



Author and researcher
Todd Litman on the
future of transportation
and why so much of it
depends on parking.

Playing a CRITICAL ROLE



TODD LITMAN IS FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, an independent research organization dedicated to developing innovative solutions to transport problems. There, he works to expand the range of effects and options considered in transportation decision-making, improve evaluation methods, and make specialized technical concepts accessible to a larger audience. His research is used worldwide in transport planning and policy analysis.

Litman is author of *Parking Management Best Practices* and the “Online TDM Encyclopedia,” a comprehensive web-based resource for identifying and evaluating mobility management strategies. He is also the author of multiple studies on transportation and parking and a frequent source for the media. He recently talked with *The Parking Professional* about the changing transportation landscape and the roles parking can and should play going forward.

The Parking Professional: Why did you found the Victoria Transport Policy Institute?

TODD LITMAN: While working on my master’s thesis, which involved developing a framework for comparing the full costs of different forms of transportation, I was hired as a consultant by the British Columbia Ministry of Highways to help incorporate my research into their economic evaluation models. When that project ended, I established VTPI as a platform for continuing such research.

TPP: What are the primary goals of the Institute? How do you work to reach them?

TL: I enjoy research and policy analysis and sharing information. VTPI is funded by consulting work, but I often perform unfunded research on issues that I find interesting, which sometimes leads to more consulting. For example, early in my career I became interested in parking policy. I found that practitioners had little guidance concerning how to implement parking policy reforms and management innovations, so I wrote the book (Planners Press, 2006), which identifies various strategies that can result in more efficient use of parking resources. As a result, parking management is one of my areas of expertise, both alone and in conjunction with related issues such as campus transportation management, commute trip reduction program development, and smart growth policy implementation.

TPP: What role should the parking industry play in finding solutions to transportation challenges?

TL: Parking policy and planning decisions can have major impacts on both travel activity and land use development and also have diverse economic, social, and environmental



effects. For example, parking prices can affect how people travel to a destination, and minimum parking requirements in zoning codes often affect the density, type, and cost of development. The parking industry can help apply innovative strategies that help achieve various planning objectives; for example, more efficient parking management can help support efforts to reduce traffic congestion, increase housing affordability, and encourage more accessible, compact development. Creative parking professionals can help solve some of the most challenging problems communities face.

TPP: What role does parking play in ensuring the success of downtown areas?

TL: Until recently, many people assumed that successful commercial districts require generous amounts of free parking, but more recent experience indicates that a combination of efficient parking management, pricing, and regulations, with improvements to alternative modes (better walking, cycling, and public transit) does more to support economic activity and encourage development. These policies ensure that motorists can always find a convenient parking space when needed, for example, when making deliveries and running important errands. It also allows more compact and affordable development (because infill development is not burdened with excessive parking costs), and by encouraging commuters to use alternative modes, reduces traffic congestion and improves downtown livability. Many downtowns are experiencing significant residential development, but this is only affordable if cities eliminate their minimum parking requirements so occupants are not required to pay for parking spaces they don't want.

PARKING MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

These 10 general principles can help guide planning decisions to support parking management (as published in "Parking Management: Strategies, Evaluation, and Planning," Todd Litman, November 2013).

- 1. CONSUMER CHOICE.** People should have viable parking and travel options.
- 2. USER INFORMATION.** Motorists should have information on their parking and travel options.
- 3. SHARING.** Parking facilities should serve multiple users and destinations.
- 4. EFFICIENT UTILIZATION.** Parking facilities should be sized and managed so spaces are frequently occupied.
- 5. FLEXIBILITY.** Parking plans should accommodate uncertainty and change.
- 6. PRIORITIZATION.** The most desirable spaces should be managed to favor higher priority uses.
- 7. PRICING.** As much as possible, users should pay directly for the parking facilities they use.
- 8. PEAK MANAGEMENT.** Special efforts should be made to deal with peak demand.
- 9. QUALITY VS. QUANTITY.** Parking facility quality should be considered as important as quantity, including aesthetics, security, accessibility, and user information.
- 10. COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS.** All significant costs and benefits should be considered in parking planning.

TPP: You've written about cost-effective parking management programs' potential to reduce parking requirements by up to 40 percent, offering many economic and environmental benefits. Do you think municipal leaders have an understanding of that concept and what it means?

TL: There is good research indicating that efficient management can significantly reduce parking costs. The magnitude varies depending on specific conditions, but savings of 40 percent or more are often feasible. Stakeholders (policymakers, planning professionals, developers, real estate experts, etc.) vary in their understanding of these issues; some are unfamiliar with the full range of potential parking management strategies and are skeptical that they can be effective. Many are interested but cautious. A few are enthusiastic and lead

the change. Our challenge is to provide the information that each stakeholder needs to understand and apply these innovations.

TPP: The parking industry has embraced sustainable solutions that include carshare, electric vehicle (EV) charging, and bicycle parking in its facilities. What do you think is the effect of that on our cities, and what more can our industry do in that regard?

TL: Yes, parking policy reforms can make major contributions toward creating more economically successful and livable communities, and many parking professionals are helping implement them. You should be proud! Of course, there is still much to be done, which is job security for parking professionals.

TPP: You've offered 10 principles of parking management that can help guide planning decisions that support parking management. How can parking professionals best work with city planners and others to spread understanding of the principles and the important role of parking professionals during the planning/design phase of major projects?

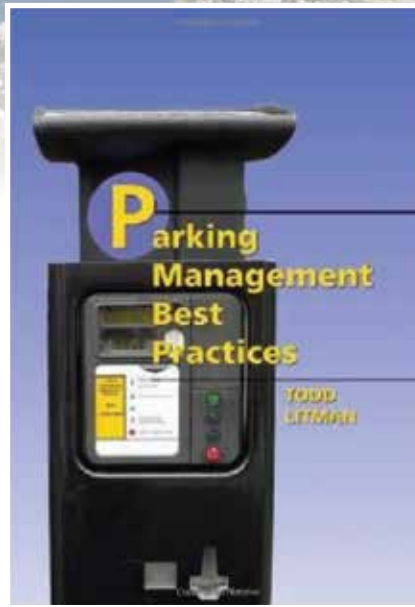
TL: We have a terrific product! More efficient parking management can help achieve a variety of economic, social, and environmental objectives, including traffic congestion reductions, more affordable development, more attractive streets, traffic safety, revenue generation, energy conservation, and emission reductions. In fact, efficient parking management is so beneficial that many people think we are exaggerating, but these impacts are measurable and often quite large.

Parking professionals should have good information at their fingertips concerning parking policy innovations that is ready to share with various stakeholders. This should include a combination of summary documents, detailed technical reports, and descriptions of successful examples that are ready to offer a public official, planner, or developer. Be prepared to share this information repeatedly—many people need to hear a message multiple times before they fully understand the concepts and appreciate their implications for their work.

TPP: How can the parking industry educate its patrons about efficiency-based standards (where lots can fill so long as problems/overflow can be addressed) when so many drivers believe a 1:1 car-to-space ratio is reasonable and desirable?

TL: I think the best way to address this problem is to offer a lower price for shared parking and a higher price for reserved spaces. That allows patrons to decide whether the increased convenience and prestige of having their own space is worth the price premium.

TPP: What role do you envision for the parking industry as transportation demand management (TDM) and transit-



oriented development (TOD) become more common? How can it best prepare for that?

TL: The parking industry has a critical role to play! Efficient parking management both supports and is supported by TDM and TOD. For example, a typical commute trip reduction program will only reduce 5 to 15 percent of trips if it relies simply on information and persuasion, but this increases to 10 to 30 percent or more if the program includes efficient parking pricing (either charging motorists directly for their parking spaces or offering parking cash-out so commuters are offered the cash equivalent of parking subsidies if they don't drive). Similarly, the number of parking spaces needed in a building can be significantly reduced if it is

located in a TOD, and efficient parking management allows more and more affordable development there.

It is up to parking professionals to communicate these issues: We need to point out the ways we can help support other planning strategies such as TDM, TOD, and smart growth and help build coalitions with the stakeholders interested in implementing these strategies. For example, parking professionals can help organize meetings with policymakers, planners, and developers to learn about parking management innovations and strategize for their implementation.

TPP: How can parking providers at airports and hospitals/medical centers embrace TDM and smart parking design while ensuring enough supply to meet transient and often unpredictable demand?

TL: This is another example of the need for parking professionals to collect and share information about these strategies and support trial projects to demonstrate their effectiveness.

TPP: If you had your ideal, looking out 20 years, how would parking change?

TL: We live in interesting times! During the last decade the basic concepts and tools for parking management have been developed, but so far their implementation has been limited. The next two decades will be the period of implementation during which many ideas that seem new and controversial will become common and acceptable. For example, I believe that most jurisdictions will reform their minimum parking requirements to allow significant reductions based on geographic, demographic, and economic factors, and electronic parking guidance and pricing systems will become standard. These changes will be incremental, but their cumulative effects will be large. As a result of more efficient transportation and parking management, the amount of land devoted to parking will probably decline significantly in most urban areas. **P**