SANDAG Parking

How do communities implement parking management strategies?

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Management Toolbox

For cities well-staffed and versed in all things parking, it may seem easy: Assess the problem, apply the solution, and keep moving along. But what about communities or towns who have never even considered the benefits or impacts of parking management? How do they begin the process? How do they measure success? Is it a one-time endeavor?

These questions challenge planners, policy makers, and administrators throughout the country. Often times, parking management strategies are picked at random based on limited knowledge of their potential impacts. But what's the basis behind the selection? And what's the true issue to be solved? This myriad of questions is at the center of an effort led by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to help its local jurisdictions and communities tackle tough parking problems.

The Regional Parking Management Toolbox is an interactive tool that helps professionals in the region assess parking problems, define potential solutions, apply strategies, and communicate with the parking public. Through the development of this tool, the staff at SANDAG found that the application of parking management strategies was less about the solution and more about the process of defining, developing, and implementing the right mix of solutions. And the critical element involved in the success of parking management strategies? Using a community-driven process based in data and communication.

The Process of Parking Management

The prevailing finding from the development of the Regional Parking Management Toolbox was that the application of effective and successful parking management strategies is a multi-step process that requires input from multiple channels. It's not as easy as pulling a book off the shelf and picking the strategy du jour. And those steps are somewhat introspective, defining who you are and what you really want to accomplish.

As we went through the process, we managed to define it in eight steps that start with the basic understanding of your program and end with a fully functioning parking management entity. So, what's involved? Let's take a look.

1 Identify Who You Are

The first step in the parking management process is truly understanding who you are. For SANDAG, the jurisdictions and entities vary from large urban centers to small coastal communities, as well as event generators and institutional uses. While there are certainly overlapping trends and issues among all of these entities, each location posed unique challenges for implementation, ongoing management, and application. By accurately defining your typology, your chances of successfully selecting and implementing the right parking management solution go up dramatically.

2 Understand What Your System Is Telling You

The second step, and perhaps one of the two most critical, is understanding what's actually happening with your parking system. This step is highly rooted in data collection and analyses. The process of "knowing the numbers" about your system allows you to effectively diagnose the real problem (as opposed to the perceived problem) and apply management strategies that counter the problem. Data collection and analysis should include parking occupancy, parking duration, review of citations and trends, and user surveys. The results will typically begin to point you to the true nature of your parking issue.

3 Getting to the Root of the Real Issue

Once you have data, you can begin to diagnose the parking issue affecting your program. These issues could range from parking deficiencies to misuse of parking assets to cultural or behavioral issues. For the SANDAG Regional Parking Management Toolbox, we defined these problems based on those that typically plague their various communities. Using the results from steps 1 and 2, the toolbox user can begin to drill down on specific issues and challenges based on real data and community concerns.

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4 Selecting the Right Approach

After defining the problem, the toolbox navigates users to choose a direction for the implementation of parking management strategies. Parking needs, characteristics, and resources can vary greatly between different communities, agencies, and institutions. However, there are a number of common parking management strategies that, if implemented appropriately, can be of great benefit for that parking program. These nine strategies are listed below:

- Balancing competing users.
- Enforcement and regulation.
- Parking demand management.
- Managing parking supply effectively;
- Creating new parking supply.
- Implementing and managing paid parking.
- Transportation demand management strategies.
- Sustainable parking initiatives.
- Communication strategies.

5 Applying the Right Solution

Based on the defined direction from the previous step, the toolbox begins to lay out alternative solutions within each of the nine common parking management strategies. An alternative matrices of solutions is defined for each of the nine common parking management strategies , based on the program's identified challenges. The matrix approach allows the toolbox user to compare a variety of solutions side by side, each tailored to the unique challenges of that community.

6 Trial and Error

To this point, the selection of management strategies has been largely theoretical, albeit based on community specific data. The sixth step involves moving from theory to actual application. But most evolved programs understand that full-scale implementation of new strategies and tools is not often the best strategy for success. Most communities are using pilot tests to understand the effectiveness of solutions, allowing parking professionals to assess and tweak implementation strategies to achieve the highest level of success. Pilot studies also allow for community involvement, helping the parking user understand the solution and define the direction of full implementation. After the completion of the trial-and-error period, a full-scale implementation is typically less challenging and much more effective.

7 Communicating Effectively

The seventh step doesn't actually need to fall sequentially in order with the others. In fact, if you wait on this step, the solution has already likely failed. Effective communication is the other "most critical" component of parking management. Most evolved programs have learned that engaging the community helps to define the real problem, identify acceptable solutions, and smooth the implementation process by creating buy-in during the development process. Communication elements include program education, marketing, and community outreach.

8 Defining a Parking Program

A new program typically starts with a few strategies or policies cobbled together to counter parking issues as they emerge. However, over time, these strategies and policies need to give way to a larger management entity that begins to operate the parking system for the good of the community. This last step in the toolbox helps communities and jurisdictions pull this together, focusing on the key considerations for the evolution of a parking program. These include program structure, staffing considerations, operations and management technology, and budgeting/financing.

Putting it All Together

The prevailing finding from the development of the SANDAG Regional Parking Management Toolbox is that the implementation of parking management solutions is not cut-and-dry. Effective and successful implementation requires a well-thought out process, community involvement, and a reliance on local data. While the process is more cumbersome than selecting a strategy from a menu of solutions, the resulting implementation often leads to more positive program changes.

The toolbox was developed with input from numerous parking professionals throughout the country. Each provided a unique approach and context for inclusion in the toolbox, which helped to define a holistic strategy for implementing parking management strategies.

While each professional provided a different perspective, the common theme echoed through: *It's all about the community and users. Define program elements for them and you will define a successful program.*

The SANDAG Regional Parking Management Toolbox can be found on the agency's website (sandag.org). The document, which is being developed into an interactive website for member jurisdictions, is available for download publicly. While the document is developed specifically for the communities in San Diego, it's also likely a good reference document for communities throughout the country that are struggling with the challenges of implementing parking management solutions. ℗

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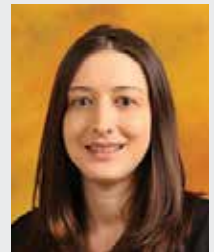
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