



GIVING DRIVERS



OUR VISION AS MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES is to make Boise, Idaho, the most livable city in the country. Part of making a city “livable” means encouraging visitors to return for subsequent visits, send their children to college in town, or even call our home their home at some point. Parking and wayfinding play a large role in helping visitors find their way around and we are fortunate to have three agencies that work to help make Boise the visitor-friendly place it is:

- Capitol City Development Corporation (CCDC) manages most off-street garage parking for monthly permit holders and visitors. CCDC has been diligently working on a project that will help establish a brand for parking and transportation and we hope to soon have a comprehensive wayfinding application that will direct drivers to parking that fits their current needs.
- The Downtown Boise Association (DBA) coordinates communications and activities for the businesses downtown and helps with education and outreach for parking and other projects. The DBA has played a key role in helping businesses better understand the uniqueness of parking supply and demand. Healthy businesses help foster our values of a lasting, innovative, and vibrant city.
- The Ada County Highway District (ACHD) is unique organization that maintains all roads, traffic signals, and signs, not only in Boise but across the whole county. ACHD is a driving force in improving the bicycle transportation network, as well as keeping our streets clean and running smoothly.

Citizens and visitors to downtown Boise have a variety of options for parking and the single-space meter is a favorite. All on-street parking, is managed by the City of Boise, and all off-street parking is managed by

CCDC or one of several different private agencies. In 2013, we began installing credit card-enabled meters to offer a more user-friendly parking experience. The new payment option was well-received so we decided to increase the number of new meters to just about 1,000. Those meters were installed last summer, and citizens are happily paying with their credit cards. If you ever visit the city of trees you will likely see an IPS parking meter on one of our 22-foot parking stalls (we like our long trucks in Idaho).

All that is well and good, but metered parking isn't always easy to use or clear to city visitors, who rack up violations that leave them feeling a bit grumpy about their time in town. That's not very livable at all, is it? We knew we had to do something to help them—and us—out.

The Serendipitous Process

Nobody likes receiving parking violations, but being cited in a foreign city can be even more frustrating than getting a ticket at home because we may not be familiar with local rules and regulations. Many people who visit Boise are from other cities where they do not have parking meters or even parking enforcement. We welcome a large number of visitors from other states and many students who attend Boise State University



A PASS

An innovative first-time-offender amnesty program takes root in Boise, Idaho.

By Tyler Johnson

and have traveled a long way to seek an undergraduate or graduate degree. The good news is that we have worked with the agencies mentioned earlier to implement some great wayfinding signs, and we hope to soon have more mobile-based applications to further assist those drivers.

Despite our best efforts, visitors can become lost, lose track of time, or simply have difficulty understanding parking meter payments. City of Boise Parking Enforcement Officers are legendary in their ability to quickly cite vehicles parked at expired meters, and visitors have traditionally not been exempt; after all, we cite vehicles, not people. The frustration that comes with receiving a parking citation may make a person not want to return to our downtown area. Because of this, the City of Boise was willing to try out a new policy that would allow first-time, out-of-state vehicles to receive warnings instead of violations for parking at expired meters.

As anyone in the parking industry knows, it can be very difficult to obtain registered owner information on vehicles, especially those visiting from out of state. Some companies do provide these records but generally at a cost. A new policy was adopted to address these challenges quite successfully. In short, we gave visiting drivers a pass. Out-of-state visitors are not cited on their first expired-meter offense, which makes them happy. In turn, we do not have to purchase records from a third-party agency to send someone across the country a bill for a parking ticket they were already upset about receiving.

This letter, which was received by our office in early June, 2015, shows how this policy has affected non-native parkers in our downtown area.

Dear Sirs: On May 17, we moved permanently to Boise from California. This major change was prompted by many things we like about your fine city, but most of all, the friendly, courteous nature of the many locals we have come in contact with in the course of deciding whether or not to purchase a new home here. Last night, we headed out for an early dinner, taking a break from unpacking. We found a parking place several blocks from the restaurant. After dinner we were surprised to find this ticket on our windshield. After the initial disappointment, we realized that free parking does not begin until 6 p.m., not 5 p.m. like back home. Then we knew we made the right decision to move when we discovered it was just a warning; back home it would be \$50 and don't think twice about challenging. Thank you for the warning. We will be more careful next time as we learn the rules and regulations.

The Results

For other cities that are looking at implementing visitor-friendly policies, this was a good decision for Boise. It was not difficult to implement, thanks to our real-time data handhelds.

The first step was a simple programming update to our software that adds a warning to every license plate that has been cited for an expired meter offense. The second step was to train officers that out-of-state plates that have not been cited should receive a warning only for an expired meter violation.

The final step was to just hold onto letters from satisfied visitors in case they were ever needed to support a policy change in a magazine.



TYLER JOHNSON was parking services/animal enforcement manager for the City of Boise, Idaho, when this story was written. He is now a city police officer (probationary). He can be reached at tjohnson@cityofboise.org.