

Automated Parking Operational & Staffing Plan



City of Santa Barbara

Public Works Department

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Introduction

To achieve financial sustainability, in which parking revenues adequately cover the cost of parking operations, capital improvements, and fund healthy reserves, the Downtown Parking Program must increase hourly parking rates, reduce or eliminate the 75-minute complimentary parking period, and/or reduce expenses. City Council has supported automation of the parking payment system, which will reduce staffing costs and increase revenue collection.

By implementing an automated parking system built on automated license plate recognition (ALPR) technology, Downtown Parking will ensure a financially sustainable parking system to support the vitality and health of the Downtown. The new ALPR-enabled system will offer a novel customer-centered parking experience. The customer-facing portion of the system will encourage touchless payment and provide new payment options. Customers will have access to support staff through an easy-to-use intercom system and remote service capabilities. Downtown Parking staff will be available to respond quickly to customer needs through a fully-equipped centralized Command Center. This new technology will bolster revenue collection and decrease operating expenses.

This Automated Parking Operational and Staffing Plan describes the system and staffing strategy, as well as the transitional steps to get to full implementation of an automated operational model. Under this Plan, Downtown Parking is working toward a full implementation date in January of 2022. Other strategies will be added to this plan or produced under separate covers, such as a Public Communications Strategy and an Accessibility Plan.

Parking Operational Strategy

Objective

To ensure our automated parking system continues to provide excellent customer service while maintaining flexibility to adapt to changes in occupancy. Our automated parking system will offer multiple payment options and strategic staffing to optimize revenue collection and customer service.

Overview

The Parking Operational Strategy outlines the automated parking operational model and the process for transitioning to automated operations in January 2022. Currently, customers pay for hourly parking at staffed exit kiosks. Prior to pandemic-related closures, kiosks were staffed from 9:00 AM to 11:00 PM Sunday through Thursday, and 9:00 AM to 2:00 AM on Friday and Saturday. Following a complete closure at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, kiosk staffing has been reduced to match demand. Staffing hours are gradually increasing as parking demand dictates, ensuring that kiosks are only staffed when revenues will exceed staffing costs. Automating operations will enable Downtown Parking to expand the hours during which fees are collected without having to staff all kiosks, eventually enabling payment to be collected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7). The challenge, however, will be to sustain or improve customer service in the parking facilities with the introduction of automation.

The automated operations model will consist of a closed loop, cash-free system operating 24/7. Parking Operations will no longer utilize kiosk operators to accept payment upon exit. Customers will pay at the exit column using a credit card or mobile payment option, or by scanning a QR code on their entrance ticket and using the SWEB Mobile payment platform (SWEB Mobile). An automated license plate recognition (ALPR) system will log vehicle entrance and exit times for purposes of determining fees due, and will speed the exit of customers who do not owe fees. Customers who need assistance will be able to use an intercom call button on the exit column to contact staff. Response team members called Lot Monitors will be on-call to respond to customer needs.

Customer Experience

Customers will enter our parking facilities by collecting a parking ticket at our entrance column. At the same time, the ALPR system will read the customer's license plate and attach that data to the entrance ticket. The collection of a parking ticket is still required due to the potential for the ALPR system to misread the license plate, and to enable customers to utilize our multiple payment options.

When a customer exits within the 75-minute complimentary period, the gate will automatically be raised as they pull into the exit lane, provided the license plate was captured by the ALPR system. Customers that exceed the 75-minute period will have several options to pay. As a customer pulls up to the exit column, the ALPR system will read the vehicle's front plate and display accrued parking fees. If the ALPR does not read the license plate, the customer will have to manually enter their entrance ticket into the column to determine accrued parking fees. Once fees are displayed at the column, the customer can pay at the column using Visa, Mastercard, Discover Card, Apple Pay, Google Pay, Samsung Pay, or Downtown Parking Pre-Paid Cards. Customers can also pay before exiting using SWEB Mobile on their mobile phones, accessed by scanning a QR code printed on their entrance ticket.

Once payment is received, the gate will open for exit. The gate will open automatically once the vehicle license plate is read for permit holders and customers who have paid using SWEB Mobile.

Fee Structure

Fees are adopted by City Council resolution. The following fee structure is currently in effect:

- First 75 minutes – complimentary
- For persons with valid disabled parking placards or license plates, first 2.5 hours - complimentary
- \$1.50/hour or part of an hour thereafter
- Rates in effect 24/7
- \$5 service charge for non-surrendered tickets or failure to pay fees due upon exit

Payment Options

Customers will have the option of paying at a self-service exit column or by using the SWEB Mobile Payment (no app necessary). Cash payments will not be accepted in the parking lots.

EMV Credit Card Reader

The customer inserts their Visa, Master, or Discover Card into the reader where the system will authorize the payment with a PIN code. These new card readers comply with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) for customer protection.

NFC Reader – Touchless Payments

This touchless payment option uses near-field communication to process payment. The customer holds a smart phone in close proximity to the payment sensor to pay with Apple Pay, Samsung Pay, Google Pay, or touchless credit cards. Touchless payment options will provide customers a quick and safe way to pay for parking fees without having to touch any of the revenue control equipment.

Remote Payment

Customers can also pay for their parking before reaching the entrance gate using the SWEB Mobile platform. The customer scans the QR code printed on their entrance ticket using their smartphone camera. The camera will display a link to a Skidata mobile payment center, where a customer can enter their credit card information and pay for parking fees accrued. Once the payment has been made, the customer will proceed to the exit where the ALPR system will read the plate as gate will automatically be raised for the paid customer. If the plate cannot be read at the exit point, the customer will insert their entrance ticket and the gate will be raised. Customers will have 15 minutes to exit the lot after paying via SWEB Mobile.

Pre-Paid Cards

Customers have the option of purchasing Pre-Paid Cards from the Downtown Parking office using cash, check, or credit card. Pre-Paid Cards are available in \$30, \$60, \$90, and \$120 denominations and can be used to pay for parking in any Downtown Parking lot. Once either the license plate is read or the ticket is inserted into the exit column and the fee due displays, the customer holds the Pre-Paid Card up to the HID permit card reader and the system deducts the fees due from the card balance and raises the gate.

Customers can refill the balance on Pre-Paid Cards by visiting the Downtown Parking office, calling the office, or by submitting a request online.

Cash Payment

Cash payments will not be accepted in the parking lots. Customers who do not have a valid Visa, Master, or Discover Card, mobile payment device, or Pre-Paid Card upon exit will use the call button on the exit column to contact the Command Center in the Downtown Parking Office. Staff will record the vehicle information and use a third-party service to bill the registered owner for fees due, plus a \$5 service charge. If the billed fee is not paid within 21 days, it will be referred to the Police Department, where it will become a citation subject to additional penalties.



Customer Billing

Customers who do not have a cashless means to pay upon exit will be billed for the parking fees owed, plus a service charge. Downtown Parking will contract with a third-party billing service to offer an effective and efficient way for customers to be billed for parking fees.

When a customer who is at the exit column realizes they do not have a way to pay, they will press the intercom button for assistance. Team members in the Command Center will also be actively monitoring exit columns for customers who need assistance. A team member in the Command Center will answer the call and ask a series of questions to help resolve the problem. If a solution cannot be found, the parking staff member will collect the customer's name, phone number, license plate number, make, model and color of the vehicle. This information will be sent to the third-party service, which will then generate and send a notice of fees due to the customer within seven days. Customers will have an additional 14 days to pay that bill. If the customer fails to pay within this 21-day period, the bill will become a parking citation and the Police department will append additional late fees. Continued failure to pay will result in the citation being sent to the DMV to be added to the registered owner's registration fees.

Accessibility

Customers who need assistance to pay upon exit can use the call button on the exit column to summon a Lot Monitor. A phone number will be posted on the entrance and exit columns so that customers who are unable to use the call button can contact the office and request assistance.

The City will continue to offer an extended complimentary period for customers with valid disabled parking placards or license plates. These customers can use the call button to request validation, which will be entered remotely from the command center.

Automated License Plate Recognition

The City's Skidata Parking Access and Revenue Control System (PARCS) will be equipped with Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) technology. ALPR uses specialized cameras to capture images of license plates. These images are converted to computer-readable data that is then linked to the entrance ticket and used to determine the fees due upon exit, or to automatically lift the gate if the vehicle is within the complimentary period. License plate data can also be used in place of proximity cards to give permit holders access to a lot without having to pay upon exit.

The ALPR system will decrease customer wait times at exit by raising the gate automatically for the 60-plus percent of vehicles that do not owe fees. ALPR will also curb vehicle "cycling", in which customers exit and re-enter the lot within the 75-minute complimentary period to avoid paying fees.

Downtown Parking's use of ALPR technology is subject to the City's adopted policies to protect customer privacy.

The Challenges of Parking Automation

With the implementation of an automated parking system, there may be customer concerns and challenges regarding how automation may work against customer service. This issue is heightened with the perceived lack of customer service due to not visually seeing a lot attendant at exit for assistance. Another customer concern may be the anxiety and confusion that comes from operating the multiple payment options at exit when waiting in line. Downtown Parking staff will be responsive to customer needs by monitoring security cameras and asking customers through the intercom system if they need assistance when customers sit too long at an exit column. We will also have an extensive signage program within the parking facility and at exit to ensure that customer have proper instructions to paying for parking fees.

Staffing Strategy

Objective

To maintain flexible staffing levels during automation to ensure the highest levels of customer service and maximum revenue collection.

Staffing with Full Automation

Downtown Parking's goal is to implement full automation beginning in January 2022, at which time parking lot kiosks will no longer be staffed, customers will pay at self-service exit columns or via SWEB Mobile, and floating Lot Monitors will be available to assist on call. This staffing strategy will enable the transition to a "closed loop" system, in which entry and exit gates remain down 24/7. The current system, in which gates are raised after hours, allows vehicles to park overnight without paying. Keeping gates down at all times will allow collection of all parking fees, ensuring that every vehicle that uses more than 75 minutes of parking will be required to pay.

Work Groups

To ensure efficient lot operations and optimal customer service with a high-touch feel, Downtown Parking will staff three key work groups.

Command Center

The Command Center is the first point of contact for customers of our downtown parking lots who require assistance or information. The Command Center will be equipped with Skidata terminals that can operate gates and push fees to the exit columns remotely and live video feeds of all entrance and exit lanes. Call button intercoms connect customers directly to Command Center staff.

Command Center staff will offer real-time assistance for a quick and effective response to resolving customer issues at the exit column. Personnel will include established Parking Coordinators and Parking Office Specialists. The Command Center will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week with multiple shifts throughout the day.

Response Team

The Response Team represents the City and Downtown Parking as ambassadors to visitors, employees, and customers by patrolling the parking structures and public

walkways around the parking structures, assisting customers with use of the exit columns, providing a safe and welcoming environment for downtown guests, and performing minor maintenance and repair work.

Response Team personnel will consist of former Lot Operators who have transitioned into Lot Monitors. Lot Monitors will be staffed from 6:00 AM to 12:00 AM, Sunday through Wednesday and 6:00 AM to 3:00 AM Thursday through Saturday. Sunday through Wednesday will consist of three shifts - 6:00 AM to 12:15 PM, 12:00 PM to 6:15 PM, and 6:00 PM to 12:15 AM. Thursday through Saturday will consist of four shifts - 6:00 AM to 12:15 PM, 12:00 PM to 6:15 PM, 6:00 PM to 12:15 AM, and 8:45 PM to 3:00 AM.

Event Staff

Special staff teams will be required to ensure efficient entry, exit, and traffic control during special events, such as theater performances and festivals. Event Staff represent the City and Downtown Parking as ambassadors to visitors, employees, and customers by providing a safe and welcoming environment, assisting with the pre-sales of event tickets, directing traffic and expediting vehicles upon exit.

Event Staff personnel will consist of former Lot Operators who have transitioned into Event Staff team members. Event Staff scheduling will vary depending on each event. Event Staff will ensure an efficient entrance and exit to event held around the downtown area. \$5.00 event fees will be collected at entrance, and pre-paid event tickets will make for an easy exit.

Staff Training Schedule

May Training: EMV Readers, Touchless Sensors, HID Readers & Sweb Mobile Pay.

Monday, May 10, 2021 10:00am	Team Meeting (Granada Garage Roof)
Thursday, May 13, 2021 10:00am	Team Meeting (Granada Garage Roof)
Monday, May 17, 2021 10:00am	Make up meeting (Granada Garage Roof)

September Training: License Plate Recognition

Monday, September 6, 2021 10:00am	Team Meeting (Granada Garage Roof)
Thursday, September 9, 2021 10:00am	Team Meeting (Granada Garage Roof)
Monday, September 13, 2021 10:00am	Make up meeting (Granada Garage Roof)

Lot Monitor Training: Lot Closer Shadowing – in process

Transition Plan

Objective

To maintain flexible staffing levels during our transition to automation to maintain excellent customer service and ensure parking revenues are collected.

Transition Phases

The Transition Plan will consist of two main phases.

Phase 1 – Maximize Revenue Prior to Automation - June 2021

During this phase, staffing levels will be increased to near pre-pandemic levels to ensure excellent customer service and extend operating hours to improve revenue collection. During the pandemic, staffing was eliminated during the initial business closures, when customers stopped coming to the parking facilities. As businesses have been permitted to open and customers have returned, staffing of the parking facilities has been slowly increased to capture revenue. Absent full automation, revenue can only be collected by staffing the exit kiosks. However, revenue must also outpace the cost of staffing. Consequently, staffing has been increased to the extent a net positive revenue can be achieved. As the State opens businesses and summer activity approaches, staffing will be increased as rapidly as possible to capture revenues. Added staffing is also needed for Phase 2 and the implementation of automation, including efforts to educate and assist customers with the new payment options.

Phase 2 – Transition to Automation – September 2021 through January 2022

As the system transitions to automation, peak staffing levels will be required. While customers are already becoming acquainted with the new credit card and touchless payment options at the exit columns, customers will continue to need assistance with the automated system. During this phase, Downtown Parking will begin to phase out cash payments in the parking lots. Lot Monitors will be placed outside the kiosk to continue educating and assisting the public with our new equipment. As customers become accustomed to the new automated system, our Lot Monitors will transition away from the kiosk and be able to monitor multiple parking facilities at a time. This will be accomplished with the assistance of the Command Center and its remote capabilities.

Staffing Attrition - February 2022

Staffing will decrease through attrition as customers become comfortable with using self-serve payment options and staff can minimize delays in the exit lanes. Downtown Parking usually experiences a high rate of turnover for hourly lot operators. As the need for staff decreases, staffing levels will be reduced through natural attrition. No hourly employees will be laid off. Remaining hourly staff will be transitioned into new roles as Lot Monitors or Event Staff, or Ambassadors. During this period, staff will be assessing the appropriate and ideal number of hourly employees that will be needed to maintain the fully automated system.

Customer Assistance

Calls for customer assistance will be addressed by the Command Center, which will be located in the Granada Garage Parking Office. The Command Center will offer real-time assistance for quick and effective resolution of customer issues at the exit column. Using multifunctional workstations, equipped with multiple monitors, intercom systems and a Skidata terminal, Staff will offer verbal instructions to customers remotely. Staff will be able to remotely raise the exit gates, and send fees and validations to the exit columns for customer payment. For issues that require onsite assistance, Command Center staff will dispatch a nearby Lot Monitor or Maintenance staff member to assist the customer.

The more detailed information about the following common customer issues, please refer to the *Parking Operations Standard Operating Procedures* manual maintained by parking operations staff.

- Customer calls
- Disputed charges
- Non-surrendered (lost) tickets
- No money to pay at exit
- Credit card errors
- Misuse tickets
- No ticket issued
- Exit column malfunctions
- Credit card server malfunctions
- Excessive wait in line
- 75-minute complimentary period shuffling