

OPINION

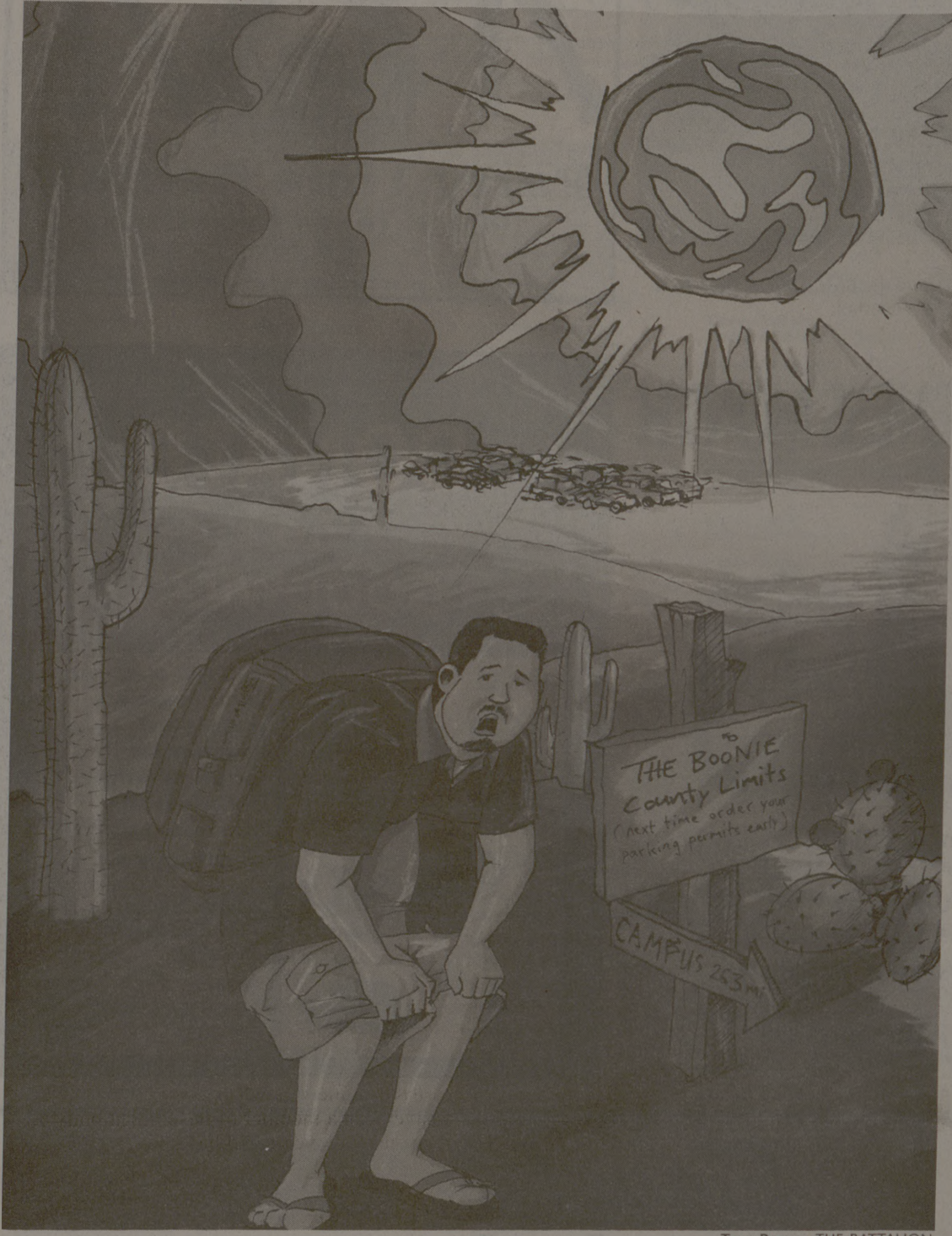
THE BATTALION

Page 6B • Thursday, September 30, 2004

PAGE BY MATH

One is the loneliest number

Limiting students to one lot ruins the new parking system, bring back the blue



TONY PIEDRA • THE BATTALION



ADAM SCHARN

One of the greatest natural freedoms in life is the freedom of choice. When one has the right to choose, he can seek alternative solutions for any given problem. With regards to parking, off-campus residents of Texas A&M had this freedom last year. But the last choice they got to

make for parking was, "where will be a good spot to park all year long?" Unfortunately, that decision was not a choice, but merely a suggestion to Transportation Services.

The suggestions of almost 7,000 commuters were not considered for long, because so many did not get their first-choice lots or even their second choices. These students were instead put in the highly overcrowded PA 100 lots in Reed Arena and Olsen Field.

The old system worked fine; there may have been difficulty getting spots in certain lots, but those who really wanted to park there figured out a way. TS needs to realize giving each student one choice of where to park is not enough, and reinstate the old system of blue lots.

The way the system worked last year and for so many years is simple. With the exception of PA 50, commonly known as Zachry, the commuter lots were on West Campus. Some chose to battle it out in Zachry, while others chose to just park in Reed or Olsen and take the bus. Zachry was extremely difficult to find a spot in, because so many wanted to park there; but, where there's a will, there's a way. Commuters inherently figured out a system to get a parking spot, and it seemed to work for the most part. Students are still battling it out for a spot this year, but in Reed Arena — not exactly a favorite place to park.

Those who chose to ride the bus from West Campus had their own system. There were enough bus routes making stops at these parking lots to ensure students would make it class on time; even if they missed one bus, they could still catch another. This year, only one bus runs by Olsen and two by Reed, and both are usually overcrowded. Now, if a commuter misses the bus, he may have to wait 30

minutes for the next one. This wouldn't be a problem if the student could drive and park somewhere closer to class, but only a handful have the luxury now.

Students don't always park in the same lot every semester. One semester, a student's classes may all be on main campus, making Zachry the most logical choice. The next semester, a student may be stuck on West Campus all day. In that case, it wouldn't make much sense to park in Zachry and ride Yell Practice all the way to West Campus every day. Unfortunately, the only alternative this year is Reed Arena. Olsen Field is a little too far to walk, and the goal is not to ride the bus. The other two lots close to West Campus are Fish Lot and Horticulture Lot (PA 61 and 97), but those are no longer a choice. So, the student faced with this problem is in a Catch-22. He could park at Zachry and take a long, uncomfortable bus ride, or he can scan a sea of cars for one of the 2,911 spaces in Reed Arena that have been assigned to 6,877 off-campus Aggies.

With a ratio of 2.36 permits for every one parking space in Reed Arena, it is not likely that a student will easily find a spot after 10 a.m.

Perhaps someone from TS should park at Reed Arena one day. Then he can ride the over-crowded bus and look out the window at each stop to see all the empty parking lots he was allowed to park in last year as a student, rather than battling for a place in an unpopular lot.

Beyond basic math, there is rarely just one solution to a problem. Confining students to one parking lot does not fix much. Students should have the right to choose where they want to park each day. Not everyone will choose the same lot, as was the case last year thus opening up spaces in PA 100s, while filling the largely empty lots of "high-demand" lots. As the old saying goes, "If it's not broken, don't fix it."

Adam Scharn is a senior political science major.

The parking system has its flaws, but most complaints are unfounded



JIM FOREMAN

While time-honored Aggie traditions such as humping it at a football game and saying "Howdy" are dying, a less desirable tradition has been surfacing over the years: bad-mouthing Transportation Services.

Any student who owns a vehicle has done it at least once. It's no surprise that casual remarks of annoyance have turned into conversations of outright spite. Perhaps it wouldn't be such a problem if the complaints were based on fact, but as is typical human nature, most complaints are totally fabricated.

Let's take for example a mail call published last week. Manny Garcia, Class of 2005, said, "UPD has no jurisdiction over bike theft, that task belongs to TS." Garcia obviously has not taken the time to find out that not only is bike theft solely the responsibility of the police, but TS does not have the authority to arrest or even detain a bike thief. Garcia's blatant disregard for the facts is a prime example of students' treatment of TS.

Parking has been the main issue regarding students' resentment. In an interview with Rod Weis, director of TS, Weis said most complaints came from fourth- and fifth-year seniors who had never purchased a parking permit before. Unfortunately for them, this year the system is based on customer history with TS and not academic seniority.

Many decisions were not left entirely to the discretion of TS. Weis addressed students and student leaders at public forums to get their input. While many complain they never heard about such forums, they probably just didn't care at the time, considering the Student Government Association launched an impressive campaign to boost attendance. Those who did attend were impressed with the improvements being made.

Since Weis arrived at Texas A&M a few years ago, he has made a number of changes that have captured the attention of universities around the nation. Of course, when you run the largest university transportation system in the United States, you're bound to turn a few heads. One would think Aggies would take pride

in TS being nationally recognized, or at least in the fact that A&M has 34,000 parking spaces around campus, more spaces than Ohio State University, which is home to 62,000 students.

Weis is probably one of the best administrators suited for his position, not only because of his years of experience in parking and transit or his strong work ethic that grew from life on a farm, but because he is the proud father of a current student at A&M. Being directly affected by tuition increases, Weis has tried to keep permit and citation prices as low as possible. The increases in permit prices are mainly the result of the \$3 million West Campus parking garage.

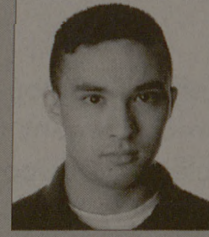
"I think we spend a lot of our time defending the decisions we already made," said Weis, referring to decisions such as the purchase of the new Tahoes that are frequently scrutinized by critics. Little do they know, purchasing the Tahoes was one of the best business moves taken by TS. When Weis arrived at A&M, TS owned a number of old Jeep Cherokees that were replaced by the new Tahoes. TS received

such a good deal on the Tahoes that the monthly payments are actually less than the monthly cost of maintaining the old Jeeps. Unlike the Jeeps — which are practically disposable — the Tahoes will still have some value when they are ready to be retired and sold.

The problem with students these days is that they would much rather gripe about not getting the spot they wanted (when they probably only listed one lot at registration) than acknowledge the improvements in parking that have decongested the roads and made spots much easier to find in many of the former red and blue lots. Of course not everyone can be satisfied; if students think they have a legitimate complaint, it would be much more productive to get the facts and file a complaint at transport.tamu.edu than to gripe about it. The new and improved Web site is actually designed to be informative and not just to make it easier to pay citations.

Jim Foreman is a junior mechanical engineering major.

Put the money making aside, stop double-charging students



ERIC BROWN

As many students know, this semester Transportation Services has implemented a new parking plan to try and make parking more accessible and easier for students and faculty members on campus.

One thing remains the same between these two plans: the designation of certain lots on campus as Twelfth Man lots. If a student is assigned to a Twelfth Man lot, he must move his vehicle to a non-Twelfth Man lot on campus on Friday afternoons before 5 p.m.

This new plan, however, seems like it revolves around how much profit it can generate and has little to do with customer service. Because TS is charging students twice to park in lots they have already paid for, the system must be changed.

The biggest difference between the old plan and the new plan is the way the permit system was set up.

For the old plan, a student was assigned a permit based upon residency status and would have a certain number of lots available to park in. Red lots were designated for students living on campus, and blue lots were designated for commuter students.

In the new plan, a student is only assigned to one lot, based upon seniority and residency status. By having the plan work in this manner, every student is guaranteed a spot to park in his assigned lot — in theory.

The problem with that, however, is that on football weekends, no permit is required to park on campus, so all of the non Twelfth Man lots are essentially first-come, first-serve.

If the student does find a parking space, but finds he or she needs to leave campus, more than likely he will lose the parking space and not be able to find parking elsewhere.

TS, however, guaranteed every permit-holder a spot in his assigned lot. If one finds that he cannot find parking available in any of the non-designated Twelfth Man lots, he has the option of parking in his assigned lot, regardless of whether it's a designated Twelfth Man lot.

This sounds fine until students learn that TS will charge them to park in a lot that they have already paid for whenever they initially registered for a permit. TS should concentrate on customer service rather than its profit margin. The students and faculty who purchase permits to park on campus are customers who are just as important as the weekend visitors.

If students are forced to double-pay to park, they should explore other options besides Transportation Services.

TS has long cheated its most loyal customer base out of customer service. Students should be allowed to submit and vote on new parking plans. This is a world-class University with a lot of bright students. There is someone there with a better and more efficient idea than the one currently used.

Eric Brown is a student of post baccalaureate studies in education.