

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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The good David Shoemaker thinks parking isn't the issue



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Last year, a change was proposed that caused a firestorm of indignation, much anxiety and general gnashing of teeth among students. It would do away with the only system students had ever known. It may have been the most heavily resisted change at Texas A&M in recent memory. And when the change came, many were in agreement on its eventual failure. But the issue was not traditions, diversity, tuition or even student service fees. It was parking. Parking, it seems, may be the most important issue facing this

university today.

Perhaps people should realize that things might actually be getting better, give Transportation Services time to work out the kinks and focus on things that are of far greater importance. Although there have been some issues with the plan and its implementation, there have been major steps forward as well.

One area of improvement has been towed vehicles. According to TS, during the first week of school last year, 379 vehicles were towed. For the same timeframe this year, TS towed just 10 vehicles. And Rod Weis, director of

TS, said that this year, no cars were towed before the first football game.

TS has also held to its promise not to touch resident lots and has only

expanded commuter lots based on the occupancy counts that it has done

and continues to do. For example, at

Southside PA 50, the Zachry lot is

at 88 percent at the beginning of

the semester. The lot did not fill

but rather had significant excess

capacity. Since TS occupancy counts

determined just exactly how many

spaces were open, it began to issue

permits to those on the waiting list

at PA 50 and other lots.

TS issued notices to 2,200 people in

the first round of moves, although only

around 47 percent of those offered their lot from

the waiting list actually chose to move, said Weis.

TS will issue notices to another 2,000 students

soon, and Weis indicated that the process will be

ongoing, as occupancy counts will continue and

some seniors will graduate in December.

The data that TS collects this year will help it improve lot allocations for next year and inform

students about their odds of getting into a particular lot when they apply again this spring. Consider-

how little hard data TS had on the parking situation, things have gone remarkably well. There

even those outside TS who are happy with the changes.

Many students — residents and commuters — have been pleased with the changes. Southside

was a flashpoint of disagreement between TS and students last year, over matters such as

the policy of permit holders having a numbered, reserved space in the garage. The policy

ended with the new plan, and there are some residents who like the unreserved system.

Jeffrey Yeung, a freshman in Appelt Hall, doesn't mind the unreserved system since "the point of

garage is to have a covered space. I like the first-come, first-served basis. I can get the best spot I

can find without having to worry about it."

Many commuter students are also happy with the plan. Although those who park at Reed Arena

don't like it, those who parked in other lots such as PA 79 last year, and are doing so again this

year, have noticed a major change.

Kelly Gray, a senior accounting major in the PPA Program, was pleasantly surprised by how the

plan worked out. "I thought the lots would be over-crowded and I would never be able to find a spot,

instead, I pull in 10 minutes before my class starts and park immediately without waiting or hav-

ing to "vulture." Her only complaint is that the permits are limited to just one lot during the day.

However, the plan will continue to be reevaluated and changed to meet demand. As Weis said,

"We (TS) are trying to solve the small problems." Students should give TS a chance to do so before

tearing it to shreds.

Parking does not shape the culture of Aggieland, now or tomorrow. It does not make up a major

component of tuition costs, which may be going up again in the future. It has no bearing on matters

of campus safety, highlighted by the tragic University Apartments explosion. If students and faculty

responded to other administration activities as strongly as parking, perhaps they could take a hand in

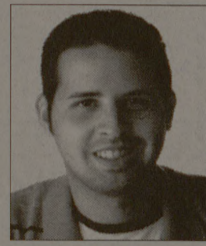
fixing them, instead of having a sense of fatalism about them.



WILL LLOYD • THE BATTALION

The parking

The bad Mike Walters wants a plan students like



MIKE WALTERS

Over the course of the first month of the new school year, complaints, accusations, apologies and excuses have been flying back and forth between the student body and Transportation Services regarding the new parking plan. TS radically changed the parking system to create a more lot-specific parking system, and due to the fact that few off-campus lots are actually near anyone's classes and the fact that many students have to travel from buildings such as Zachry to West Campus in 20 minutes, many students have expressed outrage at the inconvenience. Some Aggies began the school year expecting to find the same bus routes that had existed for years cut without a word of warning to them.

While TS has already made a few changes, some Aggies are just as angry about the administration's performance. However, there are those who say that Aggies should forget about such problems as parking and worry about more important things. The excuse is that no plan will make everyone happy, so we shouldn't worry about it.

Instead, it's merely justifying a poor attitude. Aggies should never settle for anything less than the best and always demand an end to inefficiency and planning problems whenever they are found, especially when it comes to such an important thing as parking and transit around campus.

It's easier for new Aggies to dismiss upperclassmen's complaints because they likely do not understand that there could be better parking and bus plans.

Some of the students believe it can be better because they remember when it was.

"I have been a member of the student body for more than six years and have never experienced this kind of trouble associated with getting a permit," Tim Shaw wrote in an Aug. 31 mail call to The Battalion. "Since the summer of 1998, I have seen the parking on campus go from bad to worse."

It's true that in six years the campus has added new students and employees to its population, but it has also added new parking lots and even a new garage as well.

The parking issue is also important because it deals with wasting the most valuable thing an Aggie possesses: time. Adam Shephard wrote a mail call published on July 28, in which he estimated losing 68.3 hours this school year due to the new parking plan. "Multiply 68.3 by the thousands of students in the same situation I am in and multiply that by the average value of a student's time," he wrote. "That comes to several million dollars."

Assuming that 68.3 hours were spent working a minimum-wage job, that comes out to \$351.75, which is a conservative estimate, given that many students make much more than \$5.15 per hour. Whether you pay for college and your living expenses or not, that's a great deal of money that could best be spent elsewhere. And even if you didn't choose to spend that time working, 68.3 hours is a lot of time that could be spent studying, exercising or relaxing, which all may contribute to better grades.

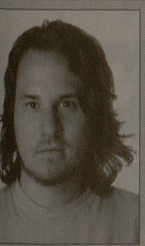
The last excuse many can make about why students shouldn't complain so much about the parking situation, is that imperfect parking plans exist outside of College Station and students should just get used to it. "Even in the outside world," columnist David Shoemaker wrote in a May 4 Battalion column, "parking is an issue with imperfect solutions. Ask anyone who has tried to park in the downtown of a major city recently."

Anyone who has had to work downtown in such cities as Houston and Dallas can confirm this. However, simply because bad parking situations exist doesn't mean they have to or that students should learn to be content with anything less than perfect. The attainment of excellence requires constant vigilance, and Aggies must always be ready to react whenever they have problems that aren't being solved by administrations that exist to serve them.

David Shoemaker is a senior management major.

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.

Parking won't improve until the faculty budgets



JONATHAN SMITH

There's little doubt that many students are frustrated with the new parking plan, especially those who did not get a parking lot they wanted. Instead of blaming the often unlovable Transportation Services, these students should consider other causes for their parking woes.

One of the primary reasons for the magnitude of parking angst is not that the new plan was poorly conceived, but rather because some campus commuters — faculty and staff — refuse to play along. The parking situation won't be fixed until they do.

The new parking plan was halted last January because there were concerns about how the faculty parking would be handled. In the end, the plan was allowed to go only involving students, and the faculty part was cut.

At the time, the faculty complained that the new plan would make their lives tougher. Some faculty expressed concerns about finding parking space and arriving late to class.

In all honesty, it would be a surprise if the plan allotted fewer spots for faculty; the spots would probably be farther away than many were accustomed to. Of course, if a faculty member is late to class, no one complains, but if a student comes in late because of transportation trouble, he might expect a reprimand from the professor.

The fact of the matter is that in any new plan, faculty only

have ground to lose. Looking at TS student parking map on its Web site tells the whole story. In the main part of campus (from University Drive to Texas Avenue to Wellborn Road to George Bush Drive), there are only six student lots available, not including garages. Some of the lots, such as Zachry and Kyle Field, are fairly large. Yet, this is nothing compared to the space taken by the 35 small faculty and staff lots. Also, the student lots are all on the perimeter of the main campus.

Selling 24-hour reserved spaces is not the answer. Many of those are needed around the clock. Instead, the faculty should be forced to give up at least one yellow lot, as during the day, many of these lots have vacancies. These spaces could be counted and consolidated, leaving an extra lot or two for seniors to jump in. "When you make the first moves, then you open up space for additional people to park," Weis said.

It's easy to see why the faculty won't budge by just looking at a parking map. Unfortunately for them, this school serves the undergraduate students' interests as well as their own. Every year a new parking plan will come through that will try to erode their strangle on the good spaces. It is up to students to demand the faculty give up some unused ground.

"(This situation) allows us, this coming year, to talk to faculty and staff, to calm their fears, basically, and find out what they really want," Weis told The Battalion in April. "If what they really want is to maintain these reserved numbered spaces in the core of campus, we can do that. But the cost is going to be considerably higher than it is now, like 50 percent or more."

This statement was Weis' best attempt to say nicely "Either you faculty give up some ground you never should have had, or we will charge you so much for your special parking passes that you won't be able to afford one anyway."

For the sake of all commuting students at A&M, it would be nice if the faculty decided to play along in the parking game next semester. Until that happens, the new parking plan will continue to perform like an all-star football team with its quarterback chained to the bench.

“One of the primary reasons for the magnitude of parking angst this semester is not that the new plan was poorly conceived, but rather because some campus commuters — faculty and staff — refuse to play along.”

Jonathan Smith is a junior political science major.