

Creating a Local Parking Strategy that Works

In this guide we share our best practice experience and insight to help ensure your strategy delivers all the benefits of a well researched, tailored parking offer.

At the start of this month the Government declared the ‘end of the war on the motorist’, paving the way for new, local approaches to parking issues. National planning guidance has been revised, removing the requirement for councils to limit the number of parking spaces permitted in new residential developments, and set high parking charges to encourage the use of alternative modes of transport.

The changes are designed to bring the responsibility for parking back to local councils – allowing councils and communities to set parking policies that are right for their area.

This is not an easy task. Parking is a controversial and emotive issue, and views about how it should be managed are often based on perceptions rather than reality. Recent press shows that parking is one issue which will unite the public and local businesses in protest against the ‘unfairness’ – whether perceived or real – of any changes to the norm.

Parking – Maximising the Benefits

The benefits of a good parking strategy are self-evident. Improving the management of parking in your area can provide:

- Greater convenience for local residents and visitors;
- Support for local businesses;
- A reduction in traffic congestion;
- An improved local environment and reduced carbon emissions; and
- Optimised and reliable revenue streams.

However, striking a balance between effective management and economic vitality is not easy. Many local authorities have lost parking revenue since the onset of the recession, yet feel constrained in their ability to introduce new parking measures, particularly in their urban areas. Constraints over reducing competitiveness (as customers, businesses and residents move elsewhere) are prevalent; yet a knee-jerk reaction of increasing charges and restraint does not mean revenue maximisation or align with wider council objectives of regeneration and growth.

Our experience has led to the identification of six inter-related themes that are integral to a managed parking process.

The six themes

Survey & Monitor - Quantifying supply and demand, and understanding consumer behaviour

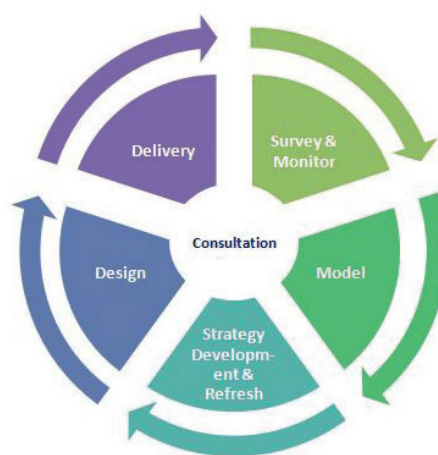
Modelling and Revenue Forecast - Forecasting future demand and optimising revenue

Strategy Development & Refresh - Balancing objectives and prioritising interventions

Design - Detailed design of engineering interventions to deliver strategic objectives

Delivery - Successful implementation of the strategy and detailed designs

Consultation - Local decision making informing the process and building consensus



1. Survey and Monitoring

Understanding local parking supply and demand is critical to an authority’s planning processes. Simple demand and turnover surveys through to more complex attitudinal analysis using questionnaires and Stated Preference techniques inform us of current issues, and shed light on the likely responses to changes in parking policy and the introduction of certain interventions.

The most basic of surveys is a ‘beat survey’, which involves an observation of a parking area over a defined period of time (repeated peak and off peak). A beat survey provides an approximate indication of percentage of occupied spaces and the level of turnover.

If the parking problems are more complex, or a number of characteristically different areas need to be considered, a user survey may be more appropriate – the survey will ask users for their length of stay, how often they park in the area, the purpose of their stay and their reasons for choosing to park there, as opposed to a different location.

The type of survey used will depend on the scope and scale of the proposed changes, but it is of greatest importance to begin with even the most basic of surveys to ensure an adequate understanding of the current picture.

2. Modelling and Revenue Forecasts

Parking pricing is implemented for a variety of reasons: to reduce parking demand, to reduce congestion, to recover parking facility costs or to raise revenue. It is often intended to achieve a combination of these objectives, but is often inefficiently priced and fails to reflect the true cost of parking to a local authority.

Parking can often appear free to the user, as it may be significantly subsidised, or included within building costs or rents. Parking, though, is never really free. If motorists do pay directly for parking, it is often a flat fee (an annual or season ticket), providing little incentive to use an alternative mode occasionally.

Tariffs should be set as part of an overall strategy and targeted to balance parking supply and demand, aiming to provide about 15% of parking space as available at any time. For example, well considered parking charges for a short stay car park have benefits such as a higher turnover of spaces, ease of finding a space and supporting retail and leisure businesses. Predicting the effects of different tariff structures can be difficult, but simple models, using tried and trusted and easily accessible parameters can give operators the ability to forecast revenue, traffic and footfall impacts in response to a changing policy and economic context.

Steer Davies Gleave's Parking Cost Model

To complement our more detailed analysis, we have a simple and easy-to-use spreadsheet model that can be readily tuned to local conditions, and allows local authorities themselves to test their parking strategies. The model can be used to adapt policy and strategy to balance the demand for parking, traffic levels, footfall and parking revenue in response to changing policies (price, capacity, location and competitor strategies). Outputs from the model can be easily transferred on to GIS-based maps for communicating the policy impacts to decision makers and the general public.

3. Strategy Development and Refresh

In the face of declining commercial activity in town centres, local authorities have sought to re-assess parking policies to increase the attractiveness of local centres and stimulate recovery. A well conceived parking strategy is able to balance competing demands, allowing for an attractive trading environment for local business while securing effective management of congestion and additional revenue. Each local authority should be clear about where the appropriate balance lies in its own area.

Parking is an essential component of the transport system and it is important to define parking problems carefully; for example who they apply to, where and when. Tailored parking policies are integral to a local authority's overall transport strategy.

There are a number of general principles that should assist in the development of a parking management strategy:

- **Consumer choice.** People should have viable parking and travel options. In some areas the public may have very limited alternatives to using their cars; in others, it may be more appropriate to give them a 'nudge' to help them make better travel decisions.
- **User information.** Motorists should have adequate information on the parking and travel options. The strategy should be clear, straightforward and consistent within recognised boundaries, avoiding too many conditions and caveats which may confuse users.
- **Shared facilities.** Parking facilities should serve multiple users and destinations.
- **Efficient utilisation.** Parking facilities should be sized and managed so spaces are frequently occupied.
- **Flexibility.** Parking plans should be able to accommodate uncertainty and change.
- **Prioritisation, or parking hierarchy.** The most accessible spaces should be designated for higher-priority users (e.g. Blue Badge holders).
- **Pricing.** The motorist should pay the true cost for the parking facilities used.
- **Peak management.** Special efforts should be made to deal with peak-demand.
- **Quality versus quantity.** Parking facility quality is as important as quantity, including aesthetics, security, accessibility and user information.
- **Analysis.** All significant costs and benefits should be considered when planning parking.

4. Design

A coherent strategy must be supported by the detailed design and implementation of a well managed system of parking control, or management. The controls must be appropriate to the problem identified in the surveys and support the strategy without impinging too much on the priority users (often residents or shoppers depending upon the location). Although often a good starting point, the introduction of a one-size-fits all approach rarely works. Every town centre, or parking attractor, will inevitably display different combinations of parking supply and demand characteristics which must be considered. Therefore a good understanding of public opinion and local issues is integral to a successful scheme.

Workplace Parking Levy Case Study, Nottingham

The Traffic Management Act 2004, and recent government initiatives to give local government and communities more control, provides further powers for local authorities to take over the enforcement of parking offences. The Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) represents such an opportunity to manage congestion while raising much needed revenue.

Nottingham is the first authority to seek to introduce a WPL. With car based commuting accounting for 70% of congestion, traffic delay is currently costing the local economy £160 million each year. The anticipated charge, per space of just over £300 in 2015 is forecast to take 2.5 million car trips off the road annually and generate £14million net revenue each year for re-investment in public transport.

The importance of providing ready alternatives to the car is acknowledged and revenue from WPL is expected to provide a substantial contribution to two extensions to the Nottingham tram network. By the intelligent application of demand management, combined with the delivery of new high-quality public transport, Nottingham is setting a precedent that can be followed in towns and cities across the UK, to tackle the growing congestion that is stifling economic development.

Numerous features should be considered during the preparation of a robust design, including; whether to charge; what rate to charge; variable charges (by time or location); duration of any controls (e.g. 10am to noon, Monday to Friday; 10am to 6.30pm, Monday to Saturday or 9am to 10pm, Monday to Sunday); vehicular/non-motorised user access considerations; park & ride options; extents of any scheme; off-street parking; and vehicle displacements. The physical nature (and potential street furniture) of any controls should not be ignored.

5. Delivery

Once a scheme has been designed and improved it must be implemented. Part of the process of ensuring design integrity is monitoring the physical installation.

Traffic Orders, whether Traffic Regulation Orders (outside London) or Traffic Management Orders (in London), are vital to a scheme's success. The scheme should be supported by the creation of the requisite traffic orders (usually created in plan format). The order procedure is integral to the successful delivery of a scheme.

For implementation, the scheme needs to be presented in a format that can be understood by contractors. In addition to detailed design drawings and signing schedules, it is important that the design team be involved in 'marking-up' any on-street intervention and supervising the contractors ensuring that any minor amendments are fully recorded and the traffic orders amended appropriately.

6. Consultation

Key to the development of local parking policy and its delivery is the contribution and buy-in of the local community. This does not just mean the public, but businesses, schools, emergency services and other organisations. The community will have positive and negative opinions on proposed changes, but, as users of the current system, they will be able to provide an insight into what they need from the new parking offer.

The dialogue between planners and the community must be sincere, and it is important that the consultation process explains the reasons for the changes, rather than presenting the end product exclusively.

Effective consultation is required at different stages:

- Surveys: identifying issues and perceptions through questionnaires;
- Strategy development and design: making best use of the media and new media, and public events including 'planning for real' and 'strategic choice' exercises; and
- Delivery: public notices, customer call centres and contact addresses, and evaluation surveys.

The most important attribute is to tailor the engagements process to the local area, people and organisations being consulted, and the stage and scale of the parking management process, and the budget and timescale available.

Our Experience

We have a successful record in developing bespoke parking models for a range of clients: Transport for London, Cambridge City Council, Barclays Private Equity Ltd, North Kesteven District Council, Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company, Ashford & St. Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, City of Edinburgh Council, Derbyshire County Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, Islington Council, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, Slough Borough Council, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council and Yorkshire Forward.

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