Georgia Institute of Technology Campus Parking Policies:

A Case Study

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Abstract

The subject of this case study is the issue of campus parking. As is the case with many campuses across the nation, Georgia Institute of Technology has a shortage of parking for its 12,000 students and 3,000 faculty and staff. With a total of 9,988 parking spaces, some policies must be implemented, and/or actions must be taken in order to deal with the high demand for parking spaces. In addition, the campus is dealing with a transportation budget shortage due to the lack of use of the parking structures. The campus is also receiving complaints from the surrounding community regarding students and employees who are parking in their neighborhoods. This report provides seven alternative policy proposals that are aimed at dealing with these issues on various levels. The alternatives are evaluated, and recommendations are given regarding the implementation and review of these policies.

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Verifying, Defining and Detailing the Problem

"There is a universal problem that affects college campuses across the United States: Student parking," Aubrey Roff asserts in a study on the growing concern at many universities throughout the nation (2003). The fact is that there is not one campus whose number of parking spaces meets or exceeds the number of students, faculty, and staff. In fact, the numbers never even come close to meeting that need. Coupled with the shortage of parking is the high parking rates forced on drivers. The specific problem in this case study is the lack of parking spots available at the Georgia Institute of Technology. By the numbers, there are a total of 9,988 parking spaces on campus available for 12,000 students (4,000 resident students and 8,000 commuters), 2,400 staff and 1,600 faculty members (Patton & Sawicki, 1993). Students often suggest that dealing with the issue is as simple as turning a grass field into more parking spaces (Rice, 2008). The case at Georgia Tech proves that is it not that simple for a variety of reasons. In order to expand the number of parking spaces at the University, the administration has recently added 1,500 parking spaces, which amounted to a cost of $4,000 per parking space. Paying for this construction meant higher parking fees on campus. The annual parking fee of $100 and daily fees ranging from $1.50 (with the permit) to $3.00 (without the permit) help add revenue to pay for parking costs. The university sells 15,000 parking permits annually; however, the high parking costs have caused many people to park in surrounding neighborhoods to avoid that extra cost. Many residents in the areas around the school have complained of visitors

parking on their streets, adding congestion to their communities. In addition, it is projected that the transportation will be short approximately $100,000, due in part to the fact that the new parking structure in underused due to the increase in costs.

Establishing Evaluation Criteria

In order to adequately examine the alternative policies in this case, it is important to establish the proper evaluative criteria. First of all, the issue of equity should be evaluated. Is anyone being treated unfairly, unjustly or immorally by the alternative policies? For example, are students being given priority somehow to parking spaces over the faculty? Are faculty members given priority over the staff? Are students and faculty being forced to pay high costs for parking to the sole benefit of the surrounding residents? Are the surrounding residents unfairly losing their parking spots on residential streets because students want to avoid the high costs of parking?

The policies should also be evaluated based on political feasibility. How likely is it that these courses of action would be backed by the public, politicians, policymakers, special interest groups and other political players? What are the costs and benefits of the alternatives and how will they affect the overall plausibility? Are taxpayers going to be paying for a particular policy alternative, and if so, how much will they pay? Are students, faculty and staff and interest groups related to such likely to strongly protest the alternatives? Are the costs of the new policies unfairly distributed? Are the benefits unevenly distributed? If so, the policy might not be politically or administratively viable.

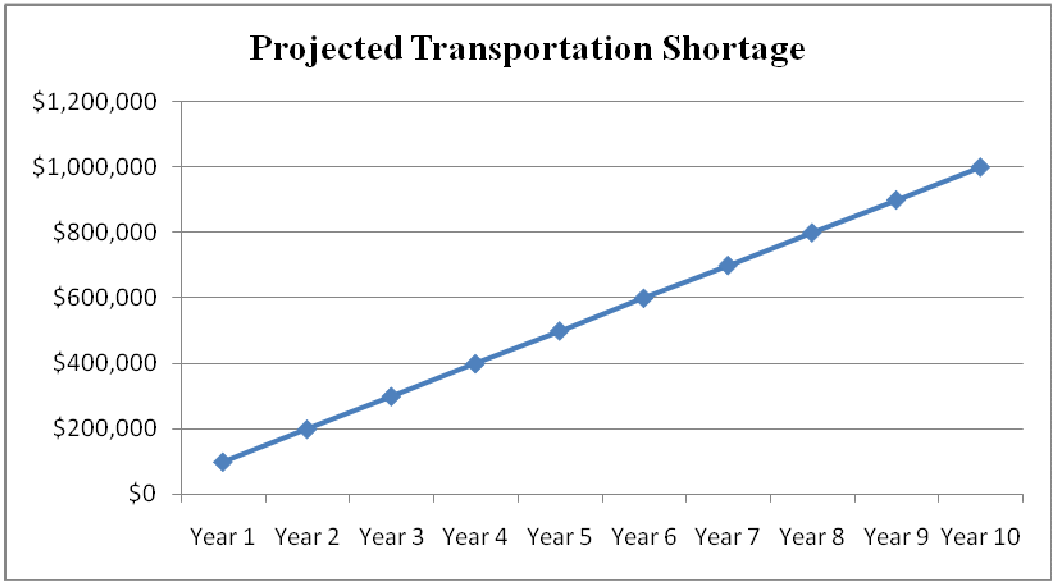
Lastly, the alternatives must be evaluated for their effectiveness. This is a critical component of the proposed actions. Many policies and actions have been taken to attempt to address this issue before, but they have proven to be ineffective in tackling the core issues that create the parking problems on campus. The alternatives in this case must be assessed to ensure that the proposed actions will effectively address one of the parking issues on campus. For example, in order for an alternative to be considered, the policy should do at least one of the following: add more parking spaces, make parking more affordable, increase parking or transportation revenue for the school or alleviate parking traffic and congestion on the nearby residential streets.

Identifying Alternative Policies

1.) Take no action – remain with the status quo.
2.) Construct more parking structures to deal with the demand of parking on campus.
3.) Create a new parking pricing model and a neighborhood parking permit program that will prohibit students, faculty and staff from parking on the residential streets.
4.) Alter class schedules, possibly by creating more night and/or weekend classes in order to alleviate high demand during peak parking hours.
5.) Slightly raise the cost of tuition or fees to cover all parking expenses.
6.) Develop better public transportation routes in the city, encouraging transit use instead of driving personal vehicles.
7.) Limit or prohibit student parking by students who live on campus.

Assessing Alternative Policies

1.) If decision makers opt to take no action and remain with the status quo, none of the issues will be addressed. The shortage of parking, the deficit of money generated for transportation services, the high parking costs, and the issue of drivers parking on nearby residential streets will all continue. If trends do not change, the university runs the risk of having a growing problem with the transportation budget over the next decade (see chart below).



Based on this extrapolation, if left unaltered for ten years, the transportation situation could lead the university to a shortage of $1 million. Thus, in spite of the ease of implementing Alternative 1, it is not a viable option in this case.

2.) If the university is to construct more parking structures on campus, this would be an attempt to deal with the shortage of parking by adding more options for drivers. It would also attempt to deal with the issue of the motorists who insist on parking in the residential areas around campus. However, this alternative would be extremely costly, as was the recently

constructed Student Center parking deck. The construction costs on that project amounted to approximately $4,000 per space, so a new parking structure would probably be comparable in expense, if it was also an above-ground structure. If the additional parking was a surface lot, the cost would amount to a much more manageable $1,000 per space. However, if the lot was to subterranean, the cost would be around $20,000 per space. Below is a summary of the costs if the university wanted to add 1,000 more spaces using the aforementioned methods.

	Surface Lot	Above Ground Structure	Subterranean Structure
Price Per Space	$1,000	$4,000	$20,000
Total Cost (1,000 spots)	$1,000,000	$4,000,000	$20,000,000

If it is determined that this alternative is feasible and would be effective, the surface lot would definitely be the most affordable option. On the other hand, the structures would take up less space, as they are build vertically, so they may be more feasible for an urban campus. However, either option would yield a very high cost, and the current budget shortage must be considered. In order for this option to be considered, officials would have to develop methods to increase revenue to pay for the construction. Furthermore, these methods could not simply include charging for parking. This is due to the fact that the case shows that students would rather park for free off campus than to pay the daily $1.50 fees to park in the new student center lot. For this reason, it is questionable whether or not this alternative would effectively deal with the shortage, the issue of the budget and the issue of students parking on nearby streets. While it would add to the overall number of parking spots, it may not be a feasible option.

3.) Creating a new parking policy model including a neighborhood parking permit program is another option to consider. This program would mean that residents surrounding campus would receive parking permits or placards to put on or in their cars to denote that they are legally

allowed to park on their streets. Commuting students, faculty and staff would not receive these permits. Under this alternative, this would leave no option but to park on the on campus lots, even if that meant paying higher parking fees. Thus, this alternative could be coupled with the President's proposal of a revised parking rate policy. This could include slightly higher parking fees, because drivers would be forced to pay these fees to avoid parking tickets from the city. If the daily fee for Student Center parking was raised from $1.50 to $2.00, the university would see a major increase in revenue for the budget. In addition, there would be increased revenue due to the fact that more spaces in the new Stundent Center lot would be full because drivers could no longer park on surrounding streets. The school could also raise the price of yearly permits from $100 to $150, and the price of quarterly transportation fees from $9 to $15. In addition, if the parking violations are given stricter repercussions for nonpayment (such as blocking students from registering or garnishing employee paychecks), offenders would be more likely to pay all their fees. And because more than 50 percent of citations are never paid, this would also increase revenue. The table below shows the increase in revenue that would result from this alternative pricing model.

	Current Revenue	Alternative 3
Parking Permits	$1,150,000	$1,725,000
Student Parking Deck	$160,000	$200,000
Quarterly Transportation Fees	$350,000	$583,320
Parking Citations	$250,000	$500,000
TOTAL REVENUE	$1,910,000	$3,008,320

This is a solid alternative because it deals with increasing the revenue and eliminating university parking traffic in the surrounding communitites. In additon, the increased revenue generated from this alternative would enable the university to create more lots and structures if necessary,

effectively addressing the need for more parking. This is a fair policy in that all players: students, faculty and staff are all effected evenly by the policies.

4.) The facts of the case show that "parking demand varies by location, time of day, day of the week, and on a quarterly or seasonal basis. Alternative 4 is based on the assumption that altering class times would alleviate the parking problems experienced at peak times. This would call for more classes to be held during off-peak times, possibly during the evenings, nights, early mornings and weekends. The alternative would free up parking spaces during these peak hours, hopefully causing less people to park on the surrounding streets. This policy is likely to be effective in dealing with the parking shortage, however, it may create new peak times. That is, if the peak hours are currently 10am – 2pm, if decision makers and planners are not careful, the peak hours could be transferred to 2pm – 6pm, instead of being eliminated altogether. Another issue with this policy is the issue of equity. Undoubtedly, some professors would be forced to teach in time slots which are considered less desireable. In addition, some students would be forced to take classes during these undesireable times. For this reason, the policy may be met with opposition, in spite of its probable effectiveness. A positive side to this alternatve is that it would cost the university nothing monitarily; however, it fails to address the issue of the budget.

5.) The next alternative is to raise the cost of tuition to pay for parking and transportation fees, which would include monies that would cover the annual operating expenses, capital expenses, future construction costs, transit operation, etc. This option would enable students to bundle this cost in with student loans so less money would be coming directly out of their pockets. Since the costs would be paid for by the tuition fees, the university would not need to charge the parking permit fee, the daily parking fees, or the quarterly transportation fees. This

alternative, however, would not effectively deal with the parking problem in the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, it would not deal with the shortage of parking spaces on campus. Furthermore, there is an issue of equity here, as the students are forced to pay for services and facilities that also benefits faculty and staff. In addition, students that do not have cars are forced to pay for parking, as well.

6.) Alternative 6 is the only public policy proposed in this study as it calls for city transportation routes to be altered and increased in order to encourage students and employees to take public tranpsortation to campus instead of driving. The university should collaborate with the city and county transportation departments in order to develop more effective bus routes. In addition, if there is enough funding, other alternatives, such as light rails can also be considered. These transportation alternatives will vary in cost, but there would be monetary fees associated with new bus lines or the development and construction of light rails. According to one source, the operating costs over time for light rails will save money compared to the operating costs of bus lines (LightRailNow.org, 2007). Either way, the costs would be weighed against the benefits of the improvements to decide if this option is politically feasible. Taxpayers would be a major voice in this alternative, as they would ultimately be tasked with voting on this policy. The strength of this policy is its perceived effect on the parking issue on campus. However, it would be impossible to forcast how many parking spots on campus that would be freed up due to the new transit lines.

7.) Another policy alternative would be to prohibit students who live on campus from being able to park on campus. This could include a rental or development of an off campus lot which

would be served by shuttles. Of course if this off campus lot for resident students was developed, the university would incur that extra cost.. The alternative would effectrively deal with the shortage of parking spaces, and could lead to a decrease in the number of drivers who park on the adjacent streets. However, this policy brings up the issue of equity, as resident students wold be treated differently from commuter students. This would make it more diffult for these students to be able to run errands, go to the store, and (don't need) or leave campus for any other reasons. Due to the inequity, this policy is more than likely not a feasible alternative.

Displaying and Distinguishing Among Alternatives

The alternatives outlined in this case present varying approaches to dealing with the parking and transportation issues at Georgia Tech. Some of the approaches attempted to focus on either constructing new parking spaces or freeing up existing ones, while others chose to focus on generating revenue. Others attempted to address the concerns of the surrounding neighborhood. One approach was aimed at providing a more holistic approach to the problem. The evaluation showed that some alternatives are clearly more sound and feasible than others. Some lacked potency in terms of effectiveness, while others were inequitable, and still others were too costly. The table below displays the different alternatives with regards to the evaluative criteria. The alternatives are given values from 1 to 5 (5 being the best) with regards to the issues of equity and cost, and to how well they address the main issues of the case: the campus parking situation, the complaints of the surrounding neighborhood, and the issue of the transportation revenue.

	Equity	Cost	Campus Parks	Neighborhood	Revenue	Total
(1) Status Quo	5	5	0	0	0	10
(2) New Structures	5	1	5	2	5	18
(3) New Pricing/ Permits	5	3	3	5	5	21
(4) Change Schedules	3	5	4	4	0	16
(5) Raise Tuition	2	5	0	0	5	12
(6) Public Transportation	4	1	3	4	0	12
(7) No Resident Parking	1	5	3	3	0	12

Alternative 3 received the highest score, which is not surprising because it was the only alternative that attempted to deal with all of the issues on some level. Other alternatives, such as Alternative 2 and 6 were hurt by the fact that the policies were to be quite costly, and thus would face much opposition from students, families, and staff, or in the case of alternative 6, taxpayers. Other alternatives, such as 4, 5, and 6 either have unpredictable impacts on the issues or did not attempt to deal with all of the issues in spite of their interconnectedness. Alternative 7 is simply not feasible due to its isolation and unfair treatment of students who live on campus. And although the status quo is always an option, and can be considered due to its low cost and high rates of feasibility, the case is clear, and the President of the university is convinced that some action needs to be taken to deal with these issues.

In spite of the scores, policies other than Alternative 3 should also be considered for implementation. Some polices might work well together if combined and enacted around the same time. For example, Alternatives 4 and or 6 may work together to lower some of the demand for parking, and free up the surrounding streets. And, if Alternative 5 is also implemented, that would deal with the revenue issue. It is important to fully analyze the projected outcomes to decide which policy or combination thereof will result in the best possible situation.

Implementing, Monitoring, and Evaluating the Policy

The implementation of the policy or policies will be a critical step. As the President suggested, the issues at Georgia Tech are related to an overall economic pricing problem. Thus, I suggest that Alternative 3 be implemented as soon as administratively possible. More than likely, it should be started at the beginning of the next school year or even the next quarter, if at all feasible. The policies should be made available to anyone who has questions or concerns. The new prices should be posted wherever possible, and administrators should be sure that everyone is aware of the new permit policy for parking in the surrounding neighborhoods. Everyone must also be aware of the strict policies regarding campus parking citations. Informing students, faculty and staff of these changes is central to the implementation phase because it may help the university avoid any potential backlash that would result from the increase in fees.

Once implemented, the policy must be closely monitored and evaluated. The fees should be examined, and the attitudes on campus should be observed. Accounting reports should be done to determine if any of the prices and fees can and should be altered by either lowering or raising fees. Alterternative 3 provides a large increase in revenue from the citations, the yearly parking fee, daily parking fee and transportation fees, so the university may find that one of the proposed changes in prices can actually remain the same. For example, they may find over time that they can lower the quarterly transportation fee back to $9 after the new parking structure is fully paid for. Or, they may find that they need to raise fees as the number of students increases, and the need for more parking structures rises.

Whatever the case, it is important for accountants and administrators to actively monitor the entire situation by providing statistics on revenue, parking congestion, opinions on campus,

and complaints from the surrounding neighborhood. If for some reason, one of the elements of the policy proves to be ineffective, then administrators should consider the implementation of other alternatives to supplement this one. For example, if for some reason the parking situation is still congested, decision makers should consider alternatives such as 2, 4, 6 and 7. And if the transportation budget is still not met, then they should consider, Alternative 5, in order to deal with that issue. The issue of campus parking is a nationwide problem, and thus the proposed solution must be closely evaluated and monitored, and if further action needs to be taken, the university must ensure that it will be able to take those actions promptly, and they must ensure that they will always be steps in the right direction towards eliminating the problem altogether.

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