

Parking Policy Principles

Approved by UCFW, June 12, 2002

Preamble

The University of California, like all major California employers, recognizes its obligation to promote alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle transportation to and at its facilities. These alternatives include convenient bus, train, and bicycle access as well as shuttle services on the campus itself. However, for most faculty and staff, driving to work and parking on campus remains a necessary fact of life.

Parking is a complex issue that elicits strong and sometimes contradictory reactions from members of the University of California community. While some approach it as a practical problem, closely tied to their ability to fulfill their job responsibilities, others emphasize the planning, environmental, or even philosophical dimensions of the parking conundrum. While acknowledging these differences, UCFW believes that current parking policies have the unfortunate effect of generating unproductive conflict and resulting in a significant loss of morale among University employees. The lack of adequate parking can also have a negative impact on the mission of the University, producing consequences that range from heightened stress, to reduced opportunities for collegial or faculty/student contact, even including the occasional missed class.

The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education recommended that parking be offered as a fringe benefit to faculty as a means of making university employment more attractive. Rather than accept that recommendation, UC policy administers parking as a "self-sustaining enterprise." However, as implemented, a significant share of parking revenues has actually been diverted to other programs. Although some of the subsidized activities are access-related, not all have been directly connected to transportation services. Additional practices that violated the "self-sustaining" character of parking operations have included the appropriation of short-term interest on parking reserves and the practice of charging those who purchase parking permits for the cost of constructing each new space, then charging them again if that space is subsequently destroyed by construction projects and has to be replaced.

UCFW notes that other California institutions of higher learning, including the California State University and Community College systems, provide parking to employees at much lower cost or even at no charge.

UCFW recognizes that parking revenues diverted to other uses may help support public transportation and shuttle services, the enhancement of alternative methods of transportation like bicycle paths, and even campus discretionary funds, all worthwhile functions in themselves. Our committee also acknowledges that for certain purposes, it may make sense to view parking as one aspect of the larger problem of "access" to our campuses. And UCFW agrees that it would be irresponsible suddenly to end all such subsidies if the result were to place essential programs at risk.

However, it is unreasonable to treat campus parking budgets as a source of revenue for expenditures that bear only an indirect connection to parking. And since the cost of such programs, whether or not related to transportation, has the potential to far exceed the revenue stream generated by moderate parking fees, reliance on permit income as a primary funding source could prove counterproductive. It is especially unfair to expect those who buy permits to subsidize the University's capital projects by having to buy a replacement parking space when a construction project destroys one that they have already paid for.

There are several reasons why UCFW is convinced that the present system is in need of fundamental reform. First, parking fee increases are an inappropriate way to discourage automobile use, since many people have little or no practical choice in how they get to work or how they get around once they arrive at work, if they are to fulfill essential professional and familial responsibilities. The morale of such employees understandably suffers when the cost of permits rapidly rises in a way that seems to bear no relationship to improvements in the availability or convenience of parking. The issue of fairness has also been raised by the two-tier system that potentially results when contractual arrangements with certain categories of employees limit fees for some, leaving others to bear a disproportionate share of the total costs.

It should also be recognized that the strategy of diverting parking fee revenues to other uses must eventually reach its limits, as it appears to have already done on some campuses. When permit fees rapidly increase, it tends to diminish the proportion of all employees who park on campus, thus reducing the base from which subsidies for other programs can be extracted. At the same time, at least on some campuses, escalating fees have resulted in people driving to work, parking on nearby neighborhood streets, and then walking, biking, or taking a shuttle for the remaining distance. This increases tensions between local residents and the University, in addition to requiring that employees expend additional time and effort to get to work.

In proposing the principles that follow, UCFW adopts what it considers a pragmatic position. It recognizes that moving suddenly to make parking a benefit, as envisaged by the Master Plan, would increase the demand for spaces beyond the existing supply. It acknowledges that even returning to the nominal UC policy that parking should be a "self-sustaining enterprise" --- which seems to imply that it would neither subsidize nor be subsidized by non-parking operations --- would potentially devastate essential activities like campus shuttles. But on grounds of recruitment/retention, fairness, morale, and sensible institutional practice, it feels that the changes embodied in the following statement of principles would go some ways toward rectifying a situation that constitutes an ongoing source of friction within the university community. For all these reasons, UCFW urges the Academic Council to approve the following set of Parking Policy Principles.

Parking Policy Principles

1. The availability of parking is of critical importance to most faculty members.

Public transit does not provide a reasonable alternative for most faculty members because it is either unavailable or unreasonably extends commute time and deprives faculty of needed flexibility in work hours, and of the ability to work late, to juggle family and work responsibilities, to transport materials to and from campus, and to participate broadly in university affairs. Campus policies therefore need to seek a balance between keeping the cost of parking moderate and assuring that the amount of parking available is reasonably proportioned to the number of permits sold.

2. Providing employee parking that is sufficient, secure, and reasonably priced is in the best interest of the University. The accommodation of faculty and staff parking needs should be acknowledged as an obligation distinct from, if not administratively independent of, the University's interest in providing students and the public with reasonable access to each campus.

The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education recommended that parking be provided as a benefit to faculty “to make college and university teaching attractive as compared with business and industry.” This concern remains important today, as the University is unable to offer salaries that compete with the private universities that are our true competition in faculty hiring and retention.

Although University practice does not follow the Master Plan recommendation in that it requires that employee parking be administered as a self-sustaining enterprise, in recent years local campus administrators have at times gone much further. Parking fees charged to faculty and staff are greater than necessary to cover the costs of providing them with parking spaces, and the resulting surpluses are regularly used to subsidize other campus operations. New roads, buildings, and landscaping have been financed out of parking revenues, which have also been used to augment discretionary funds available to some Chancellors through diversion of STIP income and ground rent charges.

These practices unfairly take advantage of the many faculty and staff who have no practical choice but to drive to campus if they wish to earn a livelihood. They also create substantial ill will, and in the case of lower-paid employees, particularly, impose financial burdens that are significant. In these and other ways, current parking fee practices undercut the University's efforts to be an employer of choice for both faculty and staff.

The needs of University employees should be distinguished from those of students (whose access to parking is already restricted by policies on most campuses) and from members of the public (some of whom may require access for such purposes as medical care, but others of whom elect to come on campus at their discretion to participate in artistic or cultural events.) The University has a strong interest in accommodating, to the extent possible, these constituencies' desire for convenient access (especially when it contributes to instructional programs, as in the case of

community physicians teaching in the medical schools; when it can be satisfied with remote parking, as in the case of students; or by allowing the public the use, outside of normal working hours, of spaces intended for employees.) But such arrangements should be differentiated from the University's primary obligation to make it possible for its employees to do their jobs by providing sufficient parking at a reasonable price.

- 3. The goal of campus parking policies should be to ensure that future increases in permit fees are gradual, moderate, and clearly justified by parking-specific expenditures. Existing subsidies to non-parking programs should be capped at their current level on each campus.**

By setting the current dollar amount of such subsidies (inflation adjusted on a per permit basis) as their upper limit, existing transportation-related operations that rely on parking revenues will not be jeopardized; but those who depend on access to parking will receive some assurance that future fee increases will be more predictable and tied directly to the cost of providing the service being purchased. Exceptions to this principle should occur for transportation-specific expenditures that are clearly shown to support benefits to the permit holders.

- 4. When existing parking is destroyed to accommodate campus development, the cost of constructing replacement parking should, to the greatest extent possible, be included in and charged to the cost of the new development.**

New construction should result in an increase in the amount of parking available in order to ensure that both pre-existing and new parking needs are met. Unfortunately, construction projects often destroy parking spaces and may even result in a net decrease to the total number of spaces available on a campus. The practice of requiring that parking budgets be levied to pay for replacement spaces amounts to an inappropriate subsidy of the University's capital costs by permit holders. There is no prohibition on the use of State funds to pay for parking expenses, and State funds have been used to pay for parking construction on at least one UC campus. Even if such a prohibition existed, it would be unreasonable to apply it to spaces that have already been paid for one or more times by permit holders.

The normal expectation should be that, to the greatest extent possible, the full, current cost of replacement parking will be incorporated into the cost of new construction and that this policy will apply to both state-funded and non-state-funded projects. However, when the cost of replacement parking would make it impossible for a campus to undertake a state-funded project deemed crucial to its academic mission, a campus administration may propose an exception by consulting the body designated under principle 6 with the understanding that the burden of proof rests with those advocating that the policy on replacement parking be overridden.

- 5. The cost of parking should be equitably distributed among those purchasing a given category of permit (for example, "A" stickers). If the University negotiates a lower rate for some purchasers of parking permits (for example, under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement), it should reimburse the parking program for the difference**

between the negotiated rate and the rate otherwise charged for the same category of permit.

These principles recognize that from an employee's perspective, purchasing a parking permit is part of the cost of earning a living. UCFW is also aware that there may be reasons why it is in the interests of collectively organized employees to trade off higher wages or other considerations for lower parking costs. While the University may be justified in agreeing to such a tradeoff, it is only reasonable to expect the University to reimburse the parking program for lost revenues, using the salary savings or other benefit that the University has realized through such an agreement. Not to do so would imply that, since the system must remain "self-supporting," other permit purchasers who are not the beneficiaries of the lower rates are being asked to subsidize those who are.

6. Adherence to these principles requires meaningful oversight of each campus's parking operations by a committee created by and responsible to the divisional Academic Senate. Although the form and precise charge of this body will vary according to the needs of the local campus, it should receive full and continual disclosure of all data necessary for its members to form and express educated judgments about the conformity to these principles of the campus's program for providing parking to faculty and staff.

Senate oversight at the divisional level is not meant to preclude either the formation of parallel oversight bodies responsible to different constituencies or the continued operation of existing parking-related administrative advisory committees. However, bodies that address multiple issues or that represent multiple constituencies lack the focus and sense of accountability necessary to bring single-minded, critical, and independent scrutiny to bear on the relationship between parking revenues and parking costs as viewed from the employee perspective.

Whether representatives of other parking-user constituencies should be invited to sit on a particular campus's Senate oversight committee should be decided by the divisional Senate. What is crucial is not the exclusion of non-Senate members from membership, but rather the notion that the oversight committee should constitute a stakeholders' body of parking permit purchasers with a clearly defined line of responsibility running directly to the Academic Senate in its traditional role as a governing body independent of the campus administration.

The oversight committee should be a necessary participant in all parking-related decisions, including setting of policy, the expenditure of revenues, and the setting of fees. The oversight committee should also participate in decisions about campus transportation improvements that will enhance the usefulness of parking facilities.