



Navigating the New Normal

By Michael Drow, CAPP

What the COVID-19 pandemic might mean to the permanent future of parking, mobility, and how we help people get from place to place.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has had a significant impact on individuals, businesses, cities and society. While some of its effects will be short-lived, others will be long lasting and in many cases, the pandemic is accelerating the adoption of trends that have been underway for several years. These trends include mobile and digital payments, self-service tools, and access to shared mobility services.

The significant reduction of parking activity in 2020 has also challenged entities to fund their parking and transportation operations and thus their ability to deliver services to customers and communities. As operating teams adjust to both the short- and long-term effects of COVID-19, it is important that they develop a plan to manage their operation through the change. The plan should consider how to implement effective methods to distribute assets (parking spaces, mobile options, curb, etc.) to the community, deliver desired customer experiences, manage data as a valuable asset, and generate revenue from community assets. Understanding the expected changes from the COVID-19 pandemic and implementing plans to meet new needs will keep communities vibrant into the future.

The New Normal

As society adjusts to the new normal, the needs of communities will evolve. While the new normal will vary from community to community based on geographic location, the profile of the community's activities, and the community's financial outlook, there are several common aspects every community will need to address. Short-term issues that an operation should consider in its plan include:

- Managing large group access to areas due to health policies. Is the community limiting the number of people who can gather in certain areas such as beaches, parks, entertainment districts, shopping areas, or business campuses? What are the requirements and/or limitations for access to the areas? Are there limits to the number of concurrent people or time restrictions? Does the availability of access vary? If so, what triggers changes in the availability—community health status? Time of day? Type of activity? Understanding the answers to these questions will assist in developing permit programs and enforcement methods to support the community implementing various health policies.
- Supporting food and goods delivery and pickup. The use of on-demand delivery and pickup services at stores and restaurants throughout North America has increased significantly



since April—how will a community or university manage the use of these zones? Are permits required to use the zone? Are pickup zone fees charged to the business entity or the pickup vehicle?

- Encouraging economic activity in city centers. Many local businesses are struggling as communities try to restart and encourage people to visit downtown areas again. One way to encourage visitors is to temporarily reduce or eliminate parking fees and/or reduce enforcement activities. Balancing the need to manage access and collect revenue while also creating an environment that encourages activity is not a trivial task. Even when parking revenue is not a priority, it is still valuable to track parking activity to understand demand. This can be done by requiring people to check in at a pay station or via a mobile device, and/or monitoring activity with existing enforcement methods. This provides visibility into customer activity to evaluate if plans are working and help a community decide when it should start to charge for parking and/or increase enforcement activities to generate revenue.

Long-term issues an operation should consider in its plan include:

- Remote work and the use of traditional offices. Many businesses will continue to experiment with remote workforces. As a result, there will likely be less demand for monthly parking and an increased need for daily parking as remote workers make periodic visits to their places of work. Parking facilities and

Many businesses have successfully implemented delivery and pickup services during the pandemic. As a result, communities will need to allocate curbside and parking assets traditionally used for parking spaces to these businesses for on-demand delivery services.

mass transit will need to adjust to accommodate this change. Implementing new pricing models will support the new use and help manage the use of a community's resources equitably. Can the use of demand pricing help spread out daily remote worker demand so everyone does not come to the office on the same day?

- Increase in social activities and meetings. Humans are social beings. With the loss of social opportunities at work, will restaurants and conference areas see more activity as people look to connect with business partners and co-workers in other ways? Will lunch meetings or afternoon social events increase to allow people to connect during the day? With less face-to-face time in the office, will teams rely on periodic meetings to develop camaraderie or tackle tough projects? The effect is not just work related; with more people working at home, will there be a desire to explore the community on the weekend with friends and family? Which areas will become destination sites—city parks, biking and hiking trails,

museums, outdoor venues? Communities that recognize and support these social needs will benefit from increased revenue generation and improved control of the community assets.

- Need to manage and monetize the curb space. There has been much written on curb management already. The recent growth of on-demand food and delivery services has highlighted the need for communities to implement delivery and pickup zones and manage the activity via virtual permitting. The congestion at the curb will only increase as the convenience of these services grows and mobility services, such as mass transit and shared ride services, eventually return. Communities should consider how they will allocate access to, and monitor and enforce the use of the curb. Remember, the “curb” can be an actual street curb, a portion of a surface lot (i.e. pickup only spaces at a restaurant), or a portion of a garage (i.e. ride-share pickup areas at airports).
- The return of mobility services. While activity slowed down due to stay-at-home restrictions, the use of mobility services such as bikes, scooters, and ride-share will return. In addition to using permit programs to ensure fair and appropriate access for these services, communities will need to consider the necessary infrastructure to support them. Will more bike lockers be required? What about showering and changing centers? Will scooters need special corrals installed on the sidewalk to reduce littering of sidewalks? Will ride-share vehicles need to stage in certain areas of a community to reduce congestion from drivers circling around the block?

Making Assets Available

Through internal discussions, an operation will identify the expected needs of the community as it adjusts to the new normal. These needs will lead to operational changes that define how people will request and use the community’s assets, which include parking spaces, curb spaces, parking garages, and mobility hubs.

Before the pandemic, parking was typically sold on a daily or monthly basis. Customers paid for daily parking via mobile devices or pay stations with pay-and-display, pay-by-space, or pay-by-plate models. Post-pandemic, there will likely be more pay-by-plate operations and a higher adoption of mobile payments via third-party services and mapping services such as Google or Apple Maps. Additionally, customers that previously bought monthly parking for work may only have to visit the office a few days a week a now, so they will want to buy different weekday configurations, such as Tuesday/Thursday or every other Monday.

Post-pandemic, there will likely be more pay-by-plate operations and a higher adoption of mobile payments via third-party services and mapping services such as Google or Apple Maps. Additionally, customers that previously bought monthly parking for work may only have to visit the office a few days a week a now, so they will want to buy different weekday configurations

Many businesses have successfully implemented delivery and pickup services during the pandemic. As a result, communities will need to allocate curbside and parking assets traditionally used for parking spaces to these businesses for on-demand delivery services. The decision will require defining how to structure the permits to use the space, proper levels of allocation between users to reduce congestion at the curb, and how to price the access.

In addition, enforcement activities must support the methods customers utilize to access the community’s assets. A community should expect an increased use of:

- Directed enforcement: Using technology to identify potential enforcement actions and sending enforcement officers to specific areas.
- Mobile and fixed LPR to automate enforcement and email citations.
- Real-time permit purchases and an increase in the use of eligibility criteria to define who can purchase permits.
- Digital representations of permits, such as phone or license based, that enable quicker activation and deactivation.

Delivering Desired Customer Experiences

How will customers access the assets a community makes available to them? Customers must have the ability to review and understand the rules, find their eligible options, make a purchase, and communicate when issues or questions arise. The success of any changes will depend on how well the community supports the customer efficiently and likely remotely, as well as with digital experiences and self-service. The use of remote support, self-service, and digital experiences have been widely adopted in banking and airlines and are a common practice for customers.

As communities continue to focus on their customers’ experience, it will require a plan that considers:

- Interacting with customers and sharing relevant

information. Communities need to transact with customers via digital means. Community websites must provide clear information and be accessible via mobile devices. In the future, a community will likely use many channels to engage customers—mobile parking payment providers, global map providers (Google, Apple, Here), community-owned digital assets, and other websites. A community needs to consider how to use all of these channels while providing consistent messaging.

- Enabling and managing transactions to use community assets. With a proper technology platform, an operation can allow multiple third-party channels access to a single rate and rule engine to process transactions. This provides the operation with a single tool to manage current demand and pricing, ensuring consistent application of rules while providing equal availability to all customers. As the world speeds up, it is critical for communities to have real-time information to manage operations, as well as for customers to know their options.
- Providing quality customer service. As self-service tools and mobile transactions become more common, new types of customer service issues will arise alongside an increased expectation for real-time support from customers. It is important to provide customers with the means to reach out when they have an issue; options include email, online chat capabilities, call centers, and real-time video support. Determining the best option for an operation depends on the likelihood that a critical issue needs immediate attention. A customer requesting pricing for a potential permit purchase can be resolved in four to eight hours, so email or chat is sufficient. However, a customer who cannot get out of a garage or has an enforcement boot on their car requires immediate attention and live customer service.
- Offering contactless options while considering credit and cash transaction needs. It is clear that contactless options are a necessary component of a parking and

In many cases, the community will not own the derived data sets created by a technology company unless that data is explicitly provided back in a contract. It is critical for communities to maintain their rights to consumer and activity data.

transportation operation. However, many communities still need to support cash transactions, so both in-person kiosk transactions and mobile-enabled transactions need to coexist. In addition to supporting cash transactions, a community should consider transactions that require the customer's physical

presence, such as validations, access control, and situations where a customer cannot pay before they arrive. Communities should leverage technology solutions that support a common rate and rule engine to engage customers that pay via multiple mobile services or self-service kiosks.

Treating Data as a Valuable Asset

Every community has valuable assets—parking spaces, curb space, parking garages, mobility hubs—and the pandemic has changed how these assets can be managed. Sometimes parking is offered at below-market costs to promote local businesses, while other times, communities charge for parking to ensure access is available to those that need it, such as shoppers, employees, or delivery trucks.

There is another asset that is just as valuable to a community: data. Companies like Google and Facebook derive their value from monitoring users' activity and their data. A community is no different—it provides customers with access to its assets and can see the activities that customers perform. As such, communities need to manage their data and protect it as if it were cash. In addition, communities need to consider the value of customer data and generate revenue for allowing third-parties to engage their customers or use the customer data, just as if it were a parking space.

To manage their data, communities should know who is accessing their data and creating derived data sets. In many cases, the community will not own the derived data sets created by a technology company unless that data is explicitly provided back in a contract. It is critical for communities to maintain their rights to consumer and activity data.

Finally, communities should manage the sharing of their data. The [Alliance for Parking Data Standards](#) is a global entity that has developed a common data sharing specification for parking data. Operations around the world are developing their tools using the APDS specification, which allows them to manage the data flowing to and from third-party entities while maintaining control of the data.

Managing Community Assets for Revenue

As parking needs change, old pricing mechanisms and structures will change as well. If fewer people need monthly parking and more need Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Friday parking, the prices for those options will have to be defined. However, it is not as simple as charging a proportion of the monthly rate for a two-day a week pass. An operation will want to understand which days have high demand and set prices accordingly to balance demand while generating revenue.

Further, as remote workers increase their lunch meeting activity or late afternoon social events to connect, it may be necessary to change how hourly pricing varies based on time of day. For example, a parking facility that supports a local lunch area may have a rate table similar to the following to generate revenue during high demand periods.

6 PM–10 AM	
0-1 hour	\$1
1-4 hours	\$5
4-16 hours	\$10

10 AM–6 PM	
0-1 hour	\$5
1-3 hours	\$15
3-8 hours	\$25

With the increase in mobile activity, it will be easier to provide custom pricing to specific customers. For example, a customer that meets certain eligibility requirements or that lives in a certain area of town, can park for \$5, but other groups need to pay \$10.

Additionally, if demand is high at a specific time, the community can charge a higher rate in Garage A and a lower rate in Garage B to reduce traffic congestion.

The COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly change parking and transportation operations and thus how a community manages its many assets in both the short and long term. As a community assess the effects, it must consider what the new normal looks like for them and the services consumers will need.

With a plan for the new normal, a community can define methods to offer its assets to consumers as well as the type of customer experience to deliver. More importantly, the community will be able to define how it will manage ALL of its valuable assets to generate value for its customers and the community as a whole. These valuable assets include the management of physical space such as parking and curbs, as well as the digital space, which includes consumer access and consumer data. ♦



MICHAEL DROW, CAPP, is senior vice president, sales and corporate development, at T2 Systems, member of the APDS Board of Directors, and co-chair of IPMI's Technology Committee. He can be reached at michael.drow@t2systems.com.

Sheila couldn't find parking to get her latte

If you can't find parking, you can't caffeinate. Let's help the Sheilas.

WWW.FLOWBIRD.GROUP 1-855-FLOWBRD

FLOWBIRD
Urban Intelligence