

Summary of faculty concerns about parking

Received and compiled by Kate Horigan for Jennifer Tougas, 10/7/22

Brief overview:

Faculty concerns seem to be in three primary camps: (1) faculty do not think they should have to pay to park at their place of employment; (2) there is frustration with non-premium parking no longer being available at the top of the hill, and (3) there is frustration with paying for parking and not having it be available—especially following changes this year, there is minimally a perception that available parking is now unused or misused. People also raised concerns about disability parking (4), and posed specific questions that they would like to hear you address (5). I've organized the concerns I received into these categories and included them below to provide further specifics.

- (1) faculty do not think they should have to pay to park at their place of employment
- "I don't think it's proper for any business to make money non-optionally off their employees, and that's basically what paying for parking permits is."
 - "In a time in which even COLA increases are rare and insufficient when they occur at all, and in which the morale of members of the WKU community continues to only drop further, it seems like taking something as small but important as parking is a ludicrous decision. We pay to park at the place where we work, a place at which many of us feel increasingly under-valued while even the spots we pay to have access to are being taken away. Surely this can be addressed."
 - "I do not think we should have to pay to park at work, and I know universities don't *have* to charge."
 - I do agree with the comment cited in your report, i.e. that we "shouldn't have to pay to come to work" – especially since "Effective August 22, 2022, until further notice, Route 1 South Campus will operate at a 34-minute frequency instead of a 17-minute frequency between 7:30am and 12:30pm"

Response: Constructing and maintaining parking lots and structures costs money. Managing parking systems, equipment and programs costs money. It is common practice on University campuses for those costs to be covered by user fees as they are here. If parking revenues were not collected to cover those costs, the University would have to incorporate them into the budget and cover it with other revenue sources.

While I recognize the desire to avoid those fees, you've seen from your research that our parking fees are very economical compared to our benchmark institutions. WKU has been very conservative and strategic about when to increase permit fees. Many of the years we haven't reflect genuine concern for impacts to faculty, staff and students. We are now in our third year without a permit fee increase. Following the great recession, our fees remained stagnant for 8 years.

(2) frustration with non-premium parking no longer being available at the top of the hill

- “The Cherry Lot, which was recently converted into a ‘premium’ lot, is consistently underused! Every day of the week, less than ½ of the lot is occupied, while the closest non-premium parking lot near the top of the hill, the Lower Hub Lot, is almost always full. The alternative is street-parking (why pay for a permit?!), which is also almost non-existent, or the structure next to Diddle Arena down the hill. There must be a way to just have part of the Cherry Lot reserved for premium permits, while keeping most of it available for non-premium permit holders.”
- “Every time this week that I’ve come to campus (which has been every day), it has been a struggle to find an FS3 spot in the only remaining lot near the Hill (the lower Hub lot). However, my old parking lot (College Hill) does not appear to be used by many. In fact, it appears to me that it is more than half empty every time I walk by it.”
- “I’m annoyed by the amount of FS3 spots that have been taken away. I personally have an FS1 pass, but my wife is an adjunct and a staff member and she has an FS3 pass. With the College Hill Lot (next to Service One) shifting to an FS1 lot, the closest FS 3 lot to FAC where she teaches and works, is the Lower Hub Lot. And that is a bit of a trek in the heat and humidity that now seems to be the norm. As I look at the parking map, there isn’t any easy way to fix it, but it feels like Parking overcorrected by turning that lot into an FS1 lot.”

Response: When we were preparing for the FY23 parking year and looking at the loss of parking on the Hill associated with the Hilltop Circulation project, we essentially had two choices: (1) abandon the FS1 on top of the Hill which would have increased competition for the non-premium parking lots, or (2) maintain an FS1 zone on top of the Hill and displace FS3 permit holders. If ever there was a “lesser of two evils” choice, this was one. Didn’t matter which we chose, somebody legitimately would not be happy with the decision.

The numbers worked on paper. With the changes we made, we had a one-for-one replacement of Premium parking spaces for those lost during construction. As you’ve observed, we still have numerous empty parking spaces in the College Hill Lot on a daily basis. We’re seeing parking patterns change after COVID and VSIP. I agree this is unacceptable. We will make adjustments prior to the start of the Spring Semester to better utilize the parking lot.

(3) Frustration with paying for parking and not having it be available

- Unclear on justification for paid spots, find it exploitative and not transparent (i.e. have to call to find out price)
- “It seems to me that someone manufactured this parking crisis so that they can price gouge”

- “I park in the Hilltop Lot and I’m a little annoyed that the seven closest spots to the Commons and FAC have been turned into PAY spots. I’m not totally against there being pay spots in this lot (although there isn’t any place to pay right now unless it’s through some online format), I just hate that they are the closest ones. It kind of feels like I’m being told that my \$250 a year isn’t good enough.”
- “I have parked in the Hilltop Lot since soon after I was hired in 2010, which means that I have experienced the changes from a gated lot with guaranteed parking to an absolutely crap shoot while all parking options surrounding it have literally become rubble. I was willing to pay a premium for the gated lot so that I knew that I could come and go if I needed to and not have to drive in circles around campus to park. The Hilltop lot, which I and others pay to use, is becoming increasingly difficult to park in. By my count, 7 spots are now “PAY” spots (ironically, since all who park there *pay* to park) and five are reserved spots. The vast majority of both types of spots are nearly always empty while at the same time there are increasingly fewer open spots and some days there are none. And there are not options nearby due to the never-ending construction.”
- Utility and maintenance vehicles parked improperly in pay lots

Response: We’ve moved to a “designated parking” system for students where we limit permit sales to specific lots and manage waitlists for them. In order to run this type of system, the only place the student can park is in their designated lot. On the plus side, there is generally always a place to park. On the downside, there’s no flexibility as to where you can park.

When we’ve discussed this option with Faculty/Staff, the culture of campus is to be able to park in multiple places to attend meetings or teach classes in different buildings. Thus, we still have broader parking zones rather than designated parking for faculty/staff. That could change if desired, but there hasn’t been an appetite to change up to now.

In regards to close pay for parking options, we are intentionally adding pay-for-parking options across campus. Annual customer surveys reveal about 25% of faculty/staff and students do not come to campus every day. Parking lot surveys show 40% of faculty, staff and students are on campus 2 days/week or less. For them, an annual permit doesn’t fit their needs. The pay-for-parking options allow them to pay for parking only for the days they visit campus. It also allows us to expand visitor parking options on campus, which has always been a challenge for us. Now that the ParkMobile app is working, I’m seeing the pay spaces in the Hilltop Lot being used extensively. (Coincidentally, we just had a student presentation from Dr. Jennifer Mize-Smith’s Communications class in which the students were advocating for expanding pay-as-you-go options on campus.)

These pay-as-you-go parking spaces are generally in good locations. Such spaces can generate \$1000/parking space compared to a \$245/yr annual premium parking

permit. The additional revenue generated by pay-as-you-go options helps keep annual permit fees, which are deeply discounted, low.

(4) Concerns about access to/from disability parking

- is price discriminatory for disability parking at the top of the hill now that they are in only FS1 lots?
- In the Hilltop lot: “There are also several spots now designated for those with a disability permit. I certainly understand this need, and therefore I am not including it my ‘complaint.’ That said, due to the rubble surrounding the lot AND the loose debris covering much of surface of the lot itself, it is not a surprise to me that those spots are also usually empty; those with mobility issues likely know it is not safe to park there and/or if they do park there, there are few places they can actually get to from there.”
- “The railings on the outside steps & paths are painted black. On a warm day like today, they are too hot to touch. This is potentially hazardous, if someone needs to hold on to the rail while using the stairs. The black painted rails are hard to see at night.”

Response: There were several disability spaces behind Helm Library that needed to be relocated as part of the renovation project and our choices were fairly limited. In the end, the Hilltop Lot provided the closest access and an accessible sidewalk now connects the Hilltop Lot to the FAC plaza and front of the Commons.

(5) Questions that committee members raised for Jennifer Tougas:

- Is Parking & Transportation revenue dependent? What happens if revenue is lost?
PTS is a revenue dependent department. We are responsible for staying within our budget.
- How many types of permits/costs are there? (especially seeking more info on ones not listed on website, such as at the credit union)
Our approach to parking fees is to provide choices across campus. Each fee tier has a number of permit choices. Park & Ride lots cost \$50/yr. Non-Premium perimeter parking costs \$125/yr. Premium permits cost \$245/yr. Reserved parking spaces cost \$755/yr.
- Based on data we gathered from benchmark institutions, it would be unusual to not have any parking fee; are there other things we can improve? (Change to pay spot system? Better tracking/communication re use of lots by part-time faculty/maintenance vehicles?)

I'm not sure I understand the ideas being shared. There are some improvements we are considering: A roadside assistance program (flat tires, locked keys); better options to spread payments out through time rather than single up-front payments; designated parking for faculty/staff if there is interest; parking guidance systems to help locate available parking, etc. Some of these services would have a cost associated with implementing and managing them. And we're always looking for ideas to improve our services.

- Is number of disability spots consistent with number of disability permits? Are people (students?) reporting difficulty with access to/from disability parking?

Across campus as a whole, our numbers are good, but some areas have more competition than others. The areas we have the most competition for disability parking are the areas we have the least amount of real estate to expand disability parking, such as behind FAC. We supplement our disability parking with an ADA van which provides curb-to-curb service.

- And a question shared with the committee by Michael Frohling, Assistant Professor of Lighting and Sound:
 - "This is very specific to my department. We, in Theatre and Dance, work in two different buildings, FAC and Gordon Wilson. We have often have to deliver furniture and set pieces back and forth. We do have a shop truck (old and decrepit as it is), but often we have to use our own vehicles, so we park behind FAC by our shop doors. For reference, the shop doors face Craves Library. There are three spots right there, one is dedicated to our vehicle and another is reserved for University vehicles 24/7. We also work long and odd hours. I started here back in 2017 and have been parking back late in the evening or on the weekends with no issues. But this fall, I and two of my other colleagues have gotten tickets because of parking back there. I was able to successfully appeal my ticket, but my colleagues were not. The only times we park there for long periods of time is during the evening or on weekends, other than that it is a short time for the purpose of pick-up or drop off. Is there anyway we could get a clarification about parking in the areas around FAC? We are reasonable and not driving around the fountain or parking like we're a food truck. We're just around our shop door, and it would be nice to be able to be close when our vehicles don't affect any foot traffic due to classes."

Under these circumstances when personal vehicles are used to transport materials, we can generally work with departments to establish a 30 minute loading/unloading pass. The challenge with allowing personal vehicles to park for extended periods are two-fold: (1) that is a heavy pedestrian area where

we try to limit the number of vehicles present and (2) it encourages others to do the same.