

# Turnaround at A&M

## Rod Weis Tackles Parking Issues with Technology

**T**hey say everything in Texas is big. Enormous, in fact. The cars, the cattle, the homes, the personalities. So it's only fitting that the parking situation at a major state university is full-scale.

Take 45,000 students and 12,000 staff—all trying to park and get to class on time—and you're bound to have issues, especially if you're managing the system with an outdated process. But, if you're Rod Weis, Texas A&M University's director of transportation services, you're up for the challenge. Having managed transportation and parking operations at both Georgia Tech and the University of Illinois, Weis came to Texas A&M with the experience and vision needed to improve the university's parking operations.

Known in the industry for implementing change, Weis joined Texas A&M under President Dr. Robert M. Gates, who wanted to make positive changes across the board.

"Dr. Gates is committed to strengthening programs that are already strong, and managing resources efficiently. Programs that are weak or not necessary will be eliminated. He's asked all departments to look at their operations, gauge efficiency, and explore ways to save money to be redirected elsewhere," says Weis.

For Weis, the primary concern was how



*Award-winning pedestrian passageway.*

to manage campus space efficiently, rather than using more of it.

"We had enough parking," he says, "it just wasn't managed efficiently. It was challenging for me to communicate information to customers about changes needed, simplifying processes, and helping them make the most of their time. That just wasn't happening.

"We have about 34,000 parking spaces, including five garages. The newest garage opened last fall with 3,800 new spaces, as well as a pedestrian passageway that connects the garage to the main campus. While the students appreciate the new spaces, the project represents a substantial investment of \$50 million, and we can't afford to keep building as the campus grows and enrollment increases. As we lose surface lots to



*Rod Weis, Texas A&M University's director of transportation services.*

office and classroom development, we need to operate the rest of our space more efficiently," Weis explains.

In addition to parking, Weis' department manages transit services, fleet services, and traffic services. He needs a solution that saves time and streamlines operations.

"Most people don't realize we spend about 75,000 hours a year directing traffic. We also run 175,000 hours of transit service," he says. "All they care about is the one parking ticket they received. They don't

understand Transportation Services is a huge area of responsibility."

Weis has been meeting with supervisors and managers of Transportation Services to evaluate current policies, procedures, and regulations to achieve as much efficiency as possible.

"There are a lot of inefficiencies in the old system, including untraceable, unpaid citations. Unfortunately, these translate to higher permit fees, which have a negative impact when hiring faculty and attracting students. When I came to Texas A&M, I knew it was time to make some adjustments," he explains.

So, Weis set out to find a solution. Enter T2 Systems' PowerPark® technology.

Weis approached university administration with a credible, cost-saving T2 Systems' solution that alleviates the need to create more parking space to accommodate rising student numbers.

"Using PowerPark® and a web interface, customers can make their own parking and transportation decisions, without having to go through someone in the office. They can

log on, view their account, register for permits, pay citations, change wait-list preferences, and access a host of other services. This is a huge benefit—it saves time for everyone. What's more, if they have the information they need at their fingertips, customers are more satisfied with the services they are paying for," Weis says.

PowerPark® will also allow Texas A&M to track and process tickets, an important feature when you process close to 10,000 a year.

"We will be able to notify people about their citations immediately. Previously, it took us a week to six months to identify a car. By that time, some students already graduated and moved on. And if they were still around, many would simply deny the ticket. With the full implementation of PowerPark®, the identification and notification processes are automated. With the new system, they get an e-mail notification the day of the citation," Weis says.

Okay. Students are going through the lines faster. Citations are being processed successfully. But what convinced the university brass of the value of the new technology? And what are the long-term benefits of a more effective parking system?

The university saw value in the technology because of its ability to improve customer service and save money.

The long-term benefits are many. "When I was hired," Weis explains, "the parking image was negative. Part of that was due to inefficiencies in the old system. We either didn't have correct information, or all the information, or both, that we needed in order to make good, consistent decisions. As a result, our employees didn't look like they knew what they were doing, when, in fact, they did. They simply needed the information. Without it, they were at a disadvantage." With PowerPark®, correct information is easily accessible.

Another benefit of the new system is a positive change in staffing, which improves service.

Weis continues: "Do I really need 140

people to operate this department? No. If customers are able to get a lot of their services through the new automated process online, I can hire fewer employees, or redirect employees to jobs that require human interaction. This enhances our service level, because the new system handles tasks so employees can take care of people.”

In addition to gaining the support of university administration, Weis knows it is critical to have support from the community as well.

“We’ve set up an implementation team to educate everyone about the new system, where we are, and what we want to accomplish,” he says. “In other words, we’re changing our marketing and communication efforts to heighten our image, and make everyone aware of the great changes we have in store.”

The department holds presentations for anyone on campus willing to listen. To support this effort, the name of the department changed, a new logo was developed, and outside activities were promoted. Formerly known as the Department of Parking, Traffic, and Transportation Services, the new “Transportation Services” unites all areas of the department and expresses a unified, customer-driven, and innovative philosophy.

“There are many good things this department does for the campus that the public doesn’t know about. That’s why we’re out there, spreading the word,” Weis says. “I am not naive enough to think everyone is going to love us three years from now, but they can certainly respect us more, and know we are doing the best we can with the resources we have available.”

PowerPark® will simplify processes and improve customer focus—two areas that are important to Texas A&M’s President.

“We have about 35 years of accumulated citation exceptions associated with our former system. I don’t need parking by excep-

tion—it takes up about 95 percent of my time, and I need to devote more time to the fleet and transit side of the department,” Weis explains. “PowerPark® saves time and effort. It allows us to go through and look at every single thing we do and ask why. If there’s no value added because of the process, we develop alternatives that enhance our efficiency and customer service.”

PowerPark® will also help Weis meet his President’s expectation to continually evaluate efficiency and value of the university’s programs and services. The technology gives Weis the option to pull a report at any



*The new logo for Transportation Services.*

time and answer questions about the state of parking on campus.

“It’s not like it was 10 years ago, when you just kept building spaces until everyone quit complaining. These days, it’s far too costly to build garages and make mistakes. You have to be right when making a major decision. You have to be able to go into a meeting and make a good, valid argument. You have to be able to explain what you did and why,” he says.

At this point, Weis has improved the university’s parking operations, and image.

“The new technology will help us manage our facilities more efficiently, and roll out a whole list of positive results,” Weis concludes. “And if you improve efficiency, you have better visitor parking relations, and may not need to build more space. Instead, you are turning your spaces faster, and managing them better. That’s the greatest impact the new T2 technology brings to Texas A&M.”

And that’s a big impact in Texas! ☐