



Cooking Up a Parking and Transportation Master Plan

By a Trio of Chefs at CHANCE Management Advisors, Inc.

With the general economy slowly recovering from the effects of the great financial meltdown, many universities have begun focusing anew on their future growth and development. This has led to calls for updating master plans that were produced in earlier times with different expectations and limitations.

Demographic shifts, a continued need to renew or expand facilities, the ascent of online learning, lowered performance by endowment funds and dwindling financial support at state universities have combined to strain higher education finances.

Obviously, these same issues translate to a dynamic playing field for parking and transportation (P&T) departments, a number of which have begun or are contemplating the development of their own Master Plans to quantify and address these future challenges.

Against this backdrop, we at CHANCE Management Advisors, Inc. (CMA) thought it timely to offer the benefit of our university experience – and our fondness for cooking (and eating!) – by highlighting the essential ingredients for a successful Parking and Transportation Master Plan.

Step 1: What's the 'Culinary Theme' of the Establishment?

All great restaurants have a theme, whether the offerings will be heart-healthy, down-home, Italian, or one of myriad varieties. The theme is decided upon by the restaurant owner, and **it conveys an expectation** to the customers.

Likewise, the theme of a P&T Master Plan is best set from above – with plenty of input by the university administration – by establishing **Guiding Principles** that convey expectations about the roles (rolls – Parker House or sweet?) of parking and transportation on campus.

Will transit be the main offering and served to everyone, or will close-in parking be favored over peripheral? Must P&T support itself financially, or will the institution pay for some services? How is parking going to be allocated?

It's also important that all employees understand the theme. Restaurants don't work well when staff members are not engaged and can't even explain

what's on the menu. Likewise, P&T staff need to be involved and participate in the plan, as they will be responsible for accomplishing it.

Step 2: How Many Customers Are Coming? And How Are They Arriving?

Who likes waiting for a table reserved for half an hour before? It may happen now and then, but if it's the norm, chances are you'll give up frequenting the restaurant, regardless of food quality. But if the owner is smart, she'll project the customer load and add tables.

So, too, parking directors should project their customer volumes by determining the composition and volumes of *existing and future population groups*. To do so, slice into the meat (so to speak) of campus population data for faculty, staff, students and visitors. Interface with HR, IT, Admissions, Housing and other departments for their FTE or headcount data – this is where the beef really is!

You already should have permit counts, parking occupancy and transit ridership stats. Add the essential ingredients of occupancy observations and surveys of the campus population.

And by calculating *driving ratios* (permits divided by group population) and *presence factors* (the ratio of permit holders and other customers present at given times), you'll have the basic data to project parking demand-and-supply needs in light of future population and growth data, both overall and by segment of the campus. Don't forget to add the parking displacement and replacement ingredients from known developments to the overall mix.

Finally, season the above ingredients with present and projected transit ridership and TDM (transportation demand management) initiatives to balance the flavor of parking-only growth, and you should wind up with a net parking supply and transportation requirement by year for the foreseeable future.

Step 3: What Special Dietary Needs Must You Be Prepared to Meet?

Many individuals and groups have special needs, sometimes well-planned-ahead and sometimes arriving at P&T's door as surprise customers. Planning accessible parking and transportation to meet future needs is a given, although conformance with the required recipes is sometimes lacking.

Improving conditions for loading, service and deliveries often gets less attention and comes out half-baked, only to cause heartburn later. Sometimes, special events are only partly prepared, ranging from large athletic activities to 40 unexpected customers showing up for a lecture in the heart of campus.

Visitor spaces need the same attention as a well-appointed table, with the right size and complement of knives, forks and spoons correctly placed for the purposes they will serve. Persuading the customers to tell you their special needs early requires a good reservation process that is well understood by all.

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Step 4: The Dessert Cart –*C'est Magnifique!*

Ah, the dessert choices may seem delectable, but in the end, it's the size of one's stomach – and wallet – that will influence decisions about ideal selections from among the variety of P&T alternatives.

Looking at the choices, how do you weigh the pros and cons of which will be selected? What are the tradeoffs – sort of like counting the calories and coming to a compromise selection of dessert? Plus, do the alternatives work together reasonably as a system? You wouldn't expect to be served fortune cookies after enchiladas, would you?

Step 5: What Can You Afford to Serve? And How Much Are They Willing to Pay?

Are your customers longing for “champagne wishes and caviar dreams” –remember “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”? – but willing to spring for only beer and nachos?

The wise restaurateur will survey potential customers to learn their preferences and their willingness to pay for them, given the options and alternatives. The P&T department is sometimes placed in the unenviable position of a dinner host at a fancy restaurant – the department is the only one who gets to see the prices.

So, it's important during the master planning process to be sure that everyone gets the menus with the real prices displayed. It will help to foster a realistic discussion of the services that are needed and can be afforded.

Step 6: Providing Great Service

Who wants to eat at restaurants with supposedly great food but horrible service, where you could forget your name by the time the “world-famous steak” arrives – *cold*? Or where the glasses have water stains, and you can never get the waiter's attention?

So much has been written about great customer service – and even “12 Easy Steps to Really Bad Customer Service” * – that we'll cut to the chase here.

Your P&T Master Plan needs to address the quality of service not only physically, as in clean parking facilities and transit equipment, but also in terms of front-line and supervisory staffing and service techniques when it comes to dealing with customers.

Plans, funds and time for conducting and acting on ad-hoc customer

surveys, focus groups and a baker's dozen of other outreach techniques to keep you “close to the customer” may be some of the most important contents of your master plan.

Step 7: Word of Mouth Is Still the Most Effective Advertising!

Just as the chef needs to step out of the kitchen and mingle with the customers to gauge their satisfaction, P&T managers need to be constantly present on campus at meetings, watching crucial areas of campus, and talking with customers to see if the menu is still appropriate, the service impeccable, and the value for the dollar appreciated by the customers. There are multiple stakeholders (oops, *stakeholders*) on campus, and they require a level of constant attention to

ensure that they give good reviews. Neglecting them will almost always result in bad reviews that show up in email, the campus newspaper and in social media.

What It All Boils Down To

If you've had the good taste to make it this far in the article, you know that we have a couple of juicy tidbits to leave with you.

- Spend sufficient time to plan the purpose, content and desired outcomes of your P&T Master Plan. Using someone else's RFP for a master plan won't express what you want for your organization and campus. Do the thinking yourself, develop the issues you want addressed, and craft the document that expresses well your desired outcomes.

- Manage the planning process so that it is both educational for individuals who participate and a viable effort to envision the future and its needs. Master Plan advisory groups help add perspective to the discussions, and they also learn and communicate the details of the issues and alternatives. Engaging the administration early and often helps to ensure that everyone is heading in the same direction and that the administration will be supportive of the approach and activities to be taken by the P&T department in the future.
- Share the results of the plan. As tasks are accomplished, advertise that fact. Use electronic newsletters, articles in the campus papers, social media, an annual report, and meetings with organizations to explain what you are doing, how it follows the P&T Master Plan, and why the activities are being accomplished. Remind individuals of the preferred alternatives that were selected, and why they were selected. No one will remember the plan as much as P&T employees will, and regular reinforcement is crucial.

Remember, the P&T Master Plan should be highly specific to the university campus involved – there are no good cookie-cutter approaches.

Bon appétit!

The “chefs” of CHANCE Management Advisors, Inc. – including Barbara Chance, Joe Sciuilli and Chris Jurek – cooked up this P&T Master Plan recipe. Contact them at info@chancemanagement.com or (215) 564-6464. Find other P&T “recipes” at www.chancemanagement.com/res_articles.html.

* “12 Easy Steps to Really Bad Customer Service,” by Joe Sciuilli, *Parking Today* magazine, November 2011).