



The City of White Rock, British Columbia

Case Study

A new pay-by-space system is helping a city make parking work for everyone

For cities and towns, it seems the only people who approve of pay public parking are the financial staff and the elected officials who see the significant benefit of cash inflows. Businesses such as restaurants often view parking fees simply as an annoyance for their customers or a roadblock hindering their business success. For its part, the parking public is none too happy having to cater to the almighty parking system: fumbling with coins, running back in the rain to add more time, etc. For a great majority, pay parking equals stress.

The City of White Rock in British Columbia decided to do something different to see if their pay parking system could achieve multiple goals. One of its objectives was to make parking more user-friendly for those people most affected: the parking visitors and businesses that rely heavily on those visitors. If the system improvements could make a difference to the bottom line for taxpayers, so much the better. The seaside resort of 19,000 is no stranger to parking, having five miles (eight km) of beautiful sandy beachfront and high-quality restaurants that are a magnet for thousands of visitors and their cars on sunny days throughout the year. But with just 900 parking spaces in the waterfront business district, devising a system that allocates the parking fairly among visitors, raises revenue for the city and is easy for parkers to use is challenging. White Rock turned to Digital Payment Technologies (DPT), a leading-edge parking payment innovator, for the solution.

“Parking on the waterfront is an important topic of discussion in our community, and doing it right fits within our community goals for providing high-quality service to residents, businesses and visitors,” said White Rock Mayor, Judy Forster. “For the ninety businesses and restaurants that rely on beachfront traffic, council considered it vital to devise a system that helps, not hinders, their retail traffic. If we could assist visitors to park and pay more easily, it would be a valuable step.”

“We’re pleased that one of our long-time customers saw the value of incorporating our most advanced technology when they upgraded their



parking system,” said Mike Rodger, director of marketing for DPT. “The new services and technologies available in the LUKE machine can help the customer improve the bottom line.” While some might argue there shouldn’t be pay parking on lots constructed with taxpayer funds, the reality is that many times during the year the spaces are completely full. If cities like White Rock didn’t charge for parking to allocate the spaces more fairly, turnover would be low. To prevent people from monopolizing a parking space all day, White Rock uses signage to limit parking in prime areas to a maximum of four hours. This facilitates the flow of new, fresh visitors to the shops and restaurants along the beach. The technology enables cities to force turnover of high-value parking spots by setting up differential pricing structures for different spaces at different times of the day or week.

In addition to its customer service goals, like many cities, White Rock has issues with revenue generation to pay for important services. The city has no major industrial base and 95% of its properties are residential. The annual contribution to the city’s general revenue of \$1.6 million provided by parking helps the city

to keep taxes down. It is also used to maintain and expand the public tourist facilities around the beach that make the city such a valuable “rubber-wheel” tourist destination for people from the nearby metropolis of Vancouver and from south of the border in Washington State.

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Judy Forster, Mayor of White Rock

Once the decision was made to go ahead, a competitive RFP process led to two vendors being shortlisted. DPT was the supplier chosen for this important task. The centerpiece of White Rock’s parking system upgrade was a move to a full pay-by-space system using 35 advanced LUKE parking pay stations from DPT. A total of 28 of these incorporated solar-power technology to save the cost of hard wiring the power. The system went live and operational in June, 2005, just in time for the peak summer parking season.

Benefits for Parkers

There are a number of pluses for parkers with the new system. First, the proven technology in the advanced LUKE system now enables parkers to pay using coins, credit cards and possibly smart cards in the future if the city decides they want to offer that payment method.

In addition, pay-by-cell (PBC) technology allows visitors to park and pay using their cell-phone account with Verrus, a leading PBC provider. By calling a toll-free number and punching in their stall number, they can renew and extend their paid parking period using their cell phone — no need to run back to the car to feed the meter to avoid being ticketed.

This is very important along this long five-mile linear strip of beach. Now, people can relax and enjoy dessert with their dinner rather than rush off — an obvious benefit to beachfront restaurants. (Interestingly, some of White Rock’s beachfront businesses have opened PBC accounts so that they can extend the time for their customers when necessary.) As an added convenience, those who use their cell phones to

purchase or add time will receive a text message advising them when they have five minutes of parking time left.

“Now that this new parking service is complete, the shops and restaurants along Marine drive will be patronized by more customers – and happier ones,” says Mayor Judy Forster. “No one likes digging for spare change or leaving a restaurant to add coins to their meter. Now they won’t have to.”

Another advantage of the advanced technology is that all machines in the system are networked through a CDMA wireless data system through Bell Canada, allowing the machines to “talk” to the central enterprise management system and server which consolidates the information. What that means — for customers, as an example — is that parking time can be extended in another part of White Rock by going to any machine, punching in their unique parking space number and buying additional parking. This is a bonus for people who may not have access to a cell phone.

Benefits for the Municipality

From the city’s point-of-view, there are a number of efficiency gains from the new system. These include the reduced maintenance costs involved in the upkeep of street meters and the lost revenue when they stop working. The modular construction of the new payment stations means that, if they have problems, repairs can be resolved quickly to keep the machine producing revenue. In addition, the machines are self-reporting and will alert the main server with a wireless signal when the paper or battery power is running low.

One of the advantages of this system is eliminating the old program of someone wheeling a coin box down the street in a regular timed schedule of coin pickups from meters. This routine work can be reduced substantially, leaving staff to work on other higher value-added tasks. An important catalyst for White Rock’s review of parking came when the contents of eighty of its street meters were stolen early on a Monday morning before they were emptied. After a busy Sunday of parking, this theft cost the city thousands of dollars and brought home the point that the volume of cash is an attractive target to thieves.

There are only 35 machines with the new system, so there are far fewer pickup points for the coins, leveraging staff productivity with a safer and more efficient coin collection procedure. In addition, these centralized payment stations are highly secure and vandal-proof. They are also alarmed so that any attempt to break in leads to both silent and audible alarms being tripped. Not only that, the ability for all units to accept credit cards reduces the amount of cash to be counted and collected. Approximately 25 to 30 percent of all parkers use credit cards. It doesn't stop there. The city receives reports from the management software which provide details of system performance, and statistics on usage that city analysts can review. The real-time collection of data provides the information White Rock needs to fine-tune its system as necessary, and to spot problems in minutes rather than hours or days as was the case previously.

“The integrated electronic system is much more efficient than the mechanical one and it helps to keep our costs down,” adds Sandra Kurylo, Director of Financial Services. “That’s an important consideration for any city or town looking to maximize service and revenue while minimizing costs.”

Improved Streetscape

The final benefit of eliminating 500 street meters of varying ages and designs along the beachfront is reducing the street clutter of this tourist destination and making the city a more attractive place to visit. The 35 new machines were even powder-coated in White Rock’s city colors of sky blue and yellow to blend in with the resort town’s brand image and graphic design theme.

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Sandra Kurylo, Director of Financial Services, White Rock

All in all, the White Rock project demonstrates that today’s advanced electronic payment stations are much better than the old mechanical systems at fulfilling the sophisticated financial and customer-service objectives of today’s urban parking planners. That doesn’t mean that parkers and business owners in this seaside town will ever be completely happy with pay



parking, but at least the inconvenience factor has been substantially reduced. And, with the city doing everything possible to make parking work for everybody while also increasing the city’s revenue base, taxpayers will most certainly be cheering the move.

About Digital Payment Technologies

Digital Payment Technologies (DPT) is an innovative leader in the design, manufacture and distribution of electronic multi-space parking meters, parking management software, and on-line services for the multi-billion-dollar parking industry. The company’s products provide complete financial tracking, control and reporting for parking revenue collected by municipalities, universities, parking management companies, and national parks, from customer payment through to bank deposit.

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