Campus commuters can say goodbye to physical permits and hello to gateless garages

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Over the last few months, Parking & Transportation Services has been busy preparing for the return of students, faculty and staff in the fall. Lo Que Pasa brings you the scoop on what has changed since then, including new options for employees who need occasional parking and the offerings available to those who perhaps caught the “alternative transportation” bug during outings on foot or by bike during the pandemic.

In one of the most noticeable changes, parking permits in most locations no longer involve a physical permit tag. Instead, the vehicle license plate registered by the user via the Parking Account Portal acts as the permit.

"Each year, we issue more than 17,000 permits, and that number does not include specialty permits, for example those for contractors or vendors," said Diana Moreno, customer relations/permit program operations manager.

"That’s a lot of printing and mailing. Switching to permit by license plate allows us to dramatically cut down on costs, paperwork and resources. This also means our customers no longer have to wait to receive their permit in the mail or display it."

So far, 80% of parking permits have been converted to license-plate-only. Some parking lots south of Highland Avenue Garage, spaces on National Championship Drive and all motorcycle locations continue to require conventional permit tags, according to Nicole Feldt, assistant director of outreach.

The customer relations team at Parking & Transportation Services has been working hard to accommodate all customers, Moreno said.

"We reached out to every employee permit-holder to inform them that if they canceled their parking permit during the pandemic, they have the opportunity to keep their location," she said.

In another big change, parking permits no longer renew automatically. Once the expiration date nears, permit-holders will receive a renewal notice, followed by several reminders. If they do not respond, the permit expires.

The duration period for parking permits remains unchanged, with the default being August to August for annual permits. Parking & Transportation Services encourages faculty, staff and students to review the program changes information on the PTS website before renewing or purchasing a parking permit.

Employees who will be working on campus this summer can request a temporary summer permit, which costs $108 and is valid through Aug. 13. The purchase form is online.

Employees who plan to continue working from home and need to park on campus only occasionally have several new options, which are described below.

Occasional use and evening permits

A visitor to campus would be charged $8 for a full day of parking in a campus garage, with no in-and-out privileges. But employees who opt for this type of permit will pay $120 for 20 days of parking, with in-and-out privileges, with four garages to choose from: Sixth Street, Cherry Avenue, Park Avenue and Tyndall Avenue.

Occasional use permit-holders will receive a wallet-sized card, which will be scanned at parking garage gates. The card is good from August to August of the following year, after which any unused balance will expire. The cards are reloadable.

"At $6 for up to a full day of parking, this is a good option for employees who plan on continuing to work remotely or only need to come onto campus every so often," Moreno said, adding that the discounted rate doesn’t include a guaranteed spot in a specific garage. “If one of the garages is full, you have the option to look at another garage for availability.” Find real-time availability information on the PTS website.

Evening permits are a lower-cost option for employees who plan to come to campus in the late afternoon or evening. Evening permits allow parking in undedicated spaces in surface lots after 2:30 p.m. while garage evening permits are issued for a specific garage and are valid after 3:30 p.m.

Visit the PTS website for more information on occasional and evening permits.

Alternative transportation
Here is a special tip for those who don’t mind parking off campus.

A new Park ‘N Ride option that uses the Passport Parking app allows users to pay only $2 a day during the academic year to park in lot 9008, located off South Plumer Avenue between East 13th Street and East 14th Street. After you park, you can hop on the Cat Tran for a short – and free – ride to campus.

Visit the Cat Tran website for route maps, schedules and other information. All Cat Tran lines will resume full operations at the beginning of the fall semester. Face coverings are required on Cat Tran shuttles.

And for those campus commuters who feel ready to ditch their car altogether – side note: the author of this article has found the recent acquisition of an electric bike a game changer that makes commuting a breeze, even in this heat! – the transportation planning and commuter programs manager has recommendations as well.

One is RideAmigos, which helps users plan the best route using a bike or public transit.

Alexandra Chavez calls it the "Swiss Army knife" of the alternative transportation program.

The app combines data from Google Maps, the city’s transit system and the bike route GIS database developed by the Pima Association of Governments, she explained.

"Based on all these data, it will map the best route from your doorstep to your destination, in all of Tucson, and, if you want it to, even beyond," Chavez said.

RideAmigos also helps students and employees looking for carpooling matches.

"Everyone in the group is affiliated with the University, so they log in with their NetID and the app helps them connect with someone else whose schedule and commute would be a good fit," Chavez said. "You can see their schedule, send them a message and connect with them that way. It takes the guesswork out of the equation."

As the name might suggest, RideAmigos offers a bit of fun, too. Users can log their trips and earn points toward badges and prizes as a reward for using sustainable modes of transport.

Other updates

- For the past year, every parking garage except the Second Street garage has been cashless and the cashiers that staffed the ground-level booths have been replaced with on-call "Wildcat Ambassadors," who can be summoned by pressing the assistance button at garage gates or by calling the dispatch office at 520-621-1108.
- To eliminate long lines at garage exits some garages are now gateless following successful pilot projects at the Honors Village and Health Sciences garages, where gates were replaced with cameras aimed at the license plates of cars entering and exiting. The South Stadium garage has been converted and the Highland Avenue garage will follow suit soon. Customers who use radio frequency identification devices to enter and leave garages must return them by Sept. 30. "If a plate is not associated with a permit, the driver is considered a visitor and will need to pay for parking via the Passport Parking mobile app," Feldt said.
- Say goodbye to parking meters. Those spots now require payment through the Passport Parking app.
- Some surface parking lots have been converted from Zone 1 to lot-specific, meaning they now require a permit specific to that lot.
- Bicycle locker locations have been added at the Shantz building, the Honors Village and the Cancer Center.
- Due to low ridership, the nighttime Cat Tran service known as Night Cat has been replaced by Night Cat by Lyft, which provides up to $10 toward the use of the Lyft car-sharing service for any after-hour trips, as long as they begin and end on campus.
- In-person customer service at the PTS main office on Sixth Street is now by appointment only. Schedule an appointment online.
- U-Pass: This discounted public transit pass – available to students, faculty and staff – provides unlimited rides on Sun Tran buses and the Sun Link streetcar. But before you buy one, you should know that rides on both are free until Dec. 31.

Links

- More information about what’s new in fiscal year 2021-22
- Summary of all program changes
- A map of campus parking areas
- Questions can be emailed to PTS-ParkingInformation@arizona.edu

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