

The Bus Stops Here!



PARKING & TRANSPORTATION NEWS

Looking Back; Looking Forward; Looking Good

With the holiday season well underway, the frenetic days of last July when the new parking permits went on sale for the first time, seem far away indeed.

D-Day was July 14th and the buying frenzy began at 5:00am online, with the PATS main office opening its doors at 7.30am. Whereas staff and faculty can have their permits automatically updated with the cost deducted from their payroll, most students nevertheless had to endure the hard slog of buying a permit in person. Ruben De La Garza, Business Management Specialist and co-ordinator of the permits release, says "It was a very busy time for our reception staff and on the first day particularly, it was a case of all hands to the pumps. This year we fielded a record number of telephone enquiries as well as having a one-day-permit sales record. This was also the acid test for our online facilities, but everything managed to stay up and running."

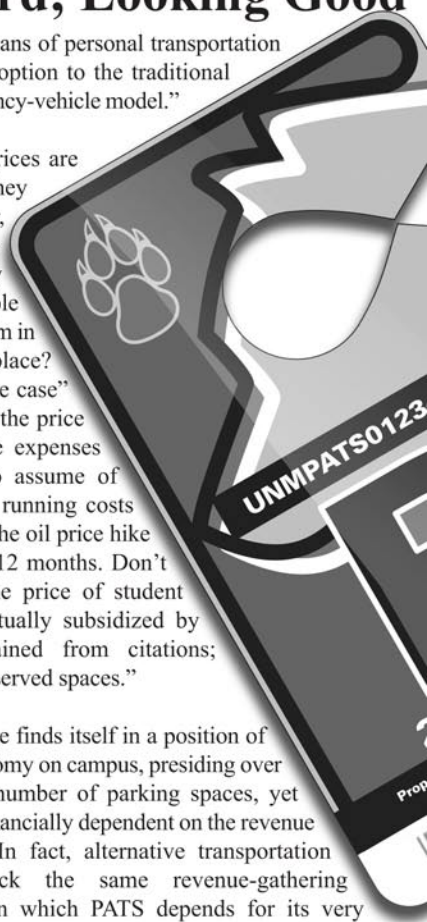
A policy of only selling permits on a strictly first-come, first-served basis drew criticism from some quarters. Ruben explains, "It's not an ideal situation, it's inevitable that some people are going to be disappointed if they don't get the permit zone of their choice and it's particularly hard if you're a first time buyer and perhaps not familiar with the means of permit dispersal. But it's the fairest means we have and the only alternative would be to deliberately over-sell some of the more sought-after areas. That's definitely not the way we operate."

Due to the construction of new buildings on campus, the amount of parking spaces available is seriously decreasing, where does the solution lie? "That's a tough one," continues Ruben, "there are 30,000 people on our main campus on any given day, and PATS has just 3,800 main campus parking spaces. That's a pretty tall order. What we are looking at long-term, is a solid, sustainable program that advocates

alternative means of personal transportation as a realistic option to the traditional single-occupancy-vehicle model."

The permit prices are greater than they were last year, could this be a tacit strategy to scare people off buying them in the first place? "That's not the case" Ruben says, "the price represents the expenses we've had to assume of maintenance; running costs and not least the oil price hike over the last 12 months. Don't forget too, the price of student permits is actually subsidized by revenue obtained from citations; meters and reserved spaces."

PATS therefore finds itself in a position of unique dichotomy on campus, presiding over a dwindling number of parking spaces, yet completely financially dependent on the revenue it produces. In fact, alternative transportation programs lack the same revenue-gathering component on which PATS depends for its very livelihood. "We're living in changing times" concludes Rubin. "Challenging times, but very exciting. I'm very enthusiastic about the future of PATS and campus transportation in general." So as the year draws to a close, PATS looks to the future with both interest and optimism.



Ideas? Information? Talk to us: bkilburn@parking.unm.edu

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