

Response from Elizabeth Krische, Western's Director Procurement Services

Thank you for opening a discussion on parking at Western. We further appreciate the Gazette reaching out with a number of questions, to which we provide the following statement.

We recognize that parking presents challenges, many of which are not unique to Western. The Gazette has identified some of those challenges and the information below builds the context around those observations.

Lot Reductions

Parking spaces are being eliminated as lots continue to be prime locations for building projects as identified in Western's Campus Master Plan, approved by the Board of Governors in June 2015. Recently, Ontario Hall has eliminated hundreds of student spaces and the new Western Interdisciplinary Research Building has done the same to hundreds of staff/faculty spaces.

As a result, we are actively seeking better ways to provide the same level of service with decreasing spaces and increasing populations.

A local solution to a similar challenge can be found at Fanshawe College, where parking permits are not issued to students living within the city and those eligible are subject to a lottery.

Lot Capacity

We have heard from our customers and observed through data collected by our gating system that there are several lots on campus that fill more quickly than others. This may give the perception that lots across campus are therefore all at capacity. Using our new real-time updates on lot capacity, we can assure our customers that Western is rarely at full capacity. Though a preferred lot may be full, permit holders have several other locations in which to park.

For example, students often use Springett as their first choice, leading to this lot filling early in the day. Permit holders unable to find a spot have several other student lots from which to choose. This is not a dilemma specific to our student customers. The Chemistry lot, for example, is a popular staff/faculty lot that fills quickly and remains at or near capacity throughout the day.

At Western, permits are sold by zone, meaning customers have access to more than one lot on campus. If a popular lot is full, customers may need to find space in one of the many other locations.

At Queen's University, space has become so scarce that a region-exclusive policy similar to Fanshawe's has been enacted and eligible customers are added to the waitlist. Fortunately, Western currently has the capacity and hasn't needed to resort to this alternative.

Lot Allocation

It is a common practice for universities to have separate lots for staff and students. Roughly 80% of all U15 Universities, including MacMaster, University of Toronto, and Waterloo have structured permit sales using this allocation model. Many of the student lots, except Springett, have been aligned with residences and provide a walking distance to class that is similar to those living on campus.

Rate Changes

One aspect of Western's parking that varies from provincial counterparts is a variable rate structure. A lower annual rate is provided to students as an incentive to purchase parking in volume. This is similar to buying a large coffee, which has twice the volume as a small, but is only a fraction more expensive. Conversely, the practice results in a disincentive and becomes more expensive for shorter term permits. Currently, staff and faculty are not provided with an incentive for longer term parking.

Rate increases this past year were more favourable to students when compared to the staff perimeter rate. Permit rates and availability may continue to change as the demand for parking is balanced against the number and/or type of spaces available. In the medium to longer term, rates and availability may also be impacted by the need for a parking structure.

Alternative Transportation

To help alleviate the vehicular congestion at Western, all student, staff, and faculty commuters are encouraged to find alternative modes of transportation. Parking is supportive of alternative transportation by outfitting campus with bike racks and lockers. The unit promotes carpooling as an option for all permit holders and supports the LTC with comfort shelters at select stops on campus. Though not a parking initiative, the USC has also negotiated a heavily subsidized city bus pass for students, providing further options for getting to campus without a car.

We acknowledge that everyone has a unique route to the University and sometimes customers must find creative ways to reduce the cost of their commute and dependence on driving.