

Parking Services Division

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

New smart parking meters for the City of Sacramento

Q: Why is the City of Sacramento installing new parking meters?

A: The current single-space meters in the city are old and are reaching their end of life. Maintenance costs are climbing. The Parking Services Division often learns of a malfunctioning meter after a citizen reports it or during scheduled preventative maintenance. The new smart meters are not only capable of immediately alerting staff of a malfunction, they will save money on maintenance. They use solar cells to keep the batteries charged, resulting in fewer batteries to change and dispose.

Also important – smart meters will improve customer service. The current meters are limited to accepting quarters. The new meters will be able to accept multiple forms of payment (coins, credit cards, pay-by-cell, and mobile app). The technologically advanced machines can offer pay-by-phone options to be able to text a customer before a meter expires. The City will be developing these applications during 2014. To see a demonstration of how a smart meter operates, visit www.sacpark.org/smartmeters.

Q: Are the new smart parking meters far more costly than simply replacing worn out meters with newer versions? How is the City justifying the cost?

A: Replacing the worn out meters with newer versions of the same technology will not provide the benefits that many customers have been requesting, such as payment by credit card, phone, or mobile app, texting to alert that time is about to expire, and finding available parking. The new meters also will alert Meter Shop staff to malfunctions so repairs can be done in a timely manner, which is not possible with the old meters.

Q: How many smart meters will be installed, and where will they be located? What will happen to the pay-and-display stations?

A: Approximately 4,000 smart meters will be deployed in most short-term parking spaces in downtown, midtown, and Old Sacramento. Smart meter installation will begin at the end of January 2014 and is expected to continue into the summer. The pay-and-display stations will be relocated to the 10-hour parking zones in the outlying areas.

Q: When will the meters at the location(s) where I park frequently be updated?

A: We don't project timelines more than a few weeks in advance because we need to be flexible to accommodate other changes on the street, such as construction, special events, and availability of posts. However, upcoming changes will always be posted at www.sacpark.org/smartmeters, and customers are encouraged to follow @SacParking on Twitter to receive updates.

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Q: Will people looking for an available on-street parking spot be able to find one with the new parking meter technology?

A: Given the new technology available with the new parking meters, the City anticipates developing an “app” or a web page by late 2014 that will be capable of directing drivers to places where they are most likely to find available parking.

Q: How often will the rates change? What are the rates anticipated to be?

A: The on-street rate structure has not been finalized. We are studying now the demands on our current on-street parking supply and what days, times, and locations are in highest demand. Once the study is complete, City staff will make recommendations for adjustments. The adjustments may be up or down.

Q: Is there a fee for using a credit card with the smart meters?

A: No. However, the minimum parking session when paying by credit card is one hour. If the parking space has a time limit of less than one hour, then the minimum parking session is the time limit for that parking space.

Q: Is there a fee associated with using pay-by-phone or a mobile app, now and with the new parking meters?

A: Parking paid through mobile payment (whether phone or app) will be processed by a third-party vendor. To cover the cost of the service, a small convenience fee will be added to the parking fee.

Q: How will the City pay for the new meters? Will this money be paid out of the general fund?

A: The City will not use or take money away from the general fund to pay for the new meters. They will be financed, similar to the way the pay-and-display meters were financed in 2006. In this case, we expect the meters will pay for themselves with the additional revenue generated by making it easier to pay for parking (by not limiting customers to quarters). Fewer people will risk a ticket if they have options to pay for adequate time. We found this to be the case with the 300 pay-and-display meters, where revenue increased approximately 38 percent after they were installed.

Q: Will my Duncan or MacKay parking card work at the new parking meters?

A: Unfortunately, those parking cards use technology that is proprietary to those companies. We will discontinue those cards shortly. However, the City soon will introduce a new parking card that will work

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not only at the new smart meters, but also at the pay-and-display stations and in City-managed parking lots and garages.

Q: Can I continue to use a pay-and-display receipt when parking at the new parking meters?

A: This practice was allowed in the past because the pay-and-display meters offered more payment options than the old single-space meters. Since the new smart meters accept the same payment methods, whenever a customer parks at a space with a smart meter, the meter needs to be paid.

Q: New poles for parking meters appear to be shorter. Is this a change?

A: Yes. The display on smart meters is at an angle, so new poles are shorter to make it easier to use the meters. Over time, the majority of poles within the City will be trimmed to have a consistent appearance.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for businesses to start a validation program for on-street parking?

A: Given the technology available with the smart meters, the City anticipates developing the ability for businesses to validate on-street parking electronically. Our current parking meter technology does not have this capability.

Q: Will there be the ability to offer promotional free parking for district or neighborhood events, such as the 12 Days of Midtown?

A: The City currently offers grant funding used to offset city service costs through its “City of Festivals Special Event Support Program.” More information on the Special Event Support Program availability, including program guidelines and application material can be found at the following link:

<http://www.cityofsacramento.org/ccl/>.