

The CSU Parking Crisis

*Report by Ed Purcell
CFA Director of Representation
August, 2004*

Twenty years of mad-cap building, funds diversion (CMS), and tens of million dollars of increased user fees later, CSU's parking program remains in crisis as the availability of student, faculty, and staff parking remains little changed.

The latest example of the Administration's mishandling of its parking mandate is found in the July 9, 2004 proposed decision of a Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) Administrative Law Judge in cases from CSU Northridge and CSU Sacramento.

In 2002, despite contractual assurances to the California Faculty Association (CFA) and the California State Employees Association (CSEA) that employee parking rates would be frozen, administrators on two campuses determined that they would seek to raise parking fees anyway.

First, rump groups of sympathetic local parking consumers were formed to rubber stamp the Administration's plan for higher fees. Next, when the Unions objected to these contract violations, the Administration unilaterally raised fees for the most vulnerable group of parking consumers, the students. When the Unions demanded detailed documentation on the financial operations of the campus programs, they were rebuffed — told essentially that parking consumers had no right to know.

Finally, when local administrators woke up to the contract violations represented by efforts to raise fees for faculty and staff, they hit upon a new scheme to pursue their ultimate goal of higher fees. Those consumers who possessed the power to object fee increases through their Union collective bargaining agreements would simply be denied access to the newly constructed facilities, a first in the CSU!

At that juncture, the Unions cooperated in the filing of an unfair labor practice charge which accused the CSU of three violations of the State bargaining law (HEERA):

- Unilateral change in campus parking practices without requisite bargaining with the Unions;
- Refusal to divulge information about campus parking operations necessary for the Unions to bargain intelligently about parking fees, thus depriving them of their statutory right to represent faculty and staff; and

- Illegally by-passing the Unions (exclusive representatives of their bargaining units) in favor of consultation and negotiation with the Administration's hand-picked supporters who were improperly billed as the real "representatives" of the employees in question for parking issues.

The Decision

PERB has now sustained the Unions' charges on all counts, ordering that parking barriers to faculty and staff use of the new facilities be removed and that CSU cease and desist from the use of rump committees. Perhaps most importantly, PERB has sustained the right of the Unions to a "look at the books" so that parking consumers — all parking consumers — can finally ascertain for themselves the real needs and costs of campus parking operations.

Predictably, the same administrators who violated the law in the first instance now refuse to admit their errors and have, instead, directed that additional, precious University resources be wasted on an appeal. Implementation of the ALJ's decision will be stayed until this appeal is decided by the PERB Board.

The Parking Crisis Will Continue: A Call for Reform

Regretfully, unless and until major reforms occur in CSU parking operations, there is every reason to believe the long-term parking crisis will continue. Rates will continue to rise while availability shrinks. The California Faculty Association believes that the time for reform is now before the situation — and attendant illegalities — deteriorates further:

Transparency — Its time that each and every aspect of parking operations from planning and construction to fees and availability be opened to the detailed scrutiny of parking consumers;

Power — Although CSU administrators represent but a tiny percentage of parking consumers, they hold complete power over parking operations, frequently to the exclusion and detriment of students, faculty and staff. If the exercise of this power had led to what parking consumers deserve -- low cost, available parking -- perhaps the current system could be excused, but that is not the case. Its time to turn CSU parking operations over to the consumers;

Creativity — CSU's efforts to build and spend its way out of the long-term parking crisis have been an abject failure. This "concrete" mentality has led to the dismissal of a variety of creative ideas both to meet parking demand and reduce

it. New thinking is needed.

Fiduciary Responsibility — Diversion of parking income to other sources whether CMS, non parking-related campus maintenance, or highly paid administrators who “manage” the parking bureaucracy must stop. That will only occur when those who pay the bills — the consumers — get to decide what those bills should be.

End the Divide and Conquer Game

Sadly, one of the most debilitating effects of the CSU Administration’s current parking program is its efforts to divide parking consumers into warring camps — student against employee; union against union; campus against campus. The heart of this strategy is the Administration’s ability to consistently force higher parking fees on students who are left with virtually no recourse.

As representative of CSU’s largest employee group, CFA is pledged to work with all consumers to develop a fairer system based on the notion that those who pay should decide. Collaborative and democratic decision-making must replace the current autocratic, imperious rule of administrators who have failed to correct the parking systems problems or even to obey the law.