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Parking Transparency, Equity, and Feasible Alternatives

February 26, 2026

Executive Summary

Utah State University is located in a geographically constrained area where space near campus is limited. However, Logan overall remains a car-dependent city, and nearly all local employers, including hospitals, airports, government, and private businesses, provide free employee parking.

At USU, rising parking permit costs function as a pay-to-work requirement, particularly for employees whose salaries are constrained by legislative oversight and already lag behind regional market rates.

Maintenance issues (potholes, surface deterioration, inconsistent snow/ice removal) further undermine the credibility of annual rate increases.

Key Issues

1. Transparency Gaps

Employees lack access to foundational financial information, including:

- Parking revenue by permit type
- Operating and maintenance costs
- Garage debt schedules and payoff dates
- Capital reserve levels
- Planned maintenance and improvement projects

Without clear data, employees cannot trust or understand rate-setting decisions.

2. Disproportionate Financial and Time Burdens

While bus routes technically serve rural areas, they often add 45–60 minutes to an employee's day. For many staff, especially working parents, full-time employees pursuing degrees, and those with time-sensitive family responsibilities, this is not a feasible alternative.

When the choice to get to my office becomes:

- Pay with rising parking fees, **or**
- Pay with an hour or more of my personal time daily

the system becomes inequitable. No employee should have to consider using **student loans** simply to afford parking that is required for their job.

Even when modest wage increases are approved by the legislature, annual price increases across essential expenses, including tuition for employees who are also students, can offset those gains, leaving many employees with no meaningful improvement in real take-home income.

This structure is incompatible with USU's goals when its leadership has identified **employee retention** as a key organizational priority, particularly in response to labor market changes and post-pandemic employee expectations.

The financial burden is similarly significant for hybrid employees, especially for low-salary hybrid employees—who must still maintain reliable campus access despite being on site fewer days.

3. Inadequate Maintenance

Rate increases continue despite:

- Unrepaired potholes
- Deferred surface and structural upkeep
- Inconsistent winter maintenance
- Sometimes inoperable and always slow elevators

Employees do not observe reinvestment proportional to rising costs.

Recommendations

1. Publish an Annual Parking & Transportation Financial Report

Include:

- Revenue and expenditures
- Debt service timelines
- Maintenance budgets

- Capital reserves
- Cost estimates and timelines for upcoming projects

Outcome: Builds trust and supports data-driven rate-setting.

2. Implement a Sliding-Scale (Salary-Based) Pricing Structure

USU already uses income-based tiers for medical insurance premiums. A similar structure should be implemented for parking, with a broader scale to reflect:

- The significant financial burden parking places on lower-wage employees
- The difference between essential, mandatory commuting and elective benefits

Possible models include:

- Salary-banded permit prices
- Percentage-of-salary caps
- Reduced-cost outer lots
- Hybrid-worker tiers
- Shared permits for alternating schedules

Outcome: Aligns parking costs with ability to pay and mirrors equity practices used elsewhere in USU's benefit system.

3. Establish Maintenance Standards and Public Reporting

Implement service-level expectations such as:

- Pothole repair within X days
- Annual structural inspections with published summaries
- Seasonal snow/ice benchmarks
- Regular lighting and safety audits

Outcome: Ensures rate increases yield visible improvements.

4. Develop Off-Site Employee Parking with Shuttle Service

Given space constraints near campus, USU should evaluate:

- Purchasing or leasing satellite lots outside the congestion zone
- Using our reliable Aggie Shuttle to transport employees, with an emphasis on normal office times
 - This would need to continue all year, not just during the semester

- Offering these lots at significantly reduced or no cost for employees

Many staff would willingly use such lots—provided they are feasible and time-efficient.

Outcome: Reduces demand for core campus parking while creating a truly viable alternative.

5. Strengthen Employee Representation in Parking Governance

Actions:

- Add employee seats to parking advisory committees
- Require committee review and public rationale for any rate increase
- Publish meeting notes and recommendations

Outcome: Ensures policy reflects the needs of those most affected.

Requested Actions

1. Release 3–5 years of Parking & Transportation financial data for transparency.
 2. Freeze further rate increases until maintenance standards are met.
 3. Convene a task force to evaluate off-site lots and shuttle feasibility.
 4. Develop a salary-based pricing model and present options within 60–90 days.
 5. Ensure any future rate change includes:
 - documented financial need
 - clear maintenance plan
 - equity impact analysis
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Conclusion

The current parking model places a disproportionate financial and time burden on employees, especially lower-wage staff and working professionals balancing family and academic commitments. Transparency, equitable pricing, and realistic alternatives are essential for USU to uphold fairness, support retention, and maintain its commitment to employees.