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Airports dial in to call waiting

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BY [FRAN SPIELMAN](#) City Hall Reporter

Motorists waiting to greet passengers at O'Hare and Midway airports will no longer have to circle endlessly, pay for parking or park illegally on the shoulder of airport roadways.

They'll be able to spend up to an hour waiting in designated "cell-phone" lots for arriving passengers to call when they touch down and retrieve their baggage.

Eighteen airports across the nation already have cell-phone lots, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Houston, San Diego, Seattle and Baltimore. They range from 25 spaces to 100.

Now, Chicago will join the parade of cities offering the popular amenity.

150 spaces at O'Hare

O'Hare will have 150 spaces at Economy Lot F. Motorists can access the lot by exiting I-190 at North Mannheim Road and following the signs to Economy Parking F/Cell Phone lot.

Midway's 90-space cell-phone lot is at 61st and Cicero just south of the airport's main entrance. Both lots will open on Monday.

Newly appointed Aviation Commissioner Nuria Fernandez said the goal is to reduce notorious congestion in the terminal core and eliminate the dangerous habit motorists have developed since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. That's when parking was banned in front of passenger terminals.

"All the way into the core, you see vehicles parked on the north side of the roadway [leading into O'Hare]. They're coming at the last minute and waiting for that plane to land. Police come through and wave everyone away, but they come right back and queue up again," Fernandez said.

"We want to improve traffic throughout the core and make sure people waiting on the curb do not endanger themselves when it's time to weave into oncoming traffic to go meet family and friends at the terminal. This gives them a free parking location where they can wait in a safe manner without circling around waiting for that phone call to come in."

Just temporary -- or be towed

Fernandez stressed that police officers will monitor cell-phone lots and will ticket and tow unattended vehicles. Motorists need to remain in their vehicles -- not "lock the doors and walk away," she said. And she stressed that the new lots are a "temporary waiting area."

"If the flight they're waiting for has been delayed -- if the officer notices that they've been there for an extended period and there's no movement after 45 minutes or an hour -- they'll be asked to move to a paid lot," she said.

The cell-phone lot is expected to be the first of several parking improvements at O'Hare.

The Chicago Sun-Times reported earlier this year that City Hall was soliciting ideas from companies vying to install a state-of-the-art parking access and revenue control system capable of transforming an often-aggravating parking experience at O'Hare.

The most intriguing concept included in the city's request for information is a "parking guidance system" designed to assist motorists "in quickly locating available parking spaces" at O'Hare's 9,266-space indoor garage.

Upon entering the garage and pulling a parking ticket, drivers would see an electronic screen that lets them know where to go.

After talking about it for years, City Hall is also laying the groundwork to implement a cashless parking system at O'Hare that would allow 20,000 daily parking transactions to be made with credit cards, value-added cards, I-Pass transponders and automatic vehicle identification systems issued to frequent business travelers.

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