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Parking at airport? Check your e-mail first

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With a new aid to help ease the hassle of flying, travelers can now make more informed decisions about where to look for parking at Chicago's airports.

The Chicago Department of Aviation launches an e-mail alert system this week that provides real-time information about available parking in the garages and surface lots at O'Hare International and Midway Airports.

Airline passengers can register in advance to receive e-mails on the days they will be traveling about which garages and lots are full and which ones still have space. Updated parking information is also posted online for the first time on the city's airport Web site, www.flychicago.com.

The new service comes just in time for the holiday season.

And it arrives not a moment too early for frustrated travelers who up until now have driven to the parking facilities at the airports only to find out that they must turn around and drive to overflow lots a good distance from terminals.

The run-around often results in missed flights for people who fail to budget an extra half-hour to an hour to wait for shuttle buses, then ride from the parking lots to Midway; or to take shuttle buses and the People Mover light-rail system at O'Hare.

"Apparently the Red and Blue economy parking lots at Midway are now always full," said frequent traveler Dan Baker, an Oak Park resident.

"The remote parking lots are located at 72nd Street and Cicero Avenue--in Bedford Park, almost 2 miles from the airport. They're not kidding when they call them remote," said Baker, who said he waited 15 minutes for a shuttle bus to arrive, followed by a 25-minute trip in congested traffic on Cicero.

O'Hare's garage and lots tend to fill up several times a day on Wednesdays and Thursdays, according to the Aviation Department. The bad days to find parking at Midway are on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The situation at Midway should ease in late December when a second garage opens with 6,300 parking spaces.

"We know the current parking situation is less than ideal," said city airport spokeswoman Wendy Abrams, adding that the idea to provide e-mail alerts was sparked by complaints that the Tribune



forwarded to the city from airport customers.

"We took to heart what you said about reaching out to passengers before they leave the house," Abrams said.

O'Hare has 22,730 parking spaces in its main garage near the passenger terminal complex and in six surface lots. About half of the spaces are within walking distance of terminals, with the rest at economy lots requiring travelers to take shuttles or the People Mover.

City officials closed O'Hare's parking Lot F, which accommodated more than 3,100 vehicles, after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks because of the downturn in air travel and the expense to the city of patrolling a little-used parking lot. Despite the frequent parking crunch at O'Hare today, Abrams said there are no plans to reopen Lot F, which is on Mannheim Road.

Midway operates one main garage, accommodating more than 2,400 vehicles; three economy lots on 55th Street with 3,150 spaces; and a remote lot at 72nd Street and Cicero Avenue that can hold 1,850 vehicles. There is also a 72nd Street overflow lot that can park 800 vehicles.

Next to the 6,300-space economy parking garage set to open in December will be a surface lot with 2,000 spaces, officials said. The additions will double capacity at Midway, from about 8,200 spaces to 16,500 by year's end.

Passengers who register for e-mail updates about parking conditions at O'Hare and Midway will receive messages three times a day, plus every time the status of a parking garage or surface lot changes, for the airport they will be going to on their travel dates, Abrams said.

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Midway Airport to expand parking

Parking capacity at Midway Airport will double by year's end with the addition of a new parking garage and surface lot.

MIDWAY AIRPORT PARKING

Terminal garage: 2,464

Economy lots: 3,151

72nd St. remote lot: 1,850

72nd St. overflow lot: 800

Current total: 8,265

Economy parking garage: 6,300

Surface lot: 2,000

FUTURE TOTAL: 16,565

O'HARE AIRPORT PARKING

Main garage lot A: 9,266

C lot: 1,166

B lot: 1,722

D lot: 946

Economy lot E: 6,916

Economy lot G: 2,714

TOTAL: 22,730

Note: Economy lot F at O'Hare has been closed.

Source: City of Chicago

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