

WORDS | ANDREA BALL

# Crowd control

**As the holiday season approaches, how can operators manage surges in demand for parking?**

**W**hether it's a crunch sporting clash or a big-name pop concert, large events can offer huge economic benefits to the towns and cities that host them, but the extra crowds inevitably mean an increase in traffic and additional demands on parking facilities. The run-up to Christmas can be an especially busy time, with seasonal markets, lights switch-ons and shopping promotions all adding to the pressure on parking spaces.

Forward-planning and preparedness is key for managing surges in demand, so how can operators plan ahead to help prevent customer frustration and problem parking?

"Event parking is like walking into the unknown," says Peter Lowe, managing director of RTA Associates, which advises councils on managing parking operations, and chair of BPA Wales Parking and Transport Group. "With everyday parking, you've got your car parks, you've got your spaces, you know your tariffs and you know roughly how many people are going to be there on a daily basis. With event parking, it's about being aware of demand and then being able to match that anticipated demand."

In June this year, US pop titan Taylor Swift brought her record-breaking Eras tour to the Principality Stadium in Cardiff. Cardiff Council provides a number of supervised park-and-ride facilities and to cope with the influx of fans, it also laid on extra trains, buses and coaches, and put a 400-metre vehicle exclusion zone around the periphery of the stadium. "It was well thought out," says Peter. "Even taxis had

to drop off outside of it – unless they were carrying someone with a Blue Badge. Everybody knew well in advance, don't take your car because you won't get anywhere near the stadium."

Despite these efforts, Wales Online reported that more than 330 penalty charge notices (PCNs) were handed out. Similarly, more than 400 PCNs were issued after Pink's huge concert at the Principality Stadium, attended by more than 50,000 fans, earlier the same month, and pictures emerged on social media showing cars parked on pavements and grass verges nearby.

"The problem we've got as an industry is the penalty charge level isn't very high," says Peter. If you park on double yellow lines it's £70. If it's a parking restriction contravention and it's paid in 14 days, it's £35. With four of you in the car, that's £8.75 each, so there's no disincentive.

"We've been talking to the Welsh Government about having a £100 PCN that's then reduced to £50. It's not a massive step, but it's getting to 'I'm not going to pay that...'. It was introduced in Scotland last year, and it works."

#### Vehicle exclusion zones

As demonstrated in Cardiff, vehicle exclusion zones can be a useful tool for managing event parking, but there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. "You've got to take each event on merit," says Peter. "With regular events, such as football or cricket that might be happening every other week, you can set traffic regulation orders to suit. In a residents' area around the ground, the parking regime can change on match days. You have flaps on the signs that are opened before the event: 'Match day parking. No

**"With event parking, it's about being aware of demand and then being able to match that anticipated demand"**

parking between 2pm and 10pm. Permit holders only.'

"Special events could be managed through a temporary traffic regulation order. So the local authority can help by bringing in temporary orders to prevent people doing what they shouldn't.

"You can't really extend no-go zones any wider, because you have so many access roads, and then you get security issues and people breaking down barriers. You also have to think about displacement. If you stop people from parking in one area, where do they go? The incentive then is to try to get people onto public transport."

#### Promoting public transport

Public transport hasn't always had the best reputation, but attitudes are changing. When US singer-songwriter Billy Joel played his first ever gig in the Welsh capital he caught the train from London Paddington to Cardiff – and he didn't travel in First Class, he got on with all the concert-goers. "When we arrived at Cardiff the fans got off the train →



Cardiff Council has used measures including extra public transport services and a vehicle exclusion zone to cope with event crowds at the Principality Stadium



only to see the star of the show behind them,” said a GWR spokesperson.

Park-and-ride schemes are also useful on event days, but you need to encourage people to use them. “You’ve got to offer incentives,” says Peter. “You’ve got to start putting your EV chargers at your park-and-ride sites, rather than your destination sites. That’s how you start to manipulate people to use other modes of transport.”

Many modern stadiums are reducing the number of parking spaces they offer in a bid to change the way people think about travelling to major events. Everton FC’s new stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock on Liverpool’s waterfront will hold more than 52,000 people, but car parking

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will only be available for those with accessibility issues and VIPs, along with dedicated parking for bicycles.

Instead, following a survey in 2018 which suggested that 60% of fans wanted to use public transport, the club is planning to upgrade facilities at nearby Sandhills train station. The stadium’s close proximity to the city also means more fans will have the opportunity to walk to the site, while looping matchday shuttle bus services will run between the stadium and the main stations in town, for those who cannot make the journey on foot.

**Making a flexible plan**

For venues with regular peaks in parking

## Temporary traffic regulation orders for special events

The Road Traffic Regulation (Special Events) Act 1994 inserted sections 16A to C into the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA) and gave local traffic authorities the power to make orders to impose temporary restrictions on the highway for sporting events, social events or entertainment (collectively known as special events).

A traffic authority can impose temporary highway restrictions for a special event once, and for up to three days, in any calendar year (1 January to 31 December). Restrictions for special events beyond this that affect the same length of road require approval from the Secretary of State for Transport.

**For more information, visit:** [gov.uk/government/publications/section-16-temporary-traffic-regulation-orders-for-special-events/temporary-traffic-regulation-orders-for-special-events](http://gov.uk/government/publications/section-16-temporary-traffic-regulation-orders-for-special-events/temporary-traffic-regulation-orders-for-special-events)

use – such as retail areas in the run-up to Christmas – creating a plan to manage flow around the site’s car parks pays dividends. Matt Towers is car park operations manager for Westfield, which runs two of the UK’s biggest retail centres in Shepherd’s Bush and Stratford, London. In the run-up to Christmas and Eid, the centres experience peaks in demand that are dealt with using thorough planning, and in collaboration with Ethos Farm, the centres’ parking operator.

Westfield has a carefully thought out traffic management plan, which is adjusted in response to real-time movement. “The local authorities and TfL helped us get our plan off the ground in our earlier years,” says Matt. “Now we’ve got it, and we know it works, we can make minor tweaks to it.”

The team at Westfield use customer feedback to inform changes to their plan every year. “One of the big pieces we had last year was telling people when we’re expecting our exits to be busy, so they might say ‘I don’t want to leave at the moment, I’ll get myself some dinner’ – or they might leave earlier. Having that information so they can make an active decision saw really positive feedback.”

It’s not just customer feedback that helps, either. Matt says that the staff working at the car parks are crucial to the centres’ success. “I’m a big believer in your people on the ground,” he says. “It’s really important to listen to them and we adapt to make a lot of dynamic assessments.”

The team have the experience and knowledge to spot increased flow before it becomes a problem and redirect traffic accordingly. “Customers don’t know the benefit – they’re just driving where they’re told – but they’re finding a space and they’re finding it quickly.”

### Communication is key

For any peak in demand, whether caused by an annual surge or one-off event, helping motorists to prepare helps to give them a positive experience. Visitors are often unfamiliar with the area, so ensuring they know exactly what to expect ahead of time is crucial. For concerts and sports events, this starts at the booking stage.

“Give the customer everything they need before they go,” says Peter. “How to get there and the best time to get there – or tell them not to get there after a certain time. You might say, ‘If you’re coming in your car, don’t arrive after 4pm for a 7pm event, because we’re shutting the roads.’

Signage is crucial; it needs to be comprehensive and clear. Parking should feature on maps and satnav systems and there must be adequate signs on approach roads and street signs. The central aim must be to indicate to the tourist which car parks are meant for them and, of course, where the attraction is.

“Make it as clear as you can,” advises

Peter. “Tell people where Gate D or Entrance A is. And then when you get there, you need enough people to say, ‘Inside the car park, you need to go that way, that takes you to Gate D.’ Signage has to be well lit, and there should be lots of security staff around when people are going back to their cars.”

### Working with other stakeholders


Event parking also offers an opportunity for local businesses to make some extra income by offering land for temporary parking. “Concert tickets go on sale months in advance,” says Peter. “So if you’ve got any business acumen and you’re a landowner nearby, you should be saying to the local authority, ‘I can put 400 cars on my land, are you okay with that?’

Manchester’s new Co-op Live Arena is well served by a tram system which runs from the city centre, but the owners of the music, sports and entertainment venue have also struck a deal with Bristol Street Motors, which owns land adjacent to the site, to offer off-street parking on event days, bookable in advance.

“That’s an example of partnership working,” says Peter. “It’s £25 to park your car for the event, but that’s not a lot of money split between four people. Event organisers should talk to adjacent landowners, and whether that needs licensing or not is then between the landowner and the local authority.”

### Conclusion

So, it seems the key to managing event parking is to assess demand, ensure clear communication and then deliver what you have promised.

“If the customer has got all the details, and those details are correct, you’ve got a satisfied customer as far as parking is concerned,” says Peter. “Whether the event is rubbish or not, is out of your hands!” 



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