

# The Psychology of Parking

By Megan Leinart, LEED AP BD+C

For years, I have considered the idea of writing about the psychology of parking. Since studying psychology for my minor in college, I've been fascinated by the inner workings of the mind, and I'm constantly analyzing people (friends, family, random people at the store or in airports) and the reasons they do what they do and make the decisions they make. As an adult, I've become a parking nerd, and I often revert back to my interest in psychology and the many connections between the perceptions and decisions that occur in this field, from the considerations made when planning and designing for parking facilities to the perceptions those looking for parking may have.

Perhaps one day I'll write a longer piece on the many psychological impacts and considerations in parking. But for now I will start with the psychological impacts of sustainability.

## A Need for Change

By nature, human beings are concerned about the health and well-being of themselves and their loved ones. They have a need to feel that they are creating positive change in the world. The ideas and concepts of sustainability are intertwined with many of the concerns people have, from concerns about climate change and pollution impacts to public health and community connectivity.

People often connect parking to pollution and climate change. Driving isn't often something associated with being the cleanest or most sustainable activity. As parking professionals, we know that a lot has actually changed in recent years, creating opportunities to implement sustainable parking (and driving) strategies from planning through design, construction, and operation, including:

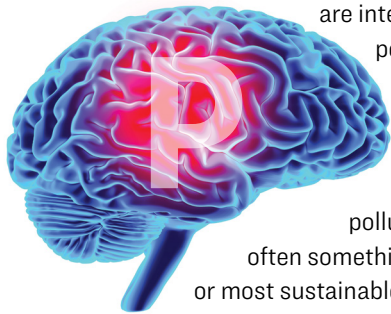
- Studies to reduce the garage footprint.
- Pricing parking to encourage alternative modes of transportation.
- Bike parking accommodations.
- Electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.
- Construction waste reduction.
- Construction material reuse and recycling.
- Recycling programs.
- Sustainable cleaning programs.
- Carpool/vanpool reserved parking.
- Low-emitting/Fuel-efficient-vehicle reserved parking.

These are just a few of the many opportunities to include sustainability in parking with which we're all familiar. Educating the public on these strategies is important to helping people understand the many ways that parking can be sustainable. Parksmart credit B13 encourages marketing and education programs within parking areas to teach the public about the ways the facility has incorporated sustainable strategies and how individuals can contribute as well (carpooling, driving electric vehicles, biking, recycling, etc.). A successful garage marketing program will provide a more pleasant visual experience for patrons, and the psychological value of educating the public about the positive effects that a parking facility is making to the environment and the community can be significant.

## Activity

Another psychological consideration is activity and community connectivity. It's no secret that even the slightest physical activity, including walking or biking, can have a positive effect on one's physical and mental health. The opportunity to walk or bike even for just a few minutes each day can significantly improve one's mood and mental state. The opportunity to do so during normal daily activities, such as traveling to and from work, is even better.

Many communities are good at walkability and biking, and parking facilities are a great hub for these activities. Often one of the goals of parking planning and design is to actually try to reduce the amount of parking required and the resulting driving. Providing routes comfortable for walking and biking (even just the last few miles or blocks) between where people park and mass transit, office buildings, and residential developments provides the extremely healthy and beneficial impacts of spending time outside and engaging in physical activity—some-



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thing not everyone has each day. Further, parking facilities are great locations for bike shares and bike storage that may not otherwise be provided in the community. These strategies also provide people the opportunity to connect more to their cities, towns, and neighborhoods and offer a sense of community and belonging. Parksmart credits A3, B1, B2, B11, and B12 all include elements of providing for walking and biking opportunities.

There is much more possible ground to cover when it comes to the psychological considerations of parking, including safety and security, parking pricing, per-

ceived versus actual supply and demand, the impacts of signage, and even structured versus street parking. But the connection to sustainability offers possibly the most satisfying results and positive impacts to health, well-being, and long- and short-term impacts to the community and individuals. [P](#)



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