

# City of Columbus, Ohio

## SmartColumbus

Building smarter, more livable cities

### Background

Columbus is the state capital of Ohio, a bustling metropolis with a rich history and a diverse range of businesses. The city has a population of nearly a million people, making it one of the most populous cities in the Midwest—second only to Chicago. In addition to being an important travel hub, Columbus’ many unique neighborhoods make it a vibrant spot for events, festivals, outdoor activities, and more.

Columbus manages over 10,000 on-street paid parking spaces and an additional 3,500 off-street spaces across four different facilities. In addition to parking, the city boasts convenient access to numerous bike and walking paths, as well as public transit. In 2016, the city was the first-ever winner of the US Department of Transportation’s Smart City Challenge. The \$40 million grant was part of Columbus’ innovative initiative to update and modernize transportation, using smart mobility to enrich people’s lives.

### Modernizing parking and permits in Columbus

Without a digital parking solution, the city’s traditional parking and enforcement systems were creating an inconsistent parking experience that couldn’t meet modern customer expectations. Additionally, the model for issuing resident permits and guest permits manually was becoming an operational challenge as it was unable to scale fast enough to meet demand. “We had a pretty static and fragmented parking system,” explains Robert Ferrin, Assistant Director for Parking Services at the City of Columbus. “Every block had different restrictions, different stickers, and different hang tags.”

In 2019, the City of Columbus partnered with ParkMobile to modernize their parking and permit systems for both on and off-street parking. They rolled out new features incrementally, while simultaneously educating the public and making periodic parking policy adjustments. The city’s comprehensive, holistic approach was a huge success—currently 6,000 of the city’s parking spaces are mobile-payment only with plans to expand in the future.

Columbus’ decision to go with ParkMobile was based both on the platform’s powerful, user-friendly capabilities and its potential to grow along with the city. “When we evaluate technologies, we



THE CITY OF  
**COLUMBUS**

Columbus, OH  
by the numbers

 **10,000**

On-street parking spaces

 **3,500**

Off-street parking spaces

 **70%**

Parking revenue  
from mobile pay

really look to see if that technology is something we can build off of,” Ferrin notes, “so that when there’s a big opportunity like the Smart City grant, we can expand it and offer additional functions and features to our customers.”

## Unifying and improving the parking experience

ParkMobile’s convenient app has been well-received by city residents and visitors and now accounts for almost 70% of parking revenue in certain areas. Residents enjoy ParkMobile’s helpful notifications and reminders along with the ability to extend their parking time remotely from the app. Added-value features like parking availability maps and built-in retail validation programs are also helping local businesses leverage parking to extend their brand. “It’s a great marketing and customer retention tool and something that you can’t really do with a physical point-of-sale meter,” Ferrin notes.

ParkMobile also extensively collaborated with Columbus to set up a digital permit system that significantly streamlined resident and guest permit management. Comprehensive integrations with the city’s existing permit and enforcement systems helped close common compliance loopholes and create a simplified, unified parking experience across all of the city’s paid parking locations.

Ferrin notes that ParkMobile’s support team was communicative and quick to solve issues that arose, and that “the ParkMobile staff is accessible and has provided valuable customer service.”

## Staying agile to meet shifting customer needs

Columbus has ambitious plans to further integrate ParkMobile’s digital parking platform into its wider mobility ecosystem, creating smart solutions for public transit, e-bikes, and curbside management. As the city embraces more smart mobility solutions and an asset-light future, creating equity remains a top priority. “One of the most important challenges we’re trying to solve with ParkMobile and others is finding ways to connect with folks across the digital divide, whether they’re unbanked or don’t have a smartphone,” Ferrin explains.

Flexibility and community engagement will continue to be essential in the face of shifting customer demands and changing curbside needs. Ferrin notes that collaboration with innovative, agile technology partners like ParkMobile is essential as cities like Columbus continue their journey towards a smarter, more equitable tomorrow.

“ParkMobile has helped the city to create a one-stop shop ecosystem for parking, breaking down the barriers between the on-street and off-street environment.”

**Robert Ferrin, CAPP**

Assistant Director for Parking Services at City of Columbus

