ParkMobile™

City of Boulder, Colorado

Implementing data-driven policy and signage best practices to improve the parking experience

Background

Nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Boulder, CO is a vibrant college town known for its quirky downtown, active lifestyle, and lately, as a host for some of the most innovative tech companies in the world. The city was also chosen as the new home for the illustrious Sundance film festival starting in 2027. In addition to full-time residents and a lively tourism season, the University of Colorado, Boulder brings in close to 40,000 undergraduates, creating some unique parking challenges.

Boulder currently manages thousands of spaces throughout the city, with approximately 2,500 paid parking spaces in and around its bustling downtown area, including six parking garages. Boulder adopted ParkMobile as a digital parking provider in 2014, which steadily grew in popularity and currently drives hundreds of thousands of dollars in monthly revenue.

Like many municipalities, Boulder's paid parking infrastructure was developed and iterated on over many decades, creating inconsistencies in policies, rates, and enforcement. This led to frustration both for Boulder's parkers and its enforcement team, resulting in noticeable revenue loss and compliance issues.

"When people would go to municipal court to contest a ticket, they were consistently winning their appeals because the signage was unclear," explains Samantha Bromberg, Senior Project Manager for the City of Boulder.

Overhauling signage to meet community needs and improve compliance

After evaluating the causes of internal and community frustration with its parking infrastructure, the city decided to undertake a comprehensive and ambitious refresh of its ParkMobile signage in 2023. The project required not only updating over 1,000 existing signs but also revamping zone numbers and replacing hundreds of outdated signposts. The city also increased the number of
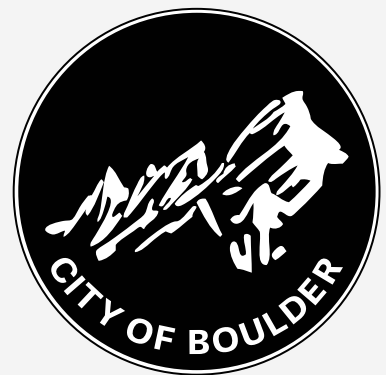
Boulder, CO by the numbers

2,500+
Paid spaces

100,000+
In-app parking transactions monthly

60,000
Monthly app users

73%
App adoption

informational signs that provide details regarding paid parking hours, further supporting its effort to improve clarity and reduce confusion for drivers.

The whole project was a major undertaking, lasting over a year and requiring coordination with city officials, utilities, and software providers. During this period, ParkMobile collaborated closely with the city to develop new zoning numbers and signage. This overhaul aimed to improve consistency and provide the parking program with greater flexibility for future expansion.

Bromberg and Kristine Edwards, Operations and Maintenance Senior Manager, admit the project was painful at times, but the results were immediately impactful. Not only did the signage refresh boost morale for the enforcement team and decrease the number of citation adjudications in municipal courts, but the city also saw a substantial increase in overall digital parking revenue after the signage refresh. Since the signage project's completion, the city has seen over 45% growth in digital parking revenue year over year.

Additionally, the signage overhaul made it significantly easier to make small adjustments to policies as the new poles make it painless to swap in new signs. Edwards also notes that the signage increase has likely helped with digital adoption, with people more likely to use a mobile solution since the swap.

Driving revenue and preparing for change with data-driven decisions

To drive continuous improvement and increase parking revenue without creating barriers for local businesses, the Boulder parking team applies a unique, data-driven approach. To better communicate the need for parking rate changes and their effectiveness to the Boulder City Council, access to quantitative data is particularly useful.

> "The signage update – and similar projects that make rules clearer for drivers – have improved the relationship between community members, municipal courts and parking enforcement."
>
> **Kristine Edwards**
> Operations and Maintenance Senior Manager, City of Boulder

Using a performance-based pricing model, Boulder analyzes transaction data from their digital parking systems to understand utilization data annually. Based on the data, the team evaluates how price changes have affected utilization and determines whether they need to raise or lower prices in certain areas.

They also monitor various KPIs, including compliance, ticket voids, customer complaints, occupancy changes, and more to address community feedback and make meaningful changes to rates and policies.

Bromberg notes that while it takes time to build a data-driven program from the ground up, it makes it much easier to run year after year once it's implemented. "Data-driven parking simplifies information sharing with stakeholders, including residents, city council, and the broader community."