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Finding parking at O'Hare may get a lot easier

February 22, 2006

BY [FRAN SPIELMAN](#) City Hall Reporter

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Motorists racing to catch flights or greet loved ones at O'Hare Airport would no longer be forced to blow valuable time circling the world's largest indoor parking garage, under high-tech improvements in the works that could automatically identify the nearest space.

And after talking about it for years, City Hall is laying the groundwork for a cashless parking system at O'Hare that would allow 20,000 daily parking transactions to be made with credit cards, value-added cards, I-Pass transponders and automatic vehicle identification systems issued to frequent business travelers.

The innovations are contained in a "request for information" due back from companies March 7.

City Hall wants a "state-of-the-art parking access and revenue control system capable of meeting the city's needs for the next decade," the request states. The system would replace equipment installed in the mid-1990s.

With \$120 million in annual gross revenues, O'Hare's public parking operation rakes in more money than any other airport in the world. O'Hare



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also ranks near the top of airports nationwide with 25,422 available parking spaces.

The most intriguing concept in the city's request is a parking guidance system designed to assist motorists "in quickly locating available parking spaces" at O'Hare's 9,266-space indoor garage.

On entering the garage and pulling a parking ticket, an electronic screen would let drivers know where to go.

"There are varying levels of intricacies of how a parking guidance system could operate. It could direct users to a specific floor or a specific parking space," said Aviation Department spokeswoman Wendy Abrams.

I-Pass compatible

The idea of a cashless parking system has been kicked around City Hall for more than a decade. It appeared to gain steam last year, when the Daley administration signed a new five-year, \$110 million parking management contract with Standard Parking Corp.

The contract called for the O'Hare garage and all remote lots to be outfitted with an automated "ticket-in, credit-card-out" payment system that's a fixture at most downtown parking garages. Credit card payments are currently confined to O'Hare's Remote Lot G.

At the time, city officials also talked about cashing in on the surge in I-Pass sales by making O'Hare parking equipment I-Pass compatible.

Now the city is taking the first step to buy and install that equipment. Other features of the system would include valet parking integration and automated license plate recognition that boot crews use to hunt down vehicles belonging to parking-ticket scofflaws.

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