

FLASH

CASE STUDY

Texas Hospitals Invest in Parking to Enhance Patient Experience

Texas Medical Center delivers superior arrival and departure experience despite COVID-related challenges

Background

Texas Medical Center (TMC) is the world's largest medical campus, representing dozens of healthcare institutions that work together to promote the highest standards of patient care, research, and education. But with over ten million encounters each year, it should come as no surprise that the parking operation is a vital piece of supporting the patients, visitors, emergency vehicles, and 100,000 employees who flow in and out of the sprawling Houston, Texas-based location.

"When you're as busy as we are, speed is everything," says Zach Eggman, the General Manager responsible for parking. "Patients are stressed about getting to their appointments. Providers and nurses are rushing to shift changes. Nobody wants to be slowed down by the garage."

That's why TMC decided to update a sprawl of parking equipment that was difficult to manage and prone to malfunction. Eggman explains, "It's frustrating to people when gates don't work or take a long time to open. And it was challenging for us to manage the parking facilities."

Challenges and Solutions

TMC sought out a parking management solution that could keep up with the campus-wide spirit of innovation, ultimately deciding on FLASH for its future-ready capabilities. FLASH's industry-leading, easily-configurable cloud software platform meant that the entire installation took just 44 days. "The ease of install was outstanding," says Eggman.

As an indirect measure of the success of the new solution, support calls have dropped close to eighty percent since the system went live. But the foundation of a superior patient, visitor, and provider experience should be measured by more tangible use cases that have value for its participants.



34

Facilities

200

Lanes

TMC at a Glance

- 10 million patient encounters per year
- 106,000 total employees
- 9,200 total patient beds
- 60+ member institutions
- \$1 Billion + in construction projects underway
- 8th largest business district in the U.S.

Speed at Scale

- 80% reduction in support calls
- Universal web-based parking validation
- Touchless access for infection control
- Garages flexibility for visitors and staff

Parking Validation

TMC provides parking validation services which allow member institution to cover the cost of parking on behalf of patients and visitors. Prior to FLASH, the operation to administer these services was costly and problematic.

“The previous system used electronic pucks to encode parking chips for use in the garages,” Eggman recalls. “The pucks were expensive, which meant there weren’t enough go around. It wasn’t uncommon for parkers to pick up their own costs and complain about it on online forums.”

The puck system did not provide accurate details on the issuers of the validation. This could lead to disputed charges when a hospital received a bill for a validation at a garage nowhere near their facility.

The FLASH system provided solutions and enhanced TMC’s system in a big way.

The new web-based platform was so ubiquitous that hospitals did away with pucks and the hundreds of thousands of chips to encode each month. Validations are now handled by nearly 900 users throughout TMC, administered either through the mobile app or any web browser. That includes the onsite restaurant where the iOS version of the app is loaded at the cash register.

The software-driven nature of the system made it simple to adopt a six-digit pin for each user so that member hospitals can audit and have confidence in who grants validations as part of their internal controls.

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Zach Eggman
General Manager - LAZ Parking - TMC

Contactless Innovation

Infection control has always been important in hospital care settings, but COVID-19 has raised the need for precautions to a new level.

TMC was more than ready to handle the change management necessary for enforcing new visitation policies, as well as providing staff to handle extra disinfection needs. But with hundreds of thousands of patients and visitors each month, the list of procedures to follow and surfaces to wipe down grew very long.

One way FLASH was able to help whittle that list down was by creating a contactless entry option for its kiosks, all in under two months. “FLASH added a motion sensor so that you can get your ticket with the wave of a hand,” explains Eggman. “Patrons can get their parking ticket without physically touching anything. It’s been a big hit, and they executed it well enough that even the demographics that aren’t tech-savvy picked up how to use it very quickly.”



TMC is also seeing additional benefits as its patients and visitors become more comfortable with touchless capabilities. One of those is a shift away from cash payments. Many people never realize how much bacteria is carried by bills and coins; according to *Forbes Magazine*, researchers have found that coronavirus can survive “at least 28 days” on banknotes. Yet cash had historically been a popular way to pay in TMC’s parking facilities.

That’s all changing now. “We’re definitely seeing methods of payment shift,” Eggman says. “Because of the pandemic, the mix of phone payment transactions like text-to-pay is approaching the same level as cash. It’s become a convenience thing now, and we expect our visitors will continue with this shift even after the pandemic is over. The FLASH platform makes it very easy to manage.”

Physician and Staff Parking

Like many hospital campuses, the parking facilities closest to hospital entrances at TMC are reserved primarily for patients and visitors. Staff lots are typically accessed by proximity card readers managed via monthly contracts.

That doesn’t mean that doctors and nurses like parking further away. In fact, most hospital facilities departments know well that medical staff can sometimes encroach on visitor parking. Eggman relates a recent story how one employee wanted to pay for one of a select few monthly contracts available in a close-in garage only to be told there were no more available.

“He said he would just buy a visitor value pass,” Eggman says. “Obviously, that defeats the purpose. But I understand the need, because some of our providers and nurses are working eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, and parking close-in would be one less thing to wear on them.”

The discussion did hatch an idea, however. Because the FLASH system utilizes enterprise cloud-based software, TMC was able to examine its parking data across the entire campus and come up with creative solutions to bridge between needs and constraints.

“We could tell some facilities weren’t at capacity because of lower patient volumes due to COVID-19,” Eggman says. “We decided to add monthly staff contracts to the system for each of those facilities.”

The flexibility of the FLASH system made such an effort easy to turn around, providing a quick way to help keep providers happy despite putting in so many hours every day.



Flexibility and the Future

If there's one thing the coronavirus has taught us, it's that the ability to be nimble and flexible can have great value. TMC is already looking toward the future for ways to deliver a superior arrival experience that will make it easy for patients to receive in-person care. One of those potential areas is how to handle rideshare services.

"Ridesharing congestion is definitely a concern," Eggman says. "Drivers will clog up entry and exit points and we hear about it as a dire concern from our members. But solving it isn't as easy as just creating a designated drop-off area somewhere else."

In particular, TMC has found that less-mobile patients such as the elderly or those with lower body injuries don't want to get out of a car and then wait for a shuttle to take them to the entrance.

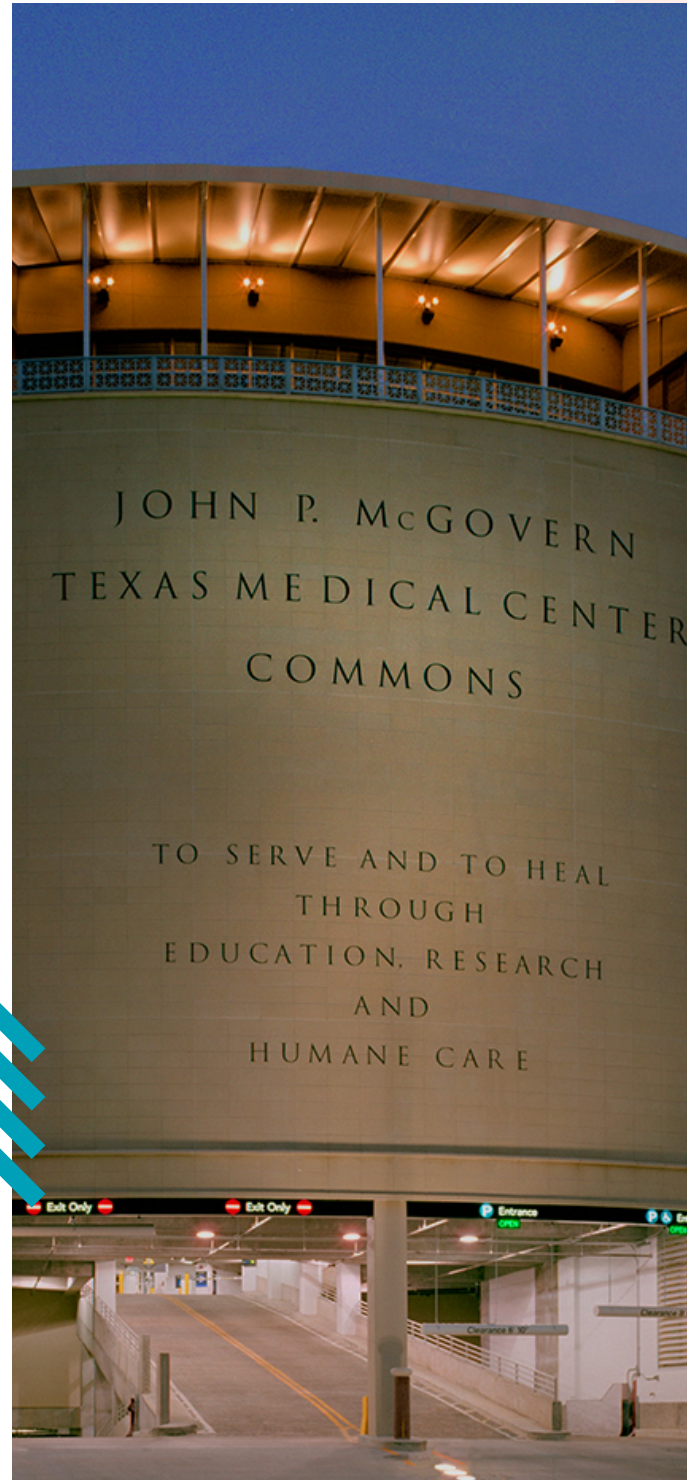
"That's why I'm very interested in what FLASH has done with the City of Las Vegas," Eggman adds, referring to how the company leveraged its cloud-based software to reduce rideshare congestion in the iconic city. Now rideshare drivers are able to access designated parking areas in municipal garages via Bluetooth or digital barcode. This lets rideshare drivers park near downtown Las Vegas when between rides, reducing fuel consumption, providing use of a bathroom, an ability to grab a meal, or otherwise simply wait for their next fare without contributing to additional traffic.

When asked to reflect on their choice of FLASH for the needs of the Texas Medical Center, Eggman doesn't hesitate. "It's been great. Performance has been excellent, and the technology is modern and flexible. I really value the partnership. At the end of the day, FLASH helps our team manage the parking system and make parking a non-event. No stress. No hassle. Just easy."

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Are You Ready For The Future?

Go to FLASH.com/products to learn about how our suite of technology can power the evolution of your asset into a networked mobility hub.