

LAREDO, TX

CASE STUDY

Partnering for Success

TEXAS





The City of Laredo: Partnering for Success

Each day nearly 12,000 commercial trucks cross the international bridges of Laredo, Texas, the US principal port of entry into Mexico. Considered an essential gateway, the city’s location on the southern end of the I-35 freeway plays a vital role in trade between the two nations. The international bridges facilitate not only vehicle traffic but also thousands of tourists, nearly doubling Laredo’s population during the day as people come to shop and dine in the City’s bustling downtown area. Tourism is essential to the economic vitality of Laredo, and as such, the City has set customer convenience as one of its top priorities.



Meter Modernization Efforts Experience Setbacks

Paid parking is available at 900 on-street spaces and in two off-street lots. The old, electromechanical coin-only meters were plagued with maintenance issues like coin jams, resulting in customer inconvenience and lost revenue for the City. Customers without the appropriate change often received parking citations, resulting in a negative experience. In line with its goals for enhancing customer convenience, the City of Laredo set out to modernize its parking infrastructure in order to offer additional payment options at the meter such as credit and debit card. The City solicited RFPs in 2011 for parking meters and vehicle detection sensors and awarded the contract to a company which was essentially unable to produce the product or results the City needed to achieve its goals. Due to unforeseen parking meter delays with the vendor, the start date was over a year later than anticipated. Throughout the entire testing period, there were continuous technical issues with the operation of the parking meters. As such, the City terminated the contract with the vendor and released a second RFP for meters and sensors in 2013. After a successful trial, the contract was awarded to the City’s current partner, IPS Group, Inc.

The meters offer customers enhanced payment options such as credit/debit card, pay-by-cell payments (future implementation) and are wirelessly networked to a state-of-the-art Data Management System (DMS) which provides the City with real-time data on faulty meters, revenue, and vehicle occupancy. The City subsequently purchased 300 IPS M5™ single-space parking meters and 300 vehicle detection sensors which were installed in the downtown area in early 2014. When paired with the IPS meter, the vehicle sensors detect the presence of a vehicle and can be used to employ unique capabilities such as the meter reset function. When a vehicle departs the space, the meter is “reset” to zero, canceling out any remaining time on the meter. The City estimates a 25%-30% increase in revenue due to this functionality alone, which has allowed the City to pay for its new equipment out of increased revenue and will enable the City to upgrade the remainder of its on-street meters to IPS technology.

Benefits of the New Meter

In addition to the added payment options, the new meters provide access to real-time data for all 300 spaces, 24 hours a day via the DMS. When a meter fault occurs, the maintenance personnel receive alerts notifying them of the type of fault and location, via text or email. This minimizes downtime and improves operational efficiency. Looking to improve its enforcement efforts, the City of Laredo deployed vehicle detection sensors in conjunction with the IPS meters. The sensor communicates wirelessly to the meter in real-time and provides the City with a wealth of information on paid status, occupancy, and spaces set to expire soon. This feature is used to conduct guided enforcement. The City can access a Google maps overview of spaces in violation and direct its enforcement officers to those spaces. These additional tools have allowed the City to streamline its operations. Prior to the deployment of the smart meters, motorists had to go to civil court to contest a parking citation. But with the introduction of the new meters, and the reporting capabilities they provide, parking enforcement and citations are handled by the same office. The easy-to-analyze and accurate data provided by the back office system has resulted in more tickets issued but fewer contested citations as the City is able to provide data on the parking fare paid, the time the parking period began and expired, and the time the vehicle arrived and departed.

In addition to the advanced data management capabilities, the large graphical LCD display can support graphics and text in any language such as Spanish, which can be used to provide meter instructions to Laredo’s diverse population.



Looking to the Future

After a nearly four-year long procurement process, the City of Laredo continues to enjoy a strong partnership with IPS and aims to upgrade the remainder of its old coin-only meters with IPS meters and sensors. The City has benefitted from state-of-the-art reporting capabilities of the DMS, additional revenue from the sensor reset customer compliance through directed enforcement, and the high reliability of the IPS products and customer support. At the same time, the City has been able to realize its goals of providing a customer-friendly experience for its vital influx of tourists by providing enhanced payment options at the meter and will continue to introduce new services such as mobile payments.



About IPS Group, Inc.

San Diego-based IPS Group, Inc. is a design, engineering, and manufacturing company focused on low-power wireless telecommunications and parking technologies. IPS manufactures locally in San Diego, CA and has been delivering world-class solutions to the telecommunications and parking industries for over 20 years. The company is best known for their patented credit card-enabled, solar powered single-space parking meter and web-based management system.

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