

THE PARKING PROBLEM IN ABU DHABI

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The Arab States of the Persian Gulf, including the United Arab Emirates, face a burning issue of car parking. The problem has emerged mostly due to the exceptional increase in the number of trucks, buses, cars, and other modes of transport. The residents of Abu Dhabi find it challenging to park their vehicles because of the lack of slots in the city. A few years ago, the competent bodies of Abu Dhabi have introduced a paid and innovative parking system called MAWAQIF. The main goal that the city officials pursued was to properly address the randomness in parking management, as well as tackle the parking issue in congested areas; however, in the course of time, this problem has become tangible in less crowded parts.

Overview of a Paid Parking System in Abu Dhabi

The city dwellers encounter stressful situations in order to find a comfortable parking space. The search also requires time and efforts. Thus, this issue is quite pressing for modern Abu Dhabi as everybody recognizes the fact that accessible and easy parking improves the quality of life of individuals who work and live in the metropolis. Therefore, in 2009, the Department of Transport introduced a comprehensive and multi-phased program called MAWAQIF seeking to establish a parking management system of best quality that will satisfy the basic needs of car owners. The system is supposed to provide a sustainable solution and properly manage the parking question so that the city no longer responds to this great challenge.

The parking problems that Abu Dhabi currently faces emerge due to the growing demand for parking spaces, misuse of limited parking areas by the

residents, and insufficient number of parking lots in some places to meet the requirements of Abu Dhabi population. Therefore, the officials have created a paid parking system taking into account the scale of the issue. Initially, the authorities implemented it in the heavily trafficked areas around the main streets and other parts of Abu Dhabi. The raised price of parking as a result of the introduction of MAWAQIF will reduce parking demand, car ownership, and traffic congestion. The residents will choose alternative destinations. In addition to the increase in revenue, the number of violations will grow as well. Higher prices without any alternatives will impede the population's mobility, demand less spending and reduce the movement to the commercial areas (Dibas, Aljassmi, & Ibrahim, 2016). The economic strain on business structures and motorists will have an adverse impact on the economy. Humans and culture are important aspects to consider when launching a program. First of all, because of people and their demands, the officials have implemented this system. Moreover, representatives of different cultures are supposed to benefit from this innovation as well. Therefore, the system has been developed taking into account the current trends and foreign experience.

MAWAQIF Solution and Problems That It Resolves

In order to overcome the MAWAQIF solution, it is crucial to introduce effective parking management and ensure that it brings fundamental and profound changes aimed at transforming the metropolis and offset costs associated with parking questions. The resolution of original problems will be accompanied by breaking paradigms and drivers' habits with regard to illegal parking; moreover, it will eliminate the complete reliance on vehicles. It will also encourage the car owners to precisely adhere to and comply with regulations, as well as increase their own awareness of current burning issues

(Al Muhairi & Longe, 2014). The introduction of this program will stimulate city officials to develop other transport and traffic initiatives fostering transportation modal changes. In order to make parking enforcement effective, stakeholders' engagement and collaborative work are critical. Afterwards, the parking management can become even more efficient. The government can reach transformational changes only through cross-agency and systematic partnership.

Such aspects as private vehicle registration and growth of economy have increased proportionally. As a result, the population and immigration flow have grown as well. The issue has aggravated due to the prevalence of vehicle-oriented culture that has resulted in the inadequate pedestrian facilities and public transportation. Illegal and rampant house sharing has also led to the fact that one family has more than one car. Large city sectors and blocks characterize the current urban setting. Contemporary building footprints are not fit for basement parking, and most of the city blocks cannot satisfy high demand for parking and road spaces in Abu Dhabi. Minimal enforcement of illegal activities, available and free surface parking, as well as widespread obstructive parking practices have induced significant challenges. Obstructed streets and traffic jams have also compromised safety. Moreover, emergency vehicles could not timely and adequately access necessary sites of accidents. Environmental issues, pollution caused by vehicle emissions, and congestion characterize the current parking situation in Abu Dhabi. Since the introduction of MAWAQIF service in 2009, many minor and major problems have been resolved. The officials have sought to provide benefits to the residents and car owners by turning existing areas into usable ones to avoid random and wrong parking. The new system has divided the area of parking to satisfy the needs of the residents, visitors, and workers (Al Taher, 2014). Despite the fact that the citizens of Abu Dhabi have various privileges, every person has to undergo an application process, submit necessary documents, and get the

permission from the competent body called the Department of Transports.

Problems with Current Solution

Despite the relevant solution that the new parking initiative offers, the majority of Abu Dhabi population continue complaining about expensive fees. The average cost of violation is 200-500 AED (United Arab Emirates Dirham) (Lyons, 2011). Towing cars without any notice is the worst thing that the residents ever experienced. The latter become nervous because of random towing. In most cases, no explanation is even provided. In addition, MAWAQIF does not significantly increase awareness regarding the transferring of rules, standards, and regulation to the dwellers of Abu Dhabi. Current issues associated with parking in the metropolis disrupt the life in the city; some of them are forced to plan their days, holidays, and vacation in advance to have a comfortable parking space. The citizens recognize that despite relevant initiatives, finding a necessary lot still poses a serious challenge that requires careful attention of the competent bodies. Nevertheless, the collection of fees is not the best option.

A New Solution

The experts and the appropriate authorities have offered a new solution, namely a smart parking technology. Hence, the residents of Abu Dhabi are encouraged to use public transport instead of their vehicles or walk to their destination. In reality, it is almost impossible to reach the desired outcome due to the locals' obsession with the cars. The city officials want citizens to change their preferences and start using public transport more than automobiles. The main reasons for this initiative are that cars cause pollution and congestion, as well as affect critical infrastructure and pedestrians' health. More taxis and buses on the streets only aggravate the situation. The

authorities deliver the locals the particular message and incite them to start thinking in advance to save time, efforts, and money when searching for a parking space. The state of affairs can only worsen if people have several vehicles that need large funds for servicing. Car owners will spend additional funds on parking vehicles in the places with restricted capacity. MAWAQIF has also reinforced parking in areas with excess capacity.

The main goal that the officials pursue is not to collect money, but make the city more beautiful and controlled. The introduction of underground bins is supposed to free up most of the parking bays (Henzell, 2011). Despite the fact that the realization of this initiative requires time, efforts, money, and significant work, the number of parking slots will be definitely maximized through these endeavors. Even one parking unit is of particular importance. By means of infrastructure, the city authorities seek to ensure extra parking. However, due to delays, MAWAQIF has not been implemented in the market and tourist areas. The provision of additional parking spaces will ease the car owners' choice and prevent random or illegal parking that causes hindrance to traffic. Other aspects to consider include extended control, improved coordination, differential paid parking, and new growth districts. The best way to address the issue is to develop an adequate mobile application and enhance the entire parking management system. The mobile application is supposed to minimize the time that motorists waste when searching for a parking lot. The new innovative and multi-phased approach adopted by the officials will make the entire parking system of Abu Dhabi more effective.

The Implementation of Shared Parking Policy

The establishment of a shared parking policy in the UAE, and, in particular, Abu Dhabi is a critical step towards the reduction of parking shortfalls that

the city currently experiences. The proposed initiatives will accelerate the optimization of parking supply in the long-term perspective. The shared parking policy is meant to provide street, non-street, public, and private car parks to satisfy the needs of car owners. In order to alleviate the underuse of parking spaces, the competent bodies include the utilization of shared parking in their multi-phased and comprehensive parking management strategy. It highlights various ways of promoting shared parking, not the reserved one. The strategy focuses on establishing multi-use parking facilities and sharing parking places among different areas.

Unresolved parking problems substantially contribute to the traffic congestion. As a result, the nation suffers from significant environmental and socio-economic implications that adversely affect the public and businesses operating in Abu Dhabi as well as other cities of the UAE (Brebbia & Miralles i Garcia, 2015). In the short-term perspective, the parking strategy developed for Abu Dhabi will help to address the burning parking issues that the city and the whole country currently face despite enormous efforts spent on transport initiatives and other vital developments.

Conclusion

Abu Dhabi has significantly developed in recent years. However, the growth has not only brought progress, but also caused problems. Due to the size of the city, the authorities have decided to construct the road system with high capacities taking into account the density of the UAE population. Despite the fact that most of the initiatives were supposed to address the parking issues, considerable work is still ahead. Moreover, there is a great necessity to create sufficient spaces to satisfy the needs of residents. Hence, such initiative as MAWAQIF is proposed to make lives of people easier. As a result, they will be able to save time and efforts spent on searching for a

comfortable parking lot. Regardless of the positive and negative aspects, the comprehensive and multi-phase parking management system called MAWAQIF has a powerful impact on parking, including enforcement and implementation of various tasks.