

'Destination Aggieland'

TAMU Football is Big! Its Parking App is Bigger

By Debbie Hoffmann and June Hood

Texas A&M University has long had home football game traditions worth writing about, as Sports Illustrated* noted a few years ago. And its Department of Transportation Services has devoted countless hours, year after year, putting into action a successful game-day parking operation. SEC fans** called it the second-best part of the Aggie game-day experience behind the incomparable Fightin' Texas Aggie Band.

This year, the Chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, set a goal to develop the best overall transportation plan *and* the best game-day experience for fans attending football games at Kyle Field in College Station.

With renovations and expansion of the stadium underway to increase capacity to 106,000 seats this season (final capacity of 102,512 in 2015), the cities of College Station and Bryan and the TAMU campus will be handling crowds that are 25% larger than last year.

"We are committed to having the best overall game-day experience in the country," Chancellor John Sharp said, "and I know that the Texas A&M

Transportation Institute's 'Destination Aggieland' will be a major contributor to the plan. [Its] history of innovation in traffic safety and management is a tremendous asset.

"While we know 2014 will be a transition year in terms of technology, in 2015, we will have one of the finest traffic management systems in college sports," Sharp said.

To prepare for the influx of more fans staying, eating, shopping, playing and tailgating at venues in the community and on campus, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) was called on to bring together the university's Transportation Services, Athletics Department, 12th Man Foundation, Police Department, Environmental Health and Safety Office, the two sister cities of College Station and Bryan, and the Texas Department of Transportation to develop a transportation component of a comprehensive game-weekend experience.

In addition to improving the fan experience, the partners set a goal of clearing traffic for the now larger game-day crowd in no more time than it has taken in previous years – from 2 to 2.5 hours. As Tim Lomax, Senior Research Engineer and Regent's Fellow with TTI, who heads up the project, likes to say, "Give us a couple of hours and we will give you your town back."

Lomax uses this statement to encourage the local communities to have patience with and tolerance of "contraflow" traffic lanes and limited turning

options at key intersections near the campus during the initial exodus of fans from campus.

Each entity responsible for a portion of the game-day experience in Aggieland is known for working diligently to make their operations run smoothly. The cities implemented a plan to improve city traffic, TAMU enacted a plan to improve university traffic, and the transit operation worked hard to plan routes to avoid the traffic.

Athletics put measures in place to ensure a safe and fun event, and the athletic association worked to ensure that their donors have a

premium experience. Local hotels, restaurants and venues hope fans will patronize their businesses. All the while, the focus of each of these plans – the fans – want an easy way to get to and from the game, and to have a great time in between.

There has always been cooperation between the all entities in the past, but the new game-day plan institutes a much more holistic approach.

Having that great experience boils down to having timely and accurate information about what is happening, when and how to most easily get to all the fun. In today's world, fast and accurate game-day information means a smartphone app.

TTI, along with app provider CrowdTorch by Cvent, are pulling together data from all the partners to a new app, which will enhance the entire Aggie game-day experience. "Destination Aggieland" will provide real-time parking options and traffic information, shuttle locations and routes, event schedules and ticket sales, as well as local dining and entertainment options.

The following communication tools have also been enhanced:

- Coordinated websites, with more partners coordinating game-day travel communications.
- Ticket sales inserts

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The Destination Aggieland app provides many options for fans coming to the school's athletic events.

- Messages added to the bus annunciators; print ads included inside buses.
- Wayfinding signs and maps, with the addition of directional “razor” flag signs for parking and shuttle stops.
- In-stadium displays and communication.
- Traditional and social media.
- Face-to-face meetings, including Coaches’ Tour and A&M Clubs throughout Texas.

Communication about Destination Aggieland will be targeted to ticketholders, tailgaters and the local community. Some of the key messages of the campaign include:

- “Download before you go” – reminder to download the app before leaving home.

- “Discover what’s different” – traffic/pedestrian flow changes, safety measures, new stadium seating, new parking operations.
- “Learn your route” – find your very best parking and shuttle options for getting to and leaving from your seat.
- “Arrive Early, Stay Late” – learn about community dining, hotel and entertainment venues, campus tailgating, etc.

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** Texas A&M University was rated as the top college football game-day environment in the 2011 preseason edition of Sports Illustrated, with Fox Sports chiming in by listing the school’s Kyle Field as one of the nation’s 10 best college football stadiums.*

*** website <http://texags.com/Stories/13548>*

