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E-mail alerts offer Chicago air travelers parking information

CHICAGO (AP) — In an effort to ease airport parking headaches, aviation officials in Chicago have begun offering a service sure to please the Blackberry set: e-mail alerts notifying fliers of which lots have already filled up.

The city's [Department of Aviation](#) on Monday announced the system as a personalized way to help travelers avoid arriving at a parking lot only to find the dreaded "Lot Full" sign at O'Hare International and Midway airports.

It is likely the nation's first system to use e-mail to alert travelers to the status of airport parking facilities, said Pam Shepherd, spokeswoman for the Airports Council International-North America.

"Airports are doing what they can to offer better customer service because they want people to have a good experience," Shepherd said. "One can only assume that this type of business model will grow."

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Airports already use various ways to notify travelers of parking conditions, including AM radio broadcasts, telephone hotlines and electronic roadside signs that steer drivers away from packed lots.

At LaGuardia, John F. Kennedy and Newark airports in the New York City area, travelers can call a hotline to get a parking update. Los Angeles International Airport also uses a hotline and an AM radio station to broadcast parking information.

"Nearly everyone has access to either a radio or phone in their car on the way to the airport, so we feel those methods are adequate," said LAX spokesman Harold Johnson.

Chicago's aviation department still will broadcast parking

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information on an AM radio station and use roadside signs to ease access to O'Hare and Midway, where the main parking garages can fill up on weekdays.

But officials said the growing popularity of handheld devices and cellphones with Internet access make an e-mail alert a valuable way to communicate with the flying public.

"If someone heads to the airport straight from the office, we think being able to get up-to-the-minute parking information will be an invaluable service," Chicago aviation spokeswoman Wendy Abrams said.

Fliers who sign up will receive several e-mail notifications on their travel day, updating them on lots that have filled. The public then will be directed to use the overflow parking lots. The city also will post real-time parking information on its website.

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