



Hot Springs Villager Discusses Barrier Arm Gate Security

Description

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Relying on a barrier arm gate system at Hot Springs Village's active East and West Gates is not as simple as it sounds. For several years I was involved with security for the Walt Disney Company and I witnessed technology successes and failures as new gate systems were implemented.

There are numerous staffing and mechanical problems associated with mechanical gate systems that should be considered before implementing a barrier arm gate system. These issues can negatively impact traffic flow on municipal thoroughfares. With my knowledge and expertise, I want to explain to my friends in the Village what they are looking at when they express an interest in implementing "Barrier Gate Operators".

Even with a barrier arm gate system in place, there is always the need for at least one security officer to check-in guests – and probably two because the first officer will need to be relieved for breaks and lunchtime and also be available in the event of an emergency requiring more than one officer.

Fixed Barrier Arms

In my security career at Disney, we first implemented fixed barrier arms but found there was a complete cycle rate of 10-40 seconds between vehicles. This is fine until someone gets confused, doesn't see the barrier arm in its recycle phase, and crashes through it. When the fixed barrier arm is subject to a vehicular crash, part of the control box is also damaged. At Disney, an incident such as this would occur every two to three months leaving the gates effectively "down" during repairs. The typical time for repairs was between one to six weeks and repeated damage to the control units led to the determination that this fixed barrier arm system was too costly to maintain. The cost to make the necessary repairs on the fixed arm gate barrier system could run from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per incident.

Snap Off Type Breakaway Barrier Arms

Next, we implemented breakaway barrier arms. This system was safer than the fixed barrier arms when someone drove through them, but the replacement of a damaged breakaway barrier arm cost between \$500-\$1750, depending on which type of barrier arm was used. When the breakaway barrier arms are hit, they are designed to snap. Unfortunately, this happened regularly, and usually, the manufacturers were out of stock with replacements leading to a gate downtime of one to three months.

Pivoting Breakaway Barrier Arms

With the development of new and improved breakaway barrier arms, we moved to that system. The new breakaway barrier arms are designed to pivot instead of snapping. This pivoting breakaway barrier arm can be reset, instead of being replaced. There is less vehicular damage and the control units are not affected if a vehicle hits the breakaway barrier arm. Many old barrier arms require service when hit, but newer pivoting barrier arms have breakaway technology that allows them to swing open or up when hit. Then these gate systems are easily reset by the gate personnel without permanent damage.

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Pivoting [Breakaway Barrier Arm](#)



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Barrier Arm Gate Security Does Not Mean a Reduction in Gate Staff

You don't reduce gate personnel by adding barrier arms. Under Federal law, there is a requirement of two fifteen minutes breaks and a 30-minute lunch for each shift. In order to cover the breaks, there needs to be at least two staff manning the guest lane, regardless of whether the barrier arms are in operational order or not. If the barrier arm gate does happen to be down, then at least one additional staff person is needed.

Even if you shut down one lane due to an operational issue with a barrier gate arm, a minimum of two people is still needed.

What Happens When the Gates are Down?

When a barrier arm is non-operational, you must either man each specific lane with a security officer or reduce the entry/exit lanes down to the one manned guest lane. When you reduce the entry lanes, you run the risk of delayed entry backups due to heavy traffic. Not knowing the seasonal and/or daily traffic flow patterns of the East and West Gates, I could only surmise the West Gate would be affected more because of population density, shopping, and the close proximity of the West Gate to Highway 7.

Also, if traffic backed up on Highway 7, there is always the potential that the Garland County Sheriff could cite the POA if this traffic congestion ended up impeding traffic flow on Highway 7.

Challenges Gate Personnel Have When Manually Verifying Authorized Entry

As already stated, if and when the barrier arm gates become inoperable, it is necessary to man these lanes with a security officer (probably a POA employee) who would keep the barrier arm in the up position, visually verifying Property Owner credentials, then waving through authorized individuals.

Having stood at a gate in freezing and in scalding weather, I know firsthand the challenges in always being able to verify that a window sticker is current.

Further adding to the difficulty of visually verifying the stickers, some individuals don't remove outdated stickers and instead line up additional stickers on their windshields like they are military medals of honor.

If people cherish their annual POA vehicle stickers, it would be better if they made them into small refrigerator magnets and display them on the refrigerator, instead of keeping the out-of-date stickers on the vehicle windshield.

In addition, some other individuals stack each new sticker on top of the previous sticker. While not ideal this is a little easier for the officer to see than if multiple outdated stickers are lined up on the windshield.

The best practice for residents in a gated community is to remove all previous POA stickers and have

only the current one visible. This makes it easier for the security officer, which allows for smoother and quicker traffic flow.

Gate manufacturers also sell an extended pole with an RFID reader attached in order for gate officers to scan POA ID cards without actually handling the card. This has been useful during COVID times because it allows for social distancing. When the card scanned is one of a current member, a green light comes on and the gate officer waves the member through.

Cameras Should be Installed at Barrier Arm Gates

Another thing to consider when installing the automatic barrier gate arms is that cameras will need to be installed in every lane for accountability and liability defense reasons.

- Accountability – in order to know who the driver is when he/she crashes through the lowered gate barrier.
- Liability defense – when someone blames the POA or gate security for the damage caused to their vehicle when they drove through the lowered or lowering gate arms, the cameras offer proof of what really happened.

Computer & Internet Support

Barrier arm operating systems must have 24-hour access to the POA owners'/members' computerized gate access lists. You can't afford the internet or electrical power of any computer system to fail. When failure occurs, you have to immediately revert to the manual system which means the gates must be at once manned with a security officer. In the event of an internet or electrical failure, for every active lane of traffic, you'll need one security officer, plus at least one additional as a backup.

Cost of Barrier Arm Gate Systems

I've included a link to a nationally known gate system site so you can familiarize yourself with the costs of these systems. In addition to the initial cost of the system, no system is maintenance-free, and between \$50,000-\$150,000 should be budgeted for maintenance and technical support.

[Click here to check out Gatedepot.com.](#)

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