

Goal 8 *INCREASE PARKING AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS FOR DOWNTOWN CUSTOMERS*

Increase parking availability and access for Downtown customers and reduce the need for downtown employee parking by making alternative modes of transportation convenient for Downtown employees and the public through methods such as:

- *improving pedestrian and transit access,*
- *increasing bicycle parking,*
- *providing incentives for employees to use alternative transportation and park in peripheral lots,*
- *discouraging the employee shuffle, and*
- *managing parking resources and/or adding new parking spaces, where necessary.*

BACKGROUND

This chapter focuses upon methods to increase the availability of parking and access to the Downtown area. The Downtown area is bounded by Sola Street on the north, Garden Street on the east, U.S. 101 on the south, and De La Vina Street on the west. The Downtown is Santa Barbara's primary governmental, commercial and business center. Its parking needs are unique because of its urban density and compact pattern of development.

In 1964, the Citywide commercial parking requirement was one space per five hundred square feet of building area. The first reference to discussion of downtown parking and traffic issues was in the 1964 General Plan, which introduced a more pedestrian-oriented vision for downtown State Street. It called for the removal of on-street parking and the creation of public off-street parking lots and a people mover system. Much of impetus for these changes came from Downtown area merchants who were concerned that business would be lost to La Cumbre Plaza (with promises of ample free parking) which was then under construction near the western City limits.

The first public parking lots were constructed to replace the on-street parking removed from the Downtown core and to increase the parking supply. To pay for construction and maintenance, two Parking Assessment Districts were formed in the Downtown area. The lots were paid for by property owners through an assessment based on Zones of Benefit (see Glossary). Sidewalks were also widened, landscaping added, and vehicle lanes reduced in order to create a more pedestrian friendly environment.

The Santa Barbara Goals Report, issued in early 1970, and the 1974 Impacts of Growth Study continued to focus on reduction of auto uses in the Downtown. These studies recommended that employee access to on-street parking be discouraged by eliminating long term on-street parking except through a Residential Parking Permit Program. Ninety minute free parking was established in the public parking lots and on Downtown streets so that short term spaces would be available to shoppers. The Shopper Hopper and People Mover systems were short-lived attempts to

encourage the “park once” concept for the shopper while minimizing employee use of parking spaces.

In the early 1980s, parking requirements were revised to one parking space for every 250 square feet of development. In the Downtown area, however, one space per 500 square feet was retained because of space availability in the public parking lots. The City initiated a Residential Parking Permit (RPP) program to give parking priority to residents of a neighborhood impacted by commuter or shopper parking. Two peripheral commuter lots were built and two-level garages replaced two surface lots. Subsequently, two additional surface lots were built in the lower Downtown (Oldtown) area.

Existing Parking

The Downtown area public parking lots supply 2705 spaces in eight surface lots and four multi-level garages. The Comprehensive Parking Analysis of the Downtown area prepared by Rich and Associates, Inc. (1991), concluded that there was an existing parking deficit of 1,613 spaces north of Carrillo Street. The analysis also identified a possible future deficit in that area of as many as 2,293 spaces.

CONSTRAINTS

Most Downtown area public lots and on-street parking areas are at or near capacity during periods of peak demand. Few, if any, resources exist to construct more parking structures. Limited area is available for new surface lots. A 1994 attempt to create a new assessment district failed by a large margin, despite the cumulative benefit to the Downtown area of sharing and pooling its parking supply. A lot is considered impacted, from an environmental review perspective, when regular occupancy exceeds 85% (although the Zone of Benefit still applies) and mitigation is required for new projects. Because of the foregoing conditions, development possibilities are constrained. Downtown area parking supplies continue to be constrained by employees who use short-term spaces for long-term parking.

OPPORTUNITIES

If adequate, reliable, alternative transportation choices exist, employees will have less need for parking. Reduced demand for employee parking will leave more of the existing parking spaces available for use by downtown customers.

If the overall need for employee parking is reduced (e.g. decreasing employee and public parking demand) it may be possible to reduce the parking requirements for new development. Reduced parking requirements could lessen development costs and make more land available for other priority uses, such as housing, commercial development, open space, and landscaping. Reducing

the need for parking can be accomplished through both short and long term strategies.

Short Term Opportunity

Because of the high cost of building new parking lots and structures, a reduction of employee parking demand will be required in order to meet a rising customer parking demand. If Downtown employers will support and promote employee transportation alternatives, such as shuttles, transit, and bicycles, customers will continue to be able to find convenient and inexpensive parking in the Downtown. In addition, the expansion of transit service between residential areas and places of employment could help reduce the demand for Downtown parking.

The opportunity exists to change employee commute choices by providing incentives and disincentives to change and reinforce behavior. An entrepreneurial and innovative approach must be taken to design incentives that will have a lasting effect on employee choices.

One disincentive, or deterrent, to employee shuffling is to reduce the free parking period from 90 to 60 minutes. This idea is controversial because businesses and property owners believe that shoppers will not come Downtown if the 90 minute free parking program is reduced. However, reducing the parking time could make more parking available to shoppers because employees are less likely to be able to leave work every 55 minutes to move their cars and would be required to make different arrangements.

The City can use underutilized parking lots, such as the employee parking lot at the intersection of Carrillo and Castillo, through marketing and other incentives to help alleviate parking congestion in the Downtown core.

In addition, the opportunity may exist to construct a new parking structure on the site of surface Lot #3 (at the corner of Chapala and Carrillo), which would help to alleviate the current parking deficit north of Carrillo Street.

Long Term Opportunity

At the beginning of the 20th century, the mix of land uses in Downtown Santa Barbara included many homes and second floor living areas over store fronts. Many people who worked in the State Street area also lived Downtown. As the Downtown core has expanded over time, residential neighborhoods have been slowly pushed back. Office spaces have replaced second floor living areas. Today, people who work Downtown vastly out number those who live Downtown. Consequently, the number of people driving to work has also increased, requiring more parking during the day.

One long term opportunity to help alleviate Downtown parking demand is the enhancement and provision of accessible and convenient transportation facilities for transit, biking, and walking. Increased public education regarding alternative transportation opportunities can also help

alleviate parking demand. In addition, an opportunity exists through the continued management of existing parking to optimize its supply. Finally, land use patterns can have a profound effect on Downtown parking demand. The provision of housing in the Downtown area can provide the opportunity for people to either live and work in the Downtown or commute from the Downtown area to outlying areas. At the very least, additional housing in the Downtown area would allow Downtown residents the opportunity to access commercial, social, and recreational opportunities in the immediate proximity without necessitating the use of the automobile. The provision of housing can also help the City alleviate the imbalance in the number of jobs to the number of housing units. This is known as a jobs-housing imbalance. For a detailed discussion on the jobs-housing balance and a list of policies to help address this issue, please refer to the Housing Element of the General Plan.

POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

DOWNTOWN PARKING AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

- 8.1 The City shall continue to manage the Downtown public parking supply to support the economic vitality of the Downtown business district while sustaining or enhancing its historical and livable qualities.**
- 8.1.1 Operate and manage the Downtown public parking program in partnership with the Downtown community to reduce the need for employee parking and to increase available parking for customers and clients.
- 8.1.2 Establish consistent parking demand standards in the Downtown based on the Zone of Benefit principles and through methods such as:
- creating standards that allow capacity to be determined by the peak hour parking demands of various uses, and
 - extending the duration utilized when determining capacity. For instance, average the amount of use of parking over an entire day rather than during the peak periods.
- 8.1.3 Consider reducing or eliminating the parking requirements for small businesses and small additions (as defined in the Santa Barbara Municipal Code), when adequate alternatives are operational.
- 8.1.4 Operate and manage the Downtown public parking program in partnership with the Downtown community to meet existing public parking needs.

MANAGING DOWNTOWN PUBLIC PARKING

- 8.2 The City shall manage the Downtown parking supply to reduce the need for employee parking while increasing the availability of customer parking and working with the County of Santa Barbara to address parking needs.**
- 8.2.1 Develop a subsidized bus pass program for Downtown employees. Consider other incentives for employees who bike, walk, or car/van pool to work.
- 8.2.2 Increase the awareness of employers and employees about impacts of employee parking and commuting habits through marketing and education.

- 8.2.3 Explore free or inexpensive preferential car and van pool spaces in the Downtown parking lots. Monitor any adopted program to ensure proper use and minimal customer displacement.
- 8.2.4 Sell daily parking permits in the commuter parking lots.
- 8.2.5 Support increased ridership on the electric Downtown Shuttle as an effective parking management tool which also reduces congestion.
- 8.2.6 Explore methods to discourage employee shuffling and, if possible, to increase revenue to fund alternative transportation programs while not impacting customer convenience.
- 8.2.7 Assess the impact of employee shuffling on Downtown parking.
- 8.2.8 In conjunction with any plans for new parking Downtown, assess the effectiveness of alternative transportation programs in reducing employee parking needs.
- 8.2.9 Consider reducing parking requirements for the downtown core if implementation strategies are successful in reducing employee parking.
- 8.2.10 Implement the strategies contained in the Circulation Element, Land Use chapter, and the Land Use and Housing Elements pertaining to increasing housing in the downtown core and along major transit routes.
- 8.2.11 Parking structures shall be designed to be compatible with the surrounding area in terms of scale, materials, design, and color. The incorporation of commercial uses along the street level frontage should be encouraged.
- 8.2.12 The interior and exterior of parking structures shall be designed to facilitate the movement of pedestrians to and from their vehicles in a comfortable and safe manner. This may include reducing driveway entrances, improving pedestrian pathways, providing signalized mid-block pedestrian crossings, and allowing commercial or service uses on the bottom level (see Chapter 5, Walking).
- 8.2.13 Increase the use of underutilized public parking lots through marketing, improved signage, and other incentives.

- 8.2.14 Consider methods to encourage auto entry to and exit from public parking lots during off-peak commute periods. Methods may include the following:
- reducing or waiving the parking fee for vehicles entering or leaving public parking lots after the peak PM commute period, and
 - eliminating the free parking period for vehicles exiting public parking lots during peak commute periods.
- 8.2.15 Explore coordinated management of the Downtown and Waterfront public parking lots in order to efficiently utilize the existing parking inventory. Improve connections between the two areas with frequent electric shuttle service throughout the day.

INCREASED PUBLIC PARKING SUPPLY

- 8.3 The City shall increase the public parking available Downtown to address existing needs.**
- 8.3.1 Identify possible areas for expanding Downtown parking that will decrease the existing parking deficit north of Carrillo Street.
- 8.3.2 Maintain the current supply and explore new opportunities for on-street parking Downtown.
- 8.3.3 Identify possible areas for expanding parking that enhance the park once concept.
- 8.3.4 Expand the use and supply of commuter and peripheral parking.
- 8.3.5 Increase the use of underutilized public parking lots through marketing, improved signage, and other incentives.

SIGNAGE AND AESTHETICS

8.4 The City shall promote excellent signage and aesthetics in the Downtown area.

8.4.1 Utilize the El Pueblo Viejo Design Guidelines to improve signage, aesthetics, and knowledge of transportation linkages to help resolve conflicts among various modes of transportation.

8.4.2 Develop a program for the Downtown area to improve parking lot aesthetics and provide signage regarding location and transportation linkages between parking lots and points of interest.

8.4.3 Work with CalTrans to improve freeway signage to and from the Downtown area.

DOWNTOWN HOUSING

8.5 The City shall promote/facilitate the development of housing to decrease the need for parking through an increased walking/biking population that lives, works, and shops in the Downtown (See Chapter 13).

8.5.1 Educate property and business owners, developers, and the community about the benefits of increased housing Downtown.

8.5.2 Allow residential parking in public parking lots for mixed use development after ensuring that there is adequate capacity to serve existing uses.

8.5.3 Develop public/private partnership criteria for the use of air space over Downtown public parking lots as an incentive for housing development.