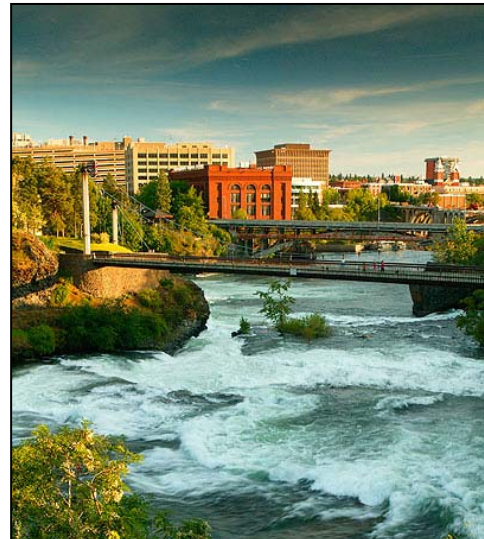


Executive Summary

This report has been produced to fulfill requirements of the work scope for the *Spokane Downtown Parking Demand Study*. The study process and its ensuing recommendations were initiated by the Downtown Spokane Partnership and the City of Spokane in association with a Parking Steering Committee comprised of representatives of retail and commercial businesses, the development community, citizens and City staff. The purpose of the study has been to develop a comprehensive parking management plan that responds to the unique access environment, goals and objectives of Downtown Spokane. The parking management plan and the process to develop it are compiled and summarized in this report. The consulting team of Melvin Mark Development Company (MMC) and Nelson/Nygaard Consulting (N/N) conducted the study. Robinson Research provided technical assistance in the collection of parking capacity and utilization data.

A. BACKGROUND

The consultant team participated with the DSP and the City in a comprehensive education and involvement process that engaged key stakeholders, City staff, City Council members, the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), and the general public. The primary objective was to identify key issues regarding parking, transportation and access in the downtown and their impact on the continuing economic vitality of the downtown. From this dialogue, functional alternatives and strategies were developed to improve identified deficiencies or shortcomings and initiate a framework plan for the on-going management of, and planning for, access in the downtown.



The work leading up to completion of this study was conducted in concert with a Parking Steering Committee (PSC). The PSC was established to provide oversight, guidance and review of the study process. Key stakeholders included local business owners, parking operators, public officials and staff, residents and downtown property owners and developers. These individuals provided significant assistance in the identification, description, and prioritization of issues to be addressed. They were further instrumental in the development of strategies and plans necessary for implementation of the parking management plan that is a component of this document. The PSC met nine times since initiation of the study in January 2004.

B. REPORT FORMAT

This report is presented in six sections, with each section representing the critical phases of the yearlong stakeholders process. The comprehensive findings of the data inventory are included in three separate appendices.

C. BASIC FINDINGS

The basic findings of the data inventory and stakeholder process include:

1. Data findings

Melvin Mark Development Company (MMDC), Nelson/Nygaard (N/N) and Robinson Research (RR) conducted the capacity/utilization and turnover inventory on two separate days, Thursday, May 20, 2004 and Saturday, May 22, 2004. The survey days were selected in consultation with the DSP, the City and the PSC, as were the boundaries of the study area. Overall, both days displayed consistent parking activity in all sectors of the downtown. The Thursday parking inventory was conducted between 10:30 a.m. and 9:30 p.m. The Saturday parking inventory was conducted between 11:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m.

The survey itself involved an hourly accounting of each occupied on-street parking stall in the study area using the last four digits of the parked vehicle's license plate. All public off-street facilities were similarly documented. In total 8,320 parking stalls were inventoried (2,419 on-street, 5,901 off-street in 29 lots and garages).

Data findings for the general downtown area can be summarized as follows.

- Overall occupancy of the downtown reaches a peak capacity of 63.8% in the peak hour (i.e., 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.).
- At the peak hour, the downtown maintains an available supply of approximately 2,683 on and off-street parking stalls.
- The *on-street* parking systems in the Core and West End Zones of the downtown operate with high turnover and utilization. The Core Zone reaches 89.7% occupancy at its maximum peak hour and the West End reaches 84.4%.
- While on-street occupancies are high in the Core and West End Zones, both zones have low utilization of *off-street* facilities. Off-street facilities in the Core Zone do not exceed peak hour utilization in the mid-60% range, while off-street facilities surveyed in the West End Zone do not exceed the mid-50% range. At its highest peak hour, the Core Zone maintains a minimum of 1,102 available off-street stalls. This relationship underscores the need for a better system of wayfinding/signage, communication, lighting/landscaping and pricing that draws patrons into off-street facilities.
- Time stay violations are high in the downtown study area. This is particularly evident in the Core Zone. The situation in the Core Zone is likely the result of the high number of 1-hour meters (and 30-minute meters) in the zone, which is out of sync with a patron's average time stay of approximately 1.5 hours. A review and reconsideration of the mix of time stay allowances in the Core Zone is recommended. *The conversion of 1-hour meters to 90-minute meters was implemented in November 2004.*
- It appears that the available supply of parking in the peak hours is adequate to accommodate current and future levels of demand.
- A large portion of available off-street supply is located on surface parking lots. Managing this surplus of parking as demand increases will impact decisions regarding future parking development requirements (for both the private and public sectors) as surface facilities in the study area redevelop into desired new uses.

2. Common Themes, Challenges and Opportunities

To develop a parking and access plan for downtown, it is first necessary to understand the dynamics of land use, access and growth that are unique to Spokane. Community perceptions and realities regarding constraints that limit existing businesses from expanding and those that limits Spokane's ability to attract new business growth to the downtown need to be fully considered. Similarly, opportunities and successful programs/strategies that currently contribute to downtown's health need to be understood in order to ensure they are supported and enhanced by any new parking and access strategies developed. The PSC was able to identify several "consensus" challenges and opportunities. These included:

Challenges to Access - Consensus Themes

- There is not a clear consensus on parking policy or the roles of the public and private sector in the provision/management of parking to meet future goals and objectives.
- The parking supply is not managed to its maximum potential.
- There is a high level of employee abuse of the on-street parking system.
- There is a negative perception of access/capacity.
- Maintaining transit service (and other modes) is a key strategy necessary to reduce constraints on the downtown parking supply.
- Concern regarding the community's ability (public and private sector) to provide for increases in the parking supply necessary to meet growing demand.

Opportunities – Consensus Themes

- Several programs are in place that communicates a customer-friendly approach to downtown. They include *City Ticket*, *Bounce-Back* and *Easy Park*.
- Demonstrable commitment to downtown by the City, business community and citizenry.
- A strong positive sense about downtown's future.



Definition of "Priority Customer"

The consensus of the PSC was the priority customers of Downtown Spokane are its **patrons**; those who come repeatedly to shop, dine, recreate and be entertained. The general profile of the patron is short-term stays that result in a high turnover of parking in the downtown. As patron demand increases, parking opportunities both on and off-street will be required to assure continued access. Efforts and resources in the area of parking management should be directed toward patron demand. The private sector can be an ally in facilitating access for employees and residents as well as support for, and participation in, alternative transportation mode programs and strategies.

The fact that the PSC has prioritized the downtown patron as the focal point of parking management is not to downplay the importance of other users of the downtown. The PSC has defined a benchmark against which management and decision-making for publicly controlled supply is measured. The PSC recognizes that constraints and conflict for demand within the

supply will occur and that decisions and strategies will have to be implemented that guarantee access to the priority patron.

It was clear from the work of the PSC there is a strong consensus on the challenges and opportunities that exist in Downtown Spokane. There is also a clear sense Spokane is moving forward in attracting economic activity and amenities that support the “ideal” downtown called for in *The Plan for a New Downtown*. Most importantly, the PSC was strong in its understanding of access priorities and unified in support of developing programs and strategies necessary to make certain those access priorities are met and desired economic uses are supported. In the area of parking, it is clear the priority of stakeholders is to assure continued and growing accessibility for the patron of downtown.

3. Guiding Principles for Access

The development of Guiding Principles for Access in Downtown Spokane supports creation of a parking system that truly facilitates and contributes to a vital and growing downtown. Guiding Principles for Access are based on the premise that development of the downtown will require an integrated and comprehensive package of strategies to stimulate economic development and redevelopment. The ensuing parking plan becomes but one critical element of a larger coordinated package for economic growth.

The work of the PSC can be summarized into an objective statement with nine Guiding Principles to facilitate future decision making related to parking and access in the downtown.

Objective Statement

To implement a Parking Management Plan for Downtown Spokane that supports the development of a vibrant, *regional center for shopping, working, living, recreation and entertainment*¹ and the customers, visitors, employees and residents of those uses. The components of this plan need to be simple and intuitive for the user, providing an understandable system that is safe, secure, affordable and well integrated into the traffic system and other access modes. The plan recognizes the role of the public sector in providing parking for patrons of the downtown, as well as seeking out opportunities for creating partnerships with the private sector to improve access and support of alternative modes of access.

Guiding Principles

- A. Make the downtown accessible to all users through multiple modes.
- B. Provide sufficient and convenient parking.
- C. Make the downtown core conveniently accessible for the priority user of the public parking system - the patron of downtown.
- D. Provide adequate employee parking and encourage other modes.
- E. Promote strategic development of off-street facilities.
- F. Preserve and expand on-street parking wherever possible.
- G. Improve access linkages between districts and the downtown core.

¹ Taken from Chapter III, Vision and Concept, of the *Plan for a New Downtown* (page 31).



- H. The City should lead in the development of access options for patrons (customers and visitors) of the downtown and actively partner with the business community to incent additional access and growth.
- I. The "parking product" in the downtown should be of the highest quality to create a positive customer experience with parking and the downtown.

The Guiding Principles derived from dialogues with the DSP, City, and its stakeholders can serve as a solid foundation for coordinating parking and transportation decision-making and policy. The Guiding Principles are grounded in the long-term economic development vision of the City and its downtown stakeholders. Their intent and purpose is to generate parking and transportation management strategies and programs that will complement the DSP and City's efforts in attaining its long-term growth and development vision.

4. Parking Management Plan – Operating Principles

Operating principles have been developed for each of five identified parking management zones. Parking management zones represent “economic activity zones” in the downtown that are both reflective of existing land uses in addition to areas where future growth of specific economic development is anticipated and desired. From an access perspective, each zone needs to be managed in a manner that supports priority economic uses and users identified for that zone.

Operating Principles complement and reinforce the Guiding Principles established for the downtown. Within the context of the operating principles for each zone a specific implementation framework has been developed through which decision making for that zone can occur. The implementation framework provides an on-going foundation for strategic decision making grounded in the operating priorities established for the zone and for the downtown as a whole.

With adoption of a parking management plan the City will work with stakeholders on ways to work toward reasonably attainable priorities as outlined in the Plan. This will facilitate strategies that support the purpose and priority for parking established in the Operating Principles.

5. Parking Management Plan – Strategies for Implementation

As a result of the data inventory process and discussions with the Parking Steering Committee (PSC), specific parking management strategies have been identified and are recommended for implementation. The plan recommends a range of strategies to improve downtown's parking environment, these include:

- Programs to improve signage and communications
- Re-mixing parking time stay allowances
- Capturing additional on-street parking supply
- Specific policy level actions to reduce levels of parking abuse
- Creation of a permanent Parking Steering Committee,
- Establishing a decision-making “trigger” that compels on-going review of the parking system (i.e. the 85% Rule), and
- Designating a Parking Manager charged with facilitating the Parking Steering Committee process and acting as a liaison/partner with the City in managing parking in the downtown.

Recommendations for changes in current policy/code and several near-term strategies will optimize the efficiency of the *existing* parking inventory in Downtown Spokane. Additional mid and longer-term strategies are also recommended for consideration. The consultant team believes all of the recommendations presented in the report are consistent with the Guiding Principles and Operating Principles for parking in Spokane.

6. Development of New Parking Supply

The PSC envisions development of a parking garage in the Core or Convention Center Zone as a long-term strategic priority within the parking management plan for downtown. The decision to create new parking supply in structures is an important element in Spokane's *Plan for a New Downtown* in its effort to continue to accommodate customer/visitor access and economic growth.

The cost of structured parking is significant. Planning for the timely development and successful financing of such projects requires combined efforts on the part of the public and private sectors. In this regard, the PSC recognizes the need for all downtown stakeholders to understand the realities of parking development and the impact such a decision can have on parking policy, financing and partnerships.

Current Parking Environment

Information from the parking and utilization study indicates that, within the entire study area, there is an adequate supply of available parking during the peak hours. The weekday average peak occupancy for the study area is approximately 62%. In the Core Zone, peak hour occupancies for the combined supply is approximately 67%, though on street occupancies approach 90% in the evening. In a status quo environment, it would be several years before "constraints" in the public supply were realized. However, the great majority of available parking supply is now located on surface parking lots. As successful implementation of *The Plan for a New Downtown* occurs, the loss of surface supply to new development could hasten the loss of available parking.

Challenges to Development of New Parking Supply

The consultant team prepared two parking garage development scenarios with proforma analysis of their cost of construction, financing and potential revenue generation. Based on existing market conditions in downtown Spokane, it is clear that pursuit of a publicly initiated garage project will require additional revenue beyond the garage's ability to cover its own operating and financing costs.

The current parking market in downtown Spokane suggests the feasibility of a new parking structure will require additional sources of revenue beyond anticipated parking revenue generated by a facility. To this end, the process for considering how a new parking facility will eventually be developed in the downtown needs to be initiated if the downtown is to be prepared to meet future demand and support existing business' continued growth. Similarly, a "package" of funding options will need to be developed and implemented. This process is recommended as a near to mid-term strategy in the overall parking management plan for the downtown to be implemented by a new Parking Steering Committee.

D. SUMMARY

Spokane has done a good job in managing its parking assets to this point in time. What is lacking is a clear, flexible and consensus based blueprint for using parking management to support and facilitate the longer-term strategic vision. This plan provides that blueprint. It will serve as a guide to maximizing the City's existing parking resources and as a means to assure cost effective solutions for access, which includes new parking supply and transportation demand management programs and strategies.

It is apparent that as Downtown Spokane grows, so too will demand for parking. New development, a faster pace of trip growth, losses of current parking supply on surface lots, parking and transportation demand management programs and/or other events can work to accelerate or moderate the need for new parking supply.

In summary, the plan developed through this process recognizes the importance of parking and access in the success of downtown's economic development future. The plan and its associated strategies provide a context from which coordinated and strategic parking management can begin.