

## Introduction – Spokane Parking Demand Study

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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.

### A. THE ROLE OF PARKING IN DOWNTOWN

The role of parking in downtown cannot be seen as a stand-alone solution in and of itself. The key to a successful downtown is truly the land uses that comprise it. A vital downtown is an area that has a clear sense of place and identity, comprised of an exciting and attractive mix of uses and amenities. In a nutshell, "people do not come downtown to park." People come downtown to experience an environment that is unique, active and diverse. As such, the true role of parking is to assure that the desired vision for downtown is fully supported.

Parking is just one tool in a downtown's economic development toolbox. Parking must be managed to assure that priority land uses are supported with an effective and efficient system of access that caters to the needs of priority users. In the case of Spokane, the priority user for the public system of parking has been identified as the patron of downtown, the person who shops, visits or recreates. As the Parking Steering Committee concluded, the objective of parking management in downtown should be to implement a plan that:



*“Supports the development of a vibrant, regional center for shopping, working, living, recreation and entertainment 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 should recognize 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.”*

### B. CONTEXT

The downtown parking strategy developed through this study needed to remain sensitive to and compatible with extensive planning work already completed in Spokane. The City of Spokane and the Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) have produced several documents that set forth

a dynamic vision for the downtown's future development as well as reviews of, and planning for, parking management. These works are briefly summarized below:

## **1. The Plan for a New Downtown (July 1999)**

The City of Spokane's 1999 *Downtown Plan (Plan for a New Downtown)* provides a clear and comprehensive vision for downtown as the center and focal point for the community. The Plan underscores the diversity of uses and activities that define and will shape Downtown Spokane. The Plan recognizes that parking and access management must be designed, calibrated and responsive to this diversity of economic activity. As development occurs, conflicts for access will arise. Important competing uses will create growing demand for access to and from the downtown. For Spokane, these users include:

- Cultural and event activities
- Commercial employment (for existing businesses and future development)
- Retail (as an employment and visitor activity)
- Residential development
- Convention trade and its associated visitor activity

With the *Plan for a New Downtown* Spokane begins with a strong base of knowledge, practices and vision that will both support and augment the development of a parking demand analysis and management plan. It will be critical that there be a clear link to the assets, challenges and opportunities identified in the *Plan for a New Downtown* as well as its Vision/Downtown Plan Concept and strategic objectives.

## **2. IDA Advisory Panel Report (November 2001)**

The DSP and the Business Improvement District (BID), with support from the City of Spokane, engaged the International Downtown Association (IDA) to conduct an expert IDA Advisory Panel focused on downtown parking issues. The panel conducted its review in November 2001. The panel came to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Spokane needs a fresh look at parking and a new way to think about downtown parking to guide decision-making.
- The “customer experience with parking” needs to be improved.
- There is high demand (currently un-met) for “close-in employee parking.”<sup>1</sup>
- There is a perception that the parking enforcement program is too aggressive.
- “Significant waiting lists” exist at certain parking facilities.
- Non-parking issues include the need to improve the performance/mix of office, retail and residential within the downtown, including a need to improve the pedestrian environment.
- Parking management should be centralized under a single entity.

These are but a few of the primary considerations from the IDA report. A complete itemized list of parking strategy and program recommendations is included in the full IDA document, which is available from the DSP.

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<sup>1</sup> In response to this, the DSP established the City Ticket parking program that provides employee parking in lots peripheral to the downtown core.

### 3. Downtown Comprehensive Parking Program – Steering Committee Recommendation (April 2002)

In response to recommendations in the *Plan for a New Downtown*, the Downtown Spokane Partnership Business Improvement District and the City of Spokane implemented a 400-sample survey of Spokane County residents on parking issues and conditions. The survey was conducted in February 2002. The final report of the survey findings was completed and published in April 2002 and updated in January 2003. Key findings and/or recommendations of the report included:

#### Findings

- Negative customer perceptions about downtown parking continue to be an issue.
  - + 54% describe downtown parking as “lousy, frustrating, terrible and inconvenient”— up from a previous year’s survey.
- On-street meters are the preferred customer parking option (34% of respondents).
  - + There is increasing use of River Park Square Garage (24%).
  - + There is moderate use of The Parkade (16%).
- There is strong use of “customer” validation program (38%).
- Employee abuse of on-street parking and how to balance enforcement activities (perception that enforcement is too aggressive) is a continuing issue.

#### Recommendations

- Goal: “A customer service-based downtown parking system to promote economic development in Downtown Spokane.”
- Create new system or organization for managing “current parking assets.”

### 4. Downtown Spokane Business Improvement District Draft 2004 Parking System Plan

The DSP has prepared a *Draft Parking System Plan* for implementation in 2004. The plan is a comprehensive attempt to initiate management of parking in downtown within the context of a system-wide approach. The *Parking System Plan* is responsive to the goals and objectives of the *Plan for a New Downtown* and the findings and recommendations of the IDA Advisory Panel Report.



The plan provides a list of implementation strategies designed to improve:

- Overall parking operations.
- Customer awareness and perceptions of downtown parking (and the downtown).

- Customer awareness of parking regulations and options.
- Use of existing programs and incentives (i.e., *Easy Park*, *Premier Pass*, *Bounce-Back*, *Courtesy Tickets* and *City Ticket*).
- Parking opportunities and traffic routes.

In summary, each of the processes and reports described above recognize the importance of parking and access in the success of downtown’s economic development future. Each provides a context from which the parking management plan has been developed. All contain objectives targeted to:

- Improve the “status quo” for parking and access to the downtown.
- Increase public awareness of program options.
- Assure that parking supports on-going economic development priorities.

The only element lacking in the present environment is a consensus blueprint for parking that will allow the City, stakeholders and the general community to leverage parking as a tool to facilitate the dynamic vision called for in the *Plan for a New Downtown*. The plan presented in this document is intended to serve as that necessary element.

## **B. STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to develop a workable parking and transportation management plan for the Downtown. The plan has been developed to be specific enough to address known parking and access constraints with immediate to near-term improvements. This will assure on going improvements in access opportunities for patrons, employees and residents of the downtown. The plan is also flexible enough to provide the City with mid and long-term solutions (and decision-making guidelines and triggers) to assure that parking management strategies and programs are implemented in a manner that best serves the unique and changing nature of the downtown business environment.

Key elements of the study work scope called for development of a parking management plan that is:

- Based on an accurate and objective understanding of the dynamics of downtown access;
- Correlated to a clear vision for downtown’s economic development;
- Grounded in a set of Guiding and Operating Principles that provide a lasting framework for decision-making;
- Comprised of both near-term and on-going strategies for parking and transportation management that allows for flexibility and effective responses to the evolving access needs of the downtown.



This report documents the process and results of an extensive study effort carried out in partnership with the Downtown Spokane Partnership, the City of Spokane and an active and representative Parking Steering Committee (PSC) of downtown stakeholders. The plan contained within this report will provide the City with the information necessary to adopt and implement a comprehensive strategic access management plan. This will equip the City with a useful and strategically coordinated “tool box” of strategies that will assure priority users are accommodated and priority land uses are fully supported.

### **C. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

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.

Overall, the high level of informed input and participation of stakeholders, City staff and City leadership reflects a deep-seated dedication and commitment to a vital and livable Downtown Spokane.

### **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.