Central Corridor Parking Policy Recommendations

Policy Actions for implementing Corridor-Wide Solutions in the City of Saint Paul

November 2010

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Summary of Issues

- The development of LRT will result in the loss of 85% of the on-street parking on University Avenue.
- Off-street parking in the corridor is inefficiently managed and poorly utilized.
- Limited commercial access on some blocks will put additional emphasis on alley circulation, safety, and maintenance.
- An influx of commuter park-and-riders threatens availability of both residential and commercial parking.
- Adopted station area plans and changes to zoning require that on-street parking be better managed.

Summary of Actions

Recommendations for Immediate Implementation

- **Increase parking enforcement in the Central Corridor.** Use license plate recognition technology, install parking meters at all remaining spaces on University Avenue, and ensure that all future purchasing decisions for parking enforcement technologies are compatible.
- **Manage parking on the side streets.** Manage the parking on the side streets a block north and south of University Avenue for commercial needs, and proactively establish corridor-wide permit parking in advance of LRT operations.
- **Involve and educate stakeholders and the public.** Solicit community feedback on the Central Corridor Parking Policy Recommendations and conduct an informational campaign to educate the public about new parking management policies as they are adopted.
- **Improve the residential-commercial alleys.** Explore ways to improve ongoing maintenance and cleanup of both sides of the alleys in the Central Corridor, explore ways to centralize and share refuse and recycling services, purchase and reopen the partially vacated alley at Mackubin Street, and direct Public Works to maximize width when repaving alleys.

Recommendations for Long-Term Implementation

- **Remove snow at station areas.** Identify the cost of removing snow at the station areas and identify potential new funding sources to pay for it.
- **Integrate parking data and information.** Use the parking data developed with License Plate Recognition technologies to strategically target scarce parking enforcement resources to areas of greatest need.
- **Monitor the effects of new parking regulations.** Monitor the effects of zoning and enforcement changes on economic development and residential livability.
- **Increase the competitiveness of transit.** Improve parking management to maintain and improve the viability of transit service.

Related Materials

Mitigating the Loss of Parking the Central Corridor: A Staff Report by the Parking Solutions Team of the Central Corridor Project Office and the City of St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 2009

Central Corridor/Traditional Neighborhood Zoning Study

Minnesota Waste Wise Program

The High Cost of Free Parking, by Donald Shoup, 2005

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Background

Need for Central Corridor Parking Policies

Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (CCLRT) will provide a new transportation choice in one of our region's most heavily traveled corridors while creating opportunity for greater reinvestment in the area. It is anticipated that 970 parking spaces (85 percent) along University Avenue will be removed due to design elements of the LRT.

Heavy construction on CCLRT will begin in March 2011 in the area west of Hamline Avenue, at which point the parking on University Avenue will be eliminated and new pressure will be applied to the surrounding neighborhoods. Also this spring, the City Council will adopt zoning changes that will replace the Central Corridor Overlay Zoning. Longer term, a potential influx of park-and-riders threatens to overwhelm the neighborhoods around University Avenue once LRT begins to operate in 2014.

Adopting a set of parking policies will require the input of many diverse stakeholders: residents, businesses, property owners, employees, customers, community-based organizations, and City staff. This report is intended to facilitate the necessary dialog by outlining policy issues and potential solutions, which will lead to City Council action on these topics.

Work to Date

In 2008, it became evident through preliminary engineering of LRT that much of the on-street parking on University Avenue would need to be removed. The City and Metropolitan Council staff formed the Parking Solutions Team to study the problem in detail and recommend solutions. Their April 2009 report, *Mitigating the Loss of Parking in the Central Corridor,* identified 11 critical areas.

In the summer of 2009, the Parking Solutions Team hosted workshops for business and property owners in the 11 critical areas, and released a workshop summary identifying potential site-specific parking solutions. In August 2009, the City established the Neighborhood Commercial Parking Pilot Program to help finance parking improvements. All business and property owners on University Avenue were invited to apply for small forgivable loans, and in 2010, 24 projects, totaling $1.325 million, were approved.

At its meeting on October 7, 2009, the Saint Paul City Council, by Resolution 09-1071, established a staff group on Central Corridor Parking Policy to explore the policy implications of the Parking Report. It was charged with looking at ways to improve parking management in the Central Corridor over the short term, and ways to increase transit ridership and transit-oriented development over the long term.

Several issues identified in this report came from City staff in Public Works, the Department of Safety and Inspections, the parking enforcement division of the Police Department, and the Department of Planning and Economic Development who met during November and December 2009 to discuss issues regarding on-street parking enforcement, permit parking, and long-term parking solutions.

Many issues were also identified by the dozens of business and property owners who contributed their valuable time and deep knowledge of University Avenue. Their participation in the surveys, workshops, and the parking program provided incredible insight into commercial parking issues.

Changing the Way We Think About Parking

City planner Donald Shoup, in his book *The High Cost of Free Parking*, fundamentally challenged the way cities have tried to deal with parking by requiring enough free off street parking to meet peak demand. Effective management of on-street parking makes commercial corridors more competitive by turning over parking on the street and increasing the use of off street parking. Market-oriented parking management strategies are being applied successfully across the country, and are proving to be powerful tools for encouraging transit oriented development in the inner city.

Recently the City Council has followed this new parking paradigm by amending the citywide Zoning Code to better align parking requirements with demand, balance the interests of all parking stakeholders, encourage reuse and denser development, simplify the code, reduce blight, support multi-modal transportation, and increase environmental stewardship. Draft text amendments in the Central Corridor/Traditional Neighborhood Zoning Study are currently under review to replace the interim Central Corridor Overlay District. This report intends to complement and inform these pending zoning changes and improve the parking management system.

Financing Parking Improvements

Some of the recommendations in this report have capital or operating costs that have yet to be quantified, and will require revenue sources that have yet to be identified. Exploring the policy implications of these comprehensive parking management recommendations in no way implies a commitment to expend these funds.

Management & Enforcement Recommendations

Action: Improve parking enforcement to increase parking turnover on the street and the utilization of off-street lots.

Be proactive with parking enforcement. Because the existing parking enforcement system is extremely labor intensive, Parking Enforcement Officers (PEOs) are primarily assigned to neighborhoods that generate the most complaints. Parking enforcement is not sustained long enough in any one area to change behavior. The system lacks the real time information it needs to allocate scarce resources to have greatest effect. Parking enforcement should be given tools to transform from being reactive and complaint-driven to being a more proactive system.

Increase the utilization of parking lots and ramps through better enforcement. Enforcing on-street regulations turns over parking throughout the day, encourages employees to park remotely or use transit, and encourages drivers to use off-street parking lots and ramps. Off-street parking in most places is vastly underutilized. Given that it costs roughly $10,000 to create a new parking space in a parking lot, and $30,000 to create a new underground parking space, parking enforcement that increases the use of existing parking is the cheapest and fastest way to "create" more parking. Parking enforcement policies should be more proactive on the street to increase the use of off street parking lots and ramps.

Improve the economics of off-street parking facilities. More effective management of on-street parking resources has the effect of increasing demand for off-street parking resources, which improves their utilization and long-term financial sustainability. If Saint Paul pursues the development of public commercial parking lots and ramps outside of downtown, on-street parking management will be key to the viability of these projects.

Action: Use license plate recognition technology to manage parking in the Central Corridor.

Purchase license plate recognition (LPR) units and direct City staff to use them to manage the on-street parking regulations in the Central Corridor and in any permit parking districts that may be established.

Do more with the same amount of staff. The existing parking enforcement system is funded by revenue from parking meters and parking tickets, with the balance going into the General Fund. It has been estimated that without new technology, enforcing new meters, time limits, and permit parking zones in the Central Corridor would require at least two more full time Parking Enforcement Officers at a cost of over $100,000 a year. While it is possible that increased enforcement would result in increased revenue, without some changes in the way parking revenue is reported, the City has no way of knowing whether that investment would pay for itself in new revenue.

License plate recognition (LPR) technology uses a digital camera to read license plates on cars parallel parked as close as 18 inches apart, checks them against a database, records the time and location with great accuracy, and captures an image of the automobile. Recently, Saint Paul and Minneapolis purchased LPR units with federal grants to locate stolen vehicles and scofflaws, for which it has been very effective. In part because of the funding restrictions, LPR has yet to be used for enforcing time limits and permit parking.

Other cities that use LPR technology report that it provides a quantum increase in efficiency and recovers ticket revenue sufficient to pay for its cost in less than a year. Because it automates the labor intensive and time-consuming process of manually checking the time and "chalking" the tires, it can cover a much larger area in a fraction of the time, giving parking enforcement officers the ability to sustainably enforce on-street parking.

Overcome barriers to implementing technology. While vendors for the new parking meter and license plate recognition technologies estimate that revenue from the new technologies will more than pay for its costs, policy makers need to emphasize to the public that the purpose of applying the new technologies is not to generate more revenue but to make more parking available on and off the street. To prove this, it will help to have data on parking turnover before license plate recognition equipment is used, and after. And parking enforcement staff needs to be reassured that the new technologies have the potential to make their jobs more secure by dramatically increasing their productivity. Finally, policy makers need to be prepared for the complaints that serious and sustained enforcement of on-street parking regulations will inevitably generate, for residents, customers, and employees in Saint Paul are not used to more aggressive enforcement of on-street parking regulations.

Action: Ensure that all future purchasing decisions for parking enforcement technologies are compatible.

Direct appropriate City staff to explore how investments in LPR equipment, automated citation writers, and parking meter systems can be integrated to increase efficiency of the parking enforcement system within existing budget constraints. Saint Paul and Minneapolis recently conducted a joint assessment of six new parking meters, ranging from single-space traditional meters, to single-space "smart" meters that can take credit cards and be remotely programmed for event pricing, to multi-space kiosks. Public Works is planning a demonstration of the "smart" meters in the downtown. All future purchasing decisions for parking enforcement technologies citywide should be compatible and integrated.

Action: Install parking meters at all remaining spaces on University Avenue.

About 195 parking spaces will remain on University Avenue, and Public Works plans to install parking meters at these spaces to manage them for customers and prevent all-day park-and-ride activity.

Action: Manage parking on the north-south streets for commercial needs.

With 970 parking spaces that will be lost on University Avenue, the 560 spaces on the side streets within one block north and south of University are seen by the business community as a critical resource. Their proximity to the storefronts on University Avenue should first serve parking and loading needs, even where there are residential uses on that block. While installing parking meters on all these side streets is one way to manage them for commercial use, policy makers need to know that the business community in the Central Corridor has expressed strong opposition to the idea of installing meters on every side street, and favor time-limited parking.

Permit Parking Recommendations

Action: Establish corridor-wide permit parking.

Protect residential neighborhoods from park and riders. As is already the case in many neighborhoods, the combination of convenient transit service and the lure of free all-day parking will continue to draw commuters who seek to park around the station areas. The residents in the neighborhoods around the station areas will need to be protected by some form of permit parking system. Though the exact boundaries need to be tailored to the neighborhood and block pattern, the regulations should be as uniform as possible, since they are easier for the public to understand and for the Police Department to enforce. Rather than relying on permit parking to be established through a reactive and piecemeal petition process, the City Council should adopt

a resolution to establish a corridor-wide permit parking system before light rail becomes operational. Community stakeholders should provide input on permit district boundaries and regulations, and determine whether employees on University Avenue should be allowed to park in them.

Expand options for employee parking. Though most attention has been devoted to the loss of customer parking, employees are also a key stakeholder, and in certain cases the health of the business also depends on the availability of affordable employee parking. If parking behind the buildings on University Avenue and on the north-south side streets is managed for customer parking, and if parking on the east-west streets is managed for residential permit parking, employees will have few convenient and affordable parking alternatives. Because of the different peak demand times for residents in the neighborhoods and employees on University Avenue, policy makers should consider the possibility of allowing some employees to park in the permit parking zones, and encouraging the use of transit by employees through established employer programs like MetroPass. Working with MetroTransit, explore ways to expand the pass program to groups of smaller employers.

Action: Conduct an informational campaign to educate the public about new parking management policies.

Most existing permit parking districts have been established in neighborhoods where the majority of the residents own their homes. The residential neighborhoods in the Central Corridor are different, with generally more renters than owners, lower incomes, and more residential turnover. This means that it may be more difficult to get residents to apply for and use the permits. This will make enforcement more difficult for the police and more onerous for the violators, for while the filing fee for permit parking is nominal, the tickets issued for permit violations are not. Recognizing the unique demographics in the Central Corridor the city should pursue a streamlined permit tracking and filing system, as well as a substantial community-based public information campaign before permit parking is implemented. Preparing the Central Corridor customers, businesses, employees, and residents for increased and sustained enforcement of on-street parking regulations can ease the long-term transition to a more transit-oriented corridor.

Alley Recommendations

Action: Pursue commitments for ongoing maintenance and cleanup of alleys in the Central Corridor.

The blighted residential-commercial interface needs to be dramatically improved. Both sides of the residential-commercial interface behind University Avenue have become blighted in many areas, which discourages customers from using off street parking, discourages investment on both sides of the alley, reduces property values, and makes alleys susceptible to crime, vandalism, and illegal dumping. The increased commercial use of the residential alleys also increases the need to buffer the residential properties from the more intense commercial use.

Continue to work towards a sustainable alley clean-up program. When the Parking Program was adopted by the HRA, some Community Development Block Grant Recovery (CDBG-R) funding was allocated for a Youth Job Corps project to improve the appearance of the alleys north and south of University Avenue. This program did not move forward because CDBG regulations require that if any major improvements are made to a residential property (even something as simple as a retaining wall), the entire residential property must be brought up to code. Securing written permission from the individual property owners also posed a formidable challenge in an area with so many absentee owners.

The possibility of cleaning up alleys through the summary abatement process was then explored, where the Department of Safety and Inspections identifies violations and gives the owners a little time to fix them, after which the Parks Department cleans them up and the property owner is assessed for the costs. But this is an expensive and adversarial process that targets both landlords and their lower income tenants, and some community members felt that this was unfair.

In exploring how to clean up the alleys, several people recalled that the Aurora-St.Anthony Block Club in the 1980s (under the leadership of Ron Pauline, who has since retired), used to sponsor neighborhood cleanups that picked up trash and cleared away overgrown vegetation on private property without asking for permission or worrying about liability. While it may not be possible

to be so informal today, community leaders and policy makers need to explore whether existing ad hoc neighborhood cleanups might be integrated with periodic enforcement sweeps by the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) to provide a less adversarial and less expensive alternative to the City's nuisance abatement process.

Action: Convene a task force to explore the potential of integrating refuse and recycling services, and assign City staff to explore the mechanics, costs, and benefits of integrating refuse and recycling services on an entire block.

Our existing refuse system reduces parking and increases blight. City ordinance requires that each business and residence contract with its own refuse hauler, resulting in separate refuse and recycling containers on each property. This results in wasted space and redundant costs that could be better used for shared parking, landscaping, stormwater management, or snow storage. It also results in more wear on alleys as they are subjected to many separate trash pick ups every week, and creates an enormous carbon footprint for each block.

Promote opportunities for shared refuse and recycling. Programs like Minnesota Waste Wise have demonstrated the cost savings from assessing and sorting the waste stream for individual businesses, a concept that could be scaled up to entire blocks. Some of the alleys may serve as an appropriate location to launch a pilot program that can demonstrate the benefits of integrating refuse and recycling services on a block-by-block scale, if City ordinances can be amended to allow it.

Action: Direct Public Works to maximize width when repaving alleys.

Use the full width of the right of way. Many alleys in the City are 20' wide, and the current standard for new alleys is 22'. Most of the alleys in the Central Corridor have just a 15' right of way, only 12' of which is paved. This is further narrowed by telephone poles in and vegetation encroaching on the right of way from private properties on either side and from illegal dumping. Adopt a policy of paving alleys to the full width of the right of way wherever possible, and encourage removing vegetation on private properties that encroaches on the public right of way. Finding ongoing funding for these shared alleys will continue to be a challenge.

Action: Explore how to finance the purchase and reopening of the partially vacated alley at Mackubin Street.

Twelve years ago, the City agreed to partially vacate the alley on the south side of University between Arundel and Mackubin Streets at the request of the owner of 484 University. The owner subsequently was able to get the rest of the owners on the block to deed the vacated property to him, and built a high wall along the north edge of the vacated alley and structures that closed off each end. During light rail construction, all the commercial properties on this block will suffer greatly from the lack of access and parking. Reestablishing this alley is critical to the survival of each of these businesses during construction, and will help mitigate their long term parking issues.

Public Input Recommendations

Action: Solicit community feedback on the Central Corridor Parking Policy Recommendations.

Ask the district councils, the District Council Collaborative, and the University Avenue Business Association to review these recommendations and give feedback in particular on permit parking, side street parking management, and ways to improve the residential-commercial alleys.

Long-term Issues and Recommendations

The action items cited above are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to promote adopting policies that would serve the most urgent needs in the Central Corridor. After their adoption, city staff will bring a second phase of recommendations before the council which will highlight long-term needs, including:

Identify potential needs and funding sources for snow removal at the station areas. Estimate costs and identify potential revenue sources for snow removal at the station areas. With most parking eliminated from University Avenue, snow will be plowed onto the 10' wide sidewalks, making the usable pedestrian space much narrower in the winter months. A source of funding needs to be found to remove the snow, at least in the station areas where the heaviest pedestrian traffic is anticipated.

Integrate parking data and information. The databases in the various separate parking and traffic information systems need to "talk" to each other, from the automated ticket writing system and the "smart" parking meters, to the state court's Violations Bureau Electronic (VIBE) System which tracks tickets and revenue. Long term, hardware and software platforms should be integrated.

Monitor the effects of regulations and local practices on parking and economic development. Convene appropriate City staff to study whether existing stormwater management requirements and landscaping and setback requirements for small lots discourage economic development or the improvement of off street parking resources.

Increase the competitiveness of transit. Transit and parking compete with each other in the market, so improving parking management in Saint Paul will likely increase the City's ability to maintain and improve its transit service. Metro Transit is more likely to reduce service on routes with low ridership, and increase service on routes where effective parking management increases the demand for and viability of transit service.