Parking Authority of the Borough of Metuchen

Downtown Parking Study

Capacity Expansion and Demand Management

NELSON
NYGAARD

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CAPACITY EXPANSION OPPORTUNTIES

The overall Downtown parking supply has long been determined by facilities built to meet park-and-ride demand for rail commuting. Demand has at times, and as recently as the last decade, d been higher than supply. Even at these times, however, there has been more than enough supply to meet park-and-ride demand among Metuchen residents, nearly all of whom also happen to live close enough to walk to the station.

The most relevant question of sufficient capacity then relates to meeting the needs of Downtown businesses and the drivers seeking to access them. Because park-and-ride demand, and the off-street supply built to meet it, is so much higher than the parking demand created by these businesses, answering questions of sufficient supply/ capacity are really a matter of determining how to make a sufficient number of existing spaces palatable (and available) to Downtown customers.

So, existing capacity issues have less to do with raw supply than location and accessibility — the degree to which customers know about these spaces, and are allowed to use them. Following are strategies for removing or minimizing these barriers to existing parking capacity.

FOCUS ON RETAIL CORE

A clear pattern of customer-preferred parking location can be discerned from on-street occupancy surveys conducted during typical periods of peak customer parking demand. Occupancy was consistently higher along a core set of Downtown blocks at these times, as can be seen in the following maps.

Figure 1 Short-Term Occupancy -Weekday Midday

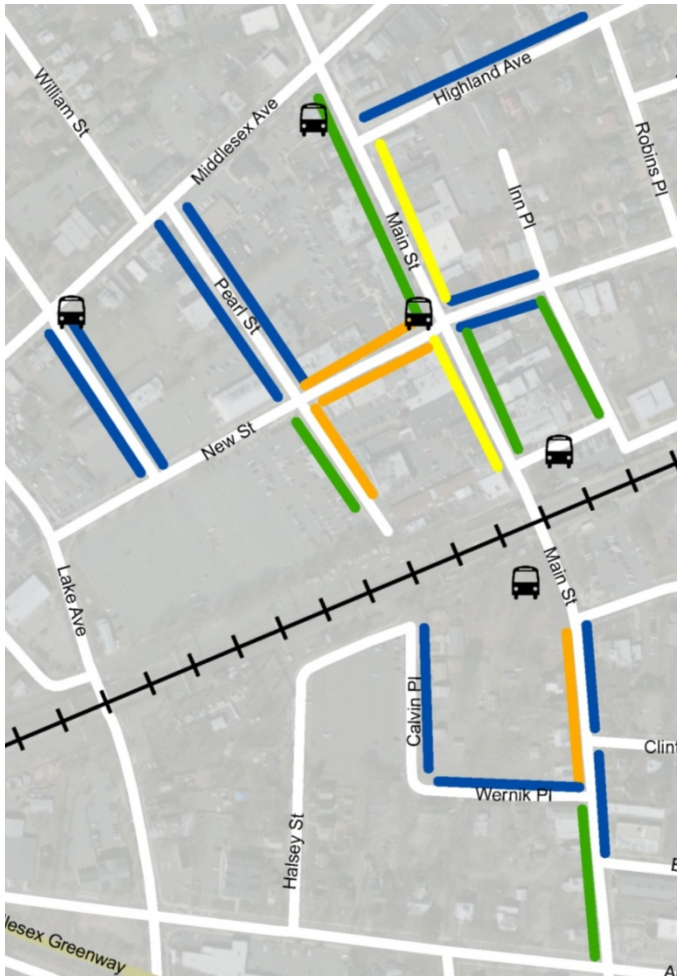


Figure 2 Short-Term Occupancy -Weekday Evening

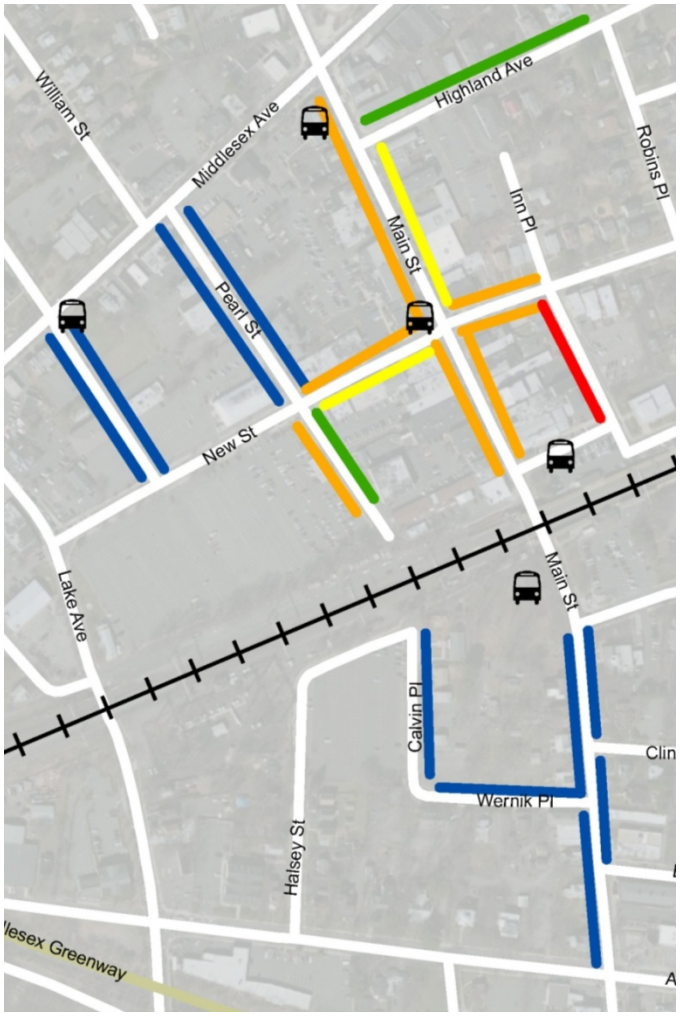
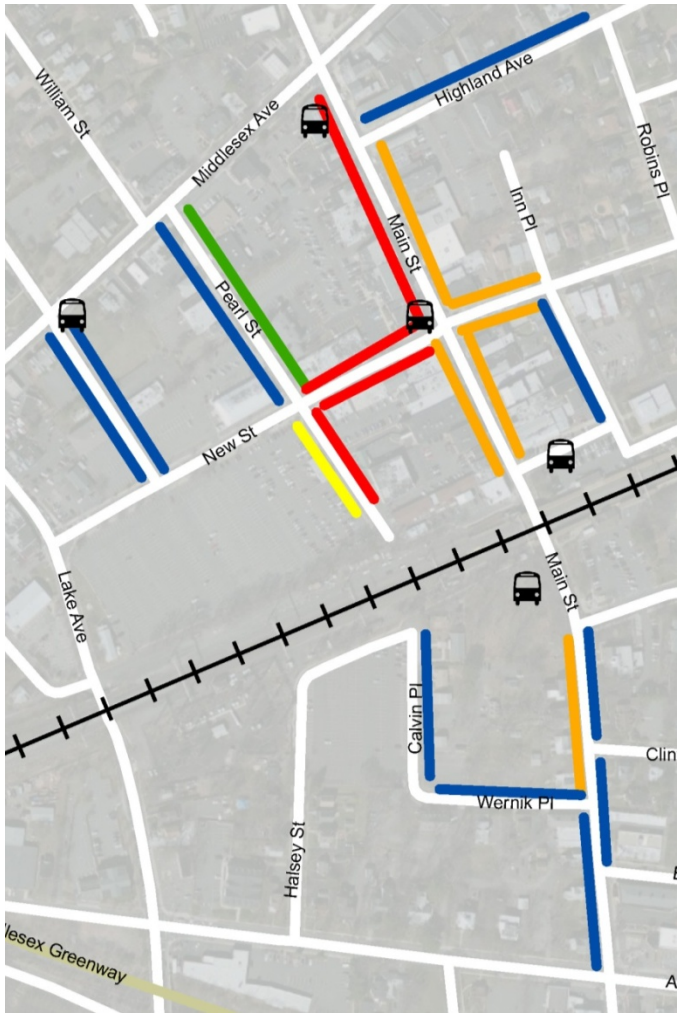


Figure 3 Short-Term Occupancy -Friday Night



Capacity strategies should focus on ensuring customer access to on-street parking along these blocks, including the block of New Street currently managed as long-term parking. Strategies should also focus on ensuring access to customer-attractive parking options among the several off-street facilities located just off of these blocks.

EXPAND ON-STREET CAPACITY

Opportunities to expand on-street parking supplies are usually fairly limited. Within the Study Area and its retail core, however, meaningful capacity-expansion opportunities are available through revisiting curbside parking restrictions and consolidating driveways.

Convert New Street to All Short-Term Meters

A much more significant short-term capacity gain is available, however, along New Street, where dozens of metered spaces are currently set aside for commuter parking. At present, daytime demand is moderate enough that this set aside is reasonable, given the location of these spaces compared to most shops, services, and restaurants. As the Pearl Street Lot redevelopment moves forward, however, retail activity and short-term demand should be expected to expand toward this block. Supporting this through customer-appropriate management of its curbside parking will be critical to its success.

Recapture Capacity from Driveways

There are several blocks within the Study Area, including multiple blocks within the retail core, where poorly designed accessory parking lots create excessive driveway space. These driveways consume on-street parking capacity, limiting parking options along Pearl Street and Station Place.

Figure 4 Private Driveways Absorb Public Parking on Pearl St.

The long-term strategy for reversing this loss is more proactive urban design standards that:

- Require parking to be placed behind buildings;
- Standardize driveway widths and locations, particularly on key pedestrian streets; and
- Discourage inappropriate land uses in these areas.

Until redevelopment has a chance to take effect, it may be possible to work with property owners to reduce driveway widths, or consolidate multiple driveways, in order to regain curbside capacity on these customer-critical blocks.

Create Options for Employee Parking

There are several blocks of on-street parking, west of Main Street and between New Street and Route 27, that are consistently under-utilized. These spaces could be used to provide a free/ cheap parking option for Downtown employees; through either 6-hour time limits (free) or special permits (cheap) that would provide unlimited parking on these blocks.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO OFF-STREET LOTS

A tendency to focus on on-street parking can create strong, popular perceptions among potential visitors that "there's nowhere to park" downtown, even when these blocks are surrounded by hundreds of empty off-streets spaces. The most common reasons why these spaces get overlooked include:

- People don't know about them, or can't find them;
- They are not, or don't appear to be, available for public parking;
- They are not sufficiently cheaper than on-street options (or even more expensive) to offset their (usually) reduced convenience; and
- Many people find lots and/ or garages foreboding environments, especially at night.

Addressing these barriers in Downtown could greatly increase the viability of existing lots to accommodate visitor parking demand. This will be particularly important for ensuring that the vast supply of parking generated by weekday park-and-ride demand is available to support a Downtown economy increasingly centered on evening- and weekend-peak businesses.

Rebrand the New Street Lot

This lot is extremely well-positioned to attract visitor parking demand, yet suffers from each of the barriers noted above. New investments in wayfinding and on-site branding should focus on raising awareness of this facility among drivers passing by along Main Street, New Street, and Pearl Street. There are two primary gateways at this facility — an unmarked pedestrian alley that connects to Main Street, and a singular driveway along Pearl Street. The former suffers from under-investment, but could easily be improved to promote the lot among passersby. The latter suffers a lack of any branding. Worse, those entering this lot are greeted by signs announcing that parking is restricted to "sticker parking".

Beyond raising awareness of the spaces that are available for public parking, most to all of these spaces should probably be set aside for this market. Currently, less than half of this facility is managed as short-term parking. The remainder of spaces are set aside for "sticker" parking to accommodate local employees. To ease the impact of such a change on this group, sticker-permit vehicles could be allowed to park at meters in the back part of the lot (near the Pearl Street entrance), exempt from payment and time limit. To address any potential confusion created by private parking areas and lots along the perimeter of the MPA facility, all MPA spaces could be restriped with a distinctive color.

Reducing parking rates, or expanding time limits, relative to on-street meters, could also help attract usage of this lot. This lot should charge no more than half of what is charged on Main Street, and provide twice the time limit. Furthermore, these space should continue to be free in evenings and on weekends — including improved signage and marketing to promote this.

Finally, ensuring that this lot is well lit and visible from adjacent sidewalk, and that the pedestrian alley is likewise lit and visible will help encourage evening utilization.

Figure 5 Pedestrian Connections to New Street Lot Could be Formalized Through This Private Lot

Figure 6 Pedestrianized Alley to Main Street

Figure 7 Private Spaces Line Much of the Lot

Promote Evening and Weekend Parking

The opportunity to park for free in commuter spaces during evenings and weekends should be promoted, though information media and on-site signage. Existing signage actually obscures this opportunity, through messaging that give an impression of 24-hour payment enforcement. Developing new, uniform signage that makes these opportunities clear should be applicable, even on NJ Transit lots.

Figure 8 Typical Signage at Off-Street Commuter Lot

Figure 9 Signage that Announces Free Off-Peak Parking

Additional Strategies

Several other strategies should be considered to expand customer parking access in this area and across Downtown.

- Sign all off-street lots as offering "Free Evening Parking"
- Convert Pearl Street and New Street to a 4-Way Stop control to make walking safer and more comfortable (critical to park-once success).
- Explore public valet options, using off-street capacities to expand on-street capacity by setting aside a block of New Street or Pearl Street as a public valet on weekend evenings and/ or during events.
- Create a Downtown Parking map, including rates and regulations by time of day for all public parking options.

DEMAND-MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNTIES

Current management practices are limited to facility-management practices, which seek to provide consistent, orderly access to various, Downtown parking options. Following is an overview of these practices, followed by a series of management best practices that take a broader, and more proactive, approach to managing downtown parking demand as a whole.

CURRENT PRACTICES

Short-Term Parking

The management of on-street, metered parking spaces in Downtown is fairly typical of most downtowns; a combination of parking meters, modest meter rates, and restrictions on parking longer than two hours. These regulations are in effect, Monday through Saturday, from 8AM to 6PM.

For the most part, these regulations are working fairly well, as indicated by documented utilization conditions when these regulations are in effect. Ideally, on-street parking is about 85% full, with a few spaces empty on most blocks. This means these resources, while being well utilized, have enough open spaces that drivers can find a spot, on their block of preference, upon arriving. This reduces excess traffic from parking searches, while making parking work better for local retail customers.

The two evening-based surveys, however, indicate problematic availability among the most convenient of these spaces. This indicates an opportunity to extend metering and time limits into evening periods to improve access to the many shops and restaurants that remain open. This likely could be offset by starting metering and time limits later, perhaps at 11 AM, as downtown parking constraints rarely emerge before Noon. Additionally, meters could be removed altogether on some blocks, including Center Street and Wernik Place.

Long-Term Parking

Those seeking long-term parking options in Downtown have several options. All customers can purchase:

- Standard monthly permits, at $200/quarter, useable in designated spaces within most MPA lots;
- Reduced-rate permits, at $115/quarter, for remote MPA lots (South Main and Memorial Parkway);
- Premium permits, at $250/quarter, for MPA spaces nearest Metuchen Station (Pennsylvania Avenue); or
- Daily "stickers", at $7/day, for all available Standard Permit spaces still available after the AM rush.[1]

Additionally:

- Anyone can park at an available long-term meter, many of which are located in MPA lots as well as several blocks of New Street, and a portion of Wernik Place; and
- Metuchen citizens and Downtown employees can purchase a reduced-rate permit, at $115/ quarter, that can be used in all spaces available to Standard Permit holders.

[1] These are only available later in morning, once MPA has had a chance to assess capacity among permit spaces following the morning rush. While not not highly publicized, regular commuters generally know about it.

Figure 10 Long-Term Parking Options

Permit/ Rate Options	Cost	Notes
Standard Permit	$200/ Quarter	Provides access to most MPA-managed spaces
Reduced Rate Permit	$115/ Quarter	Provides access to most MPA-managed spaces for Residents and Downtown Employees. All others limited to remote lots.
Premium Rate Permit	$250/ Quarter	Access to MPA spaces closest to Metuchen Station
Daily Permit	$7/ Day	Available to all, provides access to excess Standard Permit spaces.
Long-Term Meters	$5/ Day	Pearl Street Lot, South P/R Annex, Station Place, Both NJ Transit Lots

Prior to the recent, significant economic downturn, there was a growing wait-list for park-and-ride permits, despite the MPA's use of resident-preference pricing strategies. A management practice common among parking lots serving commuter rail, a monthly-permit wait list can be viewed as a reluctance to price commuter parking based on demand. In essence, a wait list exists when and where parking managers prefer denying access to some customers, to raising the price for all of them. There is no wait list today, however, and none is expected following the redevelopment of the Pearl Street Lot.

Should demand increase again to the point requiring a wait list for monthly permits, raising the Standard Permit is a strategic alternative that would could reduce non-resident demand by just enough to avoid having a wait list.

More problematic in terms of demand management, however, is the mismatch between price and demand at key, station-adjacent parking lots. The high-convenience of the two lots located on-site at Metuchen Station should be reflected in significantly higher daily rates for these spaces.

Figure 11 Standard Pricing/ Premium Location

The lack of a monthly permit option for these lots, does make them more expensive compared to MPA permit options in other lots, but utilization observations indicate that this differential should probably be increased. This is particularly true for the Pennsylvania Avenue lot, the location of which funnels peak-period park-and-ride traffic right onto the heart of Main Street. The fact that under-pricing this lot likely generates excess traffic at these lots (cars in search of spaces well after the lot is filled) should be address through higher pricing.

Neighborhood Parking

Perhaps the most uniformly successful area of parking management is the set of RPP regulations applied to neighborhood streets to preserve resident parking opportunities from commuter

parking demand. Availability along these blocks was more than sufficient for resident-convenience during all surveys. No doubt, there are other parking-related conditions symptomatic of downtown and station-adjacent neighborhoods that afflict Downtown Metuchen residents — speeding vehicles, elevated morning and evening traffic levels, noise and littering, etc. — but residents appear clearly to be receiving the primary intended-benefit of RPP regulations — consistent access to curbside parking near their home.

BEST PRACTICES

The following series of demand management best practices was assembled to address the many issues and opportunities identified in the above overview of current practices. Like the current practices assessment, the practices are organized into three functional categories.

1. On-street management
2. Off-street management
3. Demand-reduction strategies

While all are potential recommendations for Downtown, at least in some modified version, none are suggested as recommendations at this point in the study.

On-Street Management

Focus on Performance and Customer Service

For decades, parking meters and time limits have been the two primary tools for managing curb spaces — promoting consistent rates of space-turnover — in commercial districts. Meter rates, however, have, at best, been loosely based on consumer demand. Without meaningful capacity to expand on-street supplies, severing the link between price and demand has overheated demand for parking along successful commercial streets, incentivizing drivers to bide their time and repeatedly circle their destinations in hopes of eventually snagging a low-cost, high-value curb space. The external costs of this situation include increased traffic congestion and emissions as well as elevated levels of frustration with downtown.

A general lack of political will to charge an authentic, market-based rate for these high-demand parking spaces has resulted in a long history of charging enough to generate widespread frustration, but not enough to provide the benefits meters were designed to generate. Thus, unable to provide the benefits for which they were designed, meter charges have been rightly viewed as a tax, almost from their inception. As a result, one of the best bargains going (compare an hour's parking charge at a meter to one at a nearby by garage in just about any U.S. city) has become a popular symbol of municipal "greed".

At the same time, time-limits have proven to be difficult to enforce; and ill-suited to selectively mitigate unwanted long-term parking (commuters) without suppressing desirable forms of the same (all day or evening patrons). They are also poorly understood, with many (perhaps most) parking customers viewing meter-feeding is a mere burden (part of "dealing with parking" when you're downtown) rather than a violation. As a result, attempts to "crack down" on meter-feeding tend to generate more resentment than turnover, particularly among patrons who tend to be less adept at "gaming the system" than commuters.

A small but growing number of cities, however, are beginning to embrace a management approach that stresses performance-based, variable pricing, as a promising alternative to the long-standing convention of combining fixed meter rates with time-limits. This approach can take many forms, but its central components consist of:

- Setting variable curb-parking rates based directly on demonstrated, geographic and temporal patterns of demand;

- Adjusting rates periodically to influence these demand patterns in pursuit of a specified curb-availability target (typically around 15%) on each block, at all times;
- Eliminating time-limits once consistent availability has been achieved — the goal of space-turnover is consistent availability, thus making time-limits redundant if availability can be achieved through price alone;
- Investing meter revenue in local improvements; including off-street parking, alternative transportation, and streetscape and sidewalk improvements/ maintenance.

To minimize public resistance to higher meter rates, the first two steps, and preferably all four, must be in place and allowed to complement each other. The many significant benefits arising from consistent availability are the central objectives of this approach, and will prove elusive if pricing is not truly responsive to parking behavior. Eliminating time-limits and funding local public enhancements, furthermore, can tie performance-pricing to much more appreciable and conspicuous benefits to further promote public buy-in. This will be particularly instrumental in reversing opposition from area merchants, who hear most frequently from patron complaints about the "greed" driving meter rates and parking tickets.

Adopt Availability as Primary Performance Measure

Public input received during the study presents a clear preference among all stakeholder groups for "convenience" above all other factors in choosing where to park. This likely exacerbates the sense among many that the Study Area lacks parking, with many drivers likely focused on a small subset of parking spaces to meet their needs. What is really lacking, therefore, is access to the most convenient parking options. What are the most convenient parking options? It, obviously, depends on where one is going. The only way to ensure that the most convenient spaces are consistently available, is to ensure that all parking across the Study Area has a moderate amount of availability at any given time.

The industry standards for "optimal" availability levels are 15% for on-street spaces, and about 10% for off-street. Both of these measures should be adopted as official parking-management targets. Maintaining consistent availability at these levels will address several issues that currently reduce the Downtown parking experience in Downtown.

- Business owners and employees parking in storefront spaces — If a desirable level of parking spaces is available, it doesn't really matter who is parking in the filled spaces; this helps avoid the need to "micro-manage" demand through targeting specific groups for parking restrictions or enforcement efforts.
- Time limits — If a desirable level of parking spaces is available, it doesn't really matter how long anyone is parking; this further helps avoid the need to "micro-manage" how long anyone can park, which frequently results in time limits that are ineffective in keeping commuters out of spaces, but don't provide enough time for many visitors/ customers.
- Reserving spaces — If a desirable level of parking spaces is available in all off-street facilities, there is no need to set aside specific spaces for commuters or customers; this avoids the need to micro-manage specific spaces in these facilities, a practice that works against the inherent efficiencies of public parking facilities.
- Search traffic — Consistent availability will virtually eliminate incentives to drive around waiting for a space to open up.

An added benefit to this approach is establishing a clear rationale for parking rates, and rate adjustments, reducing the lost time and frustration of political and public debates about what the "right" price should be; while also increasing decision-making transparency.

Adopt Price as the Primary Tool for Meeting Performance Targets

To achieve performance targets based on availability, parking managers need flexible management tools that can respond to demand patterns and fluctuations. In just about all other areas of human economy, access to a limited supply of anything, for which there is sustained and variable demand, would be managed through price adjustments. Where availability is the primary management objective, pricing parking should follow suit as the primary tool for achieving and maintaining access to parking across the Study Area.

Case Study: Redwood City, CA

In 2007, Redwood City, CA implemented a demand responsive parking pricing strategy to maintain an ideal utilization rate of 85% at their more desirable "front-door" curb spaces along Broadway, their primary commercial street. Prior to 2007, Broadway had 1-hour time limits but no meters which resulted in nearly 100-percent utilization all day, every day. The strategy involved installing multi-space meters and pricing different zones according to the observed demand. The initial approach instituted a clearly communicated $0.75/hour price on the main commercial strip and removing time limits completely. The program is revisited four times a year by evaluating occupancy data and adjusting pricing by increments of $0.25 up to four times a year. The goal of this quarterly adjustment is to achieve the target 85-percent utilization rate in each of the three designated pricing zones. Following the implementation of this hourly charge, the occupancy rate has averaged roughly 82-percent, parking stays have averaged 72-minutes, and off-street parking lot permit sales have increased by 50-percent.

Embrace the Parking Benefit District Model

A key complementary strategy for demand-based pricing is returning some or all resulting revenue to fund local improvements; most frequently referred to as a Parking Benefit District (PBD). Combined with performance-based parking rates, setting aside the resulting revenue to fund conspicuous, public improvements can help address resistance to pricing parking. Merchants, in particular, are much more likely to embrace pricing-based management when they can share in the revenue benefits, in terms of improved physical surroundings.

Figure 12 Meters Announce Where Revenues Go in Old Town Pasadena

Case Study: Boulder, CO

Faced with both a shortage of customer parking and its citizens' aversion to additional traffic, the City of Boulder, Colorado, developed a Parking Benefit District (PBD) called the Central Area General Improvement District (CAGID) that combined reduced subsidies for downtown parking with aggressive transportation demand management. All downtown parking revenue, including more than $1 million per year from meters and over $2 million per year from garages, is returned to CAGID for area improvements. Among other things, the revenue is used to fund more than $325,000 per year worth of transportation demand management programs, including a free universal transit pass for all downtown employees ("Eco-Pass"), a Guaranteed Ride Home program, ride-matching services, bicycle parking and a number of other benefits.
Due to concerted efforts to invest in alternative mobility strategies, downtown Boulder has grown with little increase in traffic congestion. Since the establishment of downtown baseline figures in 1995, the drive-alone rate has fallen from 56% to 35% in 2008, while the transit rate has more than doubled from 15% to 32%. According to the City of Boulder, the drive-alone rate began dropping dramatically after 1999 because of the increase in transit service (17 different routes at 15 minute headways) and the emergence of an Eco-Pass "culture" that became universal with the PBD subsidies. Roughly 50% of downtown employees now live within two blocks of a transit stop and the resulting ridership is estimated at a parking equivalent of 4,390 spaces. Already, rapid growth has brought Boulder close to the population and employment projections for 2020. The downtown pedestrian-oriented "Pearl Street Mall" has tripled in length in the past decade, as automobile-oriented parcels at either end have been redeveloped.

Invest in New Technology

New meter technologies, which are rapidly evolving and expanding their capabilities, can provide payment and pricing flexibility to ease the burden on base rates alone to achieve performance targets. Adjusting rates at multi-space pay stations is easier and costs less compared to adjusting conventional meters. This makes it more feasible to use demand-responsive rates to keep spaces open on Friday night without over-charging on Tuesday morning.

Multi-space meters can also help ease the adjustment to new and variable parking rates by providing customers with a wide range of convenient payment options, including credit cards, smart cards, and cell phone payment — which eliminate the need to carry change or return to the meter to add time. This new technology also makes possible a number of pricing strategies that can help discourage long-term parking without raising the base meter rate.

Rates can be set based on the length of parking, so, where short-term parking is a priority, the first hour or two of parking can be offered at a discounted rate — or even for free — compared to the rates charged for subsequent hours. Where commuter parking is the primary barrier to availability, rates for parking beyond a few hours can increase significantly. This can increase availability for shoppers, without increasing their cost to park.

Case Study: Lowell, MA

Lowell, MA uses pay-by-space multi-space parking kiosks for some on-street parking. These kiosks allow parkers to pay for parking on a given block by entering their specific space number into the kiosk when paying, rather than by providing a receipt for display on the dashboard. Lowell replaced roughly 250 traditional parking meters with 35 of the new kiosks, which each serve approximately 7 to 8 parking spaces. The Parking Department in Lowell estimates that these changes have resulted in a forty percent increase in parking collections and a twenty to thirty-five percent decrease in operations and enforcement costs, since the status of parking facilities can be monitored remotely from the central office. These kiosks also help improve accountability since all collected monies are digitally accounted for by the meter, and “digital chalk” parking enforcement technology (license plate recognition software used to track parking durations) means that enforcement officers no longer need to manually patrol meters. Though Lowell officials stress that their kiosks are highly reliable, another advantage of this parking strategy is that if one kiosk is broken, parkers can easily use an adjacent kiosk to pay for their parking, thereby eliminating the issue of free parking at broken meters. While these kiosks end up costing about 40% more than traditional meters to install, Lowell estimates that the additional capital cost was recovered within the first year of operation due to operational savings and higher revenues. With networked kiosks, payments continue to be made even if one machine is malfunctioning, and credit card options have proven to increase compliance rates and "purchase amounts" among on-street customers. The program has been so successful in Lowell that the city is hoping to add an additional 20 pay-by-space kiosks later this year.

Case Study: Des Moines, IA

As a way of facilitating short-term parking for quick errands, the Downtown Community Alliance, working with the City of Des Moines, designated certain downtown parking meters in high traffic areas that would offer a short period of free parking. These meters, marked by green signs indicating they are for 30-minute parking, have a button the driver can push for fifteen minutes of free parking. The program began ten years ago, when one space close to the arena football box office was converted to a short-term meter, allowing people to park quickly and purchase tickets. The change was very popular, and the City has since expanded the program to include meters close to other high demand locations, including City Hall, the Des Moines Register (newspaper), the Iowa State Bank, as well as coffee shops and performance venues. The program does not have any goals in terms of the number of short-term meters, instead responding to the needs of the downtown demand, and installing or removing these meters as demand changes.

Case Study: Montgomery County, MD

Montgomery County began a 90-day pilot program for drivers to pay for parking by their cell phones, and the success of the pilot has determined that the program will be expanded to the entire county. Begun on January 4, 2010, the test area includes approximately 1,200 meters in a parking lot and garage, as well as on-street meters. The program eliminates the need for coins, allows people to receive text messages notifying them that their time is about to expire as well as extend their legal parking time by paying remotely. Additionally, upon returning to their vehicle, a person may terminate the parking session and avoid paying for time that will not be used. While the County does not have customer survey data for the program, it has received a significant amount of positive feedback from the public regarding the program. Between the initiation of the pilot and April 2, 2010, more than 1,900 people have signed up for the program using it 6,749 times. At this point, there is an average of more than 150 pay-by-cell sessions per day, constituting approximately 6% of daily use within the study area. By expanding the program to the full County, 14,000 meters will be changed to accommodate this new technology.

Case Study: Park City, UT

Park City, Utah made in-car meters available to residents while it simultaneously implemented a multi-space pay and display program. In-car meters are available for purchase from the city for $50.00 and provide slightly discounted parking compared to the meter stations. The limited number of vendors that offer in-car meters is an important consideration when designing an in-car meter program. Park City was sure to acquire a sufficient supply of meters to ensure continuity of the program during a potential vendor search if the current vendor were to cease production. The in-car meters have been well received by those who are willing to pay for the convenience of on-street parking without having to visit the pay-and-display station each time they park. According to Park City Public Works Director Kent Cashel, the program is frequently used by Real Estate agents and business owners who need to 'get in and get out' quickly. Many residents who frequent main-street clubs, restaurants and shopping also use the in-car meters. Employees typically don't use in-car meters because it is too expensive for all-day parking instead parking in one of the free public garages or using the free public transit service.

Explore Options for a Residential Parking Benefit District

Excess capacity on many streets that have meters (Center Street) or RPP restrictions (Hillside) presents an opportunity to sell on-street permit to local employees, as another means of encouraging Downtown commuters from parking on high-demand streets. Offering such permits only to local employees and business owners, limiting their number, and limiting the blocks on which they can be used can ensure a limited impact on any particular block. At the same time, for many Downtown commuters, these on-street spaces may be much more appealing than the MPA lot options available to them. Revenue from these permits can be set aside to fund improvements

Case Study: Aspen, CO

In February of 2009 the resort community of Aspen, CO implemented a Residential Parking Benefits District to protect residents from parking difficulties. Prior to the implementation of this program, workers and visitors spending the day in downtown Aspen were able to park for free all day in the residential areas nearby, making it difficult for residents to find parking at times. The new system of Residential Parking Districts allows non-residents free parking for up to two hours, or purchase a $7 day-pass by cell phone. Residents of the district are eligible for permanent parking permits that allow them to park their vehicles for free.

Off-Street Management

Coordinate with On-Street Management

The price of on-street parking will have a significant impact on demand for off-street lots. In many cities, off-street parking rates are many times higher than on-street rates. This is particularly true where off-street parking is primarily provided by commercial operators. When municipal lots or garages are priced higher than on-street meters, it is usually based on the fact that the off-street parking costs so much more to provide. Pricing, in these cases, is based on the need to pay down debt service on those off-street facilities.

When prioritizing performance across the downtown parking system, however, it is important to create a rational pricing environment. This creates opportunities for those who prioritize cost over convenience (cheap or free off-street locations) as well as those who don't mind paying for the most convenient parking options (consistently available on-street spaces).

Case Study: Redwood City, CA

Prior to implementing its demand-based, on-street pricing program, all on-street parking in downtown Redwood City was free, while off-street parking required payment. Downtown employees were offered discounted monthly passes to designated lots. But, given the chance to park on-street for free, and finding it rather easy to skirt time-limit enforcement, employees largely avoided these lots and occupied the best downtown parking spaces, all day every day. Soon after the new on-street rates went into effect, sales for the discounted monthly permits soared, and daylong parking on-street nearly vanished.

Brand and Market Municipal Park-Once Options

It is often difficult to distinguish MPA lots from NJ Transit and private, accessory lots. Further, most MPA lots cater primarily to monthly parking, giving a strong, though deceptive, impression that there are no public, off-street parking options in Downtown. The planned Pearl Street facility will be a notable, and conspicuous exception to this, but immediate benefit could be made by

promoting, branding, and guiding drivers to existing MPA facilities that offer significant, convenient public parking capacity.

Key steps for this include:

- Re-branding the New Street Lot as a Downtown customer lot
- Creating an Public Parking map that marks all public parking options, including rates, regulations, and lots that become public parking during evenings.
- Placing this map on the MPA website, and encouraging all Downtown businesses to link to it on their own websites.

Case Study: Port Jefferson, NY

A good model for branding MPA lots can be found in Long Island's Port Jefferson, where highly effective branding and signage have brought the appeal of off-street lots up to par with on-street parking. Key elements of Port Jefferson's branding success include:

- Attractive signage and landscaping at lot entrances;
- Comprehensive and concise parking information on the Village's website; and
- Rational pricing to create a predictable parking experience wherever one chooses to park.

Figure 13 Municipal Branding and Landscaping Present a Welcoming Brand in Port Jefferson

Figure 14 Park Once Map, Including Information on Free and Metered Long-Term Parking Lots

Demand-Reduction Strategies

Transit Benefits

Providing parking is simply a means of accommodating a particular mode of Downtown access. However, there are many non-driving options available to Downtown residents, commuters, and visitors. And each time one of these modes is used for travel to the Study Area, it frees up one more parking space for someone else.

Many parking benefit districts invest a portion of parking revenues (and other fees, grants, and/or transportation funds, when available) to establish a full menu of transportation programs for the benefit of all downtown employees. This not only helps with employee attraction/ retention, it can significantly reduce long-term parking impacts on retail streets.

Engage your TMA

Keep Middlesex Moving is a Transportation Management Association for Middlesex County. Its mission is to create transportation solutions and support alternatives such as carpooling, vanpooling, mass transit, compressed work week, telecommuting and much more to its member communities, including Metuchen. Services offered that might be particularly helpful in reducing parking needs among Downtown employees include:

- Ridematching services - Technology is making it increasingly easy to match commuters by commute routes and schedules. KMM offers online ridematching services that takes advantage of these advances. 2
- Transit information - Including routes, schedules, fares options, etc.
- Guaranteed Ride Home - A fixed number of free taxi rides home for non-driving commuters who need to leave work earlier or later than normal, and when their normal ride home options are unavailable.
- Bicycle & Pedestrian Programs
- Bike Locker Programs

Complete Downtown's Streets

Streets within and leading to Downtown should be identified as candidates for early adoption of the recently enacted Complete Streets policy. [3]

[2] http://www.kmm.org/reg_rideshare.php

[3] http://www.metuchennj.org/bc-agendas/2013/bc_20131021/R2013-210.pdf

Case Study: Boulder, CO

Boulder, Colorado is served by a Parking Benefit District called the Central Area General Improvement District (CAGID), which manages parking and subsidizes alternative mode transportation options in order to reduce auto-dependence and support a more walkable downtown. This multi-modal focus was also prompted by the reality of limited street capacities to handle more traffic, as well as simple economics. As put by James Bailey, former CAGID planner who helped establish the program: "CAGID realized early that the economics of parking garages are dismal." Rather than expand garage capacity, the CAGID Board decided to invest in alternatives. CAGID's non-parking programs are managed through the City's Downtown and University Hill Management Division. The "Eco-Pass" program provides free unlimited-ride transit passes to more than 8,300 employees of 1,200 different downtown businesses. The CAGID pays a flat fee to the transit district for each employee enrolled in the program, regardless of whether the employee actually rides transit. Because every single employee in the downtown is enrolled in the program, the Regional Transportation District provides the transit passes at a deep bulk discount — currently only $111 per person, per year. In addition to the Eco-Pass program, the CAGID also offers ride-matching services and a Guaranteed-Ride-Home program that allows those who left their car at home to have an allowance of free taxi rides home in case of any unexpected need to work late or a home emergency. In 2009, these programs cost nearly $755,000. However, they are fully funded through CAGID revenues as the Downtown Management Commission has determined that effective demand management investments are a far cheaper strategy than building new parking alone.