

Strip District Parking Study

Focus Group Discussion Notes

May 23, 2001

General issues/comments

- Parking restrictions and uniformity may be counter to the ambience of Strip
 - don't make it like every other place
 - enforcement vs. benign neglect
- Issue of good neighbors – need to understand one impact on another
- Restrictions on parking cut down on time spent in the Strip by customers (shopping = event)
- Current situation “not that bad”; there is enough parking, but a shortage of “prime spots”
- Key issue = lack of affordable parking Downtown
- What about park 'n ride in Lawrenceville or South Side?
- What are the parking durations in the market area and periphery?
 - shorter duration in the market, longer duration in periphery
- From perspective of businesses at 30th St., customers sacrifice parking to commuters
 - need to address parking outside of market area
- Liberty Ave. bus stops will be improved by the Port Authority

Marketing access and parking

- Need to communicate parking availability to the general public
 - parking map = key
 - having a garage with good signage will help
- PAT is re-designing bus schedules to highlight popular destinations and areas, including the Strip
 - schedules can be placed at points of frequent visitor reference (hotels, shops, etc..)
- Will there be an education initiative for service personnel in hotels, restaurants, etc.?
 - no program is planned presently
 - consider merchant discount/validation of parking in garage
- Encourage use of existing PAT service vs. new, closer park 'n ride lots
- Put bus routes as well as parking on Strip District map
- We need Strip District emissaries!
- Having publicly posted bus maps/routes might help to promote and boost awareness of existing service (example: bus route maps posted at bus stops and on busses)
 - PAT is interested in this, but it would require capital investment, so funds will need to be secured

On-street parking

- What about tagging long-term parkers vs. putting in meters?
- Meters on Penn alleviate commuter parking

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June 18, 2001

Page 1

- Parking meters stop commuters parking all day and commuting to downtown.
- Is there enforcement on Saturdays?
 - yes
- Merchants dictate meter time limits
- Typically 2-hour time limits city-wide
- Plusses and minuses of meters: plus = turnover, minus = tickets
- Consider utilizing forgiveness box
- Regulation alternatives
 - signs and enforcement
 - signs with meters
 - no parking at specific hours
- Meters cause problems for merchants and employees who are here every day
 - merchants would rather get rid of the meters
- Meters have caused business owners to use private lots instead of using the street
 - patrons used to park in lots, merchants on the street. Now it's reversed
 - before, merchants could move their own cars from the front of their shops to accommodate a delivery or loading, or a special customer. Now that's impossible because the general public occupies the metered spaces
- Merchants have started putting cones out to create informal loading zones for themselves
 - it is possible to apply for a loading zone permit for that purpose
 - it is possible to investigate using side streets for loading zones
- Important to bring loading issues up with NITS so that they can raise them with the City
 - loading zones are handled by the City, not the Parking Authority
 - City of Pittsburgh has been responsive when NITS voices concerns
- In order to compete with malls where there is free parking, we need to have the same. It's one more reason that Downtown is "no fun". No more meters!
- Penn Ave inbound – why is there no parking after 4:30? Can we look at that issue again? The tow trucks cause more traffic than the parked cars!
- Street cleaning on Penn Avenue 4 nights a week? There is no need for this Monday to Wednesday
 - this is handled by the Dept. of Public Works
- Slow lane on Penn Ave could be advantageous
 - traffic calming?

Shuttles

- Where would large parking lots be?
 - perhaps behind the produce terminal
 - we're talking about small circulator shuttles, not large areas of coverage
 - 500 – 600 spots upstream of 16th St. by river (access at 15th & 21st Streets.)

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Page 2

- Tram service: what about a Penn/Smallman loop?
- Each business would kick-in moderate fee towards shuttle service
- Use shuttle for employees to take employee cars out of core in work week; utilize shuttle for Friday/Saturday night entertainment customers
- Market area is so walkable that shuttle makes sense to connect to further reaches
- Issue of pedestrian connections across Smallman Street
- Building on Ground Zero
 - Ultra Violet loop could be good for visitors/conventioners because they would be easily identifiable and would also stay within a small area
 - proposed route of UV loop would duplicate some currently existing service of PAT
 - Port Authority feels that service is already there, and we should explore best ways to devote the precious resources that we have; might be best to spend these resources promoting awareness of the service and resources that we already have
 - support issue of drinking and NOT driving
- Making Smallman more pedestrian-friendly might eliminate some of the need for shuttles
 - importance of crosswalks, sidewalks, lighting, etc.
- Shuttles should help Stargate's parking shortage (400+ person company, 70 spaces)

Valet parking

- How does valet parking work vis a vis taking spaces?
 - it is permitted
- Issue of valet vs. public parking regulations
- If there were available space, there would be a market for valet. Need a secure, convenient area to put cars for it to work

Expanding parking capacity

- Are there vacant lots available for parking?
 - make incentives for private investors to create more parking
- Hard for private owners to open up lots
 - building inspection problematic
 - striping is cheap; asphaltting is the issue
 - need incentives
- If creating incentives for new parking reservoirs, don't we have to ease up on existing operators?
- Parking garage at 13th & 14th St?
 - is it possible to have small retail establishments abutting the parking garage?
 - could be a good opportunity to fill the "no man's land" that currently exists there
 - not currently in the plan, and it would be up to the developer
- Possible to have street vendors?
- Armstrong Cork lot – parking will need to be developed for them

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June 18, 2001

Page 3

- Perhaps an arrangement can be reached with Buncher
 - Buncher is opening up 500 space lot by 21st Street
- Cooperate to utilize vacant land and vacant lots
 - example – UPMC South Side lot donated on evenings and weekends

Long-term strategies

- Light rail – is it possible to create a loop?
 - this will take a long time to implement
- Proposed land is currently undeveloped
 - important to plan now, before opportunities are eliminated, without completely holding back development that needs to happen to ensure economic vitality of the area
- Future of water commuting for far distances – Oakmont, Verona commuters?
 - demonstration planned
 - water transport is in PAT's long-range plan
- Water taxi service starting from Millvale serving the Strip and Downtown very soon
- Trying to bring more commuters through the Strip will build customer base
 - route 28 alternative?
- NITS following up with PAT to extend LRT to 21st
 - does the "T" have to be below ground in the Strip?
 - no, it can be above ground

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Page 4