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RE: Parking Convening Lessons Learned

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Between November 13-14, 2013, Burlington, VT hosted a “sustainable parking convening” including parking and transportation experts from 7 municipalities (Albany, Cambridge, New York City, Oak Park, Philadelphia, Santa Monica, and Washington, DC). Facilitated by Nelson Nygaard, and organized to time with the Burlington Business Association’s Parking Summit for area businesses, the convening resulted in several lessons learned on innovations in parking management including issues around: 1) Communications and Outreach; 2) Fiscal Management; and 3) Public-Private Partnerships .

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING PARKING CHANGES

Background

A successful communication and outreach strategy often results in a successful project or change. This topic is particularly important for parking initiatives, as parking is more often than not a politically-charged topic that requires particular care with communications and outreach. Participants were asked to think about several examples and challenges on topics such as branding a parking strategy, communication on policy changes, involving the community in regulatory/zoning changes, and more.

Case Studies

The discussions identified case studies that highlighted both successes and failures of communication and outreach strategies.

1. New York City

New York City DOT has been using the branding of "PARK Smart" to engage residents in understanding that parking changes are a lot more than just rate changes. From its inception, PARK Smart was developed as a toolbox of planning and pricing tools that seek to improve space availability and general traffic and curb conditions. As a brand, PARK Smart evolved from being perceived as “just paying more for parking” to a suite of tools that builds a “curb ecology”. By emphasizing community involvement and program evaluation, NYCDOT was able to help individuals understand program goals and help individuals understand pricing without it being perceived as counterintuitive.

Publicizing and getting residents involved in parking changes in New York City is difficult, as the City went over 15 years without a substantial rate change due to the politicization of parking fees.

Recent increases have polarized this issue given that the rates have increased substantially (as a percentage in the last 5 years) citywide, although they remain some of the lowest of any large City in the world. For the City's pricing programs, rate structures evolved from a peak rate (essentially a doubling of the rate) to a progressive rate structure that provides a more equitable balance for both short and long-term parkers. In addition, the DOT sought to let the community understand that many of the non-pricing elements are important to achieving a well-managed curb. For example, allowing space for commercial vehicles and moving away from the idea that lower occupancy levels is critical. In Park Slope, occupancy remained over 90% but the number of unique vehicles at the curb went up 20%.

PARK Smart and other community-based curb management studies undertaken by NYCDOT were developed based upon extensive consultation and consensus building with community partners. Frequent, personal and non-traditional methods of engagement have allowed the stakeholders to shape the program and this approach enhanced local buy-in and acceptance of the proposed schemes. In particular, open house walk throughs and relaxed one-on-ones have gone a long way to improve communication. In addition, the materials used in handouts were geared toward framing and understanding the issue as opposed to making recommendations.

NYCDOT's biggest challenge related to communicating parking changes is being responsive to concerns about rapid increases in parking rates. Many feel that a higher parking rate will drive customers away from neighborhood commercial areas or the belief that lack of parking is the reason for storefront vacancies or a drop in business. Even in NYC, there is fear that people will flee to "big box" retailers with "free parking". The media also portrays parking as an "injustice" to motorists. The NYCDOT takes a personalized and tailored approach to each neighborhood and project to be carefully responsive to localized needs and concerns.

2. Philadelphia

The Mayor's Office of Transportation and Utilities (MOTU) worked with the Philadelphia Parking Authority on a significant curbside change on the City's two major commercial thoroughfares - Walnut Street and Chestnut Street - that were experiencing major congestion. The City recognized that some of the congestion was due to the lack of on-street parking and the tension that existed between those parking on-street and those who needed the curbspace to load and unload deliveries. The City introduced new regulations which relegated curbspace on Walnut St and Chestnut St to be only for loading and unloading from 6am-10am and then allowed individuals to park in metered spaces on-street after this time. When the Philadelphia Parking Authority (PPA) initially advertised this project, it was advertised/branded as a project which would be evaluated after six months. While there was significant resistance from the businesses and their delivery companies when it was first being implemented, after six months, the City found that it helped to ease congestion on the major commercial thoroughfares and increased the parking supply (allowing for business customers to have more opportunity to park conveniently) and continued the project.

Before the City implemented the loading zone changes, they went door-to-door to the businesses along the affected corridor and handed out a card with the information of the changes and an email address specifically dedicated to handling the response from these communications. In addition, three public meetings were had at local businesses, one at 7am, one at 6pm, and one held during the day, specifically for the delivery companies. The Philadelphia Parking Authority walked all of the streets in the downtown central business district with representatives of UPS and FedEx to identify the most ideal locations for package delivery loading/unloading zones. Also, all

local community organizations were notified of the coming changes. There was initial backlash, but the corridors have adapted to the regulations.

MOTU reports that a big challenge in communicating parking changes is the need to educate the public about why the parking change is necessary. In addition, the Philadelphia Parking Authority has somewhat of a notorious connotation within Philly. Because of this, it is difficult to keep the meeting on track and not have it digress into individuals complaining about the parking tickets they have received, etc.

Lessons Learned

The participants agreed on several important lessons learned:

- The goal of a successful marketing and outreach campaign should be to achieve improved customer experience; both through tactical, day-to-day issues, and through strategic policies/plans
- It is essential to first identify your opponents and figure out their motivations before finalizing the campaign
- Create an attractive and understandable brand for the campaign or program
- Municipal staff at all levels should be brought together early in the process to be coached to share a consistent message about the campaign's goals
- Collaborate with policy and operations people, as well as storytellers.
- Ambassadors for your parking program should be empowered and trained to communicate and implement it consistently and effectively, including parking operations staff (in the booth, at the window, and on the street), administrative front desk and phone receptionists, enforcement officers, other departmental staff, as well as representatives of the business community
- Use the right ambassadors for the right user groups to ensure messages are well-heard
- Always be collecting and sharing data, both qualitative and quantitative, before, during, and after a change
- Use all media tools and political channels to manage your message as broadly as possible, and to collect public input.
- Be flexible to be able to change outreach strategies by project and/or neighborhood (use a toolbox); know how to target specific groups using a combination of in-person communication, web-based, social media, etc.
- Communicate where money collected is going and how it will be used to benefit the community
- Utilize small groups and key advocates rather than large meetings
- Meet on the public's turf, don't ask them to come to City Hall.
- Use constant messaging and constant communication with follow-up, make it easy for a two-way dialogue
- Don't lose control of the message (own it, revisit it constantly, and tell it often)
- Manage expectations—Talk about raising the rate to higher than you actually want in order to settle on a lower rate.

- Pair carrots and sticks—When rates go up, announce good news too, such as parking control officers can now cancel a ticket if you walk up right as they are writing it.
- Implement ideas through pilot programs with constant evaluation and follow-up. If the pilot is unsuccessful (in government's or community's perspective), then do not implement
- At every opportunity, remind the public what they agreed to and tell them what we've accomplished (quantitative and qualitative).

FINANCIAL STRATEGIES FOR PARKING PILOTS AND MANAGEMENT DISTRICTS

Background

Although never a major goal of a parking management strategy, revenue generation is often a result of many smart parking changes. Smart, transparent financial planning was identified as a key for making parking projects successful, particularly in the long term. Discussions revolved around topics such as creative funding strategies, privatization of the parking system or specific infrastructure, the balance of fee and citation revenue in municipal budgets, and sharing financial data with public and private stakeholders. The group also discussed the challenges and opportunities on how to move revenues into a fund to be used to fund broader community goals.

Case Studies

Each city brought a different perspective to the table in terms of:

- The type and quantity of off-street public parking supply owned by the City
- The type and quantity of private off-street facilities leased by the City
- Responsibility for maintenance
- What the parking revenues are dedicated to (general fund, specialized fund, combination)
- The ratio of meter/permit revenues versus citation revenue

Participants also acknowledged that managing costs is an important mechanism to having a financially sustainable parking system. Some examples of controlling costs (and/or increasing revenue through programmatic changes) included:

- Paying a livable wage and maintaining good staff
- Determining the value of utilizing City employees vs. contracting out
- Introducing easy-to-use technology, particularly pay-by-cell; using technology that will save on labor costs
- Adjusting time-limit reliance (eliminate, extend, or partially eliminate, such as in the evenings or on a particular day of the week)
- Managing utility costs through energy efficiency projects, such as lighting upgrades, lights on sensors, etc.
- Removing garages that are excess supply and redevelop the land
- Implementing a parking sales tax or BID tax

- Substantial employee discounts to utilize underutilized facilities
- Partnering with the private sector to build parking that is publicly available
- Changing parking citation fee deposits from the general fund into a dedicated parking fund
- Revealing maintenance needs and costs so stakeholders understand the real costs of parking
- Utilizing a customer-focused enforcement policy that does not manage the system by punishing motorists or making people feel guilty
- Increasing the span of enforcement by both time and geographic area
- Using on-street or garage rates to leverage remote parking supply costs
- Using initial free periods as leverage to drive people into garages
- Tapping into enforcement revenues by taking enforcement duties away from public safety
- Taking low cost approaches to signing and information (unique signs, lights, paint, etc. to draw attention)
- Dedicating revenues to pilot projects that may generate income

Lessons Learned

The participants agreed on several important lessons learned:

- To create a sustainable system, a quality customer experience should be the highest priority
- Parking programs must make great business decisions
 - Collect and use robust detailed revenue, utilization, and performance data
 - Budget to collect it now and onwards
 - Share it online, with the public, etc.
 - Use civic hackers and code geeks to crunch data during competitions or challenges
 - Be transparent and open with dollars and accounts
 - Get your officials, departments and businesses to reveal their budgets
 - Create an online portal, annual report, outreach program, etc.
 - Embrace market-driven pricing and decision-making
 - To help ensure a balanced budget, better align program revenues with program purpose
- Work in service of the business community – good business decisions are good politics
 - Parking revenues should go back into improving the customer experience
 - De-politicize parking; give politicians policy-oriented parameters
 - Consider broader policy discussions about ALL municipal spending priorities – let the values-based battle begin
 - Allow stakeholders to decide the new rate and how to use excess money in parking improvement district

MODELS FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN PARKING

Background

A constant theme at the Convening was the importance of public-private partnerships in managing parking resources. The group focused on what the private and public roles are in operating parking, and where is the balance: the municipality wants to control the revenue but is challenged by the regulatory and political process; the private entities can more easily raise rates and be more demand-responsive but don't share community goals. Other topics included how to promote shared parking efficiencies, strengths, strategies, and branding; how to provide better information and balanced prices to customers, who seldom know (or care) whether they are parking in a municipal or private lot; and how to design attractive shared and remote parking.

Case Studies

1. Oak Park, IL

Oak Park currently has an agreement with a developer to demolish a 40-year old public parking garage and replace it with a private/public garage that will serve the residents of the new apartment building being built AND the public/customers of the downtown area. The Village is in the process of determining how the garage will be managed, but the concept is that the Village may be able to use the parking spaces designated for private use only in some shared fashion. One example is that while the residents are at work, the parking could be made available for public use.

It is undecided who will manage the garage: the Village or a private management company. One of the struggles is that the Village charges below market rates, and there may not be a company who wants to manage the garage because they will not be able to make money. Another concern is that an outside company will charge higher rates, and because that is the only available parking, customers will likely complain that the rates do not match. Currently, Oak Park controls all of the paid parking within the Municipality.

In addition to this development, the Village is currently negotiating for shared parking on two other development sites within the downtown. These sites are Transit Oriented Developments, so the Village is considering amending zoning requirements to reduce the number of parking spaces required and look at shared public private/parking garages. A successful example of this was in 2007, where Oak Park entered into an agreement with a developer who expanded an existing garage and built an apartment building adjacent to the garage. The Village sells a certain number of parking permits to the apartment building and manages the garage. In addition, the Village leases 27 private lots for public use; all of these privately-owned facilities are signed using Village signage for a seamless customer parking experience.

2. Albany, NY

Parking in Albany's downtown and mixed-commercial districts has been and continues to be a tremendous challenge. No matter what the situation, the City continues to hear from residents, employees, institutions, businesses, etc. that there is not enough parking. The reality is that there is sufficient parking for an urban neighborhood, but the common misperception drives policy and decision-making. This makes it challenging for the City to move away from being autocratic to promoting what makes Albany unique and special – being a walkable, transit-oriented urban environment. This requires looking at parking from an urban, not suburban, model and not providing a parking space for everyone, everywhere all of the time. The question is how to do this in a weak market city that is in competition with a suburban market that doesn't have any parking challenges, real or perceived.

Albany currently allows shared parking in commercial districts as outlined in its zoning ordinance, but it is not a forced issue. The City needs a policy that requires or incentivizes shared parking. One current issue is a proposed large parking garage for an urban renewal area project that will serve residential, office, and retail. Instead of reducing the parking supply based upon a shared parking strategy, the garage is being sized by the developer based upon each separate use requiring individual parking. In order for the City to successfully implement its goals, a new outlook and marketing strategy for parking is needed, which highlights parking as a limited and costly urban commodity – that needs to be valued as a commodity, as opposed to a right. (Since the convening, Albany successfully recommended to the City Council that the applicants be required to pay for the Planning Department to procure a transportation consultant to review the entire proposal and all related traffic studies, as well as develop a TDM Plan for the involved institutions).

Lessons Learned

Key themes identified by participants included:

- Capitalize upon existing assets of a great built environment to attract partnerships (especially where ample parking already exists!)
- Capitalize on the culture of collaboration that already necessarily exists in a downtown; rebuild trust that may have been lost due to politics and work instead towards common goals
- A partnership between public and private sectors is absolutely necessary to make a downtown succeed
- The city should decide if it wants to be in the business of operating parking

Several goals were identified:

- Build a better downtown: Development is not the obstacle, it is what makes the place. Make development good; stop needling developers
- Increase revenue for businesses—they need well-managed parking assets to thrive
- Make a happier downtown: ensure all partners are delivering on their promises
- Create a more efficient downtown: hemmed in by limited roads, think about subsidizing other than roads and parking. E.g., is two-hours of free parking the best investment of a development tax in Burlington?

- Ensure a more affordable downtown: sharing resources (such as parking) to maximize efficiencies and minimize the cost of doing business reduces costs for customers

Participants narrowed down a list of likely strategies:

- Lead the creation of a single system “feel” to downtown parking, rather than several differently regulated and signed options
- Celebrate the best downtown employers to motivate others and develop trust that better parking and demand management policies work; sell success
- Remove legacy parking requirements in zoning and instead require demand management measures
- Educate policy-makers to understand the value of business partnerships
- Establish a clear parking implementation policy and performance objectives for downtown plans, such as PlanBTV
- Identify quick wins
- Make the argument for transportation demand management—public health, air quality, employee productivity
- At the same time you remove minimum parking requirements, also require something that supports non-SOV trips, so it is not just a giveaway to developers