

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous issues and interests have affected parking conditions in the downtown. The objectives behind current, ad hoc parking practices, while well intentioned, have not always been to the benefit of an overall City desire to build and sustain a viable and vital urban environment.

Institutional Impacts on Parking Policy and Practice

Being the state capital, the State of New Jersey is Trenton's largest employer. Located within the downtown study area for this project (**Figure 1**) are the State Museum, the State Library, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, the Justice Complex, and the State Capitol Building housing the executive and legislative branches of government. As the County Seat for Mercer County, the City's downtown also houses the County Family and Civil Courts. All these government facilities and jobs have a major impact on the downtown both because the City has limited ability to control development undertaken by the state and county governments, and because a substantial amount of land in the downtown is covered in surface parking for state government workers.

Parking History

In addition to the institutional issues that hinder the City's ability to aggressively manage parking in the downtown, in more recent years, for a number of different reasons, the City has gotten away from a more centralized control of parking policy. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, the City focused parking planning decisions in the Trenton Parking Utility (TPU), operated by the then Division of Traffic and Parking. The TPU, functioning within City government, had responsibility for identifying, placing, and maintaining parking meters along with the responsibility for collecting parking meter revenues. The Division also had responsibility for drafting on-street parking and traffic regulations and for posting parking signs to provide notice of time limitations and restrictions to on-street parking. The Division had responsibility for managing the availability and use of temporary parking meter bags and the City's residential parking program. Further, the TPU had responsibility for maintaining some of the City-owned parking facilities, primarily parking lots, and the Broad and Front Street Parking Garage, before it was sold to the State of New Jersey. While active, the TPU helped the City maintain a somewhat diversified public parking supply.

City policy correctly noted, however, that the downtown area should be served by better uses than surface parking lots. In accordance with this policy, the City sold many of the TPU lots so that they could be used for development. Unfortunately, as those lots were sold, the City did not ensure that the overall number of publicly accessible spaces was maintained, or increased, to address the more intensive development uses¹⁻¹. Instead, to the extent that parking was created as part of the development, it replaced publicly accessible spaces with privately-owned, less efficiently operated private spaces.

While the TPU previously managed many parking functions, those functions did not include parking enforcement duties, which were, and continue to be, under the control of the Trenton Police Department. As a result, parking policy priorities do not always coincide or coordinate with enforcement priorities.

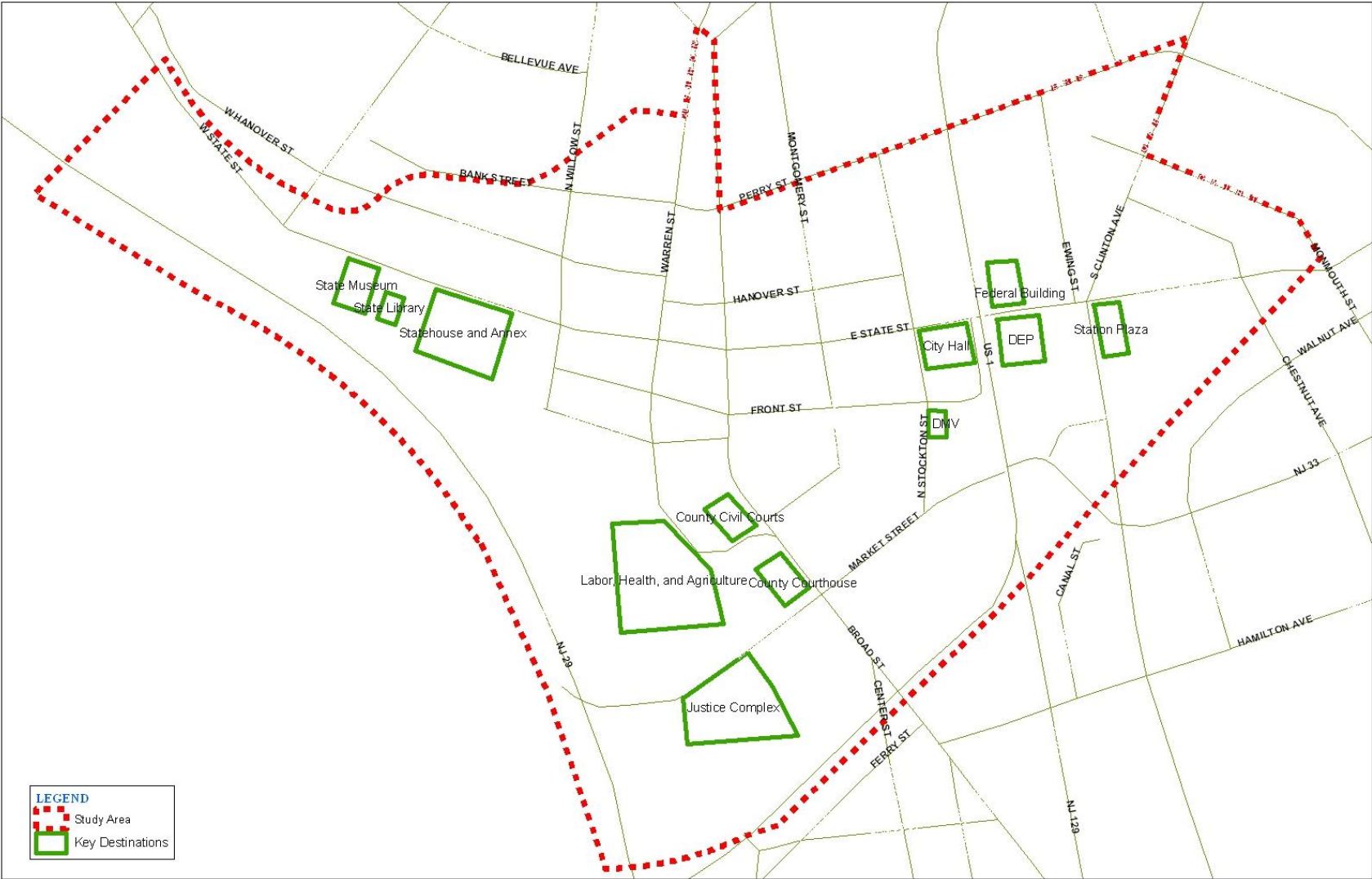
While the TPU was active, the more independently functioning Trenton Parking Authority also maintained and operated parking garages and lots in the downtown for public parking. The TPA still maintains and operates such facilities, although in some instances, most notably the former Lafayette Street surface lot, they are now managing garage structures.

Today, unlike the TPA which continues in active operation, the duties of the TPU have been divided between a number of divisions within different departments in City government, primarily because of staffing changes and limitations, rather than as the result of a deliberate desire to modify parking policy. Parking meter collections are the responsibility of Property Management in the Department of Housing and Development. Ordinances and sign installation are the responsibility of the Traffic and Transportation Division within the Public Works Department, with enforcement, as noted, the responsibility of the Police Department. Difficulty in ascertaining some elements of responsibility for parking management and planning practices suggest that parking management and planning is not occurring on a regular and on-going basis within the City.

This lack of cohesive and rational policy is further noted in the lack of parking regulation on some streets in the downtown and the authorization given to private individuals to park and reserve spaces on-street.

¹⁻¹ Two examples of the loss of public access parking were the sale of the Mill Hill surface lot for development of housing, and the loss of the TPA surface lot that was used as the site of the Mercer County Family Court House.

Figure 1
Study Area



I. Introduction

Recognizing that a rational parking policy is one of a number of important elements for helping to promote downtown revitalization, the City has undertaken the effort documented in this report to provide such a policy for the Trenton Downtown¹⁻².

This project also has developed streetscape design standards for the downtown. These standards¹⁻³, in combination with the parking policy, are intended to help create an attractive “park once” environment in the downtown that discourages excessive vehicle trips and promotes walking and transit use as attractive mobility alternatives.

The policy, recommendations and documents produced from this study are the outgrowth of several previous plans and studies, detailed in Section II. Many of these studies provided general assessments of parking conditions in the downtown area along with strategies and recommendations for improvement. Among the issues that the previous plans identified were: the prevalence of surface parking; the underutilized state owned surface lots; the limited availability of on-street parking, the pervasiveness of free employee parking; safety and security concerns of downtown commuters and visitors; lack of cohesiveness and standards for addressing design issues related to parking structures and lots; and the existence of pedestrian access and vehicle and pedestrian wayfinding needs.

¹⁻² The Downtown Project Area shown in Figure 1, is roughly defined as that area beginning at the Trenton Train Station and continues along the railroad right-of-way to the Chestnut Avenue Bridge, then going North across East State Street onto Wall Street to North Clinton Avenue, continuing Northwest to Monmouth Street, Northwest to Southard Street, East on Southard Street to Perry Street, westerly along Perry Street to Broad Street, North along Broad Street to the Battle Monument, South onto Warren Street to Bank Street, West along Bank Street which then becomes Passaic Street, and then Southwest to the Delaware River. The boundary continues South along the river to the railroad right-of-way at the Route 1 bridge and then back along the railroad right-of-way to the Trenton Train Station.

¹⁻³ Section VI of this Report.

The main work activities for the project included:

1. Ordinance and Plan Review
2. Participation and Visioning¹⁻⁴
3. Parking and Streetscape Linkage Assessment
4. Parking Policy Development
5. Documentation and Codification

The report outline generally follows this outline of work activities.

¹⁻⁴ The public participation activities included establishing and convening a project Steering Committee, which comprised representatives of the following agencies:

- City of Trenton
- Trenton Parking Authority
- Capital City Redevelopment Corporation
- Trenton Downtown Association
- Mercer County
- Mercer County Improvement Authority
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- NJ TRANSIT
- New Jersey Department of Treasury
- Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association
- New Jersey Department of Community Affairs