

SECTION III. PREVIOUS PLANS and STUDIES

Several city planning documents were reviewed to identify previously identified parking issues and proposed strategies for solution. The plans reviewed included the Trenton Master Plan Reexamination Report, the Trenton Transportation Master Plan, the Trenton Station Linkage Plan, and the Trenton Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. In addition, the study reviewed recent relevant plans by other entities including the Mercer County Improvement Authority's *Parking Market Analysis* and the Capital City Redevelopment Corporation's *Capital District Development Framework and Implementation Plan*.

A. Summary of Documents

1. Master Plan Reexamination Report

The City last prepared a Master Plan in 1999, however a reexamination report was prepared in 2005. The Land Use Plan component of the reexamination report included as one of its central principles the statement that surface parking in downtown should be regarded as temporary, and long-term plans should address its reuse for purposes more appropriate for a vital downtown (pp. 23-24). The reexamination report also identifies the following Special Planning Area Issues:

- § Possible loss of on-street parking due to River LINE extension (pp. 1-2)
- § Need for adequate amounts of accessible short-term public parking in downtown (p. 2)
- § Need to ensure adequate off-street parking in Capitol Complex area (p. 3)
- § Need for an attractive design for future conversion of the first floor of the hotel parking structure into retail space. (p. 3)
- § Need to identify the highest and best use of state parking lots and prepare master plan for redevelopment. The County has conducted a parking summit as a step toward addressing this issue. Negotiations with the state to make existing surface areas available for development are active with the goal of creating a design that incorporates a new parking structure. (p. 5)
- § Need to identify uses for vacant land and parking lots around Train Station. The city completed a plan for the Miller Homes / Train Station area in December 2004.

2. Transportation Master Plan (TMP)

The TMP comprised two phases, including sub-area analysis, and it provides a good general assessment of parking issues, covering different sub-areas of the city including Downtown, Train Station, the Roebling Complex, and residential neighborhoods. (pp. 5-24 – 5-28)

Downtown -- The TMP noted that the key issue in the Downtown is the free parking provided to state employees. The plan notes that this free parking distorts demand and creates the perception of parking shortages. The plan highlights possibilities and difficulties for passing on the cost of parking on to state workers. It also identifies a few other issues including the desirability of shared parking, pedestrian access, interagency cooperation, and transit incentives.

Train Station -- The plan identifies parking pricing as a major issue for this area. Management of supply favors longer-term commuter parking as opposed to shorter-term parking for potential redevelopment uses. The plan states the need for an approach that favors shorter, higher-value trips.

Roebling Complex -- the key issues revolve around surface parking near the arena.

Residential neighborhoods -- On-street parking and the need to balance residential parking needs with the parking demand from visitors was identified as a major issue for residential neighborhoods in the TMP.

Chapter 5 of the TMP also includes a review of the zoning code relative to parking requirements. The plan discusses the potential need for new approaches, e.g., moving from minimum parking requirements to maximum standards. (p. 5-28). The plan notes that the minimum requirements for residential uses are not onerous (typically one space per unit), but that the requirements for non-residential uses are “similar to suburbs,” and they require more space for parking than for the actual use.

The plan notes the following elements regarding the zoning code:

- § Authorizes in-lieu fees only in the Business A zone
- § Allows no reduction in parking requirements due to the presence of transit
- § Allows waivers
- § Does not provide waivers for rehabilitation, adaptive re-use, etc.

Chapter 5 (p. 5-20) also includes a brief review of the impact of parking facilities upon bicycle-pedestrian conditions, noting the following:

- § On-street parking serves as a buffer between moving vehicles and pedestrian/bicycle traffic;
- § Surface lots are not conducive to a good pedestrian environment (land uses are therefore more spread-out requiring greater walking distances from the lot to the destination and for trips between destinations);

- § Parking structures, if not properly designed, may also detract from the pedestrian environment (locations of the access or the failure to provide first-level visibility for walkers can be a deterrent to pedestrian movements);
- § Curb cuts for off-street parking facilities may be a hazard (driveways intersect sidewalks, with potential conflict between modes increasing as the number of driveways increase).

Phase II of the plan features sub-area analysis, including Downtown (pp. 5-11). The theme of the assessment of the Downtown sub-area is balancing new development, parking demand, parking supply, and pedestrian access. Specific parking issues identified in the TMP included:

- § Underutilization of state controlled surface lots;
- § Limited on-street parking;
- § Possible loss of on-street parking due to proposed River LINE extension;
- § Redevelopment of vacant buildings for residential uses.

The plan describes various tools for addressing parking issues, including parking demand management, design, shared parking, and zoning. It recommends eliminating minimum parking requirements and implementing a program of in-lieu parking fees for new development.

3. Trenton Station Linkage Plan

This plan involved a comprehensive assessment of multi-modal access to and from the train station, especially including linkages with downtown, and circulation within the station area. The plan built upon at least 10 previous studies that addressed similar issues. The analytical activity included a sidewalk and crosswalk survey, which identified many substandard conditions; a signage audit including pedestrian signs; and a pedestrian level of service analysis. The key overall finding was a lack of coherency in going to and from the station.

The final report presented a Conceptual Plan of recommended improvements, both for individual intersections and for the general area. The plans for individual intersections included pedestrian improvements such as new or widened sidewalks and enhanced crosswalks. Overall recommendations included dedicated sidewalk and crosswalk maintenance programs, pedestrian signals, new paths, and improved lighting. The plan also included recommendations to improve wayfinding and signage for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The plan included limited reference to parking issues, but it did include a “Driving to Parking Lots” map that shows the most convenient travel route to appropriate parking areas from different directions.

4. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

This report identifies improved parking as a key to revitalizing the downtown area. The key issue it identifies is the preponderance of surface parking, and it recommends redeveloping the surface lots while using structured parking to meet parking needs.

5. Parking Market Analysis – Mercer County Improvement Authority (MCIA)

This study identified various issues and proposed strategies in a study area that encompassed the “Opportunity Triangle,” which connects downtown with the Arena / Roebing District and Waterfront Park area.

6. Capital District Development Framework and Implementation Plan – Capital City Redevelopment Corporation (CCRC)

This plan, which builds upon CCRC's 1989 Renaissance Plan, provides a long term development strategy for the Capitol Complex area. The work involved reviewing existing conditions and identifying future development opportunities. It included concepts for appropriate land uses, building design, streetscapes, gateways, and edge treatments.

B. Summary of Identified Issues and Strategies

The following key issues and strategies were identified from the plans reviewed:

- Eliminate/reduce minimum parking requirements and replace with in-lieu fees
- Address the situation of downtown employers providing free parking for their employees
- Pursue opportunities to redevelop surface parking lots
- Consider structured parking to meet new parking needs