



To: Downtown Mobility Authority Board of Directors
From: DMC Staff
Date: September 28, 2021
RE: Ideas for DMA Parking Leadership in Downtown

Vision:

The Downtown Mobility Authority is uniquely positioned to create a proactive strategy for meeting future parking demand innovatively and comprehensively. With a renewed focus on walkability and quality of life, the DMA vision is that Downtown Memphis become a “park once” destination, with clear information about where to park, reasonably priced choices, and a full range of complementary mobility options.

Background:

Historically, the Downtown Parking Authority (DPA) viewed its role as building new public parking strategically as a catalyst for high-impact commercial development. While that important work will certainly continue, the Downtown Mobility Authority (DMA) intends to add transportation demand management (TDM) and mobility strategies to the toolkit. Building new parking is only one way to meet new demand.

Parking, for the sake of parking, is not our goal. Parking must always be viewed as a tool for achieving our broader economic and community goals as we build a Downtown for everyone and strengthen the local tax base through core city revitalization. Adding new public parking will sometimes be necessary to support infill development and increased density Downtown. However, adding new public parking is costly and not often the highest and best use of valuable real estate. New public parking should typically be considered as an option of last resort when existing parking and other mobility alternatives are unable to meet demand.

Challenges & Opportunities:

The Downtown Parking Study’s key guidance is to always look for ways to use existing parking first. However, there are four distinct issues that must be understood to make real progress and increase the utilization of existing parking:

1. **Downtown parking is owned, managed, and controlled by many different actors.** The DMA currently manages less than 8% of the public parking supply Downtown. Private owners control most existing parking garages and surface lots, with divergent interests, and often need to see a compelling financial interest to try a new idea. A person driving Downtown does not care whether they will park at a DMA garage or a privately-owned parking facility. They are looking for the easiest and most-affordable solution so they can get out of the car and begin their Downtown experience.
2. **The pricing strategy for public on-street and public off-street parking is not working.** Lack of synergy between on-street & off-street parking pricing and management is a missed

opportunity to encourage and incentivize behavior that uses our existing parking first. The cheapest place to park Downtown should not be along our limited curb space. Cars parked longer than 2 hours should be encouraged, through a deliberate pricing strategy and more active enforcement, to park in off-street lots or garages. Underpriced parking is also a barrier for building a great public transit system. It should not be cheaper to park all day Downtown than the cost of a bus ride.

3. **Nobody is looking at the entire Downtown parking system comprehensively.**

A vital early step to begin utilizing our existing parking supply is to create and maintain a comprehensive inventory of publicly available parking. Yet, gross information about location and hourly rate is not being collected, disseminated, or updated regularly. The DMA can become the missing hub of Downtown parking and mobility information. Whether it is a visitor, local resident, office tenant, or prospective developer, a single point of contact and a clearinghouse of information will provide clarity and improved customer service.

4. **The existing parking supply will only be used if pedestrian connections are safe and interesting.**

There is a perception that Downtown lacks enough parking because people do not want to park at existing facilities that are further away from destinations. At almost any location and any time of the day, a highly used parking facility is only a few blocks away from underutilized parking. However, this excess parking is only usable if the potential customers are willing to walk from that location to their destination. A high-quality pedestrian experience is much more important than walking distance alone. Comfortable walking distance can be significantly increased through tactical interventions such as pedestrian lighting, sidewalk repairs, public art, and activation of ground-floor vacancies. (The recently approved Downtown Sidewalk Repair Grant is an example of DMA leadership to address improving pedestrian connections.)

Three Big Ideas:

Understanding that most of the issues listed above are unlikely to be solved in the short term, the DMC staff has identified three ideas to guide the creation of solutions and build DMA leadership in the Downtown parking ecosystem.

1. The DMA should **be the information hub** for all public parking knowledge Downtown. We should know where there is availability and be able to broker connections between supply and demand.
2. The DMA should **price parking intentionally** to encourage behaviors we want to see. This includes setting performance targets and utilization goals that reflect parking for longer periods in garages, and shorter periods on the street.
3. The DMA should **unlock vacant garages and surface lots** for public parking through pedestrian improvements with an emphasis on walkability. Creative partnerships with private owners can also make otherwise dormant parking available after office hours and on weekends, and as an information leader the DMA can encourage such partnerships.