

Policy Capsule

Smart Growth Technical Session III: Smart Growth Strategies and Techniques for Parking

INTRODUCTION

The following overview is provided to frame the discussion at the February 25, 2004 Smart Growth Technical Session. It is assumed that session participants will have some familiarity with parking problems and solutions related to smart growth, in-fill and mixed use development. This capsule is intended to instigate thought and discussion on parking standards, costs and development techniques that can be used to help overcome barriers to smart growth development.

BACKGROUND

Smart Growth Sessions I and II focused on how transportation modes and development risks pose barriers to smart growth in the Bay Area. In each of the two previous discussions, parking related issues were identified as significant barriers to smart growth and in-fill development.

Local jurisdictions regulate parking through standards that are set assuming certain parameters for development. Changes in the number of vehicles per household, public transportation availability and development patterns affect the need for parking, both in actual number of spaces and the configuration. Further, current assumptions do not account for potential changes in patterns due to population dynamics, cost of parking/driving trade-offs, and emerging styles of development.

Local jurisdictions, developers and advocates, alike, struggle with the best way to count, develop and replace parking as new development patterns are introduced into the planning arena.

THE ISSUES

Local parking requirements for new developments are often:

- **Costly.** Building parking spaces for residential units adds tens of thousands of dollars per space to the cost of each unit. Parking costs affect the potential for development of affordable housing, neighborhood and downtown commercial and high density mixed-use developments. Shared parking, dis-aggregation of parking development costs from housing, and new parking technology may all play a role in reducing parking requirements and their associated building costs.
- **Regulation heavy.** Parking regulations mandated through local ordinances may not address the specific needs of a given development, nor the needs of new development patterns. By re-visiting parking standards, local governments could refine actual parking needs for residential, commercial and other uses.
- **Inflexible.** Many jurisdictions have a “one-policy fits all” approach to parking. Rather than apply a standard, inflexible policy to all developments, local government can create parking policies to meet the particular needs of various developments. For example, for affordable housing developments near transit, parking requirements could be reduced, as census data demonstrate that car ownership declines with income. In addition, if a development offers alternatives to car ownership to its residents, such as free-bus passes and car-sharing, parking requirements could be reduced.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are three focused strategies that can be implemented to reduce parking mandates at the local jurisdictional level?
- What new construction techniques and/or planning mechanisms might developers use to reduce capital costs related to parking?
- What potential exists for regional transit agencies such as BART, ferry services and other transit providers to rethink parking requirements, costs and placement?

NEXT STEPS, STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

- What actions can developers, local governments, regional agencies and regional transit agencies take to support modified parking requirements?

Examples:

Local Government Actions:

- Adjust parking requirements to better reflect actual demand, and to support local affordable housing, quality of life, Smart Growth and congestion reduction goals.
- Support the “unbundling” of parking costs from the cost of housing and commercial space.
- Adopt urban design guidelines to reduce negative impacts of parking facilities on community walkability and livability.
- Introduce flexibility into parking codes, such as landscape reserves, in-lieu fees, options for valet or stack parking, exemptions for historic retrofits, etc.
- Adopt reductions in parking requirements along with Transportation Demand Management or trip reduction program incentives.
- Introduce Residential Parking Permit district programs, to reduce existing residents’ fears of spillover parking.

Regional Agency Actions:

- Create parking regulations “best practices” to assist with the development of parking codes.
- Establish funding formulas that require transportation projects to compare economic efficiency of new parking with investments in other access modes.
- Establish funding incentives for communities that introduce market pricing of parking as a tool for reducing automobile trip generation and traffic congestion.
- In environmental reviews, eliminate parking demand impacts from consideration.

Transit Agency Actions:

- Design parking facilities that enhance pedestrian access in and around transit stations/hubs.
- Introduce carpool parking and car-share pods in and around transit stations/hubs.
- Design parking facilities that support high density and mixed use development.
- At stations, examine the most cost effective mix of parking, feeder transit, joint development, TDM and bicycle & pedestrian facilities to maximize access to the station and revenue to the agency.
- Introduce market pricing of parking at stations to optimize ridership, revenue and social equity.