

# WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

**Improving Parking at Wayne State University**

**Report of the Parking Task Force**

**January 2002**

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### Introduction

Few issues generate more interest, debate and emotion on any university campus than parking. Wayne State is no exception. The availability of convenient, safe, well-maintained and affordable parking has been a perennial goal at the university—a goal that has not been fully achieved. The parking task force, convened by the executive vice president in late August 2000, met at varying intervals over the course of fifteen months to look at ways to improve parking operations at the university. The group focused on areas of immediate concern: the sufficiency and availability of parking, visitor parking, traffic flow and congestion at the beginning of the semester and maintenance and security issues. The task force did not delve into the day-to-day operational or financial issues facing the parking department.

The parking inventory consists of six parking structures and 44 surface lots located throughout the central and medical campus. The total number of available parking spaces is 11,600, with approximately 40% assigned to faculty and staff and 60% available for students and visitors. The table attached as Appendix I lists the location and number of total spaces of both parking structures and surface lots.

The Parking and Transportation department is an auxiliary operation of the university much like the bookstore, McGregor Conference Center or university radio station, WDET. Auxiliary operations are intended to be self-sufficient and operate independently without general fund financial support. While this may have been the original intent for the parking operation, it is not the present reality. Because the revenues generated from parking operations have not been adequate to cover the necessary maintenance and structural repairs, major improvements have been paid for from university resources. For example, in 1999, the university provided \$2.7 million from the sale of bonds to renovate a portion of PS #1 when conditions in the structure became so intolerable that a portion of the structure was unusable. The merits of self-sufficiency for the parking operation can be debated, and there are certainly strong arguments on both sides of the issue. The fact of the matter is that the operation has been subsidized for many years by the central administration. For FY 2002, President Reid directed the vice presidents with responsibility for auxiliary operations, including Parking, to reduce the general fund subsidy over time and to operate them as independent auxiliaries.

This report provides a summary of the issues addressed by the task force and its recommendations for improving parking operations. The group's initial recommendations were presented to a number of campus stakeholders---students, employees, housing residents and faculty---from July through October 2001 to provide feedback and input from the larger campus community. The task force found these sessions to be very valuable and a number of the group's initial recommendations were revised as a result of this feedback.

The charge to the group was to come forward with recommendations for parking improvements.

This report offers cost estimates for the improvements that are recommended, but it does not propose how to fund the improvements. Obviously, increasing the parking fee is one way to fund improvements to the system. The task force does not, in principle, oppose a rate increase; rather, the issue was not within the scope of this task force's charter. It will be up to the university administration to determine which improvements to implement and how they might be funded, whether through a rate increase or otherwise. Without additional revenue, however, it is unlikely major improvements can occur.

As a general matter, the parking department operates under tight financial constraints. (A copy of the department's budget for FY 2001 and 2002 is attached as Appendix II.) Revenues generated from the parking operations---monies collected from those who park in the facilities---are not sufficient to properly maintain the facility or to enable a sufficient maintenance reserve to handle the major capital improvements that inevitably arise as facilities age. Excluding the newest facility, PS #6, which opened in September 2001, the average age of the parking structures is 26 years, with PS #1 being the oldest, at 43 years. As the facilities age, it is reasonable to expect that the maintenance costs will increase.

The last rate increase occurred in 1991 when the daily parking fee was increased from \$0.75 to its present level of \$1.00. Before that, increases had not occurred for 17 years. Most commercial parking operations raise rates on a regular basis to cover the costs of inflation and to meet the rising costs of maintenance and repair. If the university's parking operations are ever to be maintained in a first class manner, increases will have to occur more than once each decade. The rates currently charged are below most of the competition in the immediate vicinity and comparable urban institutions. (See Appendix III). It is interesting to note, however, that some higher education competitors---notably the University of Michigan, Dearborn and Oakland University,---do not currently charge directly for parking. Also, a separate parking fee is not imposed at the university's satellite facilities (i.e. Oakland Center).

### Areas of Focus

Although there are many issues confronting the university's parking operation, the following areas were identified as requiring the most immediate attention and are therefore the subject of this report.

1. Improve the traffic flow and alleviate congestion during the first two weeks of the semester.

At the group's first meeting in August 2000, it reviewed a new plan by the Parking Department to address the beginning of the semester traffic and congestion. Congestion at the start of a semester has been a perennial problem---lengthy lines at structures and lots, extreme traffic congestion and tie-ups---bringing frequent complaints by staff, faculty and students. The problem intensified during the transitional period after the introduction of the WSU One Card.

A number of improvements were put into place in the fall of 2000 to address the parking dilemma, including:

- A pilot project to provide free parking at remote lots (Lots 4,7,5 and 6) and a shuttle bus to main campus.
- Equipping parking attendants with coinage for change and a universal OneCard to process drivers through the gate more quickly.
- Placing attendants within the structures to direct traffic.
- Providing more signage and parking control outside the main structures and lots.
- Converting exit lanes as entrance lanes at PS #2 and 5 to accommodate more lanes of traffic during peak times.
- In conjunction with the One Card office, allowing students to add money to their OneCards by mail before the start of the semester.
- Communications sent out to all students regarding improvements via US mail and email.
- Add “express” OneCard lanes.

Overall, the changes put into place did result in improved traffic flow, less congestion and shorter lines. The shuttle bus was not fully utilized and ran empty most days and was not deployed after fall 2000. In addition, attendants located within the structures to direct traffic did not add appreciably to improved traffic flow within the structures. The improvements that appeared to help the most were increasing the number of entrances/exits at peak times, increasing the number of safety personnel to control traffic outside of the structures, and offering free parking at the remote lots. Free parking, although a useful tool to reduce congestion, however, also reduces the Parking Department’s revenues.

These improvements were continued at the beginning of the winter semester in January 2001 and the fall of 2001. In addition, in the fall of 2001, reversible lanes were added at PS #2 and #5 that dramatically improved entry into the structures for both students and staff. To improve safety within the structure, a large sign was added to warn motorists that the old exit was now being used as an entrance.

The Parking Department must continually evaluate and improve upon these mechanisms, as they do seem to have a positive effect on reducing the congestion and traffic during peak periods.

## 2. Improve the utilization of parking spaces on campus.

One of the first areas of inquiry for the task force was the sufficiency of parking on the central campus. Anyone visiting the campus during certain times would have the impression that there are simply not enough parking spaces. The group was interested in learning more about the availability and use of parking on the central campus.

In 1999, the university, as part of the facility master planning process, retained a professional parking consultant, HNTB, Inc., to comprehensively review parking operations, including both operational and infrastructure issues. The task force reviewed that portion of the consultant’s report concerning the occupancy of off-street parking areas and invited the consultant to one of its meetings. A copy of the full report is available from the Office of the Executive Vice President at 4165 Faculty/Administration Building or (313) 577-2389.

According to HNTB’s report, during the peak morning period (from 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.) only 68% of all parking spaces are occupied. None of the university’s main parking structures were fully occupied (100%) during peak morning or afternoon hours. Some lots, in particular those located to the North and South—the peripheral or remote parking lots—were never fully occupied. HNTB conducted its survey during the week of October 4, 1999 between 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and 1 – 3:00 p.m. The report concluded that “the number of spaces supplied was adequate, but not distributed as efficiently as possible. . . There is increased competition for spaces in “prime” locations.” (HNTB Report, at p. 2). The following chart depicts the occupancy percentages by zone per the HNTB study:

| <b>OCCUPANCY RATES – OCTOBER, 1999</b>               |                  |                  |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| <b>HNTB Study</b>                                    |                  |                  |
|  | <b><u>AM</u></b> | <b><u>PM</u></b> |
| <b>Central Campus<br/>(PS-1,PS-2,PS-5,NS,MH,B,C)</b> | <b>70%</b>       | <b>61%</b>       |
| <b>East<br/>(PS-3,MP,MP2)</b>                        | <b>78%</b>       | <b>89%</b>       |
| <b>West<br/>(3,T)</b>                                | <b>49%</b>       | <b>51%</b>       |
| <b>North<br/>(4,7,A,V)</b>                           | <b>22%</b>       | <b>22%</b>       |
| <b>South<br/>(2,G,UT)</b>                            | <b>80%</b>       | <b>71%</b>       |
| <b>Medical<br/>(PS-4,SH)</b>                         | <b>68%</b>       | <b>73%</b>       |
| <b>Pharmacy<br/>(19,RV)</b>                          | <b>87%</b>       | <b>69%</b>       |

Because the HNTB survey was conducted weeks after the start of the semester, and not during the most congested time period, the task force collected additional data. In September 2000, during the first two weeks of the semester, the busiest parking period, the parking department, at the task force’s request, surveyed the use of spaces in the central structures and main surface lots from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The Parking Department survey found that PS #3, located at Warren and Woodward (the Rackham facility) was the “fullest”, with 95% of the spaces occupied. None of the other structures, however, reached maximum occupancy during peak hours. It is important to note, however, that the parking department’s survey was conducted during the two-week period when parking was free at Lots 4, 7, 5 and 6. All spaces in these free lots were fully occupied.

The following chart provides the occupancy rates based upon the September 2000 parking department survey:

| <b>OCCUPANCY RATES – SEPTEMBER, 2000</b>     |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Parking Department Study</b>              |           |           |
|  | <u>AM</u> | <u>PM</u> |
| Central Campus<br>(PS-1,PS-2,PS-5,NS,MH,B,C) | 82%       | 78%       |
| East<br>(PS-3,MP,MP2)                        | 95%       | 91%       |
| West<br>(3,T)                                | 79%       | 50%       |
| North<br>(4,7,A,V)                           | 97%*      | 98%*      |
| South<br>(2,G,UT)                            | 94%*      | 95%*      |

Based on this information, the task force discussed ways to help re-distribute parking throughout the entire campus and to encourage use of the under-utilized facilities. The task force makes the following recommendations:

- 1) Use price to better distribute parking.
  - Provide free parking permanently at Lot 7 (Cass and Antoinette North of I-94), Lot 4 (Second and York) and Lots 5 & 6 (Cass and Canfield).
  - The university currently charges the same price regardless of where you park. Price, however, can be a valid way to encourage or discourage parking in certain areas. The university can use price (free parking) to encourage parking at remote lots. The parking department's pilot project during the beginning of the fall semester 2000 demonstrated that when these lots were free, the spaces were fully occupied.
  
- 2) Charge more for lots that are directly adjacent to key buildings but close to other parking facilities more expensive.
  - Impose premium pricing at Lot NS (adjacent to the Faculty Administration Building), Lot H (behind Old Main), Lots R, E and ET (behind Bioengineering, Engineering Technology and Physics) and Lot 30 (adjacent to the Law School).

Although the group did not discuss the amount of a premium, the general consensus was that the price for premium lots should be 50 - 100% more than other lots or parking facilities. In addition, the "oversell" on these lots should be minimal so that these premium spaces are virtually reserved. The additional revenues collected from the premium lots could be used to offset the cost of the free parking.

### 3. Improve maintenance.

The first impression that many visitors have of the university comes from their contact with the parking facilities. To make that impression a favorable one, the university should see that they are clean, well maintained, and kept in good repair. Years of insufficient repair and maintenance have taken their toll on the parking infrastructure. Because sufficient funds were not available over the years to properly maintain the structures and lots, most of the structures are in need of major repair. The HNTB report itemized the structural repairs needed for structural systems in each of the structures. (See Appendix IV).

Generally, the current maintenance issues fall into three main categories: structural, painting and lighting, and equipment. Cleanliness is also a significant issue. There is currently only one piece of cleaning equipment for all of the parking structures and only 2 FTE's dedicated to keeping the facilities clean and litter free. The following improvements would greatly enhance the overall maintenance of the facilities:

- Repair structures as indicated in consultant's report
- Purchase additional cleaning equipment
- Increase the number of maintenance personnel from 2 FTE to 6 FTE to provide cleaner facilities
- Paint stairwells, elevator lobbies and offices within the parking structures
- Re-stripe parking spaces
- Pave gravel lots, beginning with Lots B, NS, UT, SH, G, MP, SL and Z
- Repair and patch asphalt in surface lots, where needed

Many of the structural problems cannot be "fixed" in the short term; they require a long-term plan. Normally, maintenance reserves would be used to fund capital projects, such as elevator repairs and replacement, lighting upgrades, and major structural repairs. Regular repair and preventative maintenance is the best way to avoid costly major repairs down the line.

### 4. Enhance visitor parking.

Currently, parking for visitors to the campus is handled in two different ways. One way is for visitors to pay \$2 upon entry to park at one of the visitor parking facilities. The other way is for schools, colleges and divisions to send guests a parking pass through the mail to use in entering one of the visitor parking facilities. The first way – paying cash upon entry—works well for certain visitors. The guest pass procedure, however, is inadequate. It requires the visitor to remember to bring the card with them and relies too heavily on the vicissitudes of the U.S. mail. The preferred method for visitor parking would be through an attended ticket validation system.

The task force recommends that the university add attended, validated visitor parking to Lot NS. Lot NS was expanded to accommodate additional parking needed during the construction of the addition to the Law School. These additional 75 spaces, the expanded portion of the lot, could be made available for hourly, attended validated visitor parking. Rather than continue the inconvenient system of mailing parking passes, a validation system could be offered that would enable visitors to take a ticket upon entry and either obtain validation from the office they are

visiting or pay an attendant an hourly fee upon exiting the lot. This system, which is used in any number of parking garages throughout the region, would offer flexibility and convenience to visitors to the campus. Moreover, the location of Lot NS, close to the center of campus and a reasonable walk to the fitness center and McGregor Conference Center, makes it suitable for visitor parking.

#### 5. Selected operational issues.

Although the task force did not look extensively at operational issues facing the parking department, the group did discuss a number of concerns that touched upon the department's operations. The main concerns and the recommendation made to address them are presented below.

#### 24-Hour Parking

Currently, the university's parking facilities are open from 7 a.m. until midnight Monday through Friday. PS #5 is open on weekends from 7 a.m. until midnight and PS #6 is open on Saturday from 7 a.m. until midnight. Twenty-four hour parking is permitted only in residence lots. The university, however, is increasingly a 24-hour campus, particularly on the medical campus located in the heart of the Detroit Medical Center. With a growing resident population, issues of safe, convenient round-the-clock access to parking must be seriously considered. Residents of the DeRoy and Chatsworth apartments have longstanding complaints about parking in surface Lot B, which is viewed as inconvenient and is unsafe for overnight parking.

The task force recommends converting two of the six parking structures (Parking Structure #5 and Parking Structure #4) to 24-hour attended facilities. Parking Structure #4 is located on the medical campus. The medical campus is a 24-hour community, with medical students being called upon at all hours of the day and night. Currently, medical students who know they will need to remain overnight must move their cars from PS #4 or a remote location to a surface lot, Lot SH, which is open all night. This practice is unnecessary and inconvenient and raises safety issues. Making PS #4 a 24-hour facility would go a long way towards solving the nighttime parking concerns of the medical community.

Parking Structure #5 is currently used by students, faculty, and other university employees. It is not open to residents of the DeRoy and Chatsworth apartments, who currently park in Lot 1 and Lot B. The task force recommends that residents be permitted to park in PS #5 and that Lot B be converted for daytime student parking. Lot B is well suited for that use. By making PS #5 a 24-hour facility, the university would add nighttime parking at the main campus and would greatly improve the parking options for residences of the De Roy and Chatsworth apartments. Opening up PS #5 to residents would provide them with covered, 24-hour attended parking. Residents have indicated to task force members that they would prefer to have PS #2 as the 24-hour facility rather than PS #5 because of its proximity to DeRoy, Chatsworth, and the new residence hall being built on Williams Mall behind the undergraduate library. Currently, there are some structural constraints, lighting in particular, that preclude using PS #2 as the 24-hour facility. The task force recommends, however, that the parking department take the steps necessary to make PS #2 suitable for 24-hour parking as soon as feasible.



## Flexible payment

With the implementation of the OneCard system for parking in 1999, students pay for parking by adding money to their card at locations across campus and then using the OneCard to enter the parking facility. One dollar is deducted from their One Card for each entry. For University employees and faculty, the \$1 parking fee is deducted from their biweekly paychecks through a payroll deduction. Staff and faculty who use payroll deduction pay \$20/month for parking. Some staff and faculty add money to their OneCard and pay for parking on a “per entry” basis. This method is most convenient for those who are not on campus every day or those who car-pool.

Residents of university housing facilities and medical students have a few more payment options. Most users, however, have little flexibility-when it comes to paying their parking fee. The task force recommends that the parking department develop more flexible and convenient payment “packages” for students that would enable students to pay for parking up front with their tuition and for the entire year or semester. Currently, medical students can pay for parking for the entire year. This same flexibility should be available to all students. In addition, with the increased use of the web, students should be able to pay for parking using a credit card over the Internet or in the cashier’s office.

Additional flexibility for faculty and other university employees is also desirable.

## 6. Enhance safety.

A basic responsibility of the university is to protect its students, faculty, staff, and visitors from harm while they are on campus. Safe parking is an important component of providing a safe and secure campus. A number of useful steps have been taken in recent years to enhance safety, including an extensive program to improve lighting. These steps are important, but they are not enough. Based on the feedback received during the stakeholder sessions, safety in the university’s parking facilities remains the number one concern of faculty, staff and students.

Although the Department of Public Safety responds to specific incidents in the parking facilities and, thankfully, those incidents are few and far between, the task force concluded that additional steps can be taken to enhance the reality and perception of safety in the parking structures. In particular, the task force recommends that the university:

- Improve lighting throughout the campus parking facilities
- Start a public safety cadet corps with a patrol vehicle to help patrol parking facilities
- Upgrade security cameras/equipment in all the parking structures

## Conclusion

Much needs to be done to improve the university’s parking infrastructure and operations. It is critical to the university’s mission as an urban institution that it provide students, faculty, other university employees, and visitors with safe, affordable, well-managed, convenient, and well-

maintained parking facilities. The recommendations of the task force, if implemented, would address many of the perennial problems with parking operations. The recommended improvements will be costly, and the administration will have to look creatively for ways to fund the needed improvements. Appendix V provides estimates of the costs for the various recommendations proposed in this report. One thing is clear: if the parking rate is increased, the revenues generated from the increase should be tied to immediate improvements in parking operations. Those improvements that relate to increasing the reality and perception of safety in the parking facilities should be given the top priority.

Respectfully submitted,

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\* Ms. Abuel graduated in May 2001 and did not review this report.