

An aerial photograph of San Francisco, California. In the background, the city is built on a hillside overlooking the bay. Alcatraz Island is visible in the water. In the foreground, a circular parking lot is filled with several cars, and a group of people is gathered around it. The title 'REFORMING PARKING POLICIES' is overlaid in large, white, bold letters with a teal outline, slanted across the middle of the image.

REFORMING PARKING POLICIES

California works to balance community concerns with realistic parking needs.



By Valerie Knepper

Parking policies are emerging as a key and sometimes volatile issue in land use development and transportation planning efforts. A growing group of public and private interests are seeking changes in parking policies, pointing to problems such as inefficient usage of limited land, negative economic effects of high parking requirements, quality of life concerns, and environmental issues. Local governments face unprecedented fiscal challenges requiring innovative approaches that foster economic growth while working with scarce resources. In California, regions are tasked with reducing the production of greenhouse gasses through a combination of land use and transportation strategies (pursuant to Senate Bill 375, Steinberg, 2008).

Parking is at the nexus of land use and transportation planning and development. For the last several decades, most American cities have treated it as a simple engineering question. Cities typically turn to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Parking Generation Rate manual, wherein the number of potential land users (residents, employees, shoppers, etc.) is generally assumed to justify almost one vehicle for each person for each use. Since the 1950s, cities have typically established parking requirements based on these ITE levels of parking use, requiring developers and businesses to provide this amount of parking regardless of local circumstances.

Parking is now understood as a very important part of how we plan our cities and regions, both in terms of urban form and transportation mode. There is a growing understanding that parking policies affect where new development will be built, where people live, how much people spend for housing, how people travel, the cost of travel, and the economics of businesses. A growing number of cities and regions in the U.S. are rethinking parking policies, with some fundamentally changing how they think about, plan, design, price, and manage parking. The aim of these new approaches is to create more flexibility to meet market demand for parking, allow for market response to demand for a variety of housing choices, support a community's

transit-oriented and infill development goals, and address larger issues of regional economic, equity, and environmental consequences.

In California, responsibility and authority for parking policies falls squarely in the realm of local zoning by local jurisdictions. While some localities are making progress in applying these newer concepts about parking to their communities, others feel limited by dwindling resources. Some cities are reticent to allow additional development at all, especially new housing that brings new residents and new demands. Others are very sensitive to the concerns of some existing residents who fear parking spillover in their neighborhoods if new developments are built with smaller amounts of parking.

Smart Growth, SB 375, and Parking Policies

California's SB 375 established a process for the state to achieve emission reductions from the transportation sector, to meet the goals of the state's global warming legislation (AB 32, Nunez, 2006). The bill requires metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) such as the Metropolitan Transportation Committee (MTC) to develop a sustainable communities strategy—a new element of the regional transportation plan—that strives to reach greenhouse gas reduction targets through transportation, land use, and other policies. MTC has developed poli-

Common Fallacies and New Thinking

Fallacy	New Thinking
Eliminating local parking requirements for new development would mean developers would provide no parking, resulting in negative effects to on-street parking in adjacent neighborhoods.	Eliminating parking requirements is not the same thing as prohibiting parking. Developers and their financiers conduct their own analyses regarding parking demand. If parking requirements were eliminated, developers would consider the market carefully to determine how much parking to provide to ensure that their properties are desirable in the real estate/rental markets.
Developers and their financiers always want to build more parking than is required, so changes to the public requirements would have no effect on what developers build.	Many financiers are comfortable with parking levels of one space per unit for for-sale housing, lower levels for rental units, and similarly reduced rates for commercial development in town centers and downtowns. The preferred ratio varies considerably depending on the qualities of the place (transit accessibility, walkability) and the target market (students, young urbanites, seniors, etc.). Allowing the market to respond to various preferences would allow greater choice by consumers, such as units without parking at a lower price for those who would prefer that option.
Building parking is inexpensive when constructing a multi-family housing development, so the additional cost of parking doesn't matter.	Parking can amount to a significant proportion of the cost of residential development, making the units significantly more expensive for renters/buyers. In the S.F. Bay Area, structured parking costs around \$25,000 per space in suburban areas and \$30,000 or more in urban areas (for above-ground spaces). Underground spaces cost even more.
The current parking policies have been fine-tuned based on local conditions, so we need to be very cautious about changing them.	Most parking policies are based on the ITE Parking rates, whether or not the conditions are similar to those in a particular community. Because many current policies were not established based on local conditions and do not support community goals, reforms based on sound theory and case studies can have a positive effect, even without a comprehensive database of existing local parking conditions.

cies and incentives to increase the proportion of new development occurring close to high quality transit, because residents who live and/or work close to transit drive significantly less than average.¹

MTC Regional Parking Initiative

Over the last several years, I have led a multi-faceted regional initiative to support reform of parking policies in the San Francisco Bay Area. This work has focused on both the effect of parking policies on travel mode choice in the short run and on land use patterns in the long run, and has established a regional role to make significant progress on this difficult issue. The MTC Parking Initiative has included technical analyses, case studies, communication methods, several series of workshops for planning and transportation professionals, and direct assistance to local jurisdictions seeking to develop new parking policies.²

¹http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/stars/

²<http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/parking/>

Education has been a major focus of the MTC Parking Initiative. We have found a number of fallacies, some contradictory, that have required extended conversation:

MTC funds planning efforts for transit station areas, typically at a cost of \$500,000, that include parking analyses and policy development. I have heard from many city planning directors and officials that they would like to get rid of or at least reduce their parking minimums but don't have the money or the political ability to do so. MTC does not have sufficient funds to support such planning efforts at each of the 109 local jurisdictions (cities and counties) within the region.

The Perspective of Developers and Financiers

In early 2012, we conducted a series of interviews with developers and financiers about parking policies.³ They made the case that they conduct their own analysis

³[mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/parking/6-12/Final_Parking_Stakeholder_Summary_Report.pdf](http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/parking/6-12/Final_Parking_Stakeholder_Summary_Report.pdf)

of the amount of parking that will create a profitable product, and do not need city requirements to substitute for their more detailed analysis.

A number of developers and financiers expressed an interest in producing housing close to quality transit with smaller amounts of parking. The perspective was expressed that parking minimums cause developers to build too much parking, raise the cost of housing, and waste public funds, all of which acts as an exclusionary force that keeps a diverse range of housing product out of many areas. Several developers and financiers supported the relaxation of parking requirements so they could build in keeping with the current market conditions, including for a sizable younger population that has greater preferences for living in walkable neighborhoods.

Recent Activities—AB 904 and Parking Policy Discussions

There is growing concern by some members of the state legislature that the feasibility of smart growth in general and transit-oriented development (TOD) is being hampered by the high parking requirements imposed by many municipalities. Some members of the legislature are seeking to enact parking policy legislation to promote sustainable TOD to reduce urban sprawl and greenhouse gas emissions. Assembly Bill 904 (Skinner) was introduced in the 2011-12 California legislative session. The bill attempted to establish a statewide cap on minimum parking standards for developments in transit-rich areas while allowing local opt-out provisions under specified conditions. The proposed legislation generated heated debate between local planners, developers, and other government agencies and was eventually tabled. A revised bill is expected to be introduced in 2013.

Smart growth advocates, regional agencies, and developers believe various factors feed the inertia and/or unwillingness of local agencies to reform their policies to allow additional TOD. Driving factors include excessive parking requirements for TOD and political resistance fueled by community concerns about additional development spilling into neighborhoods.

The League of California Cities

countered the proponents of AB 904 with concerns about statewide planning laws that, in their interpretation, would restrict the ability of a municipality to exercise its police powers. They argued that these legislative proposals are a one-size-fits-all approach that threatens the autonomy of a city to define its individual community character and development prerequisites.

The CAPA Northern Section and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission will sponsor a workshop on Nov. 9, 2012 to bring together panelists with diverse opinions to discuss parking reform and the concerns that arose regarding AB 904. See mtc.ca.gov for more information on the workshop. The objective of the workshop is to achieve greater common ground among workshop participants on policies and legislation that can promote smart parking practices in transit-rich areas, with the hope of developing a framework for future legislation that can be supported by a majority of stakeholders. Workshop comments and recommendations will be forwarded to state legislators and the CCAPA Policy and Legislation Committee.



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