

Guest Opinion: The Recent Parking Report: The Good and Not So Good

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There are more than 85 separable suggestions in the most recent version of the Parking and Demand Management Report. I will (naively?) assume that the brief "Recommendation" by the Kempf/Whalen Subcommittee on p.82 is genuine in proposing to move forward with Short-Term Opportunities and TDM strategies identified in Section 10, and leave longer-term ideas about new parking structures for further analysis. Thus I focus particularly on the concepts in Section 10 that are ranked as priority 1 or 2 in the Report.

Despite the commitment to short-term opportunities and TDM strategies, the overall report does spend considerable time exploring options for creating one or more parking structures. However, as the report comments on page 45: "The most attractive near-term opportunities are the smaller, largely unimproved sites that do not involve a parking structure." Cut from the earlier version is the further comment that "These locations ... are cost-effective due to the modest improvements needed and would provide almost 300 additional parking spaces, many very close to Coast Highway." The Report does not analyze who is driving the increased demand for parking in different areas (one of its several significant data weaknesses). In determining an appropriate response, it is relevant the extent to which it is day-trippers, visitors, employees, shoppers, or residents.

Table 4 in Section 10 is replete with possible actions that can increase parking when necessary. Among the Priority 1 suggestions, I especially support #2 for developing partnerships for public parking among the 2,000 "underutilized" private commercial spots, #7 utilizing valet parking in selected city lots during super-peak-times, and perhaps #10 working with the School District, especially if it moves ahead with its plan for increased parking capacity. Some other Priority 1 suggestions are also inexpensive and could be helpful, such as #3 standardizing signage, and #12 implementing dynamic wayfinding (as well as other technological assistances).

Among Priority 2 suggestions, there are positive measures, such as #6, expanding city on-demand microtransit, and #11 incentivizing off-site employee parking or employee carpooling. While the focus of the report is on parking issues, enhancements for pedestrians and cycling are substantially underrepresented in this report, with only #19 about bike lockers among the 1 and 2 priorities. There are other ideas in Table 4 about revising some regulations that are positive, such as those about parking permits (#13) and in-lieu certificates (#18). However, others will further weaken the requirements on businesses and developments to provide adequate parking and I oppose them (including #14, 15, 17, and 26). Also noted in the report are the more than 100 parking places given to businesses at an unjustifiably low rate, special allocations of parking to some local organizations, and the serious shortcomings due to continued use of "grandfathering" to enable development with little or no parking requirements. These should be stopped immediately.

Three broader points. First, Laguna will never build enough parking to overcome problems of demand at super-peak moments. One new parking structure will quickly fill with induced demand. And nothing will prevent masses of non-residents from seeking parking throughout town. However, the steps above can mitigate some of the demand. And I have suggested that at least Laguna should impose a user charge on non-residents via

parking. The Idea: Create pay parking on all streets up to 6 blocks inland of Coast Highway in all public areas from the northern to the southern border of Laguna. Allow residents to park for free as they always have, no time limit. Pay parking for all visitors, from 9:00 am to 7:00 pm. This is one of the very best ways to capture some revenue from visitors to offset the more than \$20 million dollars per year that the city and its resident taxpayers subsidize the costs of visitors. Moreover, the parking revenue that is generated should be applied to financing the city's services linked to visitor costs (e.g., police and fire, marine safety, trash, toilets, congestion relief), not to more parking provision. This would pass Coastal Commission muster: not one single parking place would be eliminated from those currently available to visitors (it is not a residents-only restriction at all), it is merely a user charge to offset the many costly benefits the city provides to its visitors.

Second, I also note that there continues to be a bias in the report to justify the building of one or more parking structures. I do not categorically oppose a pay parking structure, but it should be on city-owned land and at a convenient city entry point, like the Village Entrance. This would increase walking in town and facilitate more pedestrianized areas in downtown. However, its cost should be apportioned to beneficiaries. The primary beneficiaries would be downtown businesses/landlords and visitors. I very strongly oppose the MOU with the Presbyterian Church, which would be an extremely poor financial decision costing the city millions more than building on city land. Indeed, it is ranked only 6th out of 7 parking structure concepts in the study. Also, building a structure at a far periphery of the city and providing free parking and free shuttle service into town will be a huge financial loss leader, again subsidized by tax-paying residents for visitors. This would only work if there is very limited parking in the center city area (e.g., as in many European tourist cities, although even there, peripheral parking is typically not free, even if there are free shuttles).

Third, in conclusion, many of the Priority 1 ideas in Table 4 are sensible, affordable, and would have a positive effect on the goals of reducing the impact of visitor and employee parking in residential neighborhoods ("primary objective 1"). However, I doubt they would substantially "enhance mobility in the City's commercial area during peak periods to benefit residents and... [although they would largely benefit parking for} businesses" ("primary objective 2"). There is no acknowledgement that most days of the year, most streets in coastal Laguna do not face extreme demand at the professional standard of greater than 85%. Residents in the cited survey indicated support for more "public parking" but were not asked where it should be or if it should be paid for by residents. Indeed, most Laguna residents would probably agree with the statement: "I rarely if ever cannot find parking in downtown or in my neighborhood when I need it."

The biggest traffic problems in Laguna are circulation/congestion and safety, and solving these would require reducing the 6.5 million visitors per year, alternatives to Coast Highway as the only north/south road along the coast and 133 as the key entry from the east, and/or better traffic management (e.g., better synchronized signals, improved strategies for enabling pedestrians to cross major streets, more pedestrian-friendly and bike-friendly streets), not additional parking spaces, which will just lead to "induced demand" (a transportation science concept which is ineptly discussed on p. 65 of the Report).

I encourage Council to move forward with a variety of the suggestions in Priority 1 and 2. Let's see if they will make any difference for residential quality of life, management of visitor and employee parking, or mobility during peak periods.

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