Downtown Parking Strategy

What we Heard, What we Did

06 April 2016

Project overview

The City of Calgary has maintained a comprehensive downtown parking strategy since the 1960s. The strategy has help to manage downtown traffic congestion and shortcutting through inner city communities by controlling the amount of parking in new office towers. The strategy is being updated in response to direction from City Council and development industry concerns that the amount of parking allowed by the current strategy does not match market demands. Development of the new strategy includes a review of:

- the amount of parking that is allowed to be built in each new office tower (the 'parking ratio'),
- the cash-in-lieu program, where developers build only half of their required parking stalls and pay a fee to the Calgary Parking Authority (CPA) to build the remaining as public parking stalls,
- the impacts of any changes on downtown traffic congestion, and
- any changes to rush hour transit use to the downtown.

Engagement overview

The City engaged multiple stakeholders to help guide the development of the new downtown parking strategy. Key stakeholder groups included the downtown office development industry, the Downtown Association that represents local businesses, the CPA and the general public. Engagement included one-on-one meetings and workshops with several stakeholder groups, public open houses held on December 10, 2015 and December 15, 2015, and an online survey on The City's website.

What we asked

Stakeholders were asked to comment on four different scenarios, which are described in Figure 1. The parking ratio, cash-in-lieu amount and location of new public parking using cash-in-lieu were adjusted in each scenario. The City's technical analysis found that the impacts on traffic congestion, transit use and parking price would be similar in all four scenarios. To supplement the technical analysis, stakeholders were asked to answer the following three questions:

1. How competitive would new office developments be in this scenario?
2. Are you satisfied with the number of new parking stalls per employee that would be built in this scenario?
3. Are you satisfied with the amount of short stay parking (parking available to people coming downtown for less than 4 hours) in this scenario?

Figure 1 – The Four Scenarios

Scenario 1

Business As Usual

The existing parking strategy continues and no adjustments are made

- Parking rates for office buildings are 1 stall per 140 m^2
- Manages congestion downtown and protects inner city communities from shortcutting traffic
- 50 per cent of office parking continues to be built in the office towers
- The other 50 per cent is paid as cash-in lieu funds to build future CPA parkades downtown
- These parkades ensure some public parking is available for full day and short-stay (less than four hours) users, and are at the edge of the downtown to intercept traffic
- Offers the most short stay parking opportunities since half of new downtown parking is publically provided by the CPA

Scenario 2

Office, TOD and Main Street Parkades

This scenario responds to increasing demand for office parking and building some new parking outside the downtown core

- Parking rates for office buildings increase to 1 stall per 90 m^2
- The cash-in-lieu program changes to allow 60 per cent of parking stalls to be built within each office tower
- The remaining 40 per cent of cash-in-lieu funds are used to construct parkades at certain transit oriented development (TOD) and main street locations
- Manages downtown congestion by creating parking further out and encouraging people to come in by transit, walking or cycling
- Provides public parking for evening and weekend customers in TOD and main street areas
- A similar number of new parking stalls is maintained downtown
- May limit the growth of short-stay parking opportunities since fewer new stalls will be managed by the CPA
- Parking fees to cover operating and maintenance costs for parkades in TODs and main streets are still being determined

Scenario 3

Development Driven

This scenario maximizes the amount of new parking built downtown, and retained by developers

- No cash in- lieu funds are collected and 100 per cent of required parking is built immediately to serve new office towers
- A parking rate of 1 stall per 105 m^2 matches the development industry's estimate of market demands for office parking in Calgary
- The number of new stalls built downtown is the highest in this scenario
- This results in the greatest traffic congestion increase, and may negatively impact inner city communities
- Access to new short-stay parking opportunities is more uncertain since all new parking will be provided and maintained privately
- CPA would not build new facilities but would maintain existing ones

Scenario 4

Congestion Focused

This strategy minimizes downtown traffic congestion, and associated impacts on inner city communities

- The current parking rate of 1 stall per 140 m^2 is retained, along with the 50 per cent cash-in-lieu requirement
- All cash-in-lieu funds are invested in parking facilities at TOD and main street locations
- Minimizes growth in traffic congestion downtown and the inner city, and minimizes the amount of new parking downtown
- Reduces community impacts and greenhouse gas emissions as it has the highest transit use
- The low number of new parking stalls downtown may impact market competitiveness of new office towers
- Significantly restricts new short-stay parking opportunities downtown
- Parking fees to cover operating and maintenance costs for parkades in TODs and main streets are still being determined

What we heard, what we did

Stakeholders provided a wide range of feedback on all four scenarios. When comparing positive responses to negative responses, scenarios 2 and 3 had higher general support, while scenario 4 had the lowest level of support. The following statements summarize the most common feedback across all four scenarios:

- Increase the parking ratio (the number of stalls built per office employee) to better match market demand.
- Some increase in downtown traffic congestion is an acceptable trade off for allowing more parking per employee.
- New office developments should be allowed to keep more of their required parking in the building, rather than paying for half of the stalls to be built in CPA parkades.
- The majority of new off-street parking downtown should be privately controlled.
- There is some openness to investing cash-in-lieu funds to build parkades at LRT stations, but a stronger preference to keep parking spaces downtown.

Additional detail on each summary statement, and the associated engagement themes (from the What We Heard report) are provided in the table below. It should be noted that not all stakeholders agreed with the above statements, though they represent the most common feedback.

What we heard	Themes Addressed	What we did
Increase the parking ratio	Ratio, Financial, Sustainability	Even if the parking ratio were changed to match market demand, not enough new parking stalls would be added downtown over the next 25 years to reduce the price of parking. The expected growth in downtown employment would add less than 10% more parking, and would remain at about 1 stall per 3 employees. Since increasing the parking ratio would increase traffic congestion but not provide the benefit of reduced costs, City Administration is not recommending any changes to the parking ratio.
Allow more downtown traffic congestion	Sustainability, Financial	Managing traffic congestion supports Calgary's economic productivity by reducing the amount of time employees are stuck in traffic, improves the quality of life for inner city residents, and reduces the growth in vehicle emissions. Since allowing more parking, and therefore more traffic, downtown would not help to reduce parking costs, City Administration is not recommending any changes that would increase traffic congestion beyond what the current parking ratio allows.

Let office towers keep more parking in the building	Control, Location, Parkade Construction Timing, Equity	City Administration is recommending that the cash-in-lieu program be concluded over the next two years. This would allow new office developments to keep all of the required parking in the building, making them competitive with other office developments. It would also ensure that all bylaw required parking for a new office tower is built immediately to serve the needs of the employees. The cash-in-lieu program has been successful in building enough public parking to support retail, arts and cultural activities in the downtown. The CPA will maintain their current parking facilities, including the planned public parkade in the East Village.
Let more new parking be privately controlled	Control, Location	With the conclusion of the cash-in-lieu program, all new parking in the downtown will be privately controlled except for the future CPA East Village parkade. The City will also ensure that rules and regulations are updated to allow private parking operators to make underused parking stalls available to people visiting the downtown off peak or after hours.
Keep new parking downtown rather than at LRT stations	Control, Location, Financial	With the conclusion of the cash-in-lieu program, there will be no funds to invest in parkades at LRT stations. This option was considered in scenarios 2 and 4, but for several reasons it was found that this option would not be practical to implement.

Next steps

City Administration will present the final recommendations for the “Integrated Downtown-TOD Parking Strategy” to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation & Transit on 20 April 2016. Stakeholders and members of the public who wish to comment on the recommendations can send letters or present to the Committee in person.

If approved by Committee, the report will go on to the 02 May 2016 meeting of Council for final approval.

A copy of the Integrated Downtown-TOD Parking Strategy report will be available on the project website on Friday, 15 April 2016.