



Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)

MEMO

Date: March 7, 2012

To: Members of the Transit & Parking Commission
Bill Knobloch, Parking Operations Manager
David Dryer, Traffic Engineer and Parking Manager
Anne Monks, Assistant to the Mayor

From: Mary Carbine, Executive Director
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Re: Proposed Parking Rate Increase

Dear Members of the Transit & Parking Commission,

The Board of the Business Improvement District represents commercial property and business owners in the greater State Street and Capitol Square area, including 370 retail, restaurant, service and entertainment businesses, the majority locally-owned. The BID Board preliminary input on the proposed Parking Rate Increase is below. The Board plans to address this again at its April 5 meeting.

1. We ask that the process be slowed down to provide more information, analysis and public and stakeholder input. Parking rates are an economic development issue for the downtown area, affecting not only retail and restaurant businesses but also major employers. A three-week period between announcement of proposed increases and decision is not enough. We ask that the public hearing be continued at the April TPC meeting, with the matter referred for decision to at least May.

2. In general

The Board is concerned about raising rates during a continued recession, gas price increases, and what we understand is continued low daily use at some garages. Given these factors, will the proposed price increases result in a revenue increase, or a loss of customers and thus revenue? People have other choices than downtown for shopping, dining and entertainment, and in a tight economy, a price increase may cause parking customers to go somewhere else.

Rather than repeatedly raising customer rates, have the city and Parking Utility explored a revenue restructuring so that parking ticket fine revenue goes to the Parking Utility instead of the city general fund? The Board asks that the parking ticket rate increase be accompanied by a breakdown of how much the Parking Utility pays to other city agencies for enforcement, renting on street parking spaces, maintenance, etc., and annual city parking ticket revenue.

The Board also believes the rate increase request should be accompanied by analysis of how much of the proposed price increase is necessary to do work for which costs were presumably built into the initial financing (bond issue) of construction of the garages.

3. Special Event Parking

The BID Board expresses great concern about:

- The lack of options for short term non-event parking in garages during events. This penalizes “regulars” – regular customers for parking and downtown businesses;
- The proposed Special Event fee increase from \$4 to \$5 – not because of the price for event parkers, but the price for non-event customers;
- The negative impacts of this rate increase, coupled with inadequate customer service for non-event parkers, for both downtown businesses and parking customers.

The BID Board understands the need for a special event parking system and rates. However, there is a gap in the system. It does not serve the parkers and customers who are NOT attending special events, and who are trying to patronize downtown businesses.

The above are the same concerns expressed in our 2009 memo about parking rate increases, but there has not been progress on options for non-event parking customers.

Special event parking occurs frequently during key downtown shopping, dining and entertainment days and hours (weekends and evenings). Parking customers coming downtown for lunch or dinner or to pick up something at a store will likely stay 30 min. -2 hrs. If they have to pay a \$5 special event fee, this translates into \$2.50/hr or more per hour, much higher than the normal parking fee per hour in these garages.

In the current economic downturn, while the Parking Utility is facing declining revenues, the BID Board strongly advises against a system that deters a broad range of customers from coming downtown and generating revenue for both the Parking Utility and downtown businesses.

The BID Board again recommends that the Parking Utility create a specific plan to accommodate and communicate with parking customers who are NOT attending special events, including:

- Spaces in garages reserved for short term parkers during events (for examples, look to other city parking systems or to examples like the UW’s Lake & Johnson garage);
- Validation system to provide refund to short term (2 hours or under) parkers who receive validation at a downtown business;
- Clear & consistent use of portable signage directing parkers to short-term, non-event parking;
- Adding special event parking info to the real-time parking availability website listing;
- Using new technologies (programmable meters in ramps, electronic signage) to provide good customer service and boost revenue.

Having a special events list on a webpage is one element of communication, but it is not enough. The Parking Utility needs to alert people on their real-time parking availability web page when special event rates are in effect, and find ways to provide customer service and good communication to non-event parkers when they arrive downtown.

3. Hourly Meter Rates:

While raising the rate for all downtown meters to \$1.75/hr. creates consistency, the Board has concerns about raising rates for pole (coin only) meters because it adds to customer inconvenience (having to carry even more coins to avoid a ticket) which creates a disincentive to coming downtown.

We recommend additional analysis before making a decision. What is the actual cost tradeoff (pole vs. multi-space) if pole meters were kept at \$1.50? Where are projected locations of pole vs. multi-space meters in the downtown, and what are usage levels at these locations?

4. Hours of meter enforcement

A footnote in the proposed parking rate schedule mentions extending the enforcement time for meters beyond 6pm in high-demand commercial night time venues.

Can a map please be provided specifying the blocks where this is proposed?

This could have a negative impact on downtown customers for restaurant, entertainment and shopping, and needs more detail and discussion.

5. Rates for meter hoods

The BID Board supports looking at a tiered rate schedule for meter hoods, with higher rates for non-resident and/or outside users vs. requests from adjacent businesses who need to provide loading for their operations. (For example, some businesses have contractual obligations to provide parking space immediately adjacent to their building for equipment load-in/load out, and they have no option but meter hoods.) A tiered system could help keep meter hood rates high enough to discourage non-essential use and to keep meters free for the public and customers, while keeping it reasonable for downtown business operations.

The BID is interested in working with parking Utility staff so that further discussion can occur in positive ways. Thank you, and please contact me if you have questions or would like to discuss.