

Taking Steps . . .

towards a more



Number 11

May 2006

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Parking

Love it . . . hate it . . .

Joni Mitchell lamented that "They've paved paradise and put up a parking lot." Parking lots are generally considered the least glamorous and most environmentally harmful type of land use. The tension between our dislike for parking facilities and our desire to have them wherever needed creates a conflict for individuals, businesses and communities.

Planetizen, a public-interest information exchange website directed towards the urban planning, design and development community, recently ran a series of three articles on parking lots.

Innovative solutions to vehicle parking problems

Todd Litman, author of Parking Management Best Practices and Executive Director of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute

Litman advocates a *managed* approach to parking, rather than the current strategy in



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general use, which is to provide generous levels of parking, often with considerable public subsidy.

He points out that there are about five parking spaces for every automobile on the road. Because parking is *too* cheap and easy, many people drive every day when they don't need to. One conundrum is that, even with all this parking, it is not always easy to find parking when and where you need it.

It costs up to \$1200 *annually* to provide a typical urban parking space when all costs are factored in, but most of these costs are indirect and hidden from consumers. Since we don't see the real cost of parking, we tend to use it inefficiently.

Litman contends that *managed* parking should:

- ◆ serve multiple destinations,
- ◆ provide safer and better-designed parking facilities,
- ◆ reserve the most convenient spaces for priority uses such as deliveries and brief errands, and
- ◆ provide clear and accessible information on location and price.

A managed approach, according to Litman, will result in more efficient use of parking resources, reduce overall development and infrastructure costs, provide more equitable access to parking for drivers that really need it, encourage uses of alternate modes of transportation, provide a variety of environmental benefits and result in more walkable and people-friendly urban areas.

Many of these strategies are well known, and all have been successfully implemented.

A cost-effective, integrated parking management program can often reduce parking requirements by 20-40%, while improving user convenience and helping to achieve other planning objectives, such as supporting more compact development, encouraging use of alternative modes of transportation, and increasing development affordability.



The Price Of Parking On Great Streets

Donald C. Shoup, FAICP is a Professor of Urban Planning at the University of California-Los Angeles and is author of The High Cost of Free Parking

In the second article in the series on parking, Donald Shoup expands further on the theme that free, or very low-priced parking encourages abuse of parking resources.

He argues that fees for curbside (onstreet) parking should be based on careful research. The price should be adjusted to achieve an 85% occupancy rate during most of the day. This, he says, will permit drivers to find a spot relatively easily, but will discourage them from staying too long. They will do their shopping or attend to their

appointments and then leave, freeing the spot for someone else. This higher turnover means more traffic for businesses in the area.

Shoup goes on to argue that all or part of the parking meter revenue, plus revenues from parking enforcement should be returned to the local area, to be used to improve infrastructure, beautify streetscapes and keep the streets clean and attractive. This, in turn, also works to attract more customers to the area. The converse, cheap parking in a dirty, unattractive area, only attracts people like office workers who park for the whole day but may not be spending much, if any, money in the area businesses.

The article identifies cities that have successfully tried these sorts of initiatives.



Onsite parking

Mott Smith is Principal of Civic Enterprise Associates, LLC, a planning and development firm in Los Angeles

Most cities now require commercial property developers to provide parking spaces on their property for users of the commercial building based on the size of their building space.

Mott presents the argument that these parking requirements are discouraging small-scale renewal and redevelopment of older urban areas. Because commercial lot sizes in these areas are relatively small, the requisite parking eats up so much of the space that most types of retail development are no longer viable. Instead of redeveloping, many property owners keep old buildings as storage spaces, or sit on their properties until they can sell to someone willing to buy a number of lots and build on a large scale. Another all-too-common option is to tear down these older buildings and lease the lot to a commercial parking lot operator.

Small-scale developments required to provide onsite parking will never be able to compete with large shopping centres, whose operators offer huge expanses of free parking. Mott suggests that the *community* provide parking in these inner city areas by means of onstreet meter parking, and by publicly-operated lots or garages. Innovative ideas are being tried in several cities to have area merchants contribute to operation of these parking facilities. Los Angeles is experimenting with a parking credits system based on onstreet parking. The results of such innovation can be rejuvenation of decaying older areas with attractive, pedestrian-friendly destination retail/commercial *communities*, rather than large areas of under-utilized urban space separating huge shopping centres.



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Book review

In Praise of Slow

Our articles don't usually extend to literary news and coverage, but we found a book that has enough to offer in terms of practical support for the philosophy and aims of walkable communities that it merits your attention, if you haven't already discovered it.

The author, Carl Honoré, is an Edmonton boy now living and working as a freelance journalist in London, England. He became interested in the slow movement following newspaper assignments and some personal soul-searching.

Among the many topics he covers, Honoré elaborates on the merits of leisure -- leisurely dining, working less and enjoying life more, taking steps to a healthy personal lifestyle, and seeking medical care systems that work for you. He also talks about how we can help our children find a slower pace in their busy world, and even makes suggestions as to how 'slow' can improve one's sex life.

This book is NOT about rejecting the modern world and going off to live, slowly, in a cave. Rather, the main emphasis is on exercising more choice in how you spend your time, energies and money. It is also about making the time to enjoy to the fullest those things that are important to you. In the words of The Wealthy Barber, "pay yourself first". Honoré mentions that nearly half of Britons eat their meals in front of the TV, and families spend more time together in their car than at the dinner table. This slavish devotion to busyness is a growing part of the lifestyle in Canada as well.

The following sums up the magnitude of the challenge that proponents of 'living slower' have taken up: "Perhaps the greatest challenge of the Slow movement will be to fix our neurotic relationship with time itself." Honoré quotes Golda Meir, who said mankind needs to learn how to ". . . govern the clock, not be governed by it." The parallels to the walkability movement are strong — proponents of walkability are trying to convince society to place greater emphasis on alternative forms of transportation and maintaining human-scaled features in our built world; more specifically, to keep the automobile from completely ruling our society and our environment.

In 1999 three Italian towns started a movement called *Citta Slow* (Slow Cities), which has now been taken up by more than thirty other towns. There have also been interested inquiries from other parts of Europe and from around the world. The movement is focused on 55 objectives which will seem very familiar to proponents of walkability, among them are: reducing noise and traffic; increasing the amount of green space in towns and

making them more pedestrian-friendly; promoting local farm products and the small stores, markets and restaurants that serve them; preserving local crafts, skills and foods; and creating a welcoming and hospitable atmosphere. In part, the movement is urging people to reject many of the so-called advantages of our global marketplace, in turn encouraging them to slow down and 'smell the coffee' and the flowers, and to take full advantage of the many assets that make their own area unique.

One of the funniest/saddest stories Honoré relates concerns a walkabout he took one day in a 'conventional suburb' in Maryland. After passing numerous big houses with front-drive garages and seeing almost no humans, a patrol car pulled up beside him. One of the officers leaned out and said "Good morning, sir. Everything okay?"

"Everything's fine, I'm just taking a walk."

"A what?"

"A walk. You know, like a stroll. I wanted to stretch my legs a little."

"Do you live in this neighbourhood?"

"No, I'm from out of town."

"Figures," the policeman laughs. "Folks don't do much walking around here."

Later in his book, Honoré refers to walking as a 'forgotten art'.

Some interesting statistics from the book jacket:

- ◆ The average Canadian gets an hour and a half LESS sleep than a hundred years ago.
- ◆ On average, Canadians spend 72 minutes of every day driving their car.
- ◆ A typical executive spends 68 hours a year on hold.
- ◆ Canadian adults devote only half an hour per week making love, on average.

As a final note, you may wonder what the author has to say about his old home town.

"In my old neighbourhood . . . people think nothing of driving 300 yards to the convenience store."

Yikes! Is this how the rest of the world sees us as well?

Honoré, Carl. 2004. *In Praise of Slow*. Alfred A. Knopf Canada. ISBN 0-676-97572-0.

Carl's website also has some useful links.



Improve your health and community?

Take a hike

"The simple activity of walking provides a path to well-being and creates a safer, happier community, all at a bargain."

Thomas Hylton, author of *Save Our Land, Save Our Towns*, is chairman of the Pottstown, Pennsylvania Planning Commission.

The author of this article tells how his personal adoption of a daily walking regimen has made him more involved with his community. He extolls the health benefits of walking the town to do his errands, but also points out that "I now experience my town at a much closer and personal level than I ever did by car - really seeing people, buildings and yards that, from behind a windshield, are just a blur."

Lose Weight?

Take a hike

Steve Vaught of San Diego weighed 410 lbs (186 kg) when he set out in April, 2005 to walk across the United States as a way of losing some weight.

In one of his many interviews, after 2300 miles (3700 km), he was down to 296 lb (134 kg) and had become a celebrity to boot!

One of the greatest difficulties he encountered was trying to stay away from junk food. "It is amazing how hard it is to find good, healthy food while on the road. Most restaurants . . . offer limited choices" he wrote.



Wanna be happy?

Take a hike

A fellow named Paul prefaces his website with the following:

Just over ten years ago, I wasn't feeling too good about things in general. Life seemed to have no meaning, and good advice was hard to find.

Since then, things have really turned around. Now, I'm happier and more content than ever. I also understand a lot more about how the world works and what life's all about. I'd almost forgotten how tough things were when I was confused and miserable all those years ago.

To give something back, here's my collection of "what I wish I knew ten years ago". I hope they help you in your search for happiness.

One of the articles on his site deals with how to give yourself an "instant shot of happiness". As the site's creator admits, these tips won't solve your big problems, but they will improve your outlook for "right now".

So, what is the Number One tip for short-term happiness (according to Paul, who is so famous he doesn't even have to put his last name on his website) . . . ?

(Those of you who have been paying close attention for the last page or so might already suspect the answer . . .)

Yes, gentle readers, it is . . . "go for a walk".

"Kids are driven everywhere. They don't know how their school is connected to their house, or how their house is connected to the grocery store. They don't know where things are located because they don't walk or bike to those destinations."

-- John Williams

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