



Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)

MEMO

Date: March 5, 2009

To: Members of the Transit & Parking Commission
Bill Knobeloch, Parking Utility
David Dryer, Traffic Engineer and Parking Manager
Joel Plant, Mayoral Aide

From: Mary Carbine
Executive Director, Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)
P.O. Box 71 Madison, WI 53701 t (608) 443-1973 f (608) 256-0333
mcarbine@downtownmadison.org www.visitdowntownmadison.com

Re: Proposed Parking Rate Increase

Dear Members of the Transit & Parking Commission,

The Board of the Business Improvement District represents 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 has input on three areas of the proposed Parking Rate Increase:

1. Special Event Parking Rates

The BID Board expresses great concern about:

- The lack of options for non-event parkers. This penalizes "regulars" – regular customers for parking and downtown businesses;
- The proposed Special Event fee increase from \$4 to \$5;
- 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, go to the winter Farmer's Market, etc.

Parking customers coming downtown for dinner or pick up something at a store will most likely stay 1.5 to 2 hours. 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.

BID businesses receive many complaints from customers about the current \$4 cost of event parking when they are coming to shop or dine downtown. We hear from many parking/business customers who now avoid downtown because of this single factor. In the current economic downturn, while the Parking Utility is facing declining revenues, it is inadvisable to have a system that deters a broad range of customers from coming downtown and generating revenue for both the Parking Utility and downtown businesses.

Special events occur with great frequency and duration during key downtown shopping, dining and entertainment days and hours.

For example, on Saturday, February 14, many people were coming downtown to attend the Madison Winter Festival, and shop and dine for Valentine's Day. In this economy, our local retailers and restaurants depend more than ever on these events and "good weekends." On February 14, the Overture Ramp and State Street Capitol ramp – key ramps for State Street and Capitol Square area shoppers and diners - were tied up from noon through 8pm with special event parking.

The BID Board recommends that the Parking Utility:

a) Analyze the budget impact of raising the Evening/Weekend Max to \$4 (from \$3) while keeping the meter enforcement times from 8am to 6pm and keeping the Special Event rate at \$4 rather than raising it to \$5. Raising the Evening/Weekend Max could be preferable and have less negative customer impact than raising special event rates or extending meter enforcement.

b) Evaluate the number and frequency of special events, and ramps used, to apply more stringent criteria (is special event rate really needed so many hours at more than one ramp?).

c) Create a specific plan to accommodate and communicate with parking customers who are NOT attending special events. For example:

- Spaces in ramps reserved for short term parking in ramps
- 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.
- Using new technologies (programmable meters in ramps, electronic signage) to provide good customer service and boost revenue.

Having a special events list on the website is one element of communication, but it is not enough. It is unrealistic to expect parking customers to check a website before coming downtown to shop or dine. The Parking Utility needs to find ways to provide customer service and good communication to non-event parkers when they arrive downtown.

2. Hourly Meter Rates in Underutilized Areas:

The Board encourages the Parking Utility to consider keeping the downtown meter rate at the current rate (\$1.25/hr) in areas where parking meters are underutilized. This could prevent loss of customers and revenues due to rate increases in areas where there is already lower demand.

3. Rates for meter hoods

The BID Board supports the revised staff proposal for meter hood rates.

The Board understands that meter hood rates need to be high enough to discourage non-essential use, to keep meters free for the public and customers. However, meter hoods are essential to the operations of some businesses (entertainment, hospitality). 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. For these businesses, the initial proposed meter hood rate posed an undue burden. We support the revised staff rate increase proposal.

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.

On behalf of the BID Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Carbine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "i".

Mary Carbine
Executive Director
Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID)
(608) 443-1973 mcarbine@downtownmadison.org