

Finding the Right Mix of Parking **a Guest Opinion by Nina Gruen**

Parking is one component of sustainable land use transformation. Cities — by necessity — are always works in process. The critical question we face now in San Francisco is how the City can transform itself so as to take the best advantage it can of the new economy. How can we, at the least, allow, and at best, encourage the kind of changes that will be most beneficial for present and future residents and workers? If we respond to the opportunities of the new economy, we will provide present and future San Franciscans with better living, working, and recreating opportunities. If we try to freeze San Francisco into its past, we will miss a great future while failing to bring back the past. Parking is, of course, only one component in the transportation changes that will have to be made for the City to achieve its potential.

Our challenge is to find the right mix of parking. Perhaps when San Francisco's policies to discourage parking were first formulated, they may have served to encourage more transit riders, particularly among those commuting within or to San Francisco. But many transit options — particularly Muni — are now at or close to effective capacity during the peak commute hours. And the lack of parking has not proven to be equally successful in attracting regional transit users for shopping and other recreational trips.

San Francisco's on going policy of discouraging parking for new office, residential and entertainment developments, including such recent projects as the W Hotel, the Pac Bell stadium, and the proposed Bloomingdales, is curtailing the city's economic potential. Further, the City's policy of discouraging parking has a pernicious cumulative effect as individual members of the development community, in their attempt to maximize their short run profits, significantly under park their projects.

The induced parking shortage definitely has already decreased the retail and entertainment business that San Francisco gets from the region. This shortfall has been made up by the increase in out of region visitors. But if we are going to grow beyond being a tourist town, now is the time to expand high tech and higher end service economies. To achieve this, we have to provide both market rate housing and parking. I strongly concur with Mayor Brown's concept of allowing a new high density residential corridor along Third Street, as long as one parking space per unit is also required.

We are a richer society because we have preserved Victorians and other historic buildings in San Francisco — but just because structures are old doesn't mean they are worth preserving. We are doing the right thing in Mission Bay, replacing obsolete railroad yards with a new residential and work community that responds to the new economy, such as UCSF biotech facilities. However, we should also push for Mission Bay to provide adequate parking for the proposed uses so this new community doesn't exacerbate the already significant shortage. This same situation applies to SOMA's multi-media gulch. We should be embracing, not threatened by, the pioneers of the new economy. Part of this embrace is to avoid the type of extreme congestion that worsening parking shortages induce. Another component of this embracing is permitting housing that caters to dot.comers, whether in converted lofts or new residential high rise structures. These emerging MOP's ("Millionaires on Paper") already have an alternate form of transit — the motorized scooter. For them to minimize their internal traffic impacts we need to maximize dot.com office and residential space in relatively close proximity.

In closing, I would like to encourage San Francisco to be early implementers of the new technologies to increase the cost effectiveness of both their public parking and transit. Muni should be congratulated for testing NextBus on their Fillmore line. NextBus is a new gizmo located on poles that alert bus riders when the next bus is expected. The company is currently working on a clock like device that households will be able to keep in their homes to alert them as to the bus' arrival time. BOMA's May 6th parking position paper noted the need to implement high tech robotic parking systems. San Francisco's location makes it an ideal candidate to get on the new technologies bandwagon for its transportation system as well as its economy.

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