



**Request for City Council Committee Action  
From the Department of Public Works**

Date July 22, 2002

To Transportation and Public Works Committee

Referral to Ways and Means Committee

**Subject: Parking Meter Management Plan**

**Recommendation:**

A comprehensive multifaceted Parking Meter System Management Plan would greatly improve the turnover of on-street curb-space, more efficiently manage the limited parking resource on-street, and serve the greatest number of constituents. It would also maximize revenue needed to administer and manage the city's parking resources. A strong enforcement element is required to encourage adherence to the plan provisions. We are confident that this management plan and annual reviews will respond to city parking needs now and in the future.

I recommend approval of the following measures contained in the Parking Meter Management Plan:

- Increase and maintain a high level of general parking meter enforcement by balancing personnel levels with enforcement required.
- Increase enforcement targeted at abuse of disability privileges by ineligible individuals
  1. Secure and utilize State of Minnesota Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) data on disability permit holders;
  2. Establish a Disability Volunteers Assistance Program to help monitor areas of known disability permit abuse and provide notification to appropriate enforcement personnel;
  3. Expand the abilities of the new ticket writer equipment to improve the efficiency of enforcement techniques;
  4. Adopt a City Council resolution requesting that the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (MDPS) review and tighten the current

policies/procedures for issuance and enforcement of disability parking certificates.

- Eliminate the current legal practice of all-day free parking at meters by operators of vehicles with disability license plates or certificates;
  1. Continue to allow free use of one and two hour limit meters by eligible individuals with appropriate disability designations, subject to a maximum limit of four hours;
  2. Set up a program to allow eligible disabled persons to utilize the designated disability parking spaces in Municipal Parking lots and ramps, on a monthly basis, for a fee equal to 50% of the actual monthly contract rate. Regular rates would apply to non-contract short-term disability users. The city will encourage private sector parking operators to adopt a similar policy;
  3. Establish a fee based permit process to allow a limited number of “severely disabled” individuals to obtain a special parking permit to utilize parking meters under unique circumstances for all day use;
  4. Develop a public information plan to educate the public on existing regulations and new law changes regarding legal disability use of parking spaces at meters or in lots and ramps.
  
- Increase the level of enforcement of the 30-minute limit provided for free commercial vehicle use (until noon) of the parking meters.
- Eliminate the free use of parking meters by emergency service vehicles (unless responding to an actual incident) and city vehicles (unless by special permit)

Prepared or Submitted by: Greg Finstad, P.E

Approved by: David J. Sonnenberg, P.E. City Engineer, Director of Public Works

By: Greg Finstad \_\_\_\_\_

Presenters in Committee: Greg Finstad, P.E., Director of Transportation  
and Parking Services

**Financial Impact** (Check those that apply)

No financial impact (If checked, go directly to Background/Supporting Information)

Action requires an appropriation increase to the Capital Budget

Action requires an appropriation increase to the Operating Budget

Action provides increased revenue for appropriation increase

Action requires use of contingency or reserves

Other financial impact (Explain):

Request provided to the Budget Office when provided to the Committee Coordinator

### **Background/Supporting Information**

This report was prepared at the request of chairperson Colvin Roy and the Transportation and Public Works Committee for a comprehensive review of the on-street parking meter system. The system is made up of approximately 6700 meters citywide. There are 1900 meters in the area loosely described as the “downtown loop”, and within the “core” of downtown (Washington Ave-5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South-9<sup>th</sup> Street South-Hennepin Avenue), there are only approximately 330 meters all having a time limits of 1 to 2 hours. The remainder of the meters are found in fringe areas around downtown along Lake Street and business nodes throughout the city.

The Transportation Division currently manages the Parking Meter System. Meters are purchased, installed, maintained, hooded, and administered (review locations, rates, time limits, days of enforcement, debit cards use, etc.). The financial management, revenue control measures, revenue projections, and development of recommended technical improvements to the meter system are also the responsibility of the Transportation Division. The meters are enforced and revenue collected by the Traffic Control section of Licensing and Consumer Services. Revenue generated by the meter system is credited to the city Parking Fund.

In virtually all cases, with the exception of the 8-hour meters, parking meters are installed to encourage turnover of the available on street parking. This turnover is accomplished through the use of time limits and hourly fees. In downtown, and particularly in the core area, on-street parking meter spaces are considered the prime parking spots because they are the most convenient and therefore most desirable.

Accordingly, in order to create the turnover necessary to provide the maximum number of parking spaces for the maximum number of users, these meters require a short time limit at a rate higher than at adjacent off-street parking facilities with short and/or long term rate structures. Originally, meters were considered somewhat self-enforcing with the “expired red-flags” and the threat of parking tickets. Today, regular enforcement is necessary to encourage on-going

turnover because the general public is no longer concerned about the threat of a parking ticket and are willing to take the risk for the convenience.

Although the main purpose of a parking meter system is turnover, the hourly fees obviously provide a substantial source of revenue to the city. The revenue provided by the parking meter system is used to purchase new/updated parking meters, fund personnel to install, maintain and repair equipment, fund enforcement and collection activities, and provide a source of revenue to help finance new off-street parking facilities. The on-street parking meter system rates have only increased on an occasional basis (4 to 6 times in the history of the system), as opposed to the off-street ramps and lots, which have annual rate adjustments. In late 2000, the Minneapolis City Council approved one of the rare parking meter rate increases to adjust the meter system to the rising off-street parking rates and keep the on-street meters in line with the “prime parking” theory. This rate increase was applied to the meters in the downtown loop and was implemented in January of 2001. Early on it was clear (by manually monitoring revenue in the loop meters) that the parking meter revenues generated by the rate increase were not reaching the anticipated levels. In fact, the revenue collected in 2001 was only slightly higher than revenue collected in 2000 prior to the increase. A study was undertaken to determine possible reasons that would explain the lower than expected revenue.

## Potential Factors Impacting Parking Meter Revenue

### 1. Relocation to other areas

Higher meter rates may encourage users to move to other lower cost on-street locations or possibly to low cost off-street facilities. We could not find any evidence to support this possibility.

### 2. Construction reduces the number of available parking meters

This involves both temporary construction, where meters are hooded for specific periods of time, to allow construction activities to occur (typically buildings or other off-street facilities) and permanent construction (i.e. light rail) which can result in the removal of parking meters. This is obviously a factor, with current construction activities downtown at an all-time high, resulting in a slow continual reduction in the number of parking meters in downtown. Currently down to only approximately 330 in the core area.

### 3. Weather Impacts

Severe weather conditions may affect the habits of on-street parking users. Extreme heat or cold, snow or icy road conditions, snow build-up along the curb restricting access to the meters, declared emergencies, predicted or heavy rain are all reasons why meter users either don't come downtown, take the bus, or choose a covered off-street facility rather than use the parking meters. This is always a factor in Minnesota, but obviously

varies from year to year, season to season, and even day to day and is very difficult to measure as a direct impact.

#### 4. Downturn in the Economy

If factors exist that reduce activity in the economy, businesses can fail or be greatly downsized and consumers reduce their spending. The number of consumers coming downtown to shop, dine, or use entertainment opportunities will be reduced. Unfortunately, this is a very real factor that is impacting downtown. Again, it is very difficult to measure, however, weather permitting, meter usage seems to continue to be high.

#### 5. Reduced Enforcement Levels

If enforcement of parking meters is not maintained at a high enough level, parking users can develop an impression that they are at minimal risk of “getting a ticket” and therefore do not pay or overstay the meter time limit. This greatly impacts the desired turnover as well as revenue. This is definitely a factor, as enforcement levels dropped significantly due to staff shortages and a redirected priority to traffic control to manage congestion caused by the significant amount of downtown construction. Meter usage surveys have shown a very high rate of occupied Expired meters. This indicates users have developed disrespect for the meter requirements and enforcement, severely impacting the desired turnover and ultimately meter revenue.

#### 6. Legal Disability Usage

The meter usage survey included in this report will show that a very large percentage of the parking meter system (in the core) is legally occupied all day, free of charge, by vehicles with a disability designation (license plate or certificate). The actual occupancy of “core” meters by disabled persons for long term periods is approximately 50%. This is a huge number and greatly affects the turnover of the existing meter system. This legal privilege must be modified for proper management of the entire downtown parking system. However, this issue is not a factor in the projected revenue issue because it was taken into account in the original projection. On the other hand, it does contribute to the general perception that very few parking meter users are ticketed for violation and encourages a disrespect for the law.

#### 7. Legal Emergency Service, City and Commercial Vehicle Usage

Emergency services vehicles (Police, Fire, Sheriff, State Patrol, etc.) are allowed to use city parking meters free of charge while performing their duties. Commercial vehicles are allowed to park for free until noon while making deliveries (subject to a 30-minute time limit). City vehicles routinely use parking meters without paying for a variety of work related reasons. While this vehicle usage is not large enough in number to have a significant impact on a revenue basis, it certainly contributes to the

perception of widespread non-payment and disrespect for the law, and merits review.

8. Abuse of Disability Designations

The use of vehicles with disability designations (license plates or certificate) by ineligible individuals (i.e. friends and relatives using the car or certificate without the disabled person being present, expired license plates or certificates, or other improper uses) can impact the number of available parking spaces, reduce turnover and obviously reduce revenue. Again, this activity will contribute to disrespect for the law and is absolutely illegal. The number of violators is unknown and hard to estimate but a concerted enforcement effort would quickly reduce this practice.

9. Theft or Tampering with the Meters

The use of slugs, meter jamming, electronic manipulation, actual break-ins, forgery of debit cards or thefts by collections or city maintenance personnel would, if on a large-scale basis, affect the revenues anticipated by a rate increase. Our review of records, discussions with enforcement, collection and maintenance personnel and limited surveillance of the collection process did not reveal any substantial problems or questionable situations.

10. System Maintenance Issues

The meter maintenance system was reviewed to determine if any significant problems existed with regard to equipment malfunction or failure, battery failure, jammed meters, vandalism, or meters out of order due to a "full of coins" status. These types of problems, if substantial in number, would reduce the number of serviceable meters and therefore reduce revenue. No significant problem was discovered.

The result of the study did not show any significant single issue that would conclusively explain why revenue projections were not attained. It is our opinion that a combination of the issues listed above, or others not considered, contributed to the problem. Early 2002 revenue figures are more in line with our original projections, so we will continue to monitor the revenue to determine if 2001 was simply an aberration.

A series of meter usage surveys were also conducted in the downtown core during the meter study to help verify existing perceptions about the type of user, length of use, and extent of use of downtown meters. They were also used to identify general problems inherent in the downtown on-street parking system. The surveys were undertaken over a one and one-half year time period and done repetitively to see if any trends were occurring. The actual surveys were done in June 2000, July 2001, and January 2002, during the 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. time period on weekdays.

The survey results were as follows:

1. Parking meters in the “core” are heavily used (90% occupancy-essentially full).
2. A majority of the occupied parking meters were expired (over 60%).
3. 5 to 7% of expired meters in the core are occupied by emergency, service, commercial or city vehicles.
4. Approximately one half of all meters in the downtown core are occupied by disability designated vehicles.

Therefore based on the meter study and usage surveys, we have identified the following on-street system problems:

1. There exists a serious lack of turnover at the downtown core parking meters.
2. At any given time, the majority of occupied parking meters in the downtown core are expired, indicating non-payment or over time use.
3. There is a growing lack of respect for the enforcement of the meter system as evidenced by the quantity of expired meters.
4. An undetermined number of vehicles with disability designation are being operated by ineligible drivers, who are using parking meter spaces for free.
5. A large percentage (50%) of downtown core meters are occupied all day, free of charge, legally by vehicles with disabled designation (license plates or certificates) greatly impacting turnover of spaces in the core.
6. Free use of parking meters by others (emergency service vehicles, commercial vehicles, and city vehicles) needs to be reviewed.
7. Parking meter turnover and therefore revenue is not maximized by current policies.

After reviewing the list of parking meter system problems, it was determined that the best method of addressing such significant issues was through an extensive system-wide multifaceted approach geared toward improving the overall performance of the parking meter system. The parking meter management plan would involve substantial change and could greatly impact many current users of the system. The suggested plan should include the following measures:

### **1. Increase the general level of parking meter enforcement**

As indicated earlier, construction activity downtown has required the shifting of enforcement personnel to traffic control functions. This circumstance, along with a general understaffing of traffic control agents in the Licensing Division has contributed to the public's lack of concern about receiving citations for non-payment or overtime parking at downtown meters. A sustained high level of enforcement is needed to create the

parking turnover necessary for effective use of the core parking meters. This measure is already being addressed by the License and Consumer Services Division through the hiring and training of new employees on a schedule that should have them at full strength by the end of August. Even though downtown construction will remain at high levels for some time, it is important that parking enforcement activities be given a very high priority. The Parking Meter System and Critical Parking programs are likely to continue to expand and enforcement personnel levels must be increased accordingly to maintain their effectiveness. In addition, we feel other enforcement functions need to be stepped up to deal with identified problems downtown.

At last count, there were over 75,000 disability certificates issued to residents in Minnesota, most of whom reside in the seven county metro area. Historically there is a certain amount of abuse of these certificates by ineligible users. With numbers this high, it is important to control the volume of abuse at the prime parking locations throughout the city. Traffic Control Agents currently have a limited program to identify and ticket abusers. This needs to be expanded to reduce and deter the abuse. Licensing and Consumer Services Division is pursuing direct access to the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS), established by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. This requires the assistance of the Minneapolis Police Department and is in process now. The availability of this computer system will allow Traffic Control Agents in the field direct access to the records of handicap certificate holders and greatly enhance their enforcement efforts.

In addition, representatives of the disability community have suggested the establishment of a Disability Volunteer Assistance Program where disabled volunteers would act as spotters to help identify individuals or areas of abuse in downtown. These spotters would then notify enforcement personnel for appropriate action. These volunteers could greatly improve the effectiveness of the enforcement activities in this area.

Disability representatives also discussed the need for assistance in encouraging the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) to review their current policies and procedures for issuance and enforcement of the Disability Parking certificate. It is felt that the guidelines are not clear and need to be tightened up. The expiration period is not always realistic and is seldom enforced. Penalties for physicians who write unjustified support letters are insignificant and enforcement efforts almost non-existent. A City Council Resolution requesting review could encourage the DPS to initiate a study of the improper issuance and use of the Disability Certificates.

Lastly, another area requiring additional enforcement attention is in the category best described as “other free users.” Commercial Vehicles are allowed to use parking meters free of charge (until noon) with a 30-minute limit, while in the process of loading or unloading. This activity is probably still necessary to accommodate deliveries, but increased enforcement of the 30 minute limit is needed to encourage efficient loading and unloading functions while promoting the all important turnover of the meters. It is also necessary to review the policies for allowing emergency vehicles and other governmental vehicles use of meters free of charge. It is assumed that emergency vehicle usage of the meters was intended to accommodate “incident response” and not routine business. Survey results show that many vehicles are using meters for no apparent emergency response purpose. “City” vehicles should not be using meters (without paying) unless they have a permit for a specific purpose (prominently displayed) allowing them to do so. Employees of these areas should be reminded of the proper use and procedures to enforce the proper established use.

As a function of the effort to carry out these enforcement activities Traffic Control Agents currently are using an electronic “ticket writing” device that frequently breaks down and is out of service, slowing the enforcement process. Recently, permission was granted for Licensing and Consumer Services to purchase new, reliable ticket writers with expanded capabilities that will improve the efficiency of the enforcement process.

**2. Eliminate or greatly reduce the currently legal practice of allowing the operators of disability designated vehicles (license o r certificate) to utilize parking meters all day, free of charge.**

The importance of this measure cannot be overstated. It is a key element of the Parking Meter Management Plan. Currently there are over 75,000 disability certificates in the state – most located in the metro area. Over half of the existing parking meters in the core are used all day, daily, at no charge, by disability designated vehicles. Obviously, the potential exists for many more to utilize this privilege. It is doubtful that the original intent was to accommodate large numbers of free, all-day employee parking. However, it is clear that the current ordinance is very detrimental to the overall parking meter policy of providing the maximum number of prime parking spaces to the maximum number of users through the use of management techniques that encourage turnover at the metered spaces.

This issue is very controversial and of serious concern to the disabled community. Therefore representatives of the Transportation Division, Licensing and Consumer Services and Traffic Control Divisions, and the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities have been meeting to discuss various approaches for addressing this situation.

It was important to understand the issues of the disabled community before developing any potential disability parking alternatives. Their list of identified issues and concerns is listed below:

- Location – This is by far the biggest issue for disabled people. There is a need to have parking within as short a distance as possible to/from their destination. However, this parking should only accommodate the needs of the disabled for short term (4 hours) parking, as opposed to all-day employee type parking.
- Time Limit – Currently most parking meters within the “core” of downtown have a time limit of 2 (two) hours to encourage turnover of parking for the short-term needs related to business functions in downtown. Longer-term needs should be served by off-street parking lots and ramps. People with disabilities, due to the constraints of physically parking, unloading/loading themselves, traveling to their destinations, and negotiating doors, stairs, elevators, etc. in addition to conducting their business, shopping, dining, or enjoying the many entertainment opportunities downtown, require more time than the current two hour limits.
- Cost – For many years state law has allowed people with disabilities (with the proper identification – license plate or certificate) to park at parking meters free of charge with no time limit. Thus, disabled people have become used to “free” on-street, all-day parking. To lose this privilege would be very disappointing to them, if not a significant financial change, and would not be accepted without major controversy unless a reasonable alternative is provided. Recently the state legislature has passed modifications to the state statutes allowing Minneapolis to legislate it’s own time limit for disabled people at parking meters. This was done in response to the realization of the increasing problem of illegal use of invalid disabled certificates, and the ever increasing number of people with disability permits, causing a major impact on the on-street parking meter system that was established to provide large numbers of short term parking spaces in downtown.
- Access to Parking Meters (coin and card) – Individuals with severe disabilities have major problems with placing coins or cash cards into the coin/card slots in the parking meter. In addition, it is difficult to even get to parking meters from the drivers’ side of the vehicle (particularly for those individuals in wheel chairs) due to the need to get between parked vehicles and to then negotiate over the curb. Any system that included charging for parking would have to deal with these issues.

- Use of lost, stolen or invalid certificate or use by unauthorized people – This is a serious problem that has been growing significantly, and is contributing to the general public being less sensitive to the needs of the disabled because they see non-disabled people illegally using certificates to park for free or in choice locations. This situation can only be dealt with by tightening state regulations and strict enforcement of abuse.

With these issues in mind, we considered the following potential disability parking alternatives:

1. Blue Meters – X number per block face
2. Disabled Parking Zones – X spaces per block face
3. Electronic Meter Options – debit card alternatives
4. Special Permit System – restricted use (city issue)
5. Municipal and Private Parking Ramp discount parking plan system
6. Disability Parking Facility – In remote location with shuttle buses
7. Valet Parking – in specified locations, by arrangement, for severely disabled

Most of these were eliminated for a variety of reasons including inappropriate for the level of demand, too physically taxing, too time consuming or inconvenient, too costly, too difficult to administer, etc.

However, a plan was developed that combined a few of the alternatives, using the creative assistance of representatives of the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities, that accomplishes the City's need for meter turnover while providing reasonable alternatives for disability users. It needs to be emphasized that removing the all-day, free parking privilege, will place a new financial and mobility burdens on the disabled users. With this in mind, the following proposal was developed to address disability use of the parking meter system in downtown Minneapolis:

- A) Eliminate the free all-day parking privilege provided for operators of vehicles with disability designation (license or certificate).
- B) Continue to allow the free use of 1 or 2 hour limit parking meters for eligible disability users subject to a maximum time limit of 4 (four) hours.
- C) Create a program to allow eligible disability users to utilize the designated disability parking spaces in the Municipal lots and ramps, through monthly contracts, for a fee equal to 50% of the actual monthly contract rate. Regular rates would apply to non-

contract, short-term disability users. The city will encourage private sector lot and ramp operators to adopt a similar policy.

- D) Establish a free-based permit process to allow a limited number of “severely disabled” individuals to obtain a special parking permit to utilize parking meters under unique circumstances for all-day use.
- E) Establish a public information program to notify the disability community and general public of the new changes and opportunities available under the proposed plan.

It is our contention that although free parking is eliminated for some all-day disability users, a reasonable alternative is provided in the climate-controlled or covered off-street facilities available in Municipal or private ramps. These facilities’ disability spaces are currently greatly under utilized and provide a supply of parking spaces that currently exceeds the demand. Most of these facilities are connected to major employers by the skyway system or a tunnel. The four hour limit at short term meters was created to account for the challenges faced by the disability community that require longer times to conduct even short-term business, appointments, shopping, dining, or personal business. Elimination of the free all-day parking privilege should provide more short-term parking space availability for the disabled users.

The “special permit” plan is intended for a very limited number of severely disabled individuals. The details and requirement will need to be created at a later date with disabled community input. The disabled community representatives indicated there were a limited number of severely disabled that simply could not travel longer distances that the parking meters located immediately in front of the entrance to their place of work. Any relocation to other parking spaces could consequently cost them their jobs. This provision was created to address that issue. The city’s major concern with this provision is the potential number of individuals requiring this special permit.

Lastly, it is important that a public information effort be implemented to publicize the ordinance changes, new provisions, opportunities, etc. as the changes are significant and impact many users, employers and parking operators. A full-scale effort is needed on this provision.

The disabled community does support some provisions of the disability use modifications. Support varies from measure to measure and some individuals strongly oppose certain measures. We have worked with representatives of the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities to create the plan and to take into account their issues and concerns. Total agreement is not possible and this plan is presented as a compromise.

## PARKING METER MANAGEMENT PLAN

- Increase and maintain a high level of general parking meter enforcement by balancing personnel levels with enforcement required.
- Increase enforcement targeted at abuse of disability privileges by ineligible individuals.
  1. Secure and utilize State of Minnesota Criminal Justice Information System ( CJIS) data on disability permit holders;
  2. Establish a Disability Volunteers Assistance Program to help monitor areas of known disability permit abuse and provide notification to appropriate enforcement personnel;
  3. Expand the abilities of the new ticket writer equipment to improve the efficiency of enforcement techniques;
  4. Adopt a City Council resolution requesting that the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (MDPS) review and tighten the current policies/procedures for issuance and enforcement of disability parking certificates.
- Eliminate the current legal practice of all-day free parking at meters by operators of vehicles with disability license plates or certificates;
  1. Continue to allow free use of one and two hour limit meters by eligible individuals with appropriate disability designations, subject to a maximum limit of four hours;
  2. Set up a program to allow eligible disabled persons to utilize the designated disability parking spaces in Municipal Parking lots and ramps, on a monthly basis, for a fee equal to 50% of the actual monthly contract rate. Regular rates would apply to non-contract short-term disability users. The city will encourage private sector parking operators to adopt a similar policy;
  3. Establish a fee based permit process to allow a limited number of “severely disabled” individuals to obtain a special parking permit to utilize parking meters under unique circumstances for all day use;
  4. Develop a public information plan to educate the public on existing regulations and new law changes regarding legal disability use of parking spaces at meters or in lots and ramps.
- Increase the level of enforcement of the 30-minute limit provided for free commercial vehicle use (until noon) of the parking meters.
- Eliminate the free use of parking meters by emergency service vehicles (unless responding to an actual incident) and city vehicles (unless by special permit).
- Improve the use of parking meter technical capabilities:
  1. Utilize multiple rates in selected meter areas.
  2. Utilize multiple time limits in selected meter areas
  3. Expand debit card use and applications
  4. Utilize electronic monitoring capabilities
    - a. Determine actual usage of individual meters
    - b. Identify usage trends/patterns by individual meter or by area
    - c. Improve revenue control monitoring
    - d. Improve ability to develop accurate revenue projections under varied scenarios
- Conduct annual parking meter system reviews
  1. Expand parking meter system into high demand outlying areas

2. Increase parking meters rates to encourage turnover and maintain the proper balance with off-street parking facilities
3. Extend the hours/days of enforcement at those existing meter locations where parking demand continues into the evening or weekends.