

Public Comments to University of Michigan Board of Regents

Re: University Parking Policy Alternatives

Joel Batterman, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, mgogreen.org

President Coleman and members of the Board of Regents, thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. My name is Joel Batterman, and I am a Master of Urban Planning student specializing in transportation. The previous semester, I served on the Phase 2 transportation task force of the University's Integrated Assessment of Campus Sustainability. The draft Phase 2 reports just became available online this week, and I would like to highlight findings which have significant implications for the University's transportation policies, and specifically for the question of parking facility expansion, which the University may act on in the coming months.

Parking provision has been an element of policy at American campuses for the better part of a century. "I have sometimes thought of the modern university," wrote University of California president Clark Kerr, "as a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking." Strategies for providing it have been straightforward. In 1956, the Dean of my College wrote that "[t]he only solution to the campus parking problem is *more parking*." To a large extent, this remains the University's strategy today. The University has added about 2300 structured parking spaces to its Central and Medical campuses over the past ten years.

Since we draw employees from across a large metropolitan area lacking regional transit, there is little doubt that many staff need to commute by car. However, we can meet their need for parking in a variety of ways. The results of the Integrated Assessment suggest that continually increasing parking supply may be less environmentally and fiscally sustainable than an alternative strategy of adjusting parking pricing to more efficiently use existing parking supply.

An analogy may be helpful. In seeking a privately managed parking space for a football game, you may have observed that the price for a parking space varies according to location. The closer a space is to the Stadium, the more expensive is its price. In economic terms, by pricing parking according to the demand at particular locations, this parking "market" achieves the most efficient allocation of parking supply to demand.

Our commuter parking pricing system, however, differs substantially from that model. The system does tier parking rates according to location, using a color-coded system of four tiers (gold, blue, yellow, and orange), but this price structure is still relatively flat. For example, "blue" parking at a surface lot on North Campus is no cheaper than "blue" parking at a Central Campus parking structure, in spite of the fact that parking demand is much lower there.

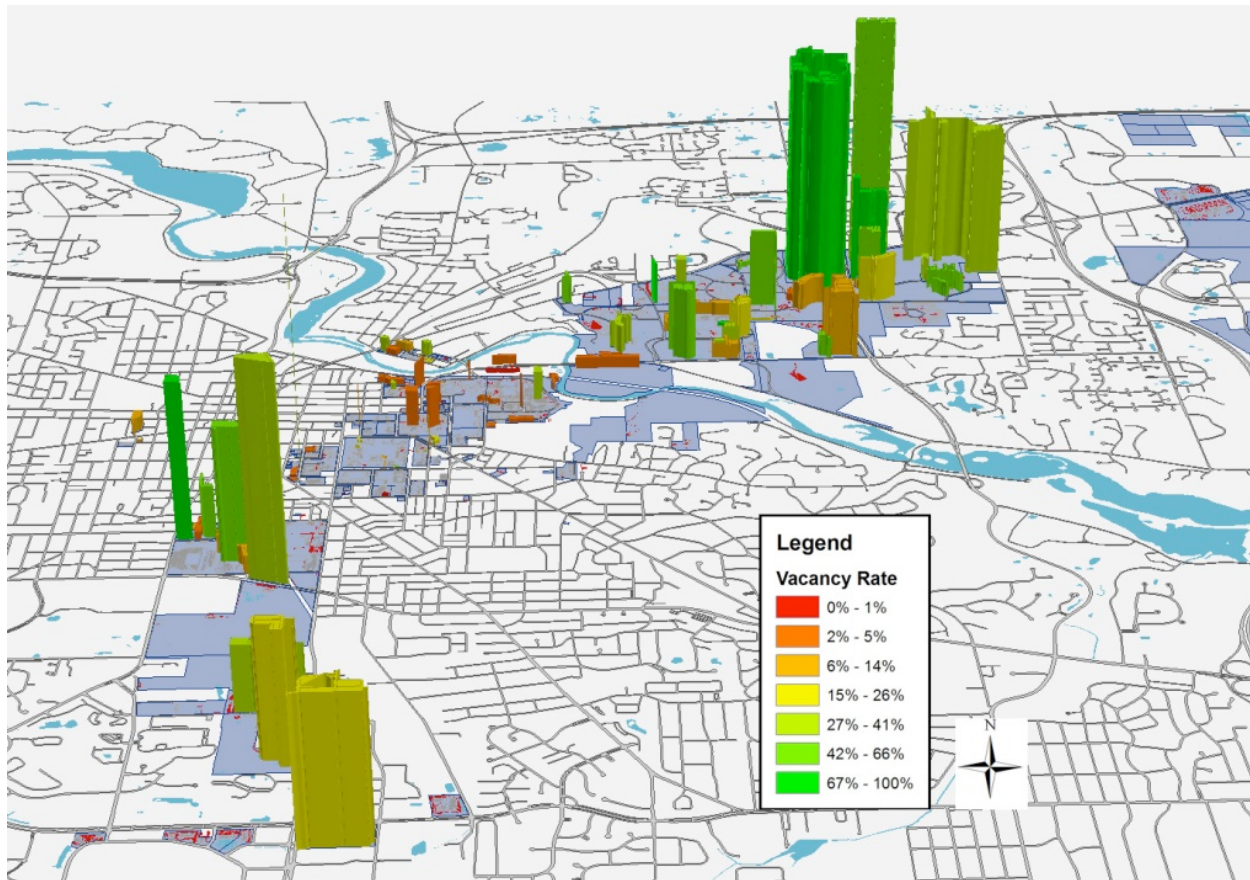
The results of this artificially flat price structure are apparent in this figure from the report. Using data from Parking & Transportation Services, the Integrated Assessment team generated a picture of average daily commuter parking vacancies in our system. As you can see, it suggests that our perceived parking capacity problem is actually a parking allocation problem. Central Campus and Medical Campus parking is at capacity, but many lots elsewhere are highly underutilized. The Medical Campus average parking vacancy rate is only 4%, but the North and South Campus rates are 20% and 28%, respectively, with close to 1000 average vacant spaces each. The acquisition of the North Campus Research Complex added additional capacity. As of

last fall, the NCRC contained an additional 750 vacancies, but this figure includes only lots then in operation; including lots not in operation would add several thousand to the total.

Once the issue is understood as a parking allocation problem, rather than a parking capacity problem, a different set of solutions present themselves. Rather than building new structures on Central Campus, we might choose to better utilize our existing parking resources. Thousands of commuters already choose to park in park-and-ride lots on the outskirts of campus, then take shuttle buses to their final destination. If our parking pricing system were restructured to better match demand, even more commuters would choose that option, and additional parking in central areas would be unnecessary.

In addition to its environmental benefits, this alternative would yield significant cost savings. Operating subsidies for parking are considerable, including a direct \$142 subsidy from the University unit for each parking permit sold. Moreover, capital costs for new structures have increased. Each parking space at the 977-space structure currently proposed for Fuller Road is estimated to cost \$44,000, equivalent to four years' undergraduate tuition.

At a time when the University is seeking to cut millions from its budget, and substantial unused capacity exists in our parking system, adjustments to the parking price structure appear an attractive alternative to new construction. With that in mind, I and others will be meeting with University and City staff next week to request a reassessment of the proposal for a \$43 million Fuller Road parking structure in light of the new findings just presented. Two dozen UM faculty members have signed a petition to President Coleman urging such action. I believe the Assessment has given the University a unique opportunity to cut costs and pioneer the innovative transportation solutions which will establish us as "leaders and best" in sustainable campus development. I hope you will consider lending your support to this initiative, and encourage you to contact us with your questions or concerns. Thank you very much for your time.



Average weekday commuter parking vacancies by location at the University of Michigan, September-October 2010. Column heights represent total vacancies at individual lots. Data courtesy of UM Parking & Transportation Services; graphic by Te-Ping Kang, UM Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

Average vacant University of Michigan parking spaces by campus, Sep-Oct 2010.

Campus	Total Spaces	Vacancy Rate	Vacant Spaces
Central	4334	11%	462
Medical	6122	4%	243
South	3351	28%	949
North (excluding NCRC)	4339	20%	874
NCRC (excluding lots not operational)	1141	67%	763
Total Vacancies			2586