

**SOMA AND “NEW TERRITORIES” PARKING EXPANSION:
A PRACTICAL SOLUTION TO MITIGATING SAN FRANCISCO’S
PARKING CRISIS**

A Position Paper and Proposed Solutions

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By

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Overview –

San Francisco's booming economy has spurred a remarkable surge in commercial renewal and development, bringing with it many new jobs to satisfy increased business and consumer demand for local products and services. Yet efforts to ensure that the City's expanding workforce, daily shoppers and visitors and increasingly mobile resident base are provided available parking have not kept pace with the economic expansion. In fact, the number of available parking spaces in San Francisco will soon significantly decrease, necessitating a careful and considerate re-examination – and redress – of the City's current transportation planning efforts.

Current estimates are that the City soon will lose as many as 10,000 parking spaces. The San Francisco Department of Parking & Traffic (DPT) and the City's Planning Department confirm that, between now and 2004, public and private development in San Francisco will result in the City losing between 4,000 and 6,000 parking spaces. In addition, CALTRANS estimates that, as a result of the Bay Bridge retrofit, another 4,500 commuter-parking spaces under and along the elevated span of Interstate 80 will be eliminated for a period of at least six years.

Clearly, with the City already struggling to handle the current volume of visitors and daily commuters to its expanding and emerging commercial hubs – much less an expected increase in traffic volume and parking demand wrought by the spate of present and future commercial and retail development projects – San Francisco must develop and quickly set in motion a comprehensive and balanced parking strategy that:

- 1) Alleviates the existing strain on parking demands; and
- 2) Compensates for future constraints placed on parking by ongoing and impending commercial development projects.

A practical first step in solving the City's parking woes is to devise a sensible parking plan for San Francisco's South of Market (SOMA) District and the area described by this paper as the "New Territories," which extends from PacBell Park to 3Com Park and includes the City's Eastern Waterfront, Potrero and Hunter's Point districts. The benefit in doing so is twofold:

- 1) It enables the City's most explosive growth area(s) to develop in a coherent, straightforward and well-managed manner; and
- 2) It provides a viable means of relief to local residents and to visitors, shoppers and employees required to commute by car to the City's primary business, shopping and entertainment districts by allocating parking in reasonably close proximity to those areas.

Stuart Sunshine, director of San Francisco's Department of Parking and Traffic (DPT), was recently quoted that his agency is "in the process of studying parking needs South of Market, and we're trying to be very creative in how we solve the problem." It is encouraging that City officials recognize the severity of San Francisco's parking crisis and they are to be lauded for initiating efforts to address the situation. Likewise, Mayor Brown should be commended for his efforts to remedy what has become a significant problem.

Unfortunately, from the vantage point of the authors of this position paper, there is a distinct lack of communication between City departments. The result has been to delay and/or forestall any meaningful efforts to address San Francisco's parking crisis. Therefore, in the spirit of cooperation, the authors of this position paper implore that City and State agencies, elected officials, representatives of the private sector and other appropriate parties collaborate to quickly develop and implement a transportation plan that incorporates a balanced approach to meeting San Francisco's parking needs. In turn, the plan should include a component for replacing the 10,000 parking spaces lost to private and public development and the Bay Bridge retrofit, as well as creating new parking alternatives (as warranted by future development).

We recognize that some will dispute the call to replace soon-to-be-lost parking and to create new parking opportunities. Yet merely advancing the argument that more parking attracts more drivers is not sufficient to counter the tangible, measurable congestion we presently realize – and most certainly will increase – from not properly managing the anticipated demand for parking.

It is the overwhelming wave of new public and private developments that create the need to accommodate motor vehicles, as more and more people travel to San Francisco to shop, to be entertained or to simply go to work. It must be acknowledged that public transit cannot fully meet the Bay Area community's transportation needs. Ensuring an adequate supply of parking, therefore, must serve as a critical component to any mass transit plan the City employs.

The SOMA & New Territories Transformation –

According to the San Francisco Partnership, more than 700 New Media companies – approximately 30 percent of the world total – are located in San Francisco, the majority of which are based in SOMA and/or the New Territories. Of these New Media companies, 79 percent were founded in the City; women own 15 percent and minorities own 7 percent. Currently, the New Media industry employs more than 49,000 people in San Francisco. New Media is the fourth largest industry in San Francisco, behind Business Services (56,000), Government (60,000) and Retail Trade (79,000), and it is responsible for 40 percent of new job growth in the City. Between 1994 and 1999 the small – but growing – business district known as Multimedia Gulch added roughly 9,000 New Media jobs alone.

It is obvious that SOMA and the New Territories are in the midst of an urban transformation the likes of which has not been seen in the City in many years. Empty warehouses there have filled with thousands of people working a range of hours, seven days a week, for a multitude of multi-media and Internet companies. In the past year, many of these companies have doubled in size.

Greater SOMA and the New Territories offer more than 18 million square feet of commercial real estate. New Media firms occupy a significant portion of the commercial space in the area(s) and remain the primary source of demand for space there. According to Colliers International, in 1999, roughly 2.2 million square feet of office space was leased in the greater SOMA area, lowering its overall vacancy rate to approximately 2 percent. Moreover, Colliers research shows that practically all of the remaining 2 percent of commercial space is committed to prospective tenants, effectively zeroing out SOMA and the New Territories' vacancy rate.

As a result, SOMA and the New Territories have witnessed a notable increase in their daytime population, and area parking lots and off-street spaces – which once served as a plentiful source of parking – either have been eliminated by development or are beyond capacity. Furthermore, a confluence of residential housing and retail development in SOMA and the New Territories will greatly add to the areas' part-time and full-time population base. For example, according to Colliers, Mission Bay will contain between 4 and 6 thousand residential units and 150,000 square feet of space for the retail shops and grocery marts expected to flock there to serve thousands of new area residents (and employees).

Solutions Are Required Now –

With the transformation of SOMA and the New Territories well under way – including a booming Multimedia Gulch, increased residential housing development, the new ballpark and the restaurants and retail shops to come with it – areas that already attract an enormous amount of traffic are and will continue to be overwhelmed by drivers in need of parking. However, the City's parking and transportation policy falls well short of meeting the parking demands of residents, day and nighttime visitors, shoppers, employees and business owners in those areas (as well the adjoining business, shopping and entertainment districts). Indeed, parking, traffic and overall transportation conditions in the City as a whole are deplorable and, with continued residential and commercial development, they will worsen.

Intermediate and long-term solutions – incorporating comprehensive planning, innovative ideas and 'Internet-speed' action – are required now. The answer does not lie in San Francisco's "Transit First" policy, which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors as part of the City's Downtown Plan and has been interpreted by some to simply mean, "ride MUNI." Such a stance is shortsighted, for a commercial sector that depends solely on a public transit system to sustain its economy is doomed to suffer the consequences of not including every reasonably available option in the mix of transportation demand management strategies.

A balanced demand-management approach must include:

- 1) New parking;
- 2) Improvements to the transit system;
- 3) Better signage;
- 4) Improved connections between transit modes;
- 5) Improved transit information; and

- 6) Increased housing density, relaxation of height restrictions and more mixed-use development along well-served transportation corridors (thereby allowing people to walk to work).

The authors of this position paper applaud plans by San Francisco MUNI General Manager Michael Burns to draw \$4.5 million in funds from the City's Transit Impact Development Fee Account for the purpose of expanding MUNI services in the SOMA and Mission Bay districts. We suggest expanding on Mr. Burns' plan by creating more available parking in SOMA and the New Territories and by providing shuttle services to San Francisco's Central Business and Union Square districts. In doing so, the City not only will provide relief for San Francisco's fastest-growing neighborhoods, it will reduce the strain on parking and transportation in two, adjoining commercial districts that are glutted daily with innumerable commuters in search of a finite amount available parking spaces.

Our Position: Begin with 14 Necessary Steps –

A coalition comprised of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of San Francisco, the Committee on Jobs, the Downtown Association of San Francisco and the Market Street Association has developed this position paper as a means to initiate a process for solving the City's parking crisis. Accordingly, we advocate and strongly urge DPT, the City's Planning Department, the Mayor's office, the Board of Supervisors, CALTRANS and other responsible agencies to work with the private sector to pursue the following course of action:

- 1) Replace the 10,000+ parking spaces lost due to CALTRANS construction and other public and private developments. This figure should include approximately 4,500 spaces lost due to the Bay Bridge Retrofit and a minimum of 5,000 to 6,000 spaces to meet the parking needs of a SOMA and New Territories' employee and resident population base that is anticipated to more than exceed 100,000 (which includes Mission Bay, etc.). Both the private and public sectors should provide these new spaces – with input from SOMA and new Territories-area businesses and residents.
- 2) Prior to the commencement of the Bay Bridge retrofit/replacement project, pursue adequate mitigation funding from CALTRANS. The City should commit all funds obtained to the development of public parking facilities in the South of Market District.
- 3) Expand City owned parking facilities and acquire properties for new garage developments in SOMA and the New Territories. Expansion of existing facilities can be achieved through the utilization of valet operations and/or simply adding on to said facilities.
- 4) Increase the planning code ratio of parking-to-office space allowance from 7 percent to 10 percent of floor area in the SOMA, New Territories, Central Business and Union Square districts and, where feasible, encourage new developments to build out the allowable parking. In those instances where it is not practical to build out parking either on site or in close proximity to the development site, we suggest acting on Mayor Brown's recent proposal before the Downtown Association to designate a portion of the City's surplus funds to infrastructure improvements. In this instance, we recommend Mayor Brown and the Board of Supervisors draft and pass an ordinance that designates a portion of the City's surplus for investment in parking infrastructure, establishing a parking development fund.

- 5) Encourage public/private partnerships by providing tax incentives, expedited plan review processes, etc., for new parking garages and / or parking lots in needed locations.
- 6) Research the ability of the City to cover the liability of private property owners whose underutilized parking lots or garages could be opened to the public.
- 7) Select locations to use and / or construct inter-modal satellite parking lots (e.g., Crissy Field, Candlestick Point, Catellus land south of ballpark, Alemany Farmer's Market) providing private shuttle services. Promote the use of environmentally friendly (natural gas) vans and buses.
- 8) Select a test site in either the SOMA, Central Business or Union Square district to construct high-tech, robotic parking systems and solicit bids from private sector companies for a pilot project. Supervisor Michael Yaki noted at a recent Board of Supervisors' Transportation and Land Use Committee hearing that the time has come to consider novel solutions to San Francisco's parking crisis. We agree. If the pilot program proves effective, we recommend developing additional robotic parking system sites.
- 9) Solicit and quickly choose from best-price contract bids from private-sector shuttle services (to serve the additional satellite parking lots) and directly supervise their implementation.
- 10) Investigate the use of Federal, State of California and Metropolitan Transportation Commission funds for inter-modal parking projects.
- 11) Modify the existing Transit Impact Development Fee Ordinance to allow expenditures on parking development.
- 12) Re-examine the manner in which the City's Off-street Parking Fund is financed, consider the adequacy of the process and, in turn, assure that moneys generated (for the Fund) are spent effectively, i.e., to construct small-scale parking lots and garages in neighborhood business districts. The result will be to support the City's small, neighborhood businesses, which face increased competition from large retailers.
- 13) Work with the San Francisco Giants to develop a workable plan to utilize their facility for commuter parking on non-game days.
- 14) Develop a parking map of all public lots and garages in downtown San Francisco, SOMA and the Union Square districts, with information detailing available hours, usage fees, etc., and post it on the DPT Web site. In turn, publicize the Web site's capability.

Conclusion –

We recognize the above suggestions are not without controversy, nor are they exhaustive in their scope. We also recognize the need to address issues such as traffic management and the dependability and convenience of San Francisco's mass transit system. Yet it is undeniable that without adequate parking to support overall growth, the long-term viability of San Francisco's now strong economy is threatened. Our coalition is willing and able to work with San Francisco's elected leaders, policy makers and administrators to unlock the gridlock that prohibits the City from developing new and replacement parking for an increasingly frustrated residential and business community. We hope this sets in motion a productive, focused and solution-oriented dialogue.