Introduction

This Downtown Tampa Parking User Survey was commissioned by the Tampa Downtown Partnership and carried out by Plan Hillsborough. The survey was overseen by the Tampa Downtown Partnership Parking Task Force representing Downtown stakeholders.

While results of this Survey show the majority of respondents were unsatisfied with parking in Downtown Tampa, responses to the various questions can provide insight about potential improvements that could be made to improve parking satisfaction.

The Survey shows the most important factors in parking choice are proximity, availability, and cost. While the proximity of parking to their final destination was identified as the most important factor in parking choice, a majority of respondents were willing to walk three blocks or more from their final destination. Parking facilities to cover a three block radius of development would be considered acceptable for most drivers according to the data collected.

Another major factor focused on the availability of parking. The vast majority of open-ended responses indicated a need for more parking garages. In fact, the greatest proportion of respondents stated that they prefer to park in garages as opposed to on-street or surface level parking lots.

While the cost of parking is a major factor in parking choice, only about two out of every five respondents indicated the cost of parking in Downtown Tampa was too high. The majority were comfortable with the current cost of parking. Employees in Downtown tended to have the greatest concern about the cost of parking.

When it comes to finding their way around Downtown and to available parking, the majority of respondents found wayfaring signage to be inadequate. Respondents indicated the need for real-time parking information delivered to parking garage message boards, message board street signs, and mobile applications directing drivers to available parking. Improving wayfaring signage as well as implementing real-time
Methodology

The Downtown Tampa Parking Survey was conducted between November 2016 and February 2017. A total of 1,428 responses were collected using SurveyMonkey, an interactive online survey tool. The survey was distributed via e-mail, partner websites, social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), info cards distributed to patrons of local businesses and events, and word of mouth.

Survey responses were analyzed collectively and by dividing respondents into groups of employees, residents and visitors.

The grouping of employees comprises respondents who indicated they work downtown, park monthly or for more than three hours each visit, and park in downtown multiple days per week. A total of 442 respondents met these criteria.

The grouping of residents comprises respondents from the remaining 986 entries who indicated they were a resident and who listed their home ZIP code as 33602,. This ZIP code envelops downtown Tampa as well as Ridgewood Park and southern Tampa Heights. A total of 91 respondents met these criteria.

Finally, the grouping of visitors comprises all respondents who were not categorized as employees or residents. A total of 895 respondents were classified as visitors.

Future Steps

In general, parking is supportive of, and subordinate to the surrounding land uses. People do not go to a destination to park, but go to a destination for a reason and then park. To that end, the role of parking is to support these uses and activities, not for the activities to support parking. Parking should be seen as a tool of economic development and a part of the overall multimodal transportation system. As part of the transportation system, parking must be managed to assure it meets the transportation and land use goals of the City as well as being useful and efficient for its users.

While this Survey should be used to improve certain aspects of parking, it could serve as the impetus for the City to develop a comprehensive parking management plan for Downtown Tampa. The plan could identify Downtown parking strategies to better manage the current parking supply to serve existing demand as well as estimate the future parking need and understand the most appropriate funding opportunities to fund the on-going and future parking program. The plan could recommend strategies for improving on-street and off-street parking; manage future growth in ways that minimize traffic congestion while improving economic vitality, and improve transportation choices for traveling to and moving around Downtown. A parking management plan may be a key step in ensuring Downtown Tampa achieves its full potential.
Overall, respondents were unsatisfied with parking in downtown. More than half (56.2%) stated they were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with parking Downtown, while fewer than one-in-four (23.8%) stated they were satisfied or very satisfied. Separating respondents into groups of employees, residents and visitors shows that employees were the most unsatisfied with downtown parking (58.6%). Residents (49.5%) were the only group that had a greater proportion of neutral, satisfied and very satisfied overall opinions on parking compared to unsatisfied and very unsatisfied opinions.

In general, the majority of respondents used parking in downtown for entertainment (68.7%), with work (45.3%) and dining (41.5%) the second and third most common activities, respectively. More than one-in-three respondents used parking Downtown for outdoor activities (39.6%), and nearly one-in-three used parking for civic events (30.5%). Fewer than one-in-ten respondents used parking downtown for government service (9.3%), shopping (9%), and conferences (6.3%). Just over fifteen percent of respondents stated they used downtown parking for other activities, with 80 (36%) of those respondents stating they used Downtown parking for classes or the library at the Patel Conservatory. Twenty-three respondents who used parking downtown for other activities did so for volunteering (10%), generally at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts. Six respondents (2.7%) used parking Downtown for religious services or church attendance.
Response to the cost of parking was mixed, although not as negative as the overall level of satisfaction with parking. Slightly fewer than two-in-five respondents were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the cost of parking (38%), while the greatest single-category response was “Neither Satisfied nor Unsatisfied” (28.7%). Approximately one-in-three respondents (34.9%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the cost of parking. As with the overall perceptions of parking, employees of downtown had the highest rates of dissatisfaction with parking costs (45.7%), while residents (31.9%) again had the lowest. Dissatisfaction with parking costs for visitors (34.7%) closely matched the overall response to parking costs (38%).

When asked about parking frequency, there was no surprise that the majority of employees (100%) and residents (99%) park in Downtown either everyday or multiple times week. Among visitors, about 38% park in Downtown once per week, while 30% park in Downtown once per month. 21% park in downtown once per month. Only a small percentage (6%) park seldomly.
The greatest proportion of respondents stated that they prefer to park in garages (42.8%), followed by on-street parking (34.2%) and parking lots (21%). Residents were much more likely to prefer on-street parking (63.7%) compared to visitors (35.9%) and employees (24.9%), while employees and visitors had similar rates of preference for parking garages (46.6% and 42.7%, respectively). Employees had the highest preference for parking lots (26.5%), followed by visitors (19.6%) and residents (8.8%).

Why one location over another?

Of the 800 explanations provided, 155 (19.4%) chose their preference due to ease, 85 (10.6%) mentioned closeness or proximity to their destination, and 58 (7.3%) mentioned convenience. While both ease and convenience was often presented by respondents generally did not indicate whether their choice was due to ease or convenience as it relates to their destination or maneuvering to and from the spot itself, 30 respondents (3.8%) chose their spot due to the ease or difficulty of entering and exiting nearby on-street spots, lots and garages. Safety was another shared concern, with 130 (16.2%) citing either safety or presence of security in their responses.

A total of 126 (15.8%) respondents chose their preference in part due to cost, mentioning words such as “cost” (6.3%), “expensive” (3.1%), “free” (3.5%), and “cheap” (3.5%).

Another significant reason for their preference was the availability of spaces, with 53 (6.6%) choosing their preference due in part to spot availability.
The majority of respondents (54.1%) generally park in the River Arts District of downtown, with the Central Business District (26%) and Arena District (21.4%) the second and third most common parking locations, respectively. Fewer than one-in-five respondents usually park in the Channel District (15.8%) and East Downtown (12.2%), while fewer than one-in-ten park in the University Area (8%) and Encore/Marion Transit Center (3.2%) locations. Employees and residents were more likely to park in the Central Business District and less likely to park in the Arena District than visitors. Residents were more likely to park in the University Area and Channel District than either visitors or employees, and along with visitors were more likely to park in the River Arts district than employees.

A total of 399 “Other” locations were provided, of which 249 (62.4%) referenced either the Straz Center for the Performing Arts, the Poe Garage, or the Patel Conservancy. TECO Plaza received another 9 responses (2.3%).

Overall, the majority of respondents (54.7%) felt there was not adequate, easy-to-understand wayfaring signage to help navigate to parking in Downtown. Only slightly more than one-in-four respondents felt there was adequate signage. Separating respondents into groups of employees, residents and visitors shows that groups are generally in agreement about wayfaring signage, although employees (53.6%) and visitors (55.9%) were slightly more likely to state that there is not adequate signage when compared to residents (48.6%).
The average respondent took less than ten minutes to find a spot after arriving in Downtown, with three-in-five respondents (60%) providing that response. Approximately one-in-seven respondents (15%) took longer than 15 minutes to find a spot after arriving in Downtown. Employees and residents were quicker at finding spots than visitors, with 63.4% of employees and 68.1% of residents stating that it took them less than ten minutes to find a spot, compared to 57.4% of visitors. Approximately one-in-five visitors took longer than 15 minutes to find a spot after arriving in Downtown (18.5%), compared to one-in-ten for employees (10%) and one-in-twenty for residents (4.4%).

The distance people are willing to walk to their final destination from where they park varied greatly. Overall, however, 57.3% of respondents were willing to park three blocks or more from their destination. Less than half (41.7%) were willing to park no more than two blocks. Separating respondents into groups, residents (74.7%) were most willing to park three or more blocks to their destination while only 57.3% employees were willing to park three or more blocks. Visitors (54.7%) showed the least desire to park three or more blocks with 44.1% indicating their desire to park no more than two blocks.
Overall, respondents were far more likely to report they generally arrive Downtown between the hours of 7 am to 10 am (28.2%) and the hours of 4 pm to 7 pm (39.8%) compared to any other three-hour span of the day. Approximately four-in-five employees arrived to downtown between the hours of 4 am and 10 am (80.5%), while residents and visitors were more likely to arrive later in the day. More than half of all residents arrived between the hours of 4 pm to 7 pm (51.7%), with three-in-four arriving between 1 pm and 10 pm (75.8%). More than half of all visitors arrived during the evening hours of 4 pm to 7 pm (55.5%), with only approximately one-in-ten arriving before 10 am (11.7%).

The greatest number of respondents parked in Downtown during weekdays (66.1%), followed by weekends (57.4%) and evenings (42.5%). All but seven of the 442 respondents who were employees parked in Downtown during weekdays, though fewer of them returned during weekends (42.9%) and evenings (43.7%) compared to residents and visitors. Approximately half of all visitors parked in Downtown during weekdays (49.9%), compared to about two-in-three for evenings and weekends (62.8%). Residents were about equally likely to report that they parked in Downtown during weekdays (68.1%), evenings (72.5%) and weekends (73.6%).
When asked about the most important factor in parking choice, proximity (33.2%), availability (26%), and cost (20.6%) were ranked the highest. The least important factor was time limits on parking with less than 5% indicating this was important. Separated into groups, employees (29.6%) and visitors (36.4%) felt proximity to their destination was the most important factor, while residents (36.3%) felt availability of parking is the most important factor.

Overall, the majority of respondents felt safe in Downtown (74.4%) while only a small percentage felt unsafe (5.7%). When separated into groups, employees tended to have a more varied perception of safety with 7.3% indicating they felt unsafe, 25.1% indicating neither safe nor unsafe, and 67.2% feeling safe. The perception of feeling safe skewed higher with residents (79.1%) and visitors (77.4%) tending to feel safer in Downtown.
When asked about which parking garage and lot-related improvements are most desired, the top three of nine suggested improvements were real-time parking information delivered to message boards (44.5%), message board street signs directing drivers to available parking (39.9%), and safety improvements (38.5%). A significant number of respondents indicated the desire for mobile applications directing to available parking (31.7%) and more options to pay to park (29.8%).

A total of 230 “other” options were provided, of which 38% indicated the need for additional parking spaces and garages in Downtown, 7% felt the need for free or reduced cost of parking.

The vast majority of respondents (72.1%) indicated that they paid for their own parking in Downtown during their most recent visit. Only 13.6% of respondents indicated their employer paid for parking. Only 4.8% indicated they parked for free. 1.9% indicated a merchant paid for their parking, and less than .5% had a client pay for their parking.

A total of 95 “other” responses were received. Of those, 11% indicated they share their parking expense with their employer.
Overall, the majority (55.1%) of respondents indicated that availability of parking does not influence the time of day they visit Downtown; however, a significant portion (36.3%) said it does influence their decision.
The vast majority of respondents indicated walking (96.9%) from their parking spot to their final destination. Separated into groups, only residents showed a somewhat significant use of other services including the Downtowner (14.3%) and rideshare (5.5%) to get from their parking spot to their final destination.

How did you get from your parking spot to your destination during your most recent visit to Downtown? (Check all that apply)

- Walking
- Downtowner
- HART
- In-Towner
- Coast Bike
- Streetcar
- Taxi
- Ride share
- Other

Visitors  Residents  Employees  Overall
The survey invited respondents to provide an open-ended response to the question: Is there anything else you would like to add to help improve your Downtown Tampa parking experience? The purpose was to gain information regarding respondents major concerns and issues above and beyond what was to be gathered in this survey.

General themes regarding perception of and suggestions for parking in Downtown Tampa fell into seven general categories including:

- More parking
- Information and technology
- Safety and security
- Street and garage improvements
- Traffic and routing
- Public Transit, Bike, and Pedestrian
- Cost of parking
Of the 701 open-ended responses, 323 (41%) indicated the need for more parking in Downtown Tampa including more garages. Many of the responses expressed a need for more parking in the River Arts District around the Straz Center, Patel Conservatory, Curtis Hixon Park, and Germany Library. Several respondents specified the need for more parking for handicapped parking and senior citizens who do not have the ability to walk several blocks. Many expressed the need to build parking garages on existing surface level parking lots to accommodate additional automobiles.

Information and technology emerged as a topic many respondents felt needed attention. Of the 53 (7.6%) responses in this category, a large number indicated the need for better real-time parking information. Expanding the use of technology could include the use of mobile applications, electronic signs, and easier to use parking meters/pay stations. Many expressed the desire for expanding options to pay for parking including the use of services such as Apple Pay. A few respondents also mentioned that parking payment machines occasionally do not function properly.

While the vast majority of participants felt safe in Downtown Tampa, as indicated in the results of the survey, safety and security did emerge as a theme. A large number of those providing responses felt homeless made them feel unsafe. Several participants also expressed a need for better lighting in Downtown and the need to clean up trash and debris on streets and in garages.

In the category of street and garage improvements, of the 20 responses, the majority indicated the need for better maintenance of garages and lots. This would include cleaning of litter. Some responses felt there is a need for wider parking spaces to accommodate larger vehicles.

Seventy-six (10.8%) responses dealt with traffic and routing in Downtown Tampa. The majority of responses stated how difficult it could be to exit parking garages after a special event, and many respondents mentioned that overlapping events cause additional delays. Many felt the City could do a better job improving traffic flow during special events in and around parking garages. Better timing for traffic lights to accommodate traffic flow in and out of Downtown during special events was also mentioned by several respondents.

A significant portion of respondents (11.4%) voiced their desire for transportation options to and from Downtown Tampa. Responses indicated the need for more transit including bus and rail, more Downtowner vehicles and the expansion of the Downtowner program to a wider area, and more bicycle infrastructure and bike parking.

Moreover, the cost of parking emerged as a general category with 58 survey takers (8.3%) Most stated their desire for a reduction in the cost of parking or even providing free parking.

---

Project Team

Tony LaColla, AICP, Principal Planner, Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission
Vanko Antonov, University of South Florida Graduate Fellow, Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission
Brandon Berry, University of South Florida Graduate Fellow, Metropolitan Planning Organization