



By Keith Hutchings and Christopher Perry, CAPP

WHEN WE SPEAK ABOUT CURB EQUITY, we are not speaking about proportional access to the curb. If access were proportional, national delivery fleets would dominate all loading zones and cars would dominate all other on-street inventory. When we speak about curb equity, we are referring to equitable access to the curb within an ecosystem that is aware and considers the various people, business, and vehicles that utilize the curb. Curb space is limited and the competition for this space increases almost daily. Parking administrators and policy makers work with their staffs to craft policy that addresses this added volume but must also consider the downstream effects of these policies. What do we do to accommodate the increase in delivery vehicles? How do we best manage TNC drop-offs and pick-ups? When viewing things through this prism of curb equity, we must also answer questions like how curbside regulations affect the people using the curb? Are we treating all of the citizenship equitably? Did this new initiative disproportionately affect the business community?

To fully define curb equity, we must consider all parties with interests in the curb. In the past, curb space was primarily the domain of vehicle parking, commercial deliveries, public transportation, and taxicabs. The planning of that space was a simpler proposition. Today the competition for curb space is intense and

driven by both economic development and technology. As economic development increases, more types of commerce, entertainment, and governance expand the number of people accessing curb. There is a symbiotic relationship between the delivery companies, the businesses to which they deliver, and the consumers



on which those businesses rely, that must be considered when developing a curb management program. True curb equity will address not only the vehicular traffic at the curb but also include the economic and social results of the policy decisions. How will the [installation of a parklet](#) affect the neighboring businesses? Does the removal of on-street inventory place undue economic hardship on some drivers? By taking a holistic approach, regulations can be developed that respect all of the parties access to the curbside ecosystem.

Equal Access to all Motorists

Often, the influences driving curbside decisions negatively affect citizens with lower disposable incomes. These results, while not intentional, do come at a cost for some. When a citizen with less disposable income contemplates a

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downtown trip, cost becomes a major factor. Eliminating dedicated curbside parking reduces economical parking options for this demographic. While off-street parking options can replace some parking availability, it comes at a cost premium. The difference between a couple of dollars and upwards of \$10 or \$20 can be the determining factor in making this trip. Therefore, continued elimination of curbside parking may be a deterrent for some.

Regularly overlooked in the curb programming discussion is the access challenge faced by the ADA community.

Many citizens with ADA needs can only have their needs addressed with curbside accommodations. As on-street parking is removed, so is ADA access for citizens, making it challenging for the demographic to frequent areas that don't support access. When cities grapple with curb management, lost in the discussion of commercial traffic, transportation and mobility is access for the ADA community. In these three scenarios, equity access can be negatively impacted when the only focus is access to emerging transportation, mobility, and commercial delivery platforms.



Destination and non-destination realities translate to the need for coordinated efforts in economic development and curbside planning.



Equity for Business and Entertainment

Both large and small businesses need the delivery of goods and services to support their operations and, in turn, rely on their customers' ability to access the diverse businesses and entertainment venues to complete the business cycle. Changes made to curbside access impact this paradigm, but not always in an equitable fashion. Large business and entertainment venues are not affected in the same manner as smaller entities. Much like a mall, the curb has anchor or "destination" entities that draw traffic to the area. These destination operations are not affected by limited curbside parking at the same level as non-destination entities. The consumers patronizing the destination ventures are often willing to make more effort to support the entity. However, non-destination ventures may find consumers unwilling to park further away and walk, limiting the economic development of smaller entities. Great care must be taken when planning out curb usage or smaller operations will be challenged. Destination and non-destination realities translate to the need for coordinated efforts in economic development and curbside planning.

As a corridor develops, decisions related to its design reduce or intensify the pressure at the curb. Municipalities are under great strain to approve development projects that add to the tax base of the locality. Often developers, especially those planning mixed use buildings, lobby local planners to reduce parking requirements and provide zoning variants. Reducing parking requirements is a common method to support developers. Unfortunately, the practice often creates added pressure and congestion at the curb.

If the city's planning, transportation and parking entities work together, adequate parking for a proposed project could become a benefit rather than a liability. More parking could assist the developer in obtaining financing because of the additional revenue generated. Coupled with a parking plan that pushes the public to utilize the additional parking requirement, pressure at the curb can be reduced as the economic development projects increase profitability. The benefits to this approach encourage individuals to visit more frequently thereby increasing business viability and higher residential quality of. As curb pressure is reduced, commercial ventures are more successful, and residential units become more desirable. But such efforts only address part of the curb congestion challenge.

Efficient Vehicular Access

The types of vehicles vying for access to the curb vary almost as much as the services these vehicles perform. Gone are the days when car storage was the

key use case for the curb. In fact, car storage often suffers at the hand of new policy that makes way for new vehicles at the curb.

It is estimated that FedEx and UPS deliver more than 7 billion packages annually, and that individual drivers can deliver between 100 and 125 packages daily. This doesn't include other fleets such as Amazon and USPS. TNCs also contribute heavily to the curbside usage, with Uber alone accounting for 1.4 billion trips per quarter. Throw in bike-sharing programs and scooter storage and one can see why the competition for this space is so high. It is clear to see how these vehicles and volumes stress curbside inventory, however, we must not forget about other, more traditional uses for this real estate.

Buses require a tremendous amount of curb space for stops and the area preceding the actual bus stop. This large area is required for the safe loading and unloading of passengers, but it only used for a fraction of the day when buses are actually present and, in some circumstances, mass transit reserves the entire curbside lanes for BRT traffic lanes during rush hour. There is no question that public transportation provides benefits to riders and helps reduce congestion, but the curbside real estate it requires can affect other vehicular access.

The previously mentioned categories of vehicles present a more dynamic visit to the curb. TNCs and buses visit the curb in high volume for short durations of time. This is in contrast to more static uses such as car parking, disabled parking, construction vehicles, utility vehicles, and food trucks. Let's not forget to include parklets and curbside dining. Are they vehicles?

When examining all of the vehicles and reasons for them to access the curb, it quickly becomes clear how overcrowding occurs. Unfortunately, the solution to this problem is not so clear and the dynamic-vs.-static use of the curb only complicates matters. All these vehicles are necessary and have a role in a vibrant curb and business ecosystem and developing policy that provides equitable access is crucial to a healthy curbside environment.

Evolution of Interdependent Relationships

There is an interdependence among the various parties that interact and manage the curb. At the foundation of this is the relationship between the people and vehicles using the curb and the public policy in place to support these activities. Without proper alignment, the activities the policy is supporting will not be successful. An example of this is the relationship between

businesses, consumers, and delivery vehicles. All of these parties rely on one another and essentially use the same curb space to meet their objectives. Businesses need goods delivered to fulfill their customers' orders and consumers need access to the curb in order to patronize local businesses. There is a finite amount of curb real estate where this interaction occurs and maintaining a balance between these objectives is key.

Public policy is the beginning and creates the framework for these interactions. Defined loading zones and parking time limits are examples of policy that creates this framework. Once the policy is created, it must be monitored by operational and enforcement teams to ensure that regulations are being adhered to. Enforcement of the parking rules and regulations is an essential part of a healthy curb environment but let us not oversimplify that process. Enforcement is not just writing tickets for rule violations. These teams often act as the ambassadors and are the face of the parking operations teams. These departments also rely on various technologies to fulfill their duties. A mismatch between enforcement technology and curbside payment of reservation protocols will lead to failure of the program. When considering the relationship the enforcement teams have on this ecosystem, it becomes clear that their involvement in the entire process is a key to success.

The mobility infrastructure, whether parking meters, electric scooters, or reservation platforms, are all provided by suppliers with individual business models and objectives. Additionally, companies such as TNCs or fleet delivery companies that access the curb, also have their own business objectives. These business objectives are often in contrast to public policy initiatives, but they must be considered. Electric scooters contribute to the mobility ecosystem by providing users with an alternative to the last mile of their commute. Riders create value for the scooter company through usage and the scooters create value for the rider by adding convenience. But what if the scooters were only stored in designated areas? Would this still be valuable to the rider? Could this erode the business model of the company?

Maintaining a harmonious curbside program requires well planned public policy, consideration of the individual businesses and persons accessing the curb, and the ongoing support of the operational or enforcement staff. Concerted effort will be required to develop consensus on the competing segment biases.

What Does it All Mean?

All parties come to the curb discussion from a point of bias. Maybe we even came into this article with some bias. Parking people want to keep parking rather than redistribute it

to public transportation and TNC needs. Public transportation and TNC segments are primarily focused on dropping and picking up passengers regardless of the curb disruption. Micro-mobility segments want valuable permanent curb space even if it is only used a portion of the year in cold weather cities. And development segments focus on driving new projects at the expense of increasing curb congestion. All needs are valid and necessary but if the proper mix is not chosen, unintended consequences can derail a municipality's larger goals of economic growth.

To create effective curbside policy there must first be a full understanding of the curbside activity. Currently, most efforts rely on limited data to make costly policy changes. Incomplete or inaccurate data provide the conditions for segment biases

to drive policy rather than authentic real time information. Policy needs to match the actual activity, not to perceived activity. Data points that outline the actual activity is the beginning to matching policy with activity and will be the springboard for intelligent technological decisions.

Many parties have influences on the curb and understanding all the stakeholder needs is critical. One must also think through the cause and effect of policy decisions.

Care must be taken not to forget about income and ADA constituents needs as we work to solve the every changing curb usage requirements. Failure could create two classes of people; those who access congested centers and those for which access is challenged.

Key in solving this dilemma is the establishment of a priority list. Deciding upfront what the key objectives and priorities are will keep the ongoing policy decisions within the determined roadmap. Every segment needs to be examined within this roadmap and access should be based on data to ensure that space most efficiently used to support all curb segments. Understanding that each area may have a different set of priorities is an important realization. ♦



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