



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

CC: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
Robert Goode, P.E., Assistant City Manager

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director,
Austin Transportation Department 

DATE: January 6, 2017

SUBJECT: Proposed extension of downtown parking hours to include Wednesday nights

In an effort to improve parking availability, the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) is proposing to extend meter hours for City-owned, on-street parking spaces downtown to include Wednesday nights. This change was anticipated in the Fiscal Year 2016-17 budget approved by City Council in Sept. 2016.

In early 2017, ATD will seek City Council approval for the extension and, if approved, will implement it thereafter. All added revenue would be directed toward improving congestion and safety for all road users throughout Austin. In the meantime, ATD will continue its engagement of various downtown stakeholders and report to City Council on its findings.

Background

Per Austin City Code § 12-3-5 (Time Limits on Paid Parking), paid parking time limits for spaces located within the downtown area (bounded by Lady Bird Lake, I-35, 10th Street, and Lamar Boulevard) are in effect Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 6:01 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.; and Saturday, 11:01 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. The forthcoming proposed ordinance would extend these hours to include Wednesday from 6:01 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.

In 2015, ATD conducted parking surveys of the core downtown district (a slightly smaller area bounded by Cesar Chavez Street, I-35, 10th Street and Lamar Boulevard) and found metered parking to be occupied at 97 percent of capacity during daytime parking hours and above 85 percent of capacity on Wednesday nights in many areas. These findings exceed parking management best practices, which indicate that parking should remain at or below 85 percent of capacity and/or that one or two spaces should remain open per block face.

In order to help create more parking turnover to increase parking availability, City Council approved ATD's request in the Fiscal Year 2015-16 budget to increase on-street, metered

parking rates downtown from \$1 per hour to \$1.20 per hour. ATD implemented this change in May 2016, after receiving positive feedback from various downtown stakeholders, including the Downtown Austin Alliance, during meetings that took place between Dec. 2015 and Jan. 2016. During those same meetings, ATD discussed the possibility of extending meter hours to include Wednesday evenings. This, too, was met with positive feedback. In addition, a Feb. 2016 Conversation Corps installment on the subjects found that “there was support and understanding of parking rate increases and Wednesday night changes, but also hesitation concerning lower income residents and other implications.”

More recently, the Downtown Austin Alliance released a report in Nov. 2016 which found that, despite the rate increase, “at most times, on-street parking is underpriced.”

Process

As part of the Fiscal Year 2016-17 budget adoption process, City Council anticipated extending parking hours for on-street, metered parking spaces downtown to include Wednesday nights from 6 p.m. to midnight to help increase parking availability during this period as well as normal hours.

ATD provided a memo to City Council in March 2012 indicating that turnover on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings from 5 p.m. until midnight increased after the City extended parking hours in 2011 to include Thursday and Friday from 6 p.m. to midnight and Saturday from 11 a.m. to midnight. Staff estimates that 6,000 more customers had access to on-street parking per night than previously recorded and concludes that drivers were roughly three times more likely to find available on-street parking due to managed meters.

Moreover, staff concludes that the change did not appear to negatively impact downtown businesses, as area sales tax and mixed beverage tax receipts increased by 9.7 and 16.3 percent, respectively, between the final tax quarter of 2010 and the final tax quarter of 2011.

However, in order to alleviate affordability concerns and mitigate the effects of the rate increase and proposed Wednesday night extension on Austin service and entertainment industry employees, ATD introduced a new, discounted parking pilot program, called the Affordable Parking Program, in May 2016. Eligible employees in this industry are able to purchase a night-time parking pass at the City-owned Waller Creek Center garage, located at 10th Street and I-35, for \$35 per month, instead of paying on-street parking costs, which could cost as much as \$86 per month under current hours or \$115 per month under extended hours. As part of the program launch, ATD communicated with stakeholders, including representatives for the Red River Cultural District Merchants Association, Austin Music People and ATX Safer Streets, and published information and applications at austintexas.gov/page/affordable-parking-program.

Next Steps

ATD will notify downtown stakeholders of its Wednesday night proposal and allow feedback prior to presenting an ordinance to City Council for consideration in early 2017. The Wednesday night parking changes, if approved, would be implemented thereafter.