



# THINKING BEYOND PARKING

*is Thinking for Parking*

**A** About four years ago, I attended a one-day conference focused on the future of city and transit. Present at the meeting were the city's mayor's office, transportation department, transit agency, and planning commission. However, when I looked around the room I noticed that there was no one from the parking authority; even though this particular city had one of the largest and most innovative parking authorities around.

Not surprisingly, as soon as the panel discussion began, the issue of parking was brought up. It was the only common thread among all of these groups, yet they all thought of it as someone else's issue, or as one similar to an act of God – something no one could do anything about, but rather a problem they would all just have to live with.

The transportation department thought they had the answer: get rid of all of the parking in the city so people will just ride the train. However, this would require a tremendous amount of parking around the train stations in the urban and suburban areas.

BY TIMOTHY H. HAAHS

The City argued that they needed ample parking spaces throughout the day and night, in order to encourage people to come downtown and keep the city vibrant. They also argued that most shoppers and restaurant-goers will be unlikely to go back home late in the evening using the train.

And so the debate went on. In essence, it became a seminar on parking. However, as I said, there was no one there from any parking agency. They hadn't even been invited. Even more interesting is the fact that I don't think it ever even occurred to anyone else to invite them. My belief is that most of the city agencies thought of the parking authority not as planners who could make an impact and contribute greatly to these conversations, but more as parking operators and maintenance people.

Parking authorities today need to think beyond just "parking." Thinking beyond parking is thinking for parking. The time has come where parking itself cannot be allowed to be "compartmentalized" from the rest of the city's disciplines or agencies when planning for future urban improvements and development. Parking professionals, parking authorities in particular, need to go beyond parking by thinking about planning, collaboration, and teamwork.

Two years ago, IPI recognized this need, and adopted a new vision statement which reads: "Leading and connecting pro-

fessionals in a dynamic multi-modal world." We need to go beyond parking, and become professionals and agencies that connect all transportation modes including airports, bus terminals, railways, and ferries. In addition, we need to promote and play an integral role in creating a vision, and planning for economic redevelopment in the cities and municipalities we serve. We need to be invited to the table. We need to go beyond just

maintaining, operating, and building parking.

The idea of zoning came about in the early 1900s as a major city planning effort in order to alleviate the problems which resulted from building during the Industrial Revolution. However, the 1950 and 60's brought about suburban sprawl, in which many Americans migrated to the suburbs, where they had to rely on cars as their primary means of transportation.

Today, our land is compartmentalized into several zones, particularly commercial, industrial, residential, and manufacturing areas. In addition, we have another major unwritten natural phenomenon that compartmentalizes us like that of zoning. That is the issue of race and social disparity between the rich and the poor.

This latter phenomenon is not as evident in European and Asian countries as it is here in the United States. There the poor and rich co-exist, and race is less of an issue than it is here.

Can we go beyond race? Can we go beyond social disparity? Can we go beyond zoning? In other words, can we go beyond

We can go beyond parking by fighting to cast the vision of creating walkable, livable, people places. In the suburbs, most of this "new village" concept is created by developers. However, in the cities and urban areas where the land is limited, parking agencies with a vision in line with the city's administration can have a major impact on creating such a place.

The City of Rahway, New Jersey did just this.

Rahway desired to revitalize their urban city. The City Hall, located just one block away from the train station, was old, outdated, and in need of a new facility. However, they lacked the funding to build a new one.

A new city library was constructed on the site a few years ago, with the top two floors designated for office space, which remained vacant, yet large enough for the City Hall to relocate. A new and larger police station was also needed. In between the library and City Hall is a community recreation center requiring sufficient and convenient parking.

It would have been easy to satisfy just Rahway's parking needs. However, there was enough land to build a structure with room to provide for their needs now and in the future.

This is when the parking authority decided to go beyond just parking. The parking authority, together with the city's administration, cast the vision of creating a "people place." They went to office building owners and cast a new vision for Rahway. They spoke to other city agencies, the



Opposite: Shopping District; The new Shopping District at the Rahway Town Center will serve as an attractive destination for residents and visitors of Rahway. Top: Garage – The mixed-use parking structure at the Rahway Town Center will provide much needed parking for the area. Above: Plaza Close-Up – The close-up of the main street plaza gives a more detailed view of the many new attractions at the Rahway Town Center.

of retail space, as well as 400 residential units. The plan has already served as a catalyst for redevelopment in the city. As new businesses begin to move into the area, it will help to draw others who will want to be located there as well. This will no doubt help to drastically improve the economy of the area, as visitors and residents alike will want to be there.

The City of Rahway has transformed the way municipalities and parking authorities will look at development in the future. The Rahway Town Center project began as a simple parking structure project, but has evolved into the complete redevelopment and improvement of the central business district of Rahway.

This project shows how the idea for a simple parking garage construction can evolve into the development of an entire region. The Rahway project centered around the integration of parking, while incorporating numerous features which will help to draw residents and visitors of Rahway to the area for years to come.

Yes, we can go beyond parking. We must! ■

**Timothy H. Haahs, P.E.**, is President of Timothy Haahs & Associates, Inc. (TimHaahs), a multi-disciplined engineering and architectural firm specializing in the planning, design, and restoration of parking and mixed-use structures. Tim has over 20 years of experience in the parking industry, and he currently serves on the Board of Directors for the International Parking Institute.



# CAN THE PARKING AGENCIES GO BEYOND PARKING?

parking? We must!

The question is: Can the parking agencies go beyond parking? The answer is yes. They are in the driver's seat. In most cases, they own the land, and have the ability to seek state funds for economic development.

We can go beyond parking. We can go beyond building just one simple "municipal" parking structure where the battle is fought with those who wave the banner saying, "No parking garage in my back yard."

transit agency, and a church located at the same intersection. They also invited a local developer to help cast the vision of creating a walkable place where people would want to live, shop, dine, and walk to the train. At the same time, the vision went beyond the zoning by integrating the government civic center, housing, retail, hotel, and restaurants.

This vision of going beyond parking for the town center is currently in the

master planning stage, and has received preliminary approval. The plan will result in the creation of a new "public square." The entire development has been built around the planned parking structures, and funding was available because of its close proximity to the transit station.

The Rahway Town Center will feature a number of attractions which will draw people from the City, as well as the surrounding regions. It will include a civic

plaza, outdoor theater, shopping district, residential units, the new police station, and a variety of entertainment venues. The community will mirror European style with pedestrian walkways, plazas, and sidewalk cafes drawing people together.

The town center will positively contribute to the economic vitality of the City of Rahway. The project will drastically increase the size of Rahway's downtown business district, adding 175,000 square feet

Reprints of this article can be ordered by emailing [ipi@parking.org](mailto:ipi@parking.org).