

# MUNICIPAL OFF-STREET PARKING SYSTEMS

## in the New York Metropolitan Region

REGIONAL PLAN BULLETIN

AUGUST 1950

NUMBER 76

Finding a place to park a car is America's No. 1 municipal headache.

But a large number of communities in the Metropolitan Region are taking measures to reduce or eliminate that headache. This bulletin tells the story of actual accomplishment in 60 of these municipalities.

The average person reading of the notable examples of off-street parking progress—San Francisco's underground garage, Washington's garage-office building and New York's huge garage at the Manhattan entrance of the new Brooklyn-Battery vehicular tunnel—gathers the impression that the off-street parking problem is being solved only in a few places and only by spectacular steps.

Actually, progress here in the Region is widespread. Many places, both large and small, well-to-do and of modest means, have determined that their older business areas shall not be abandoned to obsolescence and decay.

In most communities, including those reported in this bulletin, some parking areas have been set up by merchants, industries, theatres and other private establishments. However, this bulletin reports the progress that municipalities are making with off-street parking as a public responsibility—as an adjunct to the public street system.

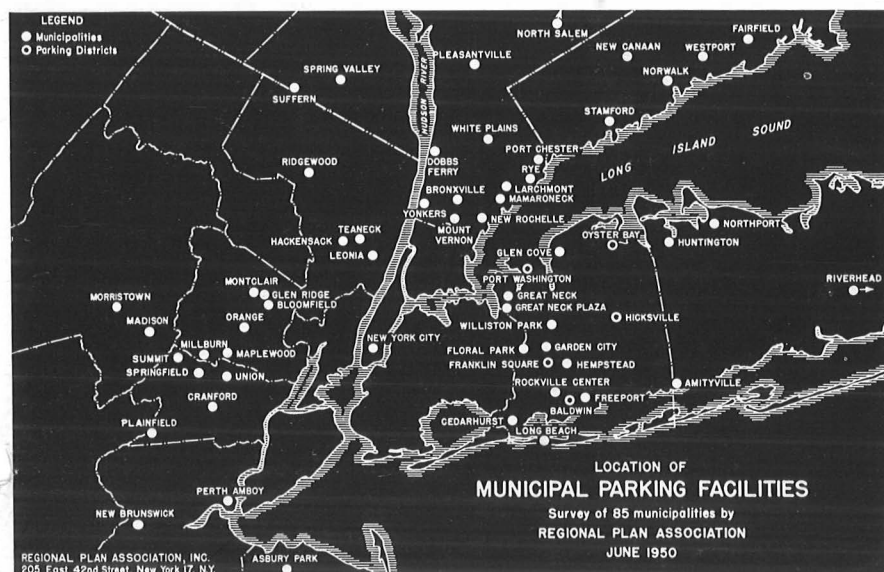
### Off-street Parking Rapidly Increasing

While a few pioneering communities established municipal parking facilities as long as 20 or 25 years ago, it was not until about 1938 that more general municipal interest and action became evident. Since 1945, however, each year has brought a greater increase both in number of fields and in new capacity.

Six new public parking fields were

established in 1945, 10 in 1946, 21 in 1947, 23 in 1948 and 43 in 1949. The corresponding figures for new parking capacity range from 468 in 1945 to 4,710 in 1949.

The year 1950 promises to be active: 29 new public off-street parking fields were established in the first three months; the new parking capacity established during the first quarter of 1950 is already larger than for any previous year.



### HIGHLIGHTS

Municipal off-street parking facilities have been established in 60 of the 84 municipalities of the New York Metropolitan Region checked by the RPA.



Since the end of the war these communities have invested a total of \$6,500,000 in municipal parking fields. Of this amount 64 per cent was spent since January 1, 1949.



During 1949, 43 new municipal parking fields were established and 29 more in the first three months of 1950.



The average municipal parking field has spaces for 120 cars and cost \$42,000.

Of those established since the end of the war, the average capacity is 146 cars and represents an investment of \$75,600.



Municipal off-street parking produces increased business, increased land values and added income to pay for itself.



Most municipal parking facilities were financed by general taxation, through bond issues and current budgets.



The vast majority of municipal parking areas in the Region are free. Fewer than 20 per cent charge a fee.

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This survey and study of municipal parking systems was made by Frederick P. Clark, Planning Director of the Association, assisted by W. E. Uptegrove. Maps and charts are by G. A. Schiller.

\$600,000 bond issue authorized in 1947. Three-quarters of the cost of the bonds for the five new fields is met by assessments on benefited property and 25 per cent by the entire village. Total investment in parking fields to date is \$737,000.

Yonkers, N. Y. (152,533) has completed its first field—for 380 cars and costing about \$825,000. The cost is high, but the site has long been a problem area because of blight. The new use solves that problem while providing much-needed off-street space. Financing is by bond issue, although half the land acquisition costs are covered by assessments on benefited business district property.

### Capital Reserve Funds and Meter Income

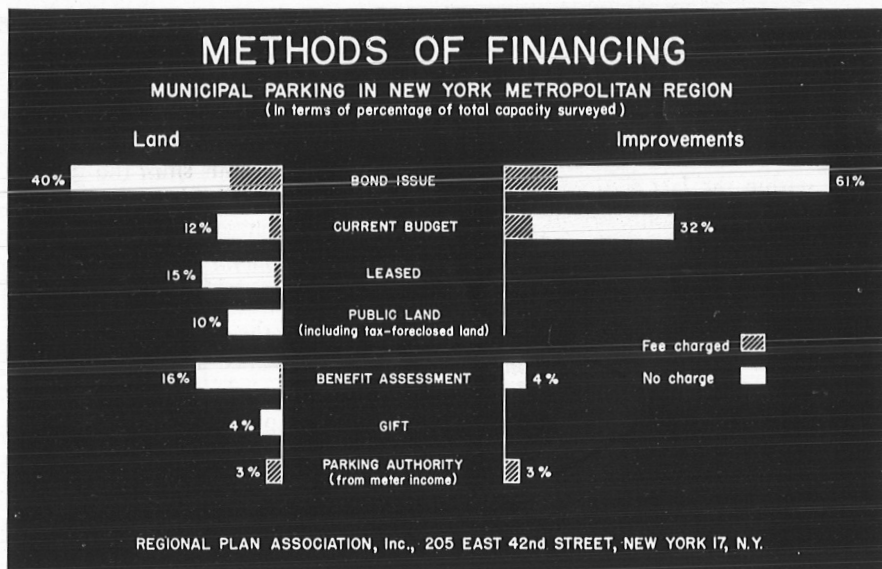
White Plains, N. Y. (43,581) since the end of the war has developed a system of eight fields for 724 cars, the first opened in 1946. Another field, being acquired, will add 67 spaces.

In 1947 a Parking Authority was established with an agreement that it would receive the income from street parking meters as well as fees collected at its own facilities. With this guaranteed income, the Authority was empowered to issue bonds up to one million dollars. However, it has not yet taken advantage of this power, deciding to proceed gradually. The only money it has used for its program beyond the receipts from parking meters (which amounted to approximately \$100,000 in 1949) has been borrowed without interest from capital reserve funds of the City.

The combination of these financial arrangements and the use of several pieces of city-owned property has enabled the Authority to add eight fields to the original one established by the City. It is planning further expansion to meet the very great needs of its shopping center.

### Public Subscription

At Spring Valley, N. Y. (4,308) a new 600-car field has been established as part of a new park created on the site of a former village dump. Funds to reclaim this land were raised by popular subscription. Improvements for parking cost the Village \$20,000 and were included in the Village budget. The location is adjacent to



the main shopping street and the capacity is expected to serve needs of the business section for years to come.

### Parking Districts

Within recent years a number of unincorporated places in Long Island towns have felt the need for off-street parking fields. Being unincorporated, they cannot provide the facilities themselves, but some towns have solved that problem by creating special "parking districts." Under this arrangement the town constructs the parking field and property owners within the special district pay for it. Generally the town issues bonds and then assesses property owners of the district to cover amortization costs. Seven such districts have been created in Nassau County: at Franklin Square, Baldwin, Port Washington, Manhasset, Oyster Bay, Hicksville, and Massapequa. Of these, Manhasset and Massapequa have not yet established fields, but all the others have.

### Merchant Cooperation

Huntington, L. I. (46,678) has acquired three of its twelve fields through the cooperation of the Huntington Business Men's Association, formed to help meet the parking problem. The group used funds subscribed by local businessmen to buy and develop these three key locations in the business district. The Town then purchased the fields at cost, with payment in 10 annual installments from current budgets. The

twelve fields have a total capacity of 682 cars.

This procedure amounts to loaning funds to the Town without interest and is basically that followed in New Brunswick, N.J., where the business men purchased city bonds bearing no interest.

### New York City

In 1947, the City of New York put into temporary use a free parking field for 3,000 cars on part of the 1939 World's Fair site at Flushing Meadow to encourage use of the subway from that point to the center of the city. It is planned to rehabilitate the field for permanent use for about 2,500 cars on a fee basis.

In 1948, a temporary field for about 550 cars was opened on Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn on space cleared for eventual construction of the Brooklyn Civic Center.

The seven-story Battery Parking Garage constructed by the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority in conjunction with the new Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel accommodates 1,050 cars and cost about \$3,500,000. It is leased for private operation. Parking fees vary with the time a car is left parked. Some garage users will be able to rent reserved space by the month.

In Flushing a field is planned for a site acquired near the business district in connection with a new housing project. When the houses are completed, existing buildings on the field site will be demolished and parking space developed.

## SPECIAL ASPECTS

### Planned System Essential

The survey discloses that a great many communities, notable as their progress has been, have been developing off-street fields on a hit-or-miss basis. The location and size of fields has been determined by where a parcel of land has happened to be available, and obtainable at a cheap price.

Therefore, a number of parking fields are inconveniently located or woefully inadequate. For example, in Mt. Vernon, N.Y., the City recently established a metered lot intended to serve the main business district. It was never used enough to justify its existence and the City sold the property. Apparently it was just too far from the stores (about 800 feet) and was considered inconvenient by shoppers.

Another disadvantage of the piecemeal program lies in the fact that the establishment of a first parking lot in an area increases the value of property within easy walking distance. The community then has to pay an inflated price to acquire property for another lot in that section. A community increases the cost of meeting the parking problem unless it acquires all needed land in a given section of the business district, even though it may intend to develop only part of it initially for parking.

A planned program, moreover, will take into account the future needs of the business district, so that areas for off-street parking can be reserved in advance and can be so located as to promote the most advantageous growth of the business district.

### Increased Property Values Pay for Parking Fields

Probably the most important way of financing off-street parking is through the increased property values created. Where parking facilities have been well-planned and properly established, available experience indicates that the resulting increase in business activity and values produces enough additional tax income to pay off the costs of the parking systems.

For example, in Bronxville, N. Y., the increased business resulting from the establishment of municipal parking fields has increased the business district property valuation about 25 per cent, adding about \$59,000 to annual local tax income. This is more

than double the annual charges on the bond issue used to acquire and build the parking areas.

In Garden City, N. Y., where a system of municipal parking areas has been in operation since 1938, the assessed valuation of business property served by these parking fields has more than doubled, while assessed valuation in the village as a whole has increased only 17 per cent. The added business valuation over and above that which might be attributed to normal village growth is producing annually about \$40,000 in increased local tax revenue. Although the Village's parking fields were largely financed by assessment of benefiting properties, the amount of added local tax income since 1938 has already totalled more than the cost of the entire system of parking fields.

Another example is New Canaan, Conn., where local retail sales jumped from \$4,216,000 in 1940 to \$19,100,000 in 1947-48. Allowing for the change in the price level, this represents a tripling of local retail volume and local businessmen consider the establishment of adequate, well-located parking space as the most important factor.

### Parking Meters

Available information indicates that about 60 of the Region's 550 municipalities are employing parking meters to ration the use of curb space in their business districts.

In 1949, coins collected by the meters of these 60 communities totalled about \$1,500,000. Except for White Plains, N.Y., apparently none of these places specifically allocates meter receipts for the acquisition and development of off-street facilities.

It has become general practice to place the receipts in the general fund of the municipality and to use them for general budget purposes, rather than for the further alleviation of the parking problem.

Some of the places that have curbside parking meters and have also established off-street parking may look upon the cost of the latter as being offset by a part of the parking meter revenues, but a questionnaire survey discloses none that specifically allocate current revenues for that purpose.

Parking meters generally increase turnover in use of curb parking space and aid in police enforcement. How-

ever, they do not in themselves solve the parking problem. Only the establishment of an adequate amount of well-located parking space will do that.

The net income from the average parking meter (over and above necessary costs in connection with them) is sufficient to pay for the establishment of one and a half average-cost free off-street parking spaces.

Estimated Average Income  
Per Meter (Net)\*  
\$45-50

Estimated Annual Debt Service For Average-  
Cost Off-street Parking Space†  
\$31

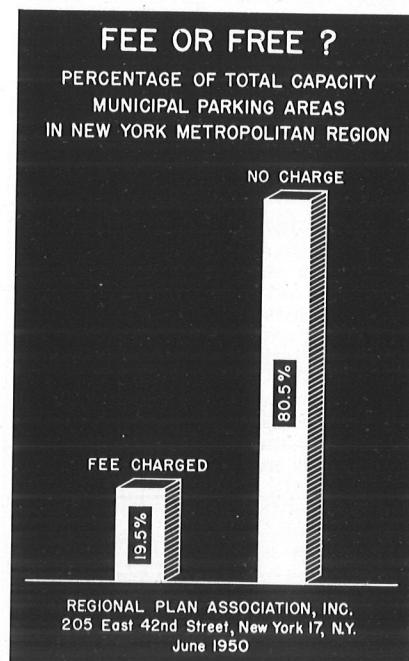
\*Assuming average net income at 80% of gross revenue from meters.  
†Assuming average cost of \$520 per space, 20 year bond issue at 2% interest.

This means that an average community with 500 curb meters would be able to finance 750 free off-street spaces without added taxes for the purpose. If a charge is made for the off-street parking, a considerably greater amount of such space could be established without added tax cost to the people of the community.

A recognition of this point should encourage citizens to work for application of the income of meters, over and above their costs of maintenance and operation, toward creation of adequate off-street fields and a real attempt to solve the parking problem.

### Parking Authorities

A few municipalities of the Region have tried or are trying to establish





off-street parking through authorities, which are devices to take the financing of these facilities outside the municipal budget and debt limit.

While the record of the authority device for off-street parking purposes to date has not been generally encouraging, this would seem to be due to the idea that these agencies can and should be self-supporting. The fact that most parking authority bonds are not marketable, except perhaps at extremely high rates of interest, is due largely to the fact that estimates of reliable income from operation of an authority's proposed facilities have not been sufficient to meet the costs of building and operation.

It would seem that this method of trying to finance off-street parking deprives the operation of one of the major sources of income to be derived from the existence of the facilities—namely, the increased tax revenue from the increased property valuations created by the parking facilities.

At least part of the financing of municipal parking facilities should be looked upon as coming from tax income—recognized perhaps by an initial agreement on the part of the municipality to help finance the facilities. This might be done by assigning net revenues from curb meters, by appropriating a certain amount of money each year to the parking authority, or by acquiring and turning over parking area sites to the authority for development and operation.

The two parking authorities of the Region that have produced results (White Plains, N.Y., and New Brunswick, N.J.) have received financial assistance outside their own operations. The former receives financial

assistance from the City in the form of meter revenues and interest-free loans. The latter has received the benefit of an interest-free bond issue through the purchase of the Authority's bonds on that basis by the local merchants.

Available information indicates parking authorities have also been established in Paterson, Hackensack and Passaic in New Jersey and in Peekskill, N.Y. A New York City Parking Authority has been authorized, but not yet established.

### Zoning

Relatively little use has yet been made of zoning as a means of insuring off-street parking space in this Metropolitan Region. There are some examples that are worth noting, however. No complete survey of such provisions has been made.

In Union Township, N.J., Darien and Greenwich, Conn., Amityville, North Hempstead, and White Plains, N.Y., zoning ordinances have been amended to require all new buildings generating traffic to provide appropriate off-street parking and loadingspace.

In the Town of Hempstead, N.Y., it is reported to be Town policy, where zoning changes are needed to establish new shopping centers, to require as a condition of any such change that the new development provide two square feet of off-street parking space for each square foot of floor space. These areas must be suitably improved and paved and dedicated to the Town as public parking areas. According to town officials several such parking fields have been established, but it has not been possible to obtain specific information.

In Great Neck Plaza, N.Y., the zoning ordinance was amended in 1949 to require the provision of off-street space by new developments in a particular section of the village zoned for business and considered ripe for development. In contrast to the usual method of requiring a certain amount of parking space in relation to floor space, tending to create separate lots for each store, this village attempted by zoning to set aside land for a system of parking fields.

Under the amendment, "parking districts" are defined as a distinct type of land use (similar to classifications of residential, business or industrial) and on the map three such districts are delineated.

## Regional Plan Bulletin

AUGUST 1950

NUMBER 76

\$2.00 a copy

REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION, INC.  
205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

*... A non-profit, research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New Jersey - New York - Connecticut Metropolitan Region.*

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### Detailed Information Available

Space limitations prevent inclusion here of nine-tenths of the data assembled with regard to the off-street parking developments of the 60 municipal parking systems summarized in this Bulletin.

The RPA therefore has prepared a supplement giving more detailed information on each of these systems—information on methods and accomplishments which will be helpful to other communities in organizing their programs.

Copies of this valuable material are available at \$2.00 each, postpaid. (\$1.20 to Association members). Please send order to the Regional Plan Association.