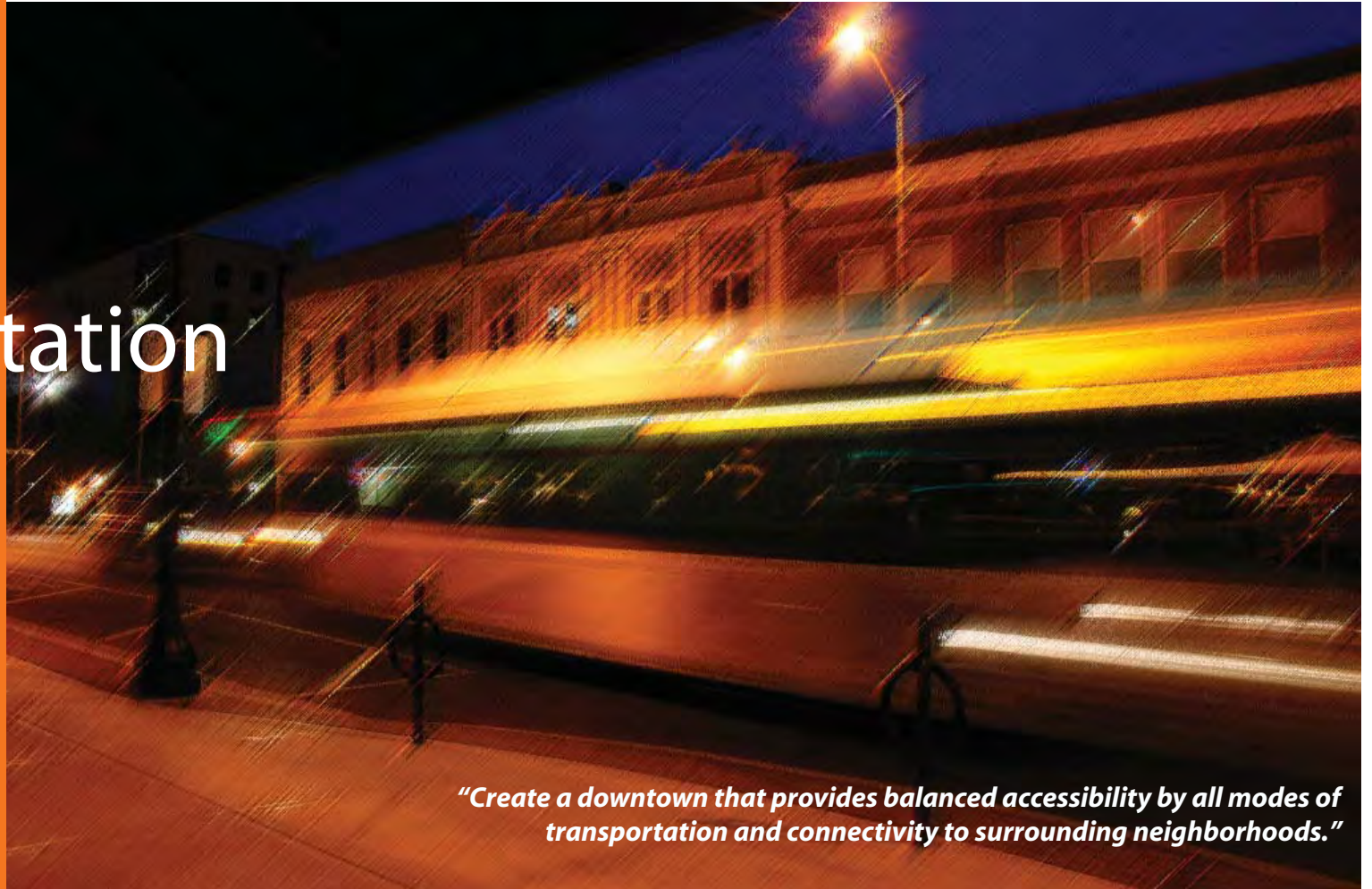


# Transportation



*“Create a downtown that provides balanced accessibility by all modes of transportation and connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods.”*

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## Summary

An efficient transportation system is essential for downtown. More so than any other area of the City, downtown must be served by a variety of modes including cars, transit, bicycles and walking. Downtown is a final travel destination for many, but it also serves as a link for transportation to other areas. The link includes two major arterial roadways: Neil Street and University Avenue, that carry significant traffic through the area and on to other destinations in the community. Also, the Illinois Terminal is a transfer location for almost all transit routes in the City. The area serves as a public transit hub for a regional system that has a total system ridership of nearly 11 million passengers per year. The Illinois Terminal serves as a final destination and transfer point for bus service, passenger rail and taxi service.

Having an accessible downtown is a part of the vision statement. However, what constitutes accessibility can be debated. For some, it means being able to drive to downtown quickly and find a convenient place to park. For others, it means having a downtown that is better served by transit and is safe and easy to walk. For others, walking or biking is their priority. In some cases, these goals can conflict with each other.

This section of the plan recognizes that there must be a strong balance in the transportation system. The needs and desire to continue to drive to downtown and find a parking space must continue to be recognized although the goals of having a downtown that favors the pedestrian and creates a safe and walkable environment will be highlighted. The plan also looks to further diversify the way people access downtown and make alternative travel options even more appealing.



Automobiles remain the preferred method by a majority of the population.



Downtown once utilized 9 miles of inter-urban line that transported citizens throughout the Champaign-Urbana community.



The Illinois Terminal, completed in 1998, serves as the center piece to the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District's city-wide bus service.

## Challenges

Current challenges in the existing downtown transportation system were considered when formulating the guiding principles and strategies for this Plan. These challenges include:

### Safety

There have been great strides made in recent years in creating a safer transportation system in downtown. However, there is still work to be done. There remains areas of downtown where the probability of vehicle/vehicle and vehicle/pedestrian conflicts remain high. In most of these instances, the current design of roadways promotes a high vehicle speed thus increasing the likelihood of accidents. The high speed design of roadways also puts the pedestrian at a disadvantage and creates an uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous experience for someone on foot or bicycle. Current examples include University Avenue between Neil Street and First Street, the split of Walnut Street and Neil Street to the South, and the intersection of Randolph Avenue and Park Avenue.

### Walkability

Having a downtown that is easy and comfortable to walk through is essential. Many areas of downtown enjoy a very walkable environment such as the core of downtown at Neil Street and Main Street. This helps create an environment that attracts people which in turn leads to being a location where businesses like to locate. There are still many areas of downtown that are either difficult to walk or do not offer an interesting environment which would attract people to walk.



### Encouraging Public Transit

The CU-MTD serves downtown Champaign from nearly all areas of the community. The system is reliable, safe, and economical. However, most employees in downtown still do not consider transit as an alternative to driving to work everyday. More trips to downtown by car creates a higher demand on roadways leading to downtown and also creates more demand for parking.



### Street Capacity

As downtown grows the population of people using downtown will grow as well. The goals of infilling under-utilized property with dense new development has an impact on the capacity of the existing street system. Streets in downtown cannot easily be widened to create more capacity. While it is difficult to imagine traffic snarls in downtown similar to much larger cities, the likelihood of congestion will increase as downtown grows unless a diversified transportation system evolves with this growth. However, some congestion in downtown signifies success because people have a reason to come downtown.

## Parking

The issue of parking in downtown is complex and subject to varying opinions and perceptions. Perhaps what makes the issue so difficult is that in many respects the goals for a dense and vibrant downtown are generally incompatible with the goals of providing abundant parking in close proximity to destinations. Downtown developed prior to today's volume of automobiles. This allowed for a development pattern that was compact and dense with no need to provide for large spaces to store vehicles. In the 1960's and 1970's the threat of suburban shopping centers with abundant surface parking presented significant competition for downtown. In response, downtowns across the country looked to eliminate building stock and replace them with surface parking lots. Unfortunately, the result for many downtowns was a loss of the original vibrancy that first made people want to visit.

Today, there is still a dual interest to have a dense and vibrant downtown but to also provide convenient off-street and on-street parking. Whether there is enough parking and if it is in the optimal location will perhaps always be debated. The goal of this plan is to strike the best possible balance between these two goals.



## Connections to Adjacent Neighborhoods

Successful downtowns often have a seamless transition to adjacent neighborhoods making it easy and enjoyable to travel between them. A significant challenge for downtown Champaign is the existing physical connection between the Core of downtown and the North First Street commercial area and surrounding neighborhood. Since the beginning of downtown, this connection has been challenged by the location of the elevated railroad tracks. Today there are essentially three points of connection; Washington Street, the Main Street viaduct, and University Avenue. To better link North First Street with the Core of downtown, the connections between the two need to be addressed.



## Transportation Guiding Principles

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The following guiding principles shall guide decisions and policy related to transportation issues in the downtown.

### *Overall Mobility*

Pedestrian safety and walkability is the highest priority for the transportation system downtown.

Neil Street and University Avenue are major roadways that connect the community through downtown. The design of these streets must carefully balance the goals of creating a pedestrian friendly environment and carrying high volumes of traffic.

Downtown streets should be designed to reduce travel speeds to increase pedestrian safety while still allowing vehicles into downtown and to parking locations.

Access should encourage use of travel modes other than automobiles.

To become an effective regional attraction, downtown needs to be an easily accessible hub of the community. It should also be easy and efficient to enter and depart downtown.

Strong transit and pedestrian connections should be established and maintained between Downtown, the First Street Corridor, the Burnham Redevelopment and Campustown to strengthen each of these areas.

Connections to adjacent neighborhoods including the North First Street area and surrounding residential areas should be improved to better link with the core of downtown.

### *Parking*

The expectations of parking supply and location should be different in downtown than in suburban areas. The placement of parking should be convenient to downtown uses but not in locations that make them a focal point. The supply of parking should be carefully managed in order to allow availability yet not encourage access to downtown solely by automobile.

The demand for new parking should be located in parking structures rather than surface parking lots, where appropriate.

The downtown public parking system (on-street and off-street) should be well signed, well illuminated, easy to locate and user-friendly.

A good balance of short term and long term public parking should be provided to accommodate different types of trips and visitors.

## Transportation Strategies

The following strategies and action steps would implement the transportation and parking goals of the plan.

### Overall Mobility

- Design intersection improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and prioritize installation based on the highest frequency or potential for pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.
- Install countdown signals at high volume intersections downtown.
- Develop strategies to promote greater use of transit by downtown employees
- Identify a bicycle route system into downtown and consider striping streets for bicycle lanes where appropriate.
- Determine strategies to promote more bicycle usage in downtown by providing appropriate facilities and by promoting bicycle events.
- Develop consistent entryway signs that direct motorists to parking facilities and other key landmarks.
- Redesign the Neil and Walnut Street "Y" intersection to reduce the width of pavement, to slow traffic speeds and create a more attractive entry to downtown
- Develop taxi cab stands in downtown and a system to ensure availability of taxis at high demand times.
- Monitor advancements in street light technology and upgrade lighting to create a safer pedestrian experience.
- Work with the CU-MTD to promote a transit route that specifically promotes a downtown to campus connection.

### Parking

- Determine and prioritize where public parking structures will be needed based on the future assumptions of growth and development, and consider their construction as public/private ventures with large scale development projects.
- Complete a comprehensive parking study for downtown.

## Strategy 1 - Intersection Safety Improvements

*Design intersection improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and prioritize installation based on the highest frequency or potential for pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.*

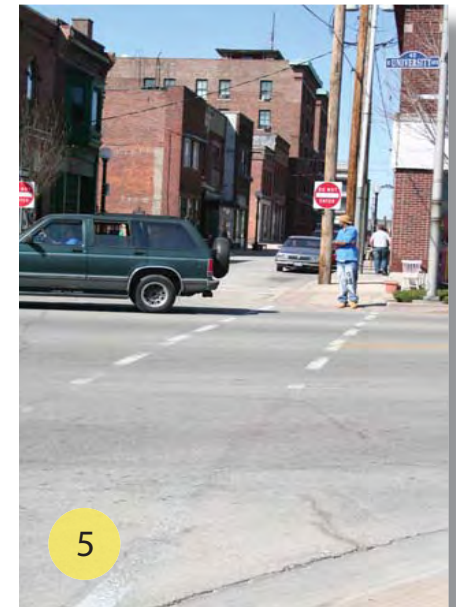
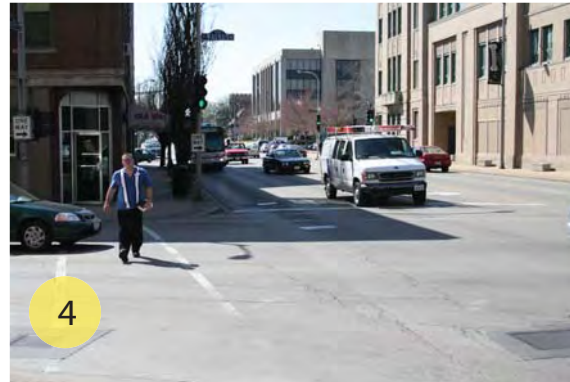
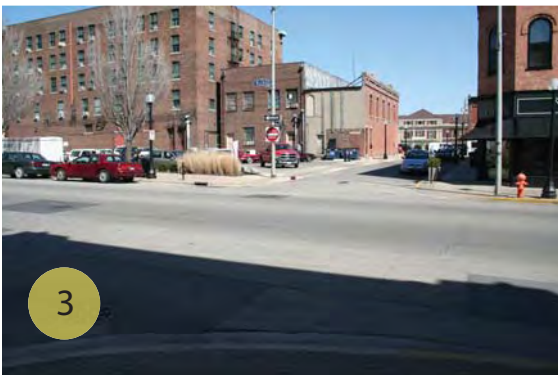
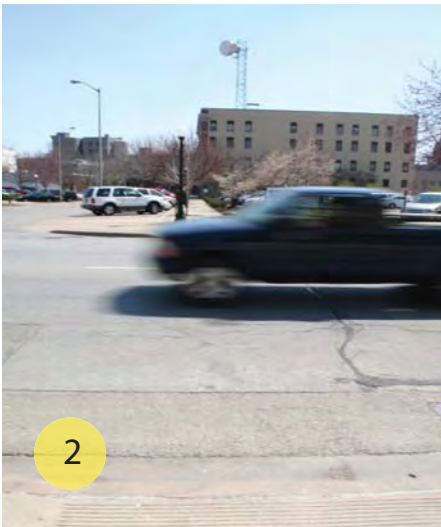
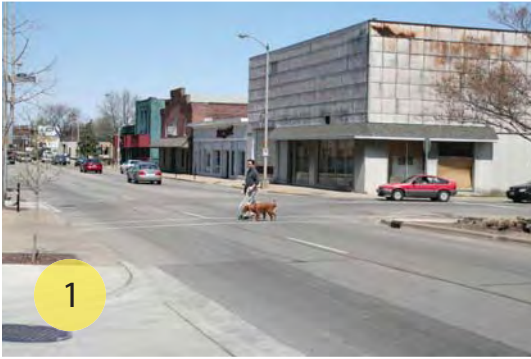
### Commentary

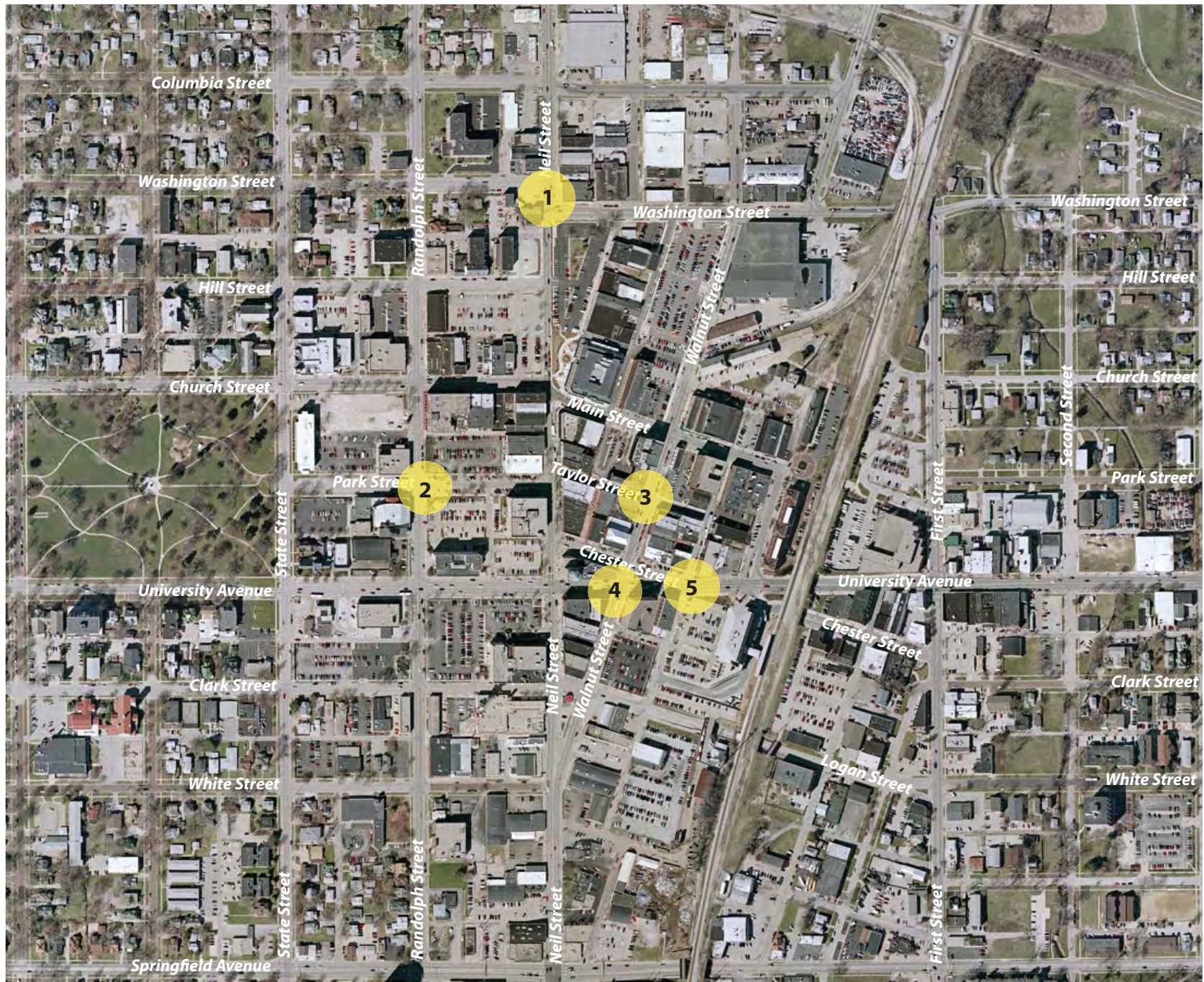
To achieve the goal of creating a more walkable downtown the design and function of downtown intersections should be studied to identify changes to prioritize pedestrian safety. Intersections should be designed to slow traffic and allow for the safe crossing of pedestrians. Possible measures include curb bump-outs, countdown signals, no turn on red policies, etc. Priority should be given to the following intersections:

- 1) Neil Street and Washington Street
- 2) Park Street and Randolph Street
- 3) Walnut Street and Taylor Street (mid-block crossing)
- 4) University Avenue and Walnut Street
- 5) University Avenue and Market Street (above left)

### Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department
- Property Owners





*Identified locations of high volume intersections that frequently result in pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.*





### Strategy 2 - Countdown Crosswalks

Install countdown signals at high volume intersections downtown.

#### Commentary

Countdown signals give pedestrians a better understanding of when the light will change and how much time is left to cross the street, therefore increasing awareness and safety for pedestrians.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department



### Strategy 3 - Increase Use of Transit

Develop strategies to promote greater use of transit by downtown employees

#### Commentary

Greater use of public transit by downtown employees would decrease the demand for parking. It would also improve traffic circulation around downtown and make streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. There are perhaps many reasons why downtown employees do not consider transit for their commute to work. These reasons may include the convenience and relative low cost of parking. Another reason may be a basic lack of understanding of how the CU-MTD system works. The CU-MTD should consider direct routes to downtown from certain locations that are easy to understand and give assurance to passengers that their route goes to downtown directly. Other strategies should be considered such as employer subsidized transit passes and incentives to employees who choose not to drive to work.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
- Downtown Businesses



## Strategy 4 - Promoting Bicycle Use

*Identify a bicycle route system into downtown and consider striping streets for bike lanes where appropriate*

### Commentary

As downtown continues to grow as a residential neighborhood, more of its residents will look to means other than vehicular travel to make short trips around downtown. An integrated bike lane system will facilitate keeping bicyclists from using busy sidewalks while protecting them from vehicular traffic. Consideration should also be given to integrating bike lanes with existing and planned bike trails as shown in the Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan. Provisions should also be made, for providing proper storage for bicycles at downtown destinations as well as transfer points to other means of transit.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department
- Champaign County Regional Plan Commission
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District

## Strategy 5 - Bicycle Facilities and Events

*Determine strategies to promote more bicycle usage in downtown by providing appropriate facilities and promoting bicycle events.*

### Commentary

In order to create a usable bicycle system, riders must feel comfortable leaving their bike once at their destination. There are currently a number of bike racks located throughout downtown, however with an increase in usage, additional opportunities for bicycle storage should be considered including the use of bicycle storage lockers. Specific events targeted towards bicyclists should be organized to originate in downtown and showcase local interest in bicycling both for recreation and commuting purposes

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Champaign County Regional Plan Commission
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (Illinois Terminal)



## Strategy 6 - Redesign the Neil Street/Walnut Street “Y” Intersection

*Redesign the Neil and Walnut Street “Y” intersection to reduce the width of pavement, to slow traffic speeds and create a more attractive entry to downtown*

### Commentary

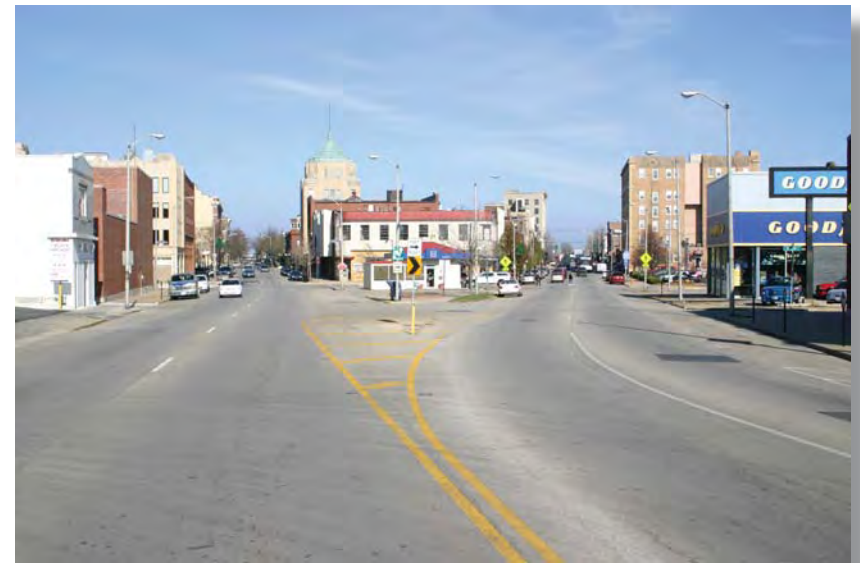
Serving as the primary entrance to downtown from the south, the “Y” intersection of Neil Street and Walnut Street meet not only begins the system of one way streets but also announces ones arrival into the downtown. Because this intersection is often viewed as a major entrance, measures should be taken to beautify this gateway. At the same time, such improvements will serve as a means of slowing vehicular speeds as drivers approach downtown and enhance pedestrian safety. This intersection would be softened from its current pavement width to a more green and inviting gateway. With the addition of raised curbs and expanded streetscape, drivers will be more likely to reduce speed and begin watching for pedestrians.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Property Owners



Existing configuration of Neil and Walnut Street division (2006)



Existing division of Neil and Walnut Street looking north (2006)



*Softening and beautifying the division of Neil and Walnut Street will create a safer more attractive entry point to Downtown from the south.*



### Strategy 7 - Taxi Stands

*Develop taxi cab stands in downtown and a system to ensure availability of taxis at high demand times.*

#### Commentary

One way to encourage a better mix of transportation in downtown is to strengthen and promote the taxi cab system. Implementing a system of converting existing loading zones into late night taxi stands will encourage higher use of taxis which can create a safer environment for late night patrons. Utilizing existing loading zones after peak hours would provide enough adequate locations for taxi stands while not interrupting existing parking spaces. Locations should be found in the heart of downtown near the intersection of Main and Neil Street.

Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Police Department
- Downtown Businesses
- Taxi Companies



### Strategy 8 - Illumination of Downtown Streets

*Monitor advancements in street lighting technology and upgrade lighting to create a safer pedestrian experience.*

#### Commentary

Proper placement of street lights and appropriate lighting levels can ensure a safe and more attractive downtown. Consider future enhancements to the downtown street lighting system when advancements in white LED technology becomes economically viable, possibly within five years. Illumination of buildings and architecture can also aid traditional street lighting methods while highlighting buildings and creating a more attractive downtown.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Building Owners

## Strategy 9 - Determine Future Parking Deck Locations

*Determine the appropriate locations for public parking structures based on future assumptions of growth and development and prioritize their construction as public/private ventures in conjunction with large scale development projects.*

### Commentary

A fundamental philosophy of this Plan is to infill surface parking lots with new development projects where appropriate. This goal helps to achieve the vision of creating a dense and vibrant downtown. It also recognizes that providing off-street parking in downtown is important and that continued reliance on surface parking would make further growth and development of the downtown infeasible. Providing parking in structures rather than surface parking lots offers the only means to provide additional spaces without having to tear down more buildings to create additional surface lots. However, parking structures are expensive and they need to be strategically planned and financed. Partnerships between the public and private sectors should be used where possible. As a top priority, a parking deck should be considered in conjunction with a proposed development at the corner of Neil and Hill Street. This deck should accommodate parking for the new development as well as provide additional public parking. Possible locations for new parking structures should also be identified on the east and south sides of downtown as need is demonstrated. When planning for parking structures, the overall goals of encouraging alternative modes of transportation in downtown should be carefully considered.

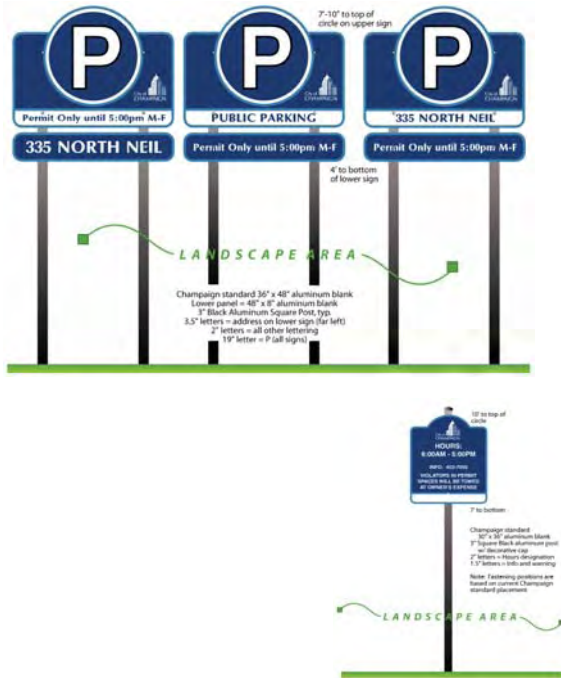
#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- City Managers Office
- Public Works Department
- Downtown Developers
- Downtown Businesses

Locating parking decks in quadrants of downtown will help to ensure that all businesses benefit from adequate parking supply while preserving the core for higher density uses.



Examples of well designed urban parking structures (Evanston, IL top, Naperville, IL center, Moline, IL bottom)



### Strategy 10 -Wayfinding Signs

Develop consistent entryway signs that direct motorists to parking facilities and other key landmarks.

#### Commentary

To attract a regional customer base, as well as to ease use by area residents, downtown signage must be well designed and feel intuitive to first time visitors. By adding attractive entryways to downtown’s primary entrances, visitors will feel as though they have reached a destination. Directional signage at key locations to guide motorist to downtown, and way finding signage throughout downtown is important in guiding visitors to major attractions, landmarks and parking. Directing motorists to their final destination can also help reduce unnecessary traffic in downtown when visitors “circle” to find parking or their destination. This signage should carry a common theme and be used to guide all modes of travel in and around downtown.

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Public Works Department
- Downtown Businesses

### Strategy 11 - Dedicated Campus to Downtown Transit Route

Work with the CU-MTD to promote a transit route that specifically promotes a downtown to campus connection.

#### Commentary

The goal of strengthening the connection between downtown Champaign and Campustown has been identified in other efforts. Such a link will strengthen the continued success of downtown. Because of policies in the campus area discouraging vehicle use and ownership, this transit connection must remain strong to ensure the continued use by university students. An easy to understand, well promoted route can also attract riders that would normally only consider driving and have never considered the convenience of transit.

#### Key Players:

- Planning Department
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
- Campustown Businesses



University of Illinois students are more frequently attracted to downtown for entertainment and shopping venues.

## Strategy 12 - 2006 Parking Study

Complete a comprehensive parking study for downtown.

### Commentary

Parking is critical to the success of downtown. Too little can cause people not to make visit downtown. Too much can compromise the density and vibrancy that make downtowns attractive. A well designed public parking system that strikes the right balance between too little and too much and between surface and structured parking, provides the greatest opportunity for success. Since downtown has become more popular, a closer look is needed to determine issues such as the number of spaces needed, their location, and how best to manage them.

Key Players:

- Public Works Department
- Planning Department



Public parking (blue) lots make up approximately one third of the available parking area in the downtown core. Private lots (red) make up the remaining space.

