

AcceliCITY Smart Challenge

Pilot Project Description
March 7, 2019

Project Category: Smart Mobility

City of New Bedford Smart Challenge Overview

The City of New Bedford has recently undertaken a comprehensive parking study for its downtown and central waterfront. Among the many challenges and opportunities identified in the report is the dominance of single occupancy vehicle trips as the primary mode of transportation in and out of the downtown. Our consultant Stantec, Inc. conducted a user survey as part of the data collection phase of the study. Over 1,000 people responded and the report states that fully 90 percent of the respondents said they traveled downtown alone in a vehicle almost exclusively. In a downtown where there is a perception of parking scarcity, this is an obvious contributor, and one which, if it could be ameliorated, would go a long way toward making the downtown a more attractive place to live, work, and play (see Report excerpt below).

To address the challenge, the report goes on to recommend that we “establish New Bedford as a City that embraces multi-modalism and current trends in travel—especially geared toward potential new residents and investors.” And they make a series of specific recommendations for investments and actions that would begin to accomplish this goal. Most are quite obvious and straight forward, and the authors call out populations who will be most receptive to mode shift, but it’s unclear to the City if this list of recommendations is exhaustive, and how effective these actions will be in inciting behavior change on the scale that would have a significant impact on parking supply.

Smart Challenge: Smart Multi-modal Transportation Solutions

The City would like to pilot a smart solution to encourage mode shifting to existing alternatives to single occupancy vehicle trips at a significant scale, and/or to pilot an alternative mode not currently in our transportation mix that would make sense for a city of our size (100,000 people). Ideally, this solution would serve not only the population traveling to and from downtown but could also be deployed in other areas of the city, particularly centers of employment.

For example, the City’s only business park is thriving and expanding, having added thousands of jobs in recent years, but those jobs are largely cut off from people who don’t own a vehicle because of the distances one has to travel from the bus stop at the entrance to the park to most of the companies within. And the park is situated at the far northern end of a 13-mile long city. Bicycling could be an answer, as our RTA’s buses are equipped with bike racks, but is this practical year round? Moreover, New Bedford simply does not have a bicycling culture, but a potential solution could be to begin building that culture. Is there a smart solution to begin building that culture?

In sum, we are potentially open to smart multi-modal transportation solutions that respond to both the supply side and the demand side of the problem, assuming there is a way to finance the proposed solution.

APPENDIX 1 – Report Excerpt

6.2 INVEST IN PARKING DEMAND REDUCTION MEASURES

Like many Parking Authorities and municipalities concerned with parking, the focus is typically on supply-side challenges and solutions. This is a natural response to the common complaint of there “not being enough parking” and the correct assumption that parking is often the key to unlocking economic success. Flipping this supply-focused approach on its head, and instead focusing on demand-reduction measures can get at the root of reasons why people choose to drive and park in the first place. And the solutions: providing people with an opportunity to re-consider driving downtown and instead walk, take the bus, carpool or bike, helps reduce the need to provide, maintain and operate parking.

Why Do It?

Based on the survey conducted as part of this study, 90% of respondents reported driving alone to get downtown. In addition, respondents cited a desire to see better walking, lighting and bike share amenities downtown. The benefits of safer more comfortable amenities, programs and incentives for people on foot, travelling by bike, in car share on the bus are numerous. Some are listed below:

- Reduce demand for parking – while mode shift away from driving alone may be modest, by targeting those within walking and biking distance there is potential for a reduction in driving demand
 - Less demand for parking also reduces pressure to provide new parking and associated maintenance and operations costs
- Capitalize on high daily student populations in Downtown New Bedford both from UMass Dartmouth and Community College
 - Car ownership levels tend to be lower amongst students, and willingness to hop on a bike or walk, is that much higher than other groups
 - UMass Dartmouth is also a potential partner in initiating and supporting a strong biking culture downtown
- Establish New Bedford as a City that embraces multi-modalism and current trends in travel – especially geared toward potential new residents and investors

How Would It Work?

Investments in non-single occupancy vehicle (SOV) modes and demand reduction measures are described in a suggested implementation table below. Figure 18 provides a map of suggested corridors for consideration for bicycle improvements, with an overall goal of creating a network with both north-south and east-west links.

- Work with Parking Commission to integrate parking locations in pedestrian-level wayfinding

STRATEGIES

– Pedestrian-level signage should help facilitate a “park-once” environment by helping pedestrians find their way back to their vehicles

- Consider funding lighting, crosswalk improvements, or other repairs with parking revenues
- Improve lighting on key routes to public garages to support greater nighttime use
- Use parking revenues to fund streetscape and sidewalk improvements, bicycle parking, and other multimodal facilities.

– Provision of secure bicycle racks show that the City is welcoming to bicyclists and may encourage travel by bicycle instead of by personal vehicle, helping to alleviate the parking crunch

- It is recommended that the City undergo a comprehensive bicycle master planning effort

– This could incorporate a re-evaluation of the one-way system – see prior Recommendation

Suggested Multi-Modal Improvements

Mode	Strategy	Suggested Investment	Planning-Level Cost
Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve lighting on key corridors – may include upgrading to LED lights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acushnet between Zeiterion Garage and William Street and streets between Elm Street Garage and Downtown core 	\$\$
Bicycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Audit downtown streets for overall bicycle levels of bicycle comfort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning Staff time 	\$0
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete regional network connections to Downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on connections to existing path from Route 6 bridge to Union Street 	\$\$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiate Downtown bicycle network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on highest demand corridors, connections to destinations – UMass Dartmouth for example (see NACTO for design standards) 	\$\$\$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add weather-protected and secure bicycle parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritize high-visibility, most convenient locations in public garages and one or two on-street locations 	\$\$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Upgrade to best practice bike racks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Upgrade to inverted U racks 	\$\$-\$\$\$
Electric Vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add EV charging in one or two high-visibility curbside locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This might include Bristol Community College and UMass Dartmouth – students tend to be early adopters 	\$\$\$
Transportation Demand Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incent walk, bike carpool and car share commuting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This might begin with City financially incenting employees that turn in their parking permits 	\$\$