

Regional Justice Center – Kent Washington – Parking Analysis

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Introduction:

Anecdotal evidence suggests that King County's Regional Justice Center underparked, i.e., that it lacks sufficient parking capacity on site to handle the parking demand that it generates. This short paper shall address the accuracy of that perception, reach some conclusions, and identify a potential recommendation.

Background:

The Regional Justice Center ("RJC") was planned, designed and constructed during the early and mid 1990's King County took occupancy in 1997. While the original programmatic and planning documents for the RJC identified a requirement of 700 total parking spaces, in fact the facility has approximately 725 parking spaces on site – approximately 625 parking spaces in the three story parking garage and the remaining parking spaces located throughout the campus.

	Constructed	Current Estimated Usage
Corrections	138	138
Corrections Staff		
Corrections Visitors		
Non Inmate Visitors		
Courts	422	422
Jurors		
Court participants		
Staff		
Non Court Visitors	90	90
Criminal Investigation Division	75	100
Sub-total	725	750
Estimated Overflow		75
TOTAL	725	825

The neighborhood around the RJC has enjoyed excess parking capacity for many years. Prior to the construction of the RJC, downtown Kent was in decline with diminishing parking demand. The nearby neighborhoods were a mix of industrial, commercial and residential and were languishing. Today, substantial excess parking capacity currently exists at three (3) downtown sites near the RJC:

1. the Borden Parking Site to the Northeast (recently purchased by City of Kent) is the most convenient to the RJC – capacity of 200;

2. the "Municipal Lot" to the southeast (City of Kent owned) is the next most convenient to the RJC – capacity of 160;
3. the James Street Park & Ride Lot to the west (KCDOT owned) is the least convenient – capacity if 400.

Why has the issue become important?

First, the Borden Parking Site will soon become off limits for spillover parking from the RJC. The Borden property was recently purchased by the City of Kent with the intention of contributing to a public / private redevelopment of Downtown Kent. The City has invested considerable resources and has formally selected a development team to redevelop the site. There is a possibility that the Borden Parking Site will no longer be available after September of 2002, and there is a likelihood that the Borden Parking Site will no longer be available after June of 2003.

Second, King County's Department of Transportation (KCDOT) desires to sell all of the James Street Park & Ride, except for approximately 1.1 acres on the north end of the site. KCDOT intends to use the sales money for a contribution to the Sound Transit Parking Garage. KCDOT would then reconfigure most of its bus routes to utilize the Sound Transit Parking Garage as part of a combined transit hub in downtown Kent.

Third, there is a potential for RJC expansion. Expansion might be one or any of the following:

- The number of detention pods may increase from 18 to 22 – i.e., an 18% increase. The parking requirement is projected to expand from 138 to 166 – i.e., an increase of 28.
- The number of superior courtrooms could increase from 16 to 20 – i.e., a 20% increase. The parking requirement is projected to expand from 422 to 506 – i.e., an increase of 84.
- A proposal has been floated that the Criminal Investigation Group might exit the facility, which would be back filled by four (4) district courtrooms. This would result in a net parking increase of approximately 150 parking stalls. (250 parking required by the district courtrooms less 100 stalls vacated by Criminal Investigations.)
- Finally, along the same line, it appears that there will be an operational change in March: the misdemeanor DV cases that were handled in Seattle are being transferred to the RJC. (see memo from Gary Knell to Bill Angle dated 2/20/2002.) Three additional staff have been assigned to handle the work load. This will result in approximately 1,000 additional misdemeanor DV cases handled each year by the District Court at the RJC. District Courts require more parking than just about any other use. This may have an immediate impact on overflow parking – which has not yet played out.

Either of the first three expansion options would require that certain entitlement permits (land use, building, EIS, etc.) be obtained from the City of Kent. Clearly, the City of Kent will require satisfaction of current overflow conditions before it will allow expansion to proceed. Moreover, the City of Kent will also require that any expanded uses identify an acceptable strategy to deal with any new RJC parking requirements. Finally, on a practical basis, when the Borden Parking Site is no longer available for RJC overflow use, the spillover parking issues will become more visible and potentially contentious between King County and the City of Kent.

What is the current overflow situation at the RJC?

Upon my direction, an employee of the Sheriff's Department did a survey on Monday 1/28/2002 and Wednesday 1/30/2002. The results of that survey are attached. Each hour, the employee counted occupied parking stalls on the three floors of the RJC parking garage (roof, mid, ground), the Borden Site, the Penny Parking Lot, and the Municipal Lot just north of the Penny Parking Lot.

Further, there was an employee survey and a jury survey of parking utilization. The Employee Questionnaires, in particular, are instructive in their narrative comments.

The parking count survey shows that the parking garage is under pressure. Spillover onto the Borden Parking Lot trends with RJC parking garage demand. A pattern can be seen to tell the following story: on Monday morning, the RJC parking garage fills up on the mid and ground levels (for business visitors) and the Borden lot is lightly used. New jurors do not know there are parking alternatives to the RJC lot. In the afternoon, the Borden lot is more heavily used because jurors have been given notice of its availability, and because King County employees that understand that the RJC garage is probably full go immediately to the Borden Parking Site.

(The demand identified on the Borden lot on Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup> is lighter than I have personally seen it on either Wednesdays or Thursday, days upon which I have regularly visited downtown Kent over the last 6 months and with which I am personally familiar.)

By Wednesday, the jury pool becomes more sophisticated about the parking difficulties and jurors have been advised about alternative parking strategies – including directions to the Borden Parking Lot. Note that the demand on the Borden Parking Lot is substantially greater on Wednesday than on Monday. Finally, the survey week in question may have been somewhat light on a general basis. The antidotal evidence (stories, complaints, etc.) suggest that 100 to 150 cars overflow onto Borden on a “typical” business day. I believe those estimates are exaggerated.

However, my personal experience is that I have never counted less than 80 cars in the Borden lot between 10:00 am and 12:00 noon on Wednesdays or Thursdays. I recently counted exactly 100 cars in the Borden lot at 9:30 on Thursday, January 17<sup>th</sup> and 98 cars at 11:30 a.m. that same day. Moreover, I have never counted over 100 automobiles in the Borden Parking Lot. During the survey week, Borden Parking Lot demand peaked at 75 vehicles at 2:00 p.m. and 60 vehicles at 10:00 a.m.

Conclusions:

While the RJC parking garage is under pressure, it would appear from the narrative comments in the Employee Questionnaire that the garage is not managed as effectively as it might be. In particular, there are comments about King County employees not parking on the rooftop of the RJC parking garage because of rain, because of puddles that form, and because there is no effective enforcement. Thus, some employees park on the second and ground levels and by doing so, put greater pressure on “business visitor” parking. A well managed garage will cut overflow demand – by how much, I do not know, perhaps by 15 to 20 cars during peak periods.

Based upon the RJC parking count survey and my observations, and making allowances for a more efficient use of the RJC parking garage, I believe that we should assume the peak overflow

during the week is 100 vehicles onto the Borden Parking Site. The data is inconclusive about whether some of the RJC overflow lands at the Penney parking site or the Municipal Lot just north of the Penney parking site. Looking at the figures, if there is overflow from the RJC, it numbers several or half a dozen at most – de minimus. The current survey is not sufficient to “prove” the above objectively, but I have confidence in the estimates. If it is decided that this should be “proven” then a professional traffic / parking engineer should be engaged to develop a methodology to get much more thorough counts over a four to six week period.

- Thus, the current “problem” is that at peak periods during the work week, the RJC is under-parked by approximately 100 parking spaces. While an inconvenience to employees and business visitors, this status quo requires no immediate action.
- Assuming that the status quo is acceptable for the time being, what should King County do (or have done) by the time Borden Parking Site becomes unavailable?
  - A decision has already been made that effectively stopped progress of the KCDOT to sell 8.1 acres of the James Street Park & Ride.
  - Although inconvenient, the James Street Park & Ride can accommodate overflow when the Borden Parking Site becomes unavailable;
  - Thus, at a very minimum, at least 1.5 acres (for approximately 100 additional vehicle parking spaces) in addition to what KDDOT intended to retain must be retained for when the Borden Parking Site becomes unavailable. That would total three acres. To be very safe and conservative, increase by one acre to a total of four acres of the James Street Park & Ride Lot that should be reserved.
- Assuming that King County must expand the RJC by four pods (and 28 parking spaces); and assuming that King County decides to locate the four district courtrooms at the RJC (and add a net 150 parking spaces), and/or King County decides to add four superior courtrooms at the RJC (and add a net of 88 parking spaces), what should King County do (or have done) by the time these expansions are ready to be entitled and constructed?
  - The current 100 parking space overflow must have been remedied, or else no entitlements are likely to be forthcoming from the City of Kent;
  - An additional 266 parking spaces must be found (i.e.,  $28 + 150 + 88 = 266$ );
  - A decision about whether the James Street Park & Ride is an appropriate location for the possible 366 required parking spaces must be made;
  - A policy decision about whether business invitees (jurors, attorneys, etc.) should pay for parking must be made;
  - A policy decision about whether employees should pay for parking must be made.
- I propose the following recommendation: King County employees and business invitees willing to use the James Street Park & Ride should be able to park for free, and employees and business invitees that require parking in the RJC parking garage or otherwise on site should be required to pay. Price the parking for the RJC garage high enough that it motivates sufficient users to park off site so that no new resources (i.e., additional structured parking either on or off the campus) are required. RJC employees would have full access to the garage – they would no longer “cheat” and park on those floors when they should be parking on the roof. This approach will require the cooperation of the City of Kent, but if it were packaged properly, it would probably satisfy the City of Kent so as to allow entitlements for expansion. Moreover, parking revenues become net income to King County, and those King

County employees that insist on “free” parking can get it if they are willing to walk 10 minutes (which may obviate any labor / collective bargaining issue.)

- The economic model / justification is as follows: the RJC parking garage has a replacement cost value of approximately \$12,000,000. This is based upon 625 parking spaces at a cost of just over \$19,000 per stall to construct. This \$12,000,000 asset is currently offered for free to employees and business invitees. Nevertheless, the demand created by RJC activities is so great that this \$12,000,000 parking asset is insufficient to satisfy the demand. Thus, at peak demand, approximately 100 additional parking spaces are required. The current spillover parking has a “cost” that is not accounted for – in economic terms it defined as an “externality”. That cost is the inconvenience to the individuals who must park at the Borden Parking Site, their loss of time, and the loss of potential parking revenue that the Borden Parking Lot might achieve if it were managed efficiently.
- The first policy questions is *whether* to make explicit that externality cost. This is done with pricing if a market is in effect, i.e., charge for parking. The costs can also be make explicit if further expansion is not permitted. Effectively, this happens “automatically” if, for example, King County were to apply for permits to expand the RJC and the City of Kent would not issue those permits until the spillover parking issue was solved and any new parking demands were satisfactorily addressed. Building 100 parking spaces can be calculated at \$2,000,000 on a rounded basis. If an additional 266 parking spaces are required for an expanded RJC, building 266 parking spaces can be calculated at \$5,000,000 on a rounded basis. Thus, meeting the current and potential parking demand will cost approximately \$7,000,000 if structured parking is constructed.
- The second policy question is *when* to make that externality cost explicit. Since King County cannot afford to pay for \$7,000,000 in additional parking assets and continue to allow them to be used freely by employees and business invitees, it is clear that the RJC would be required to charge for parking for any new parking facility that was to be constructed. If that is going to be a requirement then, why not make it a requirement today and allocate resources more efficiently?
- Moreover, King County is in a good position in terms of having a “free” parking alternative available at the James Street Park & Ride. This offers a reasonable choice and will deflate the cries of unfair treatment, etc. While the James Street Park & Ride is clearly not “free” in terms of how its value will be accounted for within internal King County budgets, it is clearly the least cost alternative and warrants a thorough review. By way of example, parking revenues at the RJC garage could be earmarked to pay to KCDOT for such part of the James Street Park & Ride as must be reserved.
- In a time of limited resources, this is the smart way to maximize public assets. In fact, there is no better time to make the argument that King County cannot afford to subsidize parking either to its existing employee base or to the general public. Certainly, that is the current King County position with regard to downtown Seattle. The policy should be made consistent throughout the county.