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Parking Made Painless: City Maps and New Apps Help Address Often Underestimated Issue



Traffic moving toward Nashville hints at the question, "Where will they park?" New parking apps and maps help solve that dilemma.

Parking ... that final logistical detail so many of us overlook when setting out for a destination, yet often the deciding factor in how positive our experience may be in reaching that destination.

Parking doesn't often come up in conversations about what makes a city livable, perhaps because it acknowledges a still very real dependence on cars that simply isn't so sexy in a time when many cities train their focus on bike lanes, bike sharing programs and walkability initiatives. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning acknowledged this in introducing its 2012 report, [Parking Strategies to Support Livable Communities](#), but also makes the critical point: "Parking is necessary to support a community's local businesses; finding the right balance between supply and demand – as an economist would – is the next step."

Few would argue against cities making it easier for people to choose bikes, their two feet and public transportation (when available) to get where they need to be. Smart city planners are preparing for a future in which more people do exactly that.

In the meantime, city governments, downtown organizations and independent mobile app developers all seem intent on outreach and education to maximize existing parking infrastructure. Many relatively new websites, maps and apps can make parking as painless as possible, even without much prior planning.

A couple of apps already offer available parking information for multiple cities, such as:

- [BestParking.com](#) (which began in New York City with founder [Ben Sann](#) gathering data, ironically, by bicycle)
- [Parker](#) by Streetline

Some municipalities have city-specific apps, such as [SpotHero](#) in Chicago, [SFPark](#) in San Francisco and [ParkPGH](#) in Pittsburgh.

And finally, those willing to do quick research by smartphone can almost always find basic or interactive maps and tips on a city or downtown organization website.

I had the idea for this post recently while visiting Fort Worth, Texas, and had a couple of meetings downtown. The experience tops my list of painless parking situations in larger cities, and I didn't really even consider where I'd park beforehand. A quick search on my iPhone for "free downtown parking Fort Worth" led me to Downtown Fort Worth Inc.'s [Fort Worth Parking](#) website. The site allows you to enter your destination, which it then plots on a map that also shows the nearest free and paid parking options, along with details about fees, validation options and time limits when applicable.

A few other good examples of city interactive parking maps: