

December 10, 2013



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Transportation experts David King, at left, and Ralph Bond believe that improving the approach to vehicle parking can be a key to developing needed transit.

Parking culture shift can influence transit use and development, says expert panel

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Creating a culture where people use more transit requires a shift in the way cities approach parking, say leaders in the transportation industry.

“The assumption seems to be if you build the transit, the riders will come. Undoubtedly some of them will come, but I don’t think enough of them will if we don’t change the way parking works,” said Ralph Bond, the executive chairman of [BA Consulting Group](#), a transportation planning and traffic engineering consulting firm based in Toronto.

Bond was one of several speakers at the recent [Transport Futures](#) Mobility Pricing Summit which explored the interactions associated with transportation demand management and infrastructure funding issues.

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One of the biggest impediments to intensification is municipal bylaws that require too much parking, said Bond. He said many municipalities copy each other’s bylaws without any research as to whether they are accurate.

He said it’s important to get parking and pricing approached consistently by regional governments in the same area.

“(Otherwise) you will get this leaping of developments into areas that developers think are more friendly where they can build acres and acres of free parking.”

He said it’s important for municipalities to provide less parking.

“This means changing their thinking about how municipal parking requirements work and municipal bylaws to stop asking for an oversupply and tightening it up so there’s more balance between supply and demand. In some cases, even a shortage of parking

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can be a good thing, if the system has been designed (for it).”

Parking policy should reflect transit and non-auto drive modes split targets.

“A lot of municipalities in suburban areas are planning these fairly ambitious transit projects, but they’re not changing their parking policies to max the mode split targets that they develop...how come they haven’t been reduced to reflect where you want to go and what you want to achieve on the transit side,” he noted.

He said when parking, transit and transportation are in the same department in a municipality, they are able to get much better results than if they are in independent silos.

In addition to being over abundant in the suburbs, parking is also a dominant feature in the urban landscape.

David King, an assistant professor of urban planning at Columbia University, said approximately 40 per cent of land in town centres across the United States is related to parking and auto commuters receive free parking about 75 per cent of the time.

He pointed out that Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin have 43 million parking spaces, three per registered vehicle. Almost five per cent of the land area of the upper Midwest is devoted to parking.

“This is an insane system of policies that we have for parking,” said King.

“Because we have so much parking, there’s no market for it.”

King said it’s imperative to design buildings to adapt to the future. He pointed to New York City’s “park once” neighbourhoods.

“We want to shift away from having the parking required as part of the building itself. We want parking to sit on its own so that ideally somebody will come along and start charging for it, but it can be shared and used more efficiently across the entire day. We may require new developments to lease existing spaces nearby before they can build any new spaces,” he explained.

The zoning code in many cases does not reflect the economic vitality of existing buildings.

“We also have to require...flat floor parking structures so that they’re able to be reused easily. They can be redeveloped into condos or offices or storage,” he said.

In Toronto, regional transportation agency Metrolinx has proposed a parking space levy as a revenue tool. The levy would be charged on all non-residential off-street parking spaces within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Bond said it would raise a lot of revenue, but he is skeptical about it creating a culture shift.

“You should allow private developments to react to it by reducing the amount of parking. And as long as you have those locations in the suburbs that are requiring way too much parking, you’re not going to get the results you need. Even if they wanted to reduce the parking, they can’t because the bylaw doesn’t let them reduce the parking,” he said.