

# SMALL Business Times

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## no parking

Removal of Park East freeway section will impact 1,800 parking spaces

The pending removal of a portion of the Highway 145/Park East Freeway in downtown Milwaukee will also lead to displacement of nearly 1,800 parking spaces, but city officials say plenty of parking will remain in the area.

With recent dismissal of a lawsuit seeking to block removal of the freeway section, work is now under way to prepare for removal of the elevated freeway between Sixth and Jefferson streets. The portion between Sixth Street and I-43 will remain.

But while removal of the freeway section has been controversial, little public discussion has surfaced on the related loss of parking in the highway corridor.

And that may be because there is an abundance of parking in the area, and the loss of the parking spaces underneath the freeway won't overtake the supply, city officials say.

Only 67% of the current parking spaces in the Park East corridor are used, says John Bratina, economic development policy coordinator for the Department of City Development.

"There is more supply than demand currently," Bratina said. "New street parking will be available as new street connections are built. Therefore, parking is not being removed, just temporarily displaced."

The parking lots, which are leased by a variety of operators, are used by office workers; by students, staff and faculty of Milwaukee Area Technical College and of Milwaukee School of Engineering; and by visitors to downtown event and entertainment venues.

Daniel McCarthy, the urban development manager for the City of Milwaukee's Department of City Development said, "We are working hand-in-glove with MATC" to resolve parking situation. One option for MATC is property within the adjacent Pabst Brewing Co. lands which are targeted for redevelopment. (See related stories in this section.)

The demolition of the Park East Freeway will result in the displacement of nearly 1,800 parking spaces, according to Bratina. However, there is ample parking in the area, the city says. For example, the parking structure on Fourth Street between Highland and Juneau avenues can accommodate 993 vehicles, and on the average business day only



**MOVE IT AND LOSE IT:** The removal of a portion of the Park East Freeway will impact nearly 1,800 parking spaces located in leased lots, many of them below the elevated highway.

400 spaces are used, Bratina said.

And while the Park Freeway section is being razed to make way for development, that development is not expected to take place overnight, presumably leaving parts of the corridor available for surface parking until building construction is realized.

When new buildings are put up, the city will require that ample parking be part of the development. Several years ago, a 150-vehicle parking lot was torn down at the corner of Kilbourn Avenue and Water Street. The land was then used to build the Wyndham Hotel and a new indoor parking structure. Similarly, after the Park East Freeway is

demolished, and after the land is developed, new parking will become available as well, McCarthy said.

As the surface lots are built over, drivers may turn to street parking, which is relatively plentiful in the area. But in many cases, street parking offers more restrictive time limits. While the area does contain unmetered, all-day street parking and 10-hour maximum metered street parking, two- and one-hour limits are common, ruling out persons who need to park for longer and who don't want a \$20 ticket.

According to Kurt Behling, assistant city attorney for Milwaukee, when a posted sign reads "two-hour parking" a vehicle is only permitted to remain in that space for two hours, regardless of whether or not additional funds were added to the meter when the original two-hours' worth of money is used up.

## **Lots of land**

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, approximately 16 acres of land will be freed from the demolition of the Park East Freeway. However, when adjacent land is included, the amount rises to 26 acres, the city notes. The title of the land currently is held by Milwaukee County. However, the land is under state control.

"Developers and investors have already begun purchasing adjacent parcels in anticipation of the spur's removal. When the corridor is fully developed, we could see in excess of \$250 million in new residential, office and commercial development." Mayor John Norquist said. "The removal of the Park East provides a tremendous opportunity for the City of Milwaukee to add to our property base while increasing access to the downtown street system and the many attractions that are located downtown and north of downtown," said Norquist.

Former Milwaukee mayoral candidate and local businessman George Watts, and several others joined forces to form the George and Martha Foundation that sued to block removal of the freeway spur. The case was recently dismissed. Watts and his associates argued that loss of the freeway would also increase the number of traffic accidents in the area, and that construction of a bridge over the Milwaukee River could affect the stability of a 96-inch sewer pipe underneath the river where the bridge will cross.

Initial work on the removal of the freeway is beginning with the construction of a temporary freeway ramp at the Hillside Interchange, and will conclude with the opening of a new lift-bridge spanning the Milwaukee River connecting West McKinley Avenue with East Knapp Street. The freeway will be replaced with an at-grade, three-lane boulevard from Sixth Street to Water Street. Completion of the project is scheduled for June, 2004.