

Methods of Relieving Traffic Congestion

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Problems of street-traffic congestion have grown from a headache, usually successfully treated by the use of aspirin, to a serious illness requiring a thorough diagnosis to get at the source of trouble and demanding penicillin as the type of proper treatment. Too often the remedial application for a solution of our traffic problem affects only a small segment of the seat of the trouble. It reminds me of trying to cure the fungus infection commonly called athletes' foot. Several remedies will clear up the trouble for a while, but it seems inevitably to return.

Fundamentally, street congestion is due to parking and terminal deficiencies. The basic purpose of our streets is for movement of traffic. Axiomatically, of course, the use of vehicular transportation requires a terminal or place to park or stand the vehicle at the destination.

From the beginning, in the history of wheeled transportation, the operator has desired to get as close to his destination as possible before parking or standing his vehicle. The obvious result, because of lack of off-street parking and terminal facilities, is street congestion.

More people desire to use their autos to travel to the central business district for shopping, business, recreation, etc., than can be accommodated by the available parking spaces at the curb and in parking lots or garages within easy walking distance of major destinations. Available curb space is also utilized for truck deliveries and for bus loading. Therefore, in spite of the increasing public demand, there is a constantly increasing deficiency in the supply of terminal parking facilities at desirable locations.

Curb parking is usually the most convenient of available facilities, but wholly inadequate. Obviously the available curb spaces can never satisfy the public demand. To attempt to balance the economics of the situation, we resort to parking restrictions which should be determined on the basis of efficient time use of the spaces. This necessitates

continuous enforcement to be effective. However, with available curb spaces conveniently located to destinations, motorists will risk, and many times welcome, the parking fine for exceeding the parking limit as a cheap form of parking fee in order to have the privilege of parking as close to their destination as possible.

Double-parking restrictions, when enforced, frequently invite trucks to usurp curb space for loading or unloading, forcing autos to less convenient locations or to lots and garages where the motorist is required to pay exorbitant fees. As the public demands more convenient curb parking, police are faced with the impossible situation of trying to enforce unenforceable curb-parking regulations.

Parking meters are fine as far as they go, and particularly if revenues are utilized for further traffic improvements. In the end, however, they do not provide for the ever-increasing demand for parking facilities. Off-street facilities must also be provided.

Fringe parking has not been too successful. As a motorist we dislike to "come down" from the freedom of the use of a private auto to the schedule required in the use of public transit. As long as a person can drive into the central business district, he will do so even if it is extremely difficult to find a place to park.

Surveys in several large cities throughout the country have revealed that the average motorist travelling to the central business district wishes to park as close to his destination as possible and will pay a higher fee on a short-time basis than he would otherwise. Since the curb spaces, regardless of how regulated, are totally inadequate for this demand, it is necessary to provide off-street terminal and parking facilities.

Off-street parking terminals must be equitably distributed throughout the business district in small units within easy access to and from major arterial routes and ultimate destinations. Such facilities must not be so large that movements in and out of the parking terminal will congest the streets in the vicinity during the peak traffic hours.

What has been said of parking terminals for the automobile is just as true for off-street loading and unloading of trucks. Removing the trucks from the travelled street area to loading bays off the street not only provides material relief of traffic congestion but saves considerable costs to the trucker as well as the shipper or the receiver of goods.