

TASK 2: HISTORY OF ABC RAMPS

The City of Minneapolis's parking division, MPLS Parking, today owns or manages over 20,000 off-street parking spaces between 16 parking ramps and 8 surface lots. Three parking ramps known as the ABC Ramps, located on the northwest side of downtown Minneapolis totaling about 6,882 stalls, make up over 30% of that off-street parking infrastructure. The ABC Ramps, owned by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and formerly referred to as the Third Avenue Distributor Garages, were completed in 1992. They are the ending point for Interstate 394 (I-394), an eleven-mile, six lane freeway extending east to downtown Minneapolis from the suburbs of Golden Valley, St. Louis Park, Minnetonka and Wayzata.

I-394 and the ABC Ramps are notable among interstate projects for their use of high occupancy vehicle lanes (HOV) and parking facilities as a means to achieve higher freeway carrying capacity. Contrary to most other parking facilities whose primary purpose is to generate revenue, the purpose of the ABC Ramps is to reduce congestion and improve air quality.¹

The ABC Ramps fulfill this mission by providing parking on the periphery of the Minneapolis central business district, giving preferential treatment to carpools for as low as \$20 a month compared to the \$150 market rate for solo drivers. The ABC Ramps are directly accessible from HOV lanes on I-394. Ramp users can access downtown employment and entertainment centers through the city's pedestrian skyway system. These options serve to reduce single occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips on I-394, trips that would have contributed to traffic on the highway and in the downtown area. The ABC Ramps remain the only federally funded project of this kind.

Lingering questions include whether programming at the ABC Ramps has been or continues to be effective at deterring congestion in the downtown core as travel behaviors have changed, how declines in carpooling can be offset, and how the ABC Ramps can support other modes of transportation now and in the future.

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INTERSTATE HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT IN THE TWIN CITIES

Following several decades of research and planning, the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 ensured funding for the development of the interstate highway system. The nearly 400 miles of freeway in

¹ <http://www.abc-ramps.com/about.htm>

Minnesota came out of cooperative planning efforts between the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) and the Minnesota Highway Department (MHD), now known as MnDOT. There are two major interstate routes through the metropolitan region, Interstate 35 (I-35) running north to south and Interstate 94 (I-94) running east to west. I-94, completed in 1971, connects the downtowns of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. I-35, completed in 1983, connects northern Minnesota to the Twin Cities before splitting west (I-35W) and east (I-35E) in the metropolitan area.

PHASE I: DEVELOPMENT OF INTERSTATE 394 AND TAD GARAGES (1957-1984)

In addition to the construction of I-35 and I-94 was the construction of I-394. The corridor, originally called Superior Boulevard, was by the 1930's one of the first paved roads in the region, connecting the growing western suburbs with downtown Minneapolis. By 1937, the BPR added the corridor to the Twin Cities Federal Aid Interstate System as Trunk Highway 12 (TH12). At the time, MHD records showed that TH12 was the busiest road in the state at 6,653 average vehicles a day and growing.² By 1952, the last extension of TH12 out to Trunk Highway 101 (TH101) was completed.

In 1956, the Minneapolis Planning Commission (MPC) hired a consulting group, Barton and Associates, to examine a distributor road between the Hawthorne Interchange and Washington Avenue that would better connect TH 12 to downtown streets.

The MPC report, *Freeways in Minneapolis*, projected significant regional population growth and automobile ownership through the 1990s. Out of anticipation for the subsequent demand in parking came recommendations for parking facilities that would directly connect to inbound traffic. This report was the conceptual basis for the Third Avenue Distributor (TAD) garages, named after their relation to the distributor along Third Avenue, transitioning TH 12 to downtown. These parking facilities would be strategically placed on the periphery of the downtown so as to prevent conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles in the central business district.³

By 1969, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) had passed. This body of environmental regulations significantly expanded the environmental review process required on federally funded infrastructure projects. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement (EIS) process began for the potential upgrade of TH 12 to the interstate system, both for the urban and suburban segments of the project. While this EIS approval process moved relatively quickly for the urban segment of I-394 and the garages, the suburban segment of the corridor did not.

² St. Louis Park Historical Society, Highway 12 (<http://slphistory.org/highway12/>)

³ Barton and Associates, *Freeways in Minneapolis*, 17–30.

That year in 1969, the MPC commissioned a plan called “Metro Center 85” to envision downtown development in the following twenty years. Among other ideas the plan endorsed was peripheral parking facilities—as many as 5,000 spaces—as a strategy to mitigate traffic congestion and maintain walkability in the urban core. The plan envisioned a network of parking facilities intercepting traffic at the periphery of the downtown. In addition to the TAD garages, this idea was the basis for the formation of the Minneapolis Municipal Off-Street Parking System, which included the Government Center Ramp in 1974 and the Gateway Ramp in 1983. The desire to make this peripheral parking, both existing and planned, more attractive laid the basis for the above-ground skyway system connecting the downtown.⁴ In addition, the plan recommended a circulator bus system from these facilities, maximum parking requirements and the elimination of on-street parking in much of the central business district.

In response to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1971, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) released a compliance plan in 1973, *Implementation Plan to Achieve Carbon Monoxide Ambient Air Quality Standard*.⁵ Of particular focus were carbon monoxide levels in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. The plan echoed calls for fringe parking facilities, calling for the development of 7,000 off-street parking spaces served by micro-transit and skyway connections that could bring travelers to the central business district. The plan called for suburban park-and-ride facilities served by express buses, and traffic control systems on all freeways to alleviate congestion and facilitate freer movement of traffic. These strategies were endorsed by the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, as well as the MHD, the Metropolitan Council and the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC).

Peripheral parking facilities proved to be a common solution in each of these plans, addressing concerns of air quality, the downtown pedestrian experience and congestion to the west. The idea was a natural fit to potentially receive federal highway funding. The draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the urban segment of I-394 was completed in 1973. The plan notably supported using the air rights over I-394 for the parking facilities, as opposed to directing traffic farther out from the core. By 1974, the location for the garages was accepted by MHD with tentative Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval to build the garages as part of the I-394 system.

As the site plan for the parking facilities and the urban segment unfolded, so did route selection for the new interstate. Per federal environmental guidelines, the process brought on an administrative advisory committee (AAC), a technical advisory committee (TAC), and a community advisory committee (CAC) to consult on the project. Routes were evaluated based on traffic service, economic impact, social impact, planning, environmental impact and public reaction.

⁴ Metro 85 pg 67 (1970)

⁵ Implementation Plan to Achieve Carbon Monoxide Ambient Air Quality Standards, MPCA

By 1973, four of the eight original design options were dropped due to, among other factors, concerns that rerouting from the original alignment of TH12 would be too disruptive to nearby communities.

Of the remaining options was a no-build, an option to leave TH12 unchanged in favor of a light rail, a plan to build the interstate along TH12 to Penn Avenue or a plan to widen the existing TH12 route. The DEIS argued in favor of this last alternative but cautioned that the project could meet projected traffic demands only if there was significant transit ridership.

The last option was ultimately selected by commissioner of MHD, with assurances that transit options would continue to be evaluated, including the use of light rail transit (LRT). That same year a transit study was conducted which established several options for I-394. Two of the transit plans involved two exclusive transit facilities in addition to conventional surface transit, like buses in mixed traffic. The latter case involved the preferential treatment of buses in mixed traffic along I-394, where I-394 would be constructed as an 8-lane freeway with the center 2 lanes reversible, directed inbound in the morning and outbound in the evening. These lanes would give preferential treatment to buses and carpools.

Nevertheless, community advisory panels were split and community pushback began to form against the recommended alignment in the DEIS and the idea of another urban freeway project. In particular, Golden Valley raised concerns of revenue losses from expansion of the right-of-way, and the effect of noise from the highway. Meanwhile a coalition opposition group called the Metropolitan Freeway Moratorium Coalition formed with support from the Minnesota chapter of the Sierra Club. As the oil embargo of 1973 unfolded, the downsides of completely car-dependent transportation landscape became more apparent to the public eye. That year the Minneapolis Tribune editorial board came out against the highway project. By spring of 1974, the EPA issued a letter recommending the plan be dropped in favor of mass transit, citing potential conflict with the MPCA's air quality plan and carbon monoxide reduction targets. In 1975, the Minnesota state legislature effectively halted funding for planning and construction efforts. By 1976, the legislature reached an agreement to resume funding on the condition that no more than six through lanes be built. This would ensure minimal expansion of the right of way and would avoid exceeding the vehicle capacity of the Lowry Hill Tunnel.

The project stalled for the next four years. In 1980, the commissioner of the MnDOT—the successor agency to the MHD—appointed the Metropolitan Council as the lead agency to resolve controversy over the recommended alignment. In 1981, the Metropolitan Council adopted the design concept of the two inside reversible “diamond” lanes reserved for buses and high occupancy vehicles, defined initially as two passengers, with the option to raise occupancy requirements to three if congestion became too severe.⁶ At the eastern end of the corridor, these lanes would connect to the Third Avenue Distributor (TAD) entering downtown Minneapolis, including the TAD garages. The design of the system around two

⁶ Transportation System Management Plan (1989)

HOV lanes and heavily discounted carpool rates was a delicate mix of incentives that would maintain the federally mandated level of traffic flow, minimize congestion and also satisfy state legislative requirements that the corridor be no wider than six lanes. The 1982 final EIS adopted this format and MnDOT began the right of way acquisition process in 1983. Construction began in 1984.

PHASE II: DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION (1984-1992)

Following the approval of the I-394 project, a Transportation System Management Plan (TSMP) was developed by MnDOT to help guide the implementation of the project and to provide a framework for evaluating its effectiveness. The plan emphasized the movement of people over vehicles, and that traffic would be managed to create a relatively free flow of traffic. This would mean maintaining a level of service grade, an A through D metric used to evaluate congestion in federally funded transportation projects—of “C” in the HOV lanes and “D” in the mixed lanes. The TSMP identified the TAD Garages as an integral part of that strategy. The I-394 lanes would connect directly into the TAD garages, with a substantial number of parking spaces dedicated to reduced price carpool parking contracts. Each garage would also accommodate transit with bus lobbies where passengers could wait. In total there were six entrances to these three lobbies—three accessible from the street level and three accessible from I-394 level.

Access to lanes on I-394 would be controlled with gates located at all the freeway entrances to and from the reversible HOV lanes. These gates would prevent automobiles from entering or exiting the reversible lanes in the wrong direction. HOV traffic would operate inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon. MnDOT would use pavement-based sensors to monitor traffic volume at multiple locations along the corridor. These sensors could also be used to adjust pricing in the HOV lanes. Additionally, the TAD garages would connect to major employment or entertainment venues like Butler Square or the IDS tower by way of the Minneapolis Skyway System. Unlike many other cities, the Minneapolis skyway system is privately built and operated between the building owners, through coordination with a city Skyway Advisor Committee. Skyway connections to the garages were conceived in the design plans of Target, Ameriprise Financial, and AT&T headquarters, as well as the First Bank building.

The TSMP was backed by state statute 161.1231, and specified MnDOT as the owner of the garages and responsible party for implementation of system goals.⁷ The TSMP noted that the garages were intended to serve the following operational priorities, in order of importance:⁸

- Monthly parking contracts for HOV commuters from I-394
- Monthly parking contracts for HOV commuters from other than I-394

⁷ <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=161.1231&year=2017>

⁸ Transportation System Management Plan I-394, MnDOT (1986)

- Monthly parking contracts for SOV commuters from I-394
- Reduced daily/hourly rates for HOV commuters from I-394
- Monthly parking contracts for SOV commuters from corridors other than I-394
- All other daily/hourly users

The verification and matching process would be run by the Metropolitan Transit Commission, the precursor to Metro Transit. Participants would fill out a form and be verified by the MTC and in exchange would receive a windshield tag denoting their status. To be eligible to maintain this status, participants had to carpool at least three times per week, use I-394 at some point during their trip and display an ID tag while parked in the garage. At the time the TSMP was published, the carpool rate was \$8 per month and \$0.50 per day compared to the SOV rate of \$50 per month or \$2.50 per day.

Construction on the TAD garages started in 1986 and finished in 1992. As construction was underway in 1989, the State of Minnesota signed an agreement with the City of Minneapolis to establish that the city would manage the TAD Garages.⁹ The original 20-year term commenced on July 29, 1989 and ended June 30, 2009, with three 10-year renewal options. As of 2009, the City exercised its option to renew and is currently in its first renewal period. Since at least that time, the facility management company ABM has been the contracted ramp operator on behalf of Minneapolis.

The construction cost of the entire roadway, including the parking and transit facilities was \$420 million. \$111 million of that covered construction of the garages. The Federal Highway Administration funded 90% of the construction costs through Federal-Aid Interstate program, including transit facilities, parking garages and administrative programs. MnDOT and the City of Minneapolis each contributed five percent, and some additional private funding was leveraged for specific areas like the Carlson Parkway interchange. Seven additional park-and-ride lots were constructed as part of the I-394 system, in part to account for parking that was lost due to right-of-way acquisition. Then-U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger was able to also earmark \$100 million in federal funding for construction of the garages under 127(a) of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982.

At the time there appears to be some ambiguity as to the naming of the specific garages. In the TSMP, published in 1986, referred to them individually as according to the street they fell on—the 7th, 5th and 9th street garages. A maintenance an operation plan prepared by SRF for MnDOT and FHWA later in 1989 refers to them both by their street-based name, as well as Garage A, Garage B and Garage C. Large exterior Ramp A, Ramp B and Ramp C signs were added with the Target Field improvements in 2009.

⁹ “Management Agreement for the I-394 Parking Facilities By and Between the Commissioner of Transportation for the State of Minnesota and City of Minneapolis,” June 30, 1989

PHASE III: EARLY REVENUE AND OPERATIONS TRENDS (1992-2003)

In the initial years after construction, the TAD garages did not generate enough revenue to cover their operating costs and were subsidized by the City of Minneapolis. After 1997, however, the garages began making enough to cover their mandatory expenses, reimburse the City and start funding discretionary operating expenses. These retained earnings were kept in two municipal accounts controlled by the City of Minneapolis, one for maintenance and one for operations.¹⁰

Per the FHWA guidance, discretionary spending required prior approval and was limited to programs that would support the goals of the garages as defined in the TSMP. These programs included:¹¹

- Parking rate incentives for HOV commuters traveling on routes other than I-394.
- Rideshare and transit marketing activities along the I-394 corridor.
- Public promotion of the I-394 HOV lanes, TAD garages and connections with transit, the downtown skyway system and other transportation options on the corridor.
- Provision of rideshare matching and other promotional programs along the I-394 corridor.
- Support for enforcement of the I-394 HOV lanes.
- Collection and analysis of data on the I-394 HOV lanes and the TAD garages.
- Support for adequate transit service along the I-394 corridor.
- Provision of traffic operations equipment and personnel to manage the I-394 corridor.
- Reduction of administrative costs directly related to the I-394 HOV lanes.
- Support downtown bus service for routes connecting through the garages.

In 2002, private parking operators in the area filed a complaint with the FHWA that the carpool program was being misused and that SOV vehicles were taking advantage of the discounted rate. Later that year, the FHWA wrote a letter to MnDOT expressing the need for research around the effectiveness of the carpool program. At the time, the carpool program was more or less run on the honor system, with carpoolers allowed to drop their passengers off downtown before entering. As it happened, the research showed that about half of all people with carpool contracts were driving alone. The findings led to a warning letter from the FHWA that both enforcement and promotion of the HOV lanes and the ABC Ramps were needed.

In reaction, several operational changes were made. Employee monitors were placed at all ramp entrances during peak commute times to ensure vehicles entering the ABC Ramps had at least two people or would pay the daily rate. Carpools were also no longer allowed to drop their passengers off

¹⁰ ABC Ramps Storybook 5.1, MnDOT Office of Transit, 2006

¹¹ Minnesota Department of Transportation Maintenance and Operations Plan (1989)

before entering the ABC Ramps unless they had a medical exception. Additional incentives were put in place as well. Carpool rates were also lowered from \$40 to \$20 a month while those in carpools were given “Ramp and Ride” cards for free transfers on transit within the CBD.

In addition to the enforcement, MnDOT also hired a marketing consultant to better understand how to promote the ABC Ramps. Based on surveys, the consultants concluded that the public was confused about several aspects of the program—including inconsistent naming of the individual garages. At the time, the exteriors from each structure read 7th Street Garage, 4th Street Garage and 5th Street Garage while signs on I-394 labeled them as Garages A, B and C, respectively. For consistency, the ABC Ramps were henceforth branded, collectively, as the ABC Ramps—ramps being the regionally preferred term over garage, as the surveys reflected. The 7th Street Garage became Ramp A, the 5th Street Garage became Ramp B and the 4th Street Garage became Ramp C, with external and internal way finding signage changing accordingly. The new naming was incorporated into a local marketing campaign to promote carpooling and the unique features of the ABC Ramps.

Despite the price drop and extra incentives, this extra layer of verification led carpool contracts to drop by half. As of 2016, the number of carpool contracts hasn’t neared its initial level since the drop off in 2002. SOV contracts have since increased, while HOV contracts have decreased with the ratio at this point about four SOV contracts for every carpool (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Carpool and Monthly Contract Trends 1993 - 2016

From 2002 onward, there were a number of other changes at the ABC Ramps. Since the opening of I-394, there had been public and political pushback against the idea of dedicated HOV lanes. Officials had come under criticism that the lanes were underutilized and that opening them to all drivers would help alleviate congestion, a position then supported by Governor Jesse Ventura. This was opposed by both MnDOT and the FHWA, which argued such a measure would ultimately only increase congestion and detract from efforts to promote carpooling and public transit. In 2003, a legislative proposal emerged for a compromise—to convert the HOV lanes to high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes that would grant access to SOVs at a fee. Under this plan, half of all excess tolling revenue would be directed back to transportation improvements along the corridor. After clearing newly elected Governor Pawlenty’s desk, plans formed for what would become branded as the MnPASS lanes. The lanes, which opened in 2005, extend for the length of I-394 and are broken into two segments: one extending from I-94 to TH 100 and another from TH 100 to I-494. The first segment is separated by barrier and is open to toll users, carpools and transit from 5am to 1pm eastbound and 2pm to 4am westbound. The other segment operates without a barrier from 6am to 10am eastbound and 3pm to 7pm westbound.¹²

One additional change was that ramp revenues were no longer to be collected by the City of Minneapolis, as this was technically a violation of state statute that revenues from the ABC Ramps would be deposited to a state account. Instead of the City of Minneapolis retaining all the parking revenue from the ABC Ramps in Minneapolis accounts, the funds were to be transferred directly to a MnDOT account at the end of each day.

Oversight of the ABC Ramps carpool program was transferred to the Office of Transit in MnDOT’s Central Office. This, as well as control of the accounts from the ABC Ramps, more easily enabled investment of discretionary operating funds. These funds, for instance, were applied to a loan for the early development of the MnPASS system on I-394.

PHASE IV: RECENT TRENDS (2003 – PRESENT)

As early as 1994, the owners of the Twins declared their desire to move the team to a newer facility than the Metrodome in Downtown East, where they had played for 13 seasons. Details of both the site of the stadium and who would fund it languished at various levels of local government throughout the 1990s, largely in part to ongoing negotiations around funding for a new public stadium. In the 1999, a committee of downtown business owners formed to explore a proposition to move the team across downtown to an 8-acre private parking lot, situated between the ABC Ramps and Hennepin County’s waste-to-energy facility. While the site was small by Major League Baseball standards, the site plan made note of the proximity the parking availability provided by the ABC Ramps, as well as connections to I-394, I-94 as well as the eventual connection to the Hiawatha Light Rail, opened in 2004. While the

¹² The Politics of Pricing: Minnesota’s Experience

eventual site plan and design were completed in 2000, it wasn't until 2006 that the measure received backing from the Minnesota State Legislature—\$522 million with 25% contributed from the Twins and 75% from Hennepin County, with construction beginning in 2008. A study was conducted that year examining adjustments on that the corridor may need to make to avoid bottlenecks associated with event traffic along I-394.¹³ MnDOT spent \$16 million on ramp improvements including:

- New street-level entrance to Ramp B on 2nd Ave due to traffic delays caused by the Blue Line LRT in front of the street level entrance on 5th St.
- Construction of a skyway connection from Ramp A to Target Field and a public elevator in Target Field to provide ADA access
- Enhanced and streamlined way finding signage in the interior and exterior of the ABC Ramps in order for visitors attending games to better find their vehicles
- Bathrooms added to the Ramp B I-394 level bus lobby for us by charter bus riders. Showers were also added for bicycle locker contract holders.
- Automated parking revenue control equipment that allowed for credit card payment, and better accounting of ramp occupancy and parking space availability. This technology also eliminated the need for staff handling cash at exits.

In 2012, digital signs were installed in the main elevator lobbies of each ramp to display traffic information and operational news at the ABC Ramps, as part of a special MnDOT program, "Destination Innovation." The intended use the signs, which since 2017 have been shut off due to outdated software, was to reduce congestion by giving travelers more traffic information. Another change came in the form of applications for the discounted carpool rate. These are evaluated on a case-by-case basis and require the applicant to demonstrate that the shortest distance in their commute involves I-394 or I-94 and that the vehicle miles traveled in the carpool route are less than if they drove alone. Processing of applications was moved from Metro Transit to Move Minneapolis, the downtown transportation management organization (TMO), in 2010. With this move an on-line carpool registration process was implemented that made the registration process somewhat less cumbersome. Move Minneapolis is a nonprofit that promotes multimodal travel planning assistance through outreach and education efforts within the limits of downtown. The organization is primarily funded through federal CMAQ grants, as well as local matches.

The net results of the development of Target Field was a notable increase in event revenue at the ABC Ramps, from about 10% to over 30%. Prior to the construction of Target Field, monthly contracts were the dominant source of revenue for the ABC Ramps, followed by funds generated from daily parking and event parking. After upgrades to the ABC Ramps and the increased event traffic in the area, event parking surpassed monthly contracts in terms of revenue. This is particularly the case at Ramps A and B,

¹³ Preliminary Planning Report, I-394 Bottleneck Study (2008)

which are closer to Target Field and Target Center. The opening of Target Field also corresponded with the Great Recession, which may have artificially suppressed the commuter population that normally used the ABC Ramps. While most of this event traffic comes on evenings and weekends, there have been occasions during weekday games in which the ABC Ramps have completely filled, with even traffic capping the remaining spots from daily and contract users.

As of 2016, revenues are roughly now evenly split between contracts, event and daily parking. The ABC Ramps are fairly unique in that they cater to a wide variety of customers, including daily commuters, people visiting downtown for entertainment, dining or nightlife, and even some air travelers utilizing the ramps' Ramp Ride Fly program. Few other parking facilities have such a variety of users over nearly a 24-hour cycle. Conversion of formerly industrial or vacant space to mixed commercial and residential has contributed to the mix of ramp users. Nearly 40% of the industrial space in downtown converted to another use between 2000 and 2016, with the greatest increases in retail, mixed commercial, multifamily housing, mixed residential, office and institutional use (Figure 2).

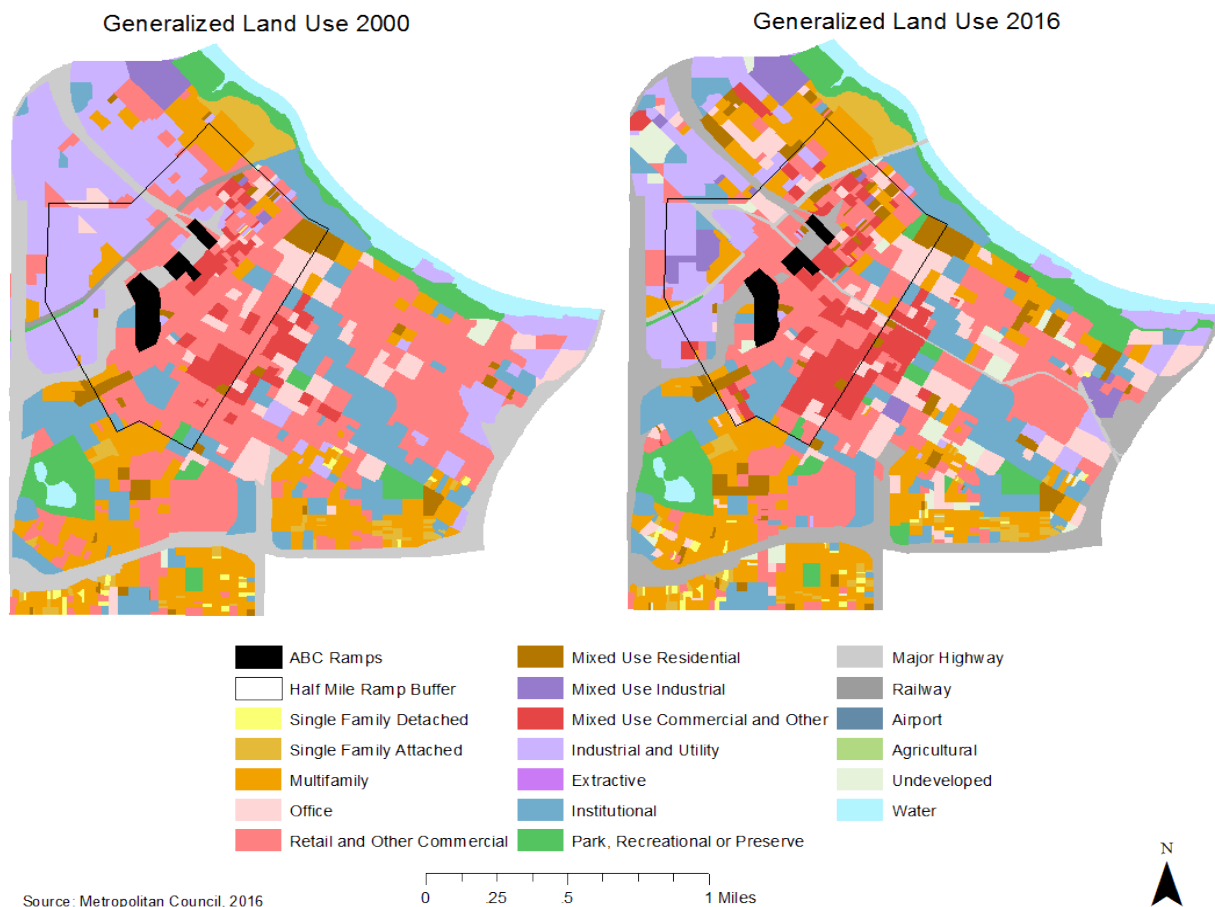


Figure 2 Downtown Land Use Change, 2000 - 2016

This redevelopment has also led to the reuse of surface parking lots, simultaneously decreasing parking supply as demand for it has gone up. These circumstances have led Ramps B and C, more recently, to often reach capacity, particularly during the workdays when there are sporting events. The increased likelihood of either ramp being full on a given day has likely contributed to this increased demand in contracts that guarantee drivers a spot at the ABC Ramps.

The net result of the ramp additions in 2008 led to an overall increase in event and daily parking revenue, particularly in Ramp A. Nearby commercial growth and re-development of surface parking lots has led to growth in monthly parking across all three ramps, though particularly in Ramp B and C. The end result has been an increase in revenue for the ABC Ramps, which on a given recent year have been double that of their pre-2009 levels.

With 3,518 stalls, Ramp A represents half the available spots between the structures. Among the overall spaces that were occupied vs. unoccupied over the course of a day in 2016, Ramp A was 45% occupied. By proximity, it is the closest facility to the Target Center, Target Field and much of Block E. Given the proximity to these destinations and its size, Ramp A is able to absorb much of the fluctuating daily and event traffic. In addition to event parking, daily parking increasingly represents the bulk of Ramp A's revenue in part due to Ramps B and C being often nearly at capacity. About 40% of the available spots at Ramp A are reserved for monthly contract holders, 992 of which were SOV and 433 of which were carpool; 430 of those 433 carpool contracts were the \$20 discounted variety.

With 1,573 stalls, Ramp B is slightly over a quarter of the overall capacity between the three ramps while Ramp C is at 1,493. By comparison, both are much more full on average, with 67 to 71% of spaces occupied over the course of last year. Due to growth in commercial and residential developments in the warehouse district and North Loop, these ramps remain popular for nearby residents and commuters. Over 85% of spaces used at Ramps B and C are by contract holders. At Ramp B, there were 256 carpool contracts and 1,010 SOV contracts. Of the 1,107 contract spots at Ramp C, 1026 were SOV and 81 carpool. Of those 81 carpool contracts, all but one was the discounted \$20 variety. Consequently, monthly and daily parking remain the primary sources of revenue here. The balance between contract, daily and event parking at each of the ABC Ramps was the basis of pricing changes in 2016 that intended to move some monthly contract holders as well as event traffic, to Ramp A where there is consistently greater capacity.

Portions of the ABC Ramps have also been used for transit, intercity and charter bus operations, and much of this activity continues today. Metro Transit operates transit centers on the street level of Ramps A and B. These are two of Metro Transit's key areas in downtown Minneapolis for bus operations and layover spaces for bus operators. For a time, the I-394 level of Ramp A was used for a shuttle for Twins games, but this service was discontinued. Megabus currently uses the street level bus lobby in Ramp C, and the I-394 level bus lobby in Ramp B is used by charter buses. Despite ongoing utilization of the ABC Ramps for bus operations, there is significant underutilized space throughout the ramps that

could serve a transportation operations role. For examples, these spaces could be used as staging areas for micro-transit and for pick-ups and drop-offs by transportation network companies.

Non-transportation uses have been proposed for the airspace above the ABC Ramps in recent years. A golf training center, St. Andrew's Golf Academy (SAGA) was proposed for the top level of Ramp A in 1998. The City of Minneapolis passed a resolution in 1999 expressing support for SAGA, and in 2002 MnDOT signed a 25-year airspace lease for SAGA. In 2003, however, the development of SAGA was put on hold pending development of a MnDOT airspace policy that was consistent with FHWA guidance on the use of airspace above an interstate highway. In 2005, MnDOT established the ABC Ramps Working Group to draft an airspace policy, among other tasks related to the operation of the ramps.

In 2006, MnDOT adopted a policy document produced by the ABC Ramps Working Group—*A Guide to Mn/DOT National Highway System (NHS) Airspace Lease Policy and Procedures*—that addressed the issue of what the proper protocol was for dealing with airspace above a co-managed facility like the ABC Ramps. The plan arose in part from continued interest to use the top level of Ramp A for a golf training facility. The policy was unique in that it was one of the first dealing with the topic of facilitating private activities on interstate property. The policy stated that non-highway use of such airspace could be allowed under the condition that the use was:¹⁴

- Interim, as in not exceeding 99 years.
- Not interfering with the current safety, construction, operation or maintenance of the facility or “anticipated future transportation need.”
- Not interfering with the original purpose of any associated structures.
- Leased at a fair market value as determined by MnDOT.
- Approved by the FHWA.

In 2008, MnDOT issued a request for information (RFI) to gather information about potential development opportunities that would “generate additional revenue which could provide for transportation enhancements in the I-394 corridor.” Responses to the RFI were submitted by Downtown Golf for development on Ramp A and the Minnesota Twins for development on Ramp B. A subgroup of the ABC Working Group convened to consider the RFI responses and issued a recommendation not to proceed with either of the proposals. The Commissioner of MnDOT accepted the recommendation and the proposals were not pursued. In 2009 the Deputy Commissioner of MnDOT announced that the agency would not reopen the RFI because of construction, changes in the surrounding neighborhood, congestion and uncertainty about future transportation needs related to the ABC Ramps.

¹⁴ MnDOT Policy Position Statement 6.5 “Agreements Relating to the Use OF and Access to Highway Airspace,” October 10, 2006

Currently, MnDOT has a 25-year airspace lease with Cooperative Energy Futures to install a solar garden on Ramp A. The developer is currently finalizing plans and construction is expected to begin later in 2018. The solar garden will cover approximately half of the top of Ramp A and provide a canopy over the parking deck.¹⁵

Other non-parking uses of the ramps include skyway advertising contract with Out Front Media to have back-lit and digital advertising boards in the hallways of the ramps that connect to the skyway system and a contract with the Metropolitan Council to provide sleeping rooms and a break area for the Northstar Train operators who need a space to rest during their split shift.

The 1989 Maintenance and Operations Plan for the ABC Ramps remains in use today and outlines the general approach to maintaining security in the ramps. It state that basic security strategies such as use of security guards, security cameras, lighting, emergency phones and clearly-marked exits will be employed.¹⁶ Today, the City of Minneapolis contracts with ABM Parking Services to operate the ramps, and ABM subcontracts with Securitas for security services.¹⁷

Entertainment venues such as stadiums and nightclubs near the ABC Ramps generate some of the security incidents that occur in the ramps. Another driver of security concerns is that many of the services available to people experiencing homelessness are located adjacent to Ramp A. The proximity of these services to Ramp A results in significant traffic of people experiencing homelessness in that ramp, and accompanying this traffic are people who prey on people experiencing homeless through theft and physical abuse. Overall, crime rates in the ABC Ramps are lower than in nearby private parking ramps. This may be attributable in part to the over 400 security cameras and 800 red emergency buttons located throughout the facilities.¹⁸ However, despite the City of Minneapolis' efforts to ensure security in the ABC Ramps, there have been several major security incidents in recent years. Several women were assaulted in mid-to-late 2014 in Ramps A and C,¹⁹ and a woman was fatally stabbed in

¹⁵ Task 8: Policy, ordinance, statute and guidance review. November 20, 2017

¹⁶ "Maintenance and Operations Plan for the I-394 Third Avenue Distributor Garage A, Garage B, Garage C," pages 38-39.

¹⁷ <http://www.startribune.com/stabbing-puts-ramp-danger-in-spotlight/438755323/>

¹⁸ <http://www.startribune.com/security-stepped-up-at-downtown-ramps-after-brazen-daytime-assaults/278589491/>

¹⁹ <http://www.startribune.com/security-stepped-up-at-downtown-ramps-after-brazen-daytime-assaults/278589491/>

2017 in Ramp A three days after a sexual assault was reported in Ramp B.²⁰ Overall, the security situation at the ABC Ramps appears to fluctuate with crime levels in the surrounding neighborhood.

FUTURE OF THE ABC RAMPS

The ABC Ramps remain a substantial portion of the publicly managed off-street parking in downtown Minneapolis and remain a core start or ending point for infrastructure supporting a variety of modes: MnPASS, Metro Transit local routes, light rail transit, commuter rail, inter-city bus travel, bike trails and the Minneapolis skyway system. As the ABC Ramps move past their 25th anniversary, questions remain on what can be done to fulfill the initial purpose of the ABC Ramps while innovating to meet present and future transportation demands.

- How are the ABC Ramps, corridors performing and are they serving their intended purpose to reduce congestion on corridors leading to downtown? Should rules of the existing incentive programs be changed?
- How can features of the ABC Ramps better serve its customer base and the broader public? Market research and public outreach efforts since the early 2000s have attempted to understand how programs can help promote the original mission of the ABC Ramps.
- How can the ABC Ramps more effectively partner with employers and regional organizations to implement programs and campaigns that complement existing travel demand management strategies?
- How can the ABC Ramps align with goals and efforts of related partner organizations?
- What parking related campaigns have been attempted elsewhere in the US and abroad and is there room to adapt those to ramp programming?
- How should the ABC Ramps adapt programming in anticipation to disruptive changes in transportation, from vehicle electrification and automation to shared mobility services?

²⁰ <http://www.startribune.com/stabbing-puts-ramp-danger-in-spotlight/438755323/>