

ODOT's On-Street Parking Policy and Outer Powell Boulevard

ODOT must consider many factors when deciding to allow new on-street parking along state highways. Here are the issues ODOT must weigh when making the decision, as required by the ODOT Highway Design Manual.

The ODOT Highway Design Manual supports providing on-street parking in “traditional downtown commercial districts” and in designated “special transportation areas” where conditions are appropriate. This means looking at two general issues:

- 1. Does existing development comprise a traditional downtown commercial district?** Is the area designated a Special Transportation Area (STA) in the Oregon Highway Plan? Is compact, mixed-use development in place? Are buildings close together and adjacent to the street, with little or no setback? Does the area look like a traditional downtown or main street?
- 2. Do traffic conditions allow for on-street parking while maintaining safety and avoiding excessive congestion?** Are travel speeds 30 mph or lower? (On-street parking is much less safe where speeds are higher.) Is there adequate sight-distance so drivers can see a parked car as it's pulling into traffic? If on-street parking is provided, can the street still meet mobility standards? (On-street parking can exacerbate congestion as vehicles slow down and do parking maneuvers in travel lanes. This can be a particular problem near high-volume intersections such as SE 122nd and Powell.)

The Outer Powell corridor does not have the characteristics of a traditional downtown commercial district as defined in the Highway Design Manual, and is not designated an STA. It is what the manual considers an Urban Business Area (UBA) or “urban-fringe/suburban.” On UBAs, the manual says, “Most UBAs are not appropriate for on-street parking due to the higher traffic speeds, traffic volumes, and typical development patterns.” Regarding urban fringe/suburban areas, it says, “On-street parking should generally not be allowed because of the higher traffic speeds and low density of roadside development. Additionally, on-street parking reduces the capacity, efficiency and safety of the highway within this highway segment designation.”

Could conditions on Outer Powell be changed so that ODOT could allow on-street parking in some places? For that to happen, ODOT must consider:

Is zoning and actual development in place that would meet the definition of an STA or a traditional downtown commercial district? Is the area a Metro 2040 town center or main street? It is important that development is in place or imminent to create a roadside environment that sends a message to drivers that they should expect to encounter on-street parking. Are the land uses intense enough and are there limited off-street parking alternatives so that any on-street parking spots are likely to be used with some frequency?

If speeds are above the 25-30 mph range, can they be reduced to allow for safe on-street parking? What impact would lower speeds and on-street parking have on the street's traffic carrying capacity? This is an issue for streets like Powell Boulevard that carry significant amounts of regional traffic in addition to local traffic.

Are there alternatives? This means both alternative locations for main street development, and alternative parking arrangements that can support the needs of businesses along Powell Blvd. ODOT policy does not support the creation of new main-street districts or STAs along ODOT facilities, particularly where other potential locations exist, perpendicular to the State Highway or along city streets. Another alternative is to provide off-street parking or on-street parking on local streets to support business districts. Vital pedestrian-oriented business districts don't necessarily require on-street parking.

In conclusion, so long as Outer Powell Boulevard remains an ODOT facility, it is unlikely that ODOT can approve on-street parking as a design feature for street improvements.