Special Issues

As part of the Decatur CTP, several specific issues were examined for special study. These special issues include: parking management, traffic calming in neighborhoods, and a railroad quiet zone. Each of these issues, while seemingly unrelated, all share a common thread as they have a significant impact on the quality of health and vitality of a community. This chapter provides the City with recommendations to help achieve the proper balance Where noted, additional documentation is located in the Appendix section of this document.

Parking Management

The management of parking resources is vital in the promotion of a pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly community. Availability and cost of parking has a direct effect on whether people choose to drive, walk, roll or ride. The City must provide "just enough" parking to satisfy need instead of an overabundance to incite more driving.

On- street parking and curbspace are two of Decatur's most valuable publicly-owned and managed resources. The supply of streets is essentially fixed – at the same time as growth and urbanization are placing new demands on the limited supply of parking. Off-street parking, meanwhile, is expensive to construct – around $40,000 for each underground space, $20,000 for each above-ground space and $3,000 for each surface space, depending upon the value of the land. Where land costs are highest, surface- and above-grade parking can approach or exceed the cost of building underground parking. In addition, every parking space has annual operating and maintenance costs that accrue to the owner and are not recovered unless the auto operator bears the costs directly through parking charges, meters or permit fees.

Careful management of the City's curbspace and parking resources is therefore essential for financial reasons. Parking and curbspace are now managed by the Community and Economic Development Office. The city owns the Conference Center Parking Garage adjacent to the Holiday Inn on Clairemont Avenue. The hotel manages the parking deck

operations. Active management of on-street parking, as well as influencing how private off-street parking resources are managed, can help the city achieve its broader transportation, land use and economic development policies.

Parking availability is a key contributor to the financial health of the City's commercial centers. At the same time, parking management is one of the most important tools for managing congestion, growing transit ridership and achieving the wider goals of the Community Transportation Plan. A successful CTP will shift preferences to walking, bicycling and riding transit so that driving becomes a choice and not a necessity. Furthermore, on-street parking has been shown to increase pedestrians' sense of safety, thereby having the potential to increase physical activity levels.

"A successful CTP will shift preferences to walking, bicycling and riding transit so that driving becomes a choice and not a necessity.."

Parking policy in Decatur is also subject to considerable tensions due to population and employment growth, particularly in the higher-density areas. As the downtown and other parts of the city grow up, parking conditions must change accordingly – from free parking to priced parking, and from "front-door" parking outside every business to a "park once" environment where most people need to walk a short distance to their final destination. In some cases, however, expectations have yet to adjust, and many people perceive there to be a parking shortage as a result – even though ample parking is available.

This Community Transportation Plan focuses primarily on parking and curbspace management in the downtown. It draws on suggestions that were discussed during the public outreach phase of the CTP in the Fall 2006.

An inventory of parking assets and policies is located in Appendix A of this document.

Decatur Parking Philosophy & Recommendations

The following parking philosophy and recommendations are designed to support the City of Decatur realize its vision of a healthy community. The recommendations are arranged in the following order: curbspace management, off-street management, development regulations, and other recommendations.

Philosophy

Decatur will provide for the parking supply needed to service the many community demands in a cost-efficient and equitable manner while increasing the walkability of the community and not creating inducements for more driving. Decatur will manage the parking supply for greater availability in commercial areas, minimal impact on residential areas, and enhanced user convenience. Decatur will use equitable, fiscally-sound, and environmentally sustainable practices.

Recommendations

A. Curbspace Management

- **Prioritize curbspace.** Not all curbside uses are created equal. Use market-based pricing, time limits, and other management tools to match the use of curbspace to the

desired users in different geographic areas and at different times. **Error! Reference source not found.**10-1 shows the general hierarchy of uses, however other prioritization factors may include the special needs of specific land uses adjacent or proximate to the street, the overall make-up of a district, proximity of MARTA stations, and the availability of all types of curbspace, are also very important in determining priorities. Due to this combination of additional factors, a low general priority may trump a higher priority under certain conditions.

Table 10-1 General Curbspace Management Priorities

Priority	Areas
High	• Pedestrian bulbouts • Bus stops • Paratransit stops
Medium	• Car Sharing (“Flexcar”) • Taxi stands • Short-term customer parking
Low	• Driveways / curb-cuts (maximum of one per site) • Loading zones • Valet parking • Long-term (employee) parking

- **Set meter rates to achieve occupancy goals.** At present, there is no differential between short-term meter rates, whether the space is in the heart of an urban center or in a lower-demand area. In consequence, the most attractive parking spaces fill up first. Meter rates should be set at the lowest price necessary to achieve 85% occupancy – the rate that represents the best balance between making it easy to find a space while maximizing utilization. This will require differential rates by location, with higher rates in the most dense commercial cores, and time of day. Rate adjustments should be a staff decision to achieve the occupancy goals set by the City Commission and revisited annually.

- **Set meter hours to better manage parking demands throughout the day and week.** Adjustments to meter hours and prices can help balance parking demands with supplies. Meter hours may need to be extended into the evenings in locales where parking demands peak in the evening and at night.

- **Shift from time limits to pricing to promote turnover.** Time limits are currently used to promote turnover, with shorter time limits set for the most desirable spaces. Once a policy of market rate pricing is adopted with the goal of achieving an 85% occupancy rate on each block, then time limits can actually be eliminated. With their elimination, much of the worry and “ticket anxiety” for downtown customers disappears, along with the enforcement challenges of preventing meter feeding. New technologies can allow differential price structures, with lower rates for the first two hours and higher rates for subsequent hours to discourage commuters from using spaces intended to serve multiple short-term users such as shoppers. Existing street frontages in high demand areas with parking time limits but no meters should be converted to pay parking.

- **Implement new technologies.** Pay-by-space and pay-and-display machines offer a wider variety of payment options and streamlined enforcement, while minimizing street clutter. Based on the results of the City's trials, these should be implemented on commercial frontages across Decatur, in place of existing meters and time limits. The City should also examine the potential to use automated enforcement technologies, such as remote sensing devices or license plate recognition technology, to improve compliance while collecting routine occupancy data for management purposes. Payment by cell phone is another technology that could be considered.

- **Develop guidelines for on-street parking.** Engineering guidelines would identify where additional curbspaces can be created, for example by converting travel lanes to off-peak (or full-time) parking. The guidelines would also identify where parallel parking can be converted to diagonal parking.

- **Enforce parking regulations.** The City's commitment to on-street parking management, promotion of parking turnover, and maintaining moving travel lanes can only be accomplished by enforcing the regulations.

- **Monitor the success of residential parking reforms.** The enhanced residential zoned permit parking regulations will need close attention to identify any needed refinements.

B. Off-Street Management

- **Develop criteria for establishing new public and publicly-accessible garages.** New garages and municipal surface parking lots elsewhere in the City serving cultural and community facilities may be desired, but the City needs to first develop consistent criteria on when such investments may be warranted. These might include:

  - Projected occupancy of on-street parking and existing garages;
  - Potential for supply to be provided through negotiating shared use or leasing space in existing garages;
  - Financial feasibility through in-lieu fees, user fees, assessments on property owners, and parking meter revenue;
  - A strategy for covering the garage's debt service, future capital and maintenance costs; and
  - A strategy for maximum utilization of the garage throughout the day and night.
  - Consider implementing a tax on the revenue collected at private and public garages to pay the debt service needed to fund the construction of new parking garages and lots.

- **Set up a parking brokerage in urban centers.** This service would address the barriers to shared parking, and seek to open up private parking facilities to public use. The parking brokerage would be best housed within a Business Improvement District (Community Improvement District or similar organization), and would:

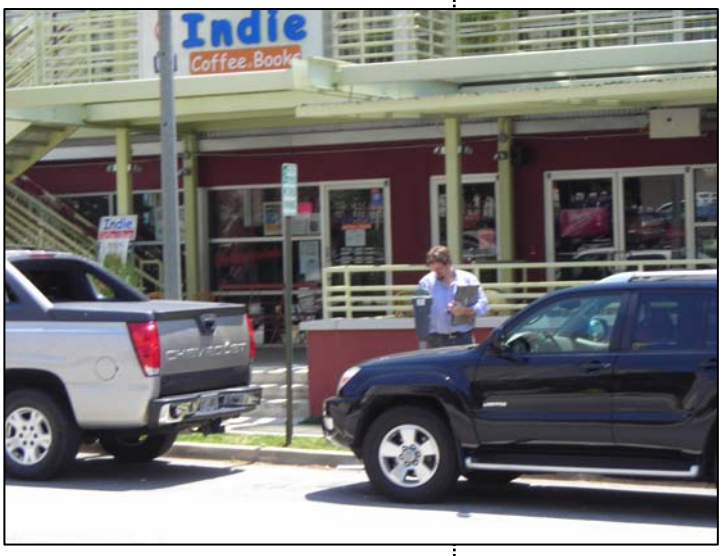
- Identify concentrations of centrally located surplus evening and weekend parking that are unavailable to the public.

- In partnership with parking facility owners, identify the barriers to making these facilities available for public use, such as cost, liability, security, and inconvenience. Not all buildings need to participate in order for a shared parking program to be successful; therefore these efforts should focus on the largest, most promising facilities.

- Provide the necessary liability insurance, operational assistance, and other support to overcome these barriers. The BID may need to lease the entire facility, and contract out evening operations. In some cases, valet parking may be the best option to overcome security concerns.

- In order to attract users, the parking may need to be free of charge initially. However, a nominal fee should be introduced as soon as possible, in order to help catalyze the development of further paid parking facilities in the area, as well as offsetting costs.

- **Improve parking information.** The City brochure "Decatur Mallternative", published in Spring 2006, sets the standard for clear, accessible parking information. It is regularly updated on the city's webpage. On the streets, it should be complemented with better signage, including banners on garages that offer public parking. The City should also explore the potential for real-time information on parking availability via the web site and changeable on-site message signs.



- **Encourage ridesharing through garage accommodations.** Develop policies that encourage carpool and vanpool parking thro ugh designation of convenient spaces and discounted fee structures.

C. Development Regulations

- **Develop guidelines for site plan review.** Applicants requesting site plan approvals or major site plan amendments are required in some cases to prepare and submit a formal traffic impact analysis *(TIA)*. The TIA estimates the impact of the development on the local transportation system. The City Commission may impose conditions in the approval of a site plan, including transportation measures and access and design of off-street parking. However, the City Zoning Ordinance does not specify the conditions which may be imposed. The following policies are recommended to be standard conditions for site plan approval:

  - Use of shared parking at nearby, off-site locations to maximize utilization of parking spaces and take advantage of parking demand at different times by different uses;
  - Require market-based pricing for public parking on-site, which lowers demand for parking while encouraging use of non-auto modes;

  - Employers should provide a monthly transportation stipend to each employee, as well as charge each employee if they want to park on-site. Employees who do not use their stipend can cash it out and keep it as incentive not to drive to work;
  - Unbundle parking costs, so that tenants pay for the parking they use, instead of an automatic surcharge on office or residential space, just for being in the building. When implemented it must be coupled with adequate protection of adjacent areas. Candidates for initial testing are residential properties within two blocks of the Town Center Parking Garage.
- **Revise zoning requirements**. Parking requirements for new downtown development should be adjusted in line with the following objectives:
  - Do not require more parking than expected demand. This means tailoring parking requirements to provide reductions for proximity to transit (for all uses, not just commercial), affordable housing, and demand management programs such as priced parking and car-sharing;
  - Encourage parking to be located off-site and shared with other uses, especially where there are constraints in parcel sizes and configurations as consolidated parking facilities may provide advantages of scale and management; and
  - Require or encourage separation of parking costs from sale or rental prices, allowing occupants to choose how much parking to rent or purchase.

- **Develop an in-lieu fee program.** In order to encourage off-site parking provision and shared parking, the City should implement an in-lieu fee program. This would allow developers to pay a fee to a dedicated City fund, as an alternative to providing on-site parking or negotiating their own shared parking agreements. Fee revenue should be used to construct new public parking facilities in the general vicinity and/or expand other transportation programs to reduce the demand for parking.

- **Bicycle parking provisions.** To encourage bicycle travel to commercial districts, workplaces, schools and other community facilities, the City should consider implementing a bicycle parking program and a requirement for new development.

- **Track the results.** Determine a schedule for collection of parking utilization data (including utilization of parking throughout the day and week, by space, space hour, and space turnover), so decision-makers have current data for adjustments of parking management policies. The collection of this type of data should be a site plan condition for new development. These data will become the basis to determine whether City initiatives are effectively influencing travel characteristics.

D. Other Recommendations

- **MultiSpace Meters —** MultiSpace parking meters, already in use in many U.S. cities, including Washington, DC, can be tested in Decatur. While the introduction of new technologies can create some initial confusion for users, a pilot program in Decatur

that tests several types of multi-space meters at locations in the downtown area is recommended. Advantages of the multi-space meters are several: they can accept multiple payment forms including credit cards, they can collect usage data for better program management, they can permit more vehicles to park within a given area and they free up sidewalk area for other uses.

- **ParkSmart and iPark Cards —** The ParkSmart Card is an easy-to-use, prepaid, debit card the size of a credit card. These are not currently in use in Decatur. The ParkSmart Card is a convenient, secure way to pay for metered parking without coins. The ParkSmart Card provides parkers with an easier and faster experience parking experience. The iPark, is a small in-car parking device with prepayment that allows the parker to pay only for the minutes that are actually used. The iPark can be used without the use of coins. Both cards allow for less time spent looking for change for the meter, permitting visitors to get in and out faster, with parking spaces become available sooner.

- **Valet Parking –** Valet parking is more space-efficient and may become increasingly desired by Decatur businesses. Valet parking is regulated by City permit.

- **Car-Sharing Spaces –** Car-sharing companies including “Flex-car” currently operate in Decatur, Atlanta and at Emory University. On-street spaces can be reserved in the commercial corridors for the exclusive use of car-share vehicles. The cars may be used by car-share members and generally are utilized several times daily. This cost-effective alternative to owning a vehicle may become an efficient way to reduce the overall number of vehicles parked downtown.

- **Loading zones –** Loading zones are desirable when no alley or off-street space is available for truck loading and there are frequent truck pick-ups or deliveries at a building. Loading zones can be regulated as to their hours and lengths to manage activities and traffic impacts.

- **Taxi service –** Curb space has been reserved at one location for taxis. The taxi stand provide both taxi patrons and drivers a known place to connect, so that the need for taxi cruising of streets is reduced. The City may want to encourage one or more local taxi companies to offer Decatur residents a flat-fee (say $5 each way) for a ride home after an evening (or day) in downtown Decatur.

Challenges to Implementing the Recommendations

While Decatur benefits from a great number of parking assets, there are also several barriers to achieving the parking recommendations. In particular:

- **Community perceptions**. There is a disconnect between public perceptions of actual parking conditions. The perception that parking is hard to find does not match the fact that the actual number of available spaces is high. Much of this can be explained by higher occupancies in the most visible, convenient parking spaces. However, poor perceptions of parking availability may also relate to the transformation of Decatur into a more urban community, where parking is a priced commodity and may be located a short walk from the final destination. Community expectations of free, "front door" parking may take longer to be accepted.

- **Impacts of construction.** Development in the downtown area results in a loss of on-street spaces for construction staging. The City does not have an effective mechanism to mitigate the loss of parking, although contractors do reimburse the City for lost meter revenue.

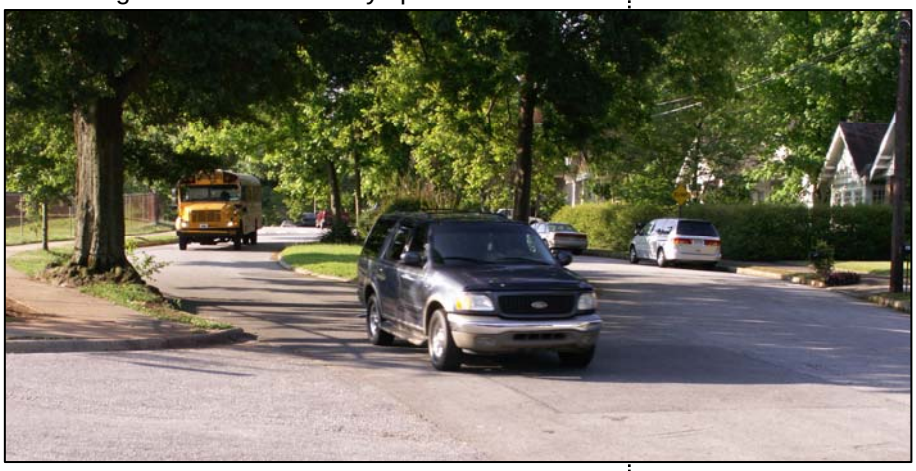
- **Limited data.** Effective parking management requires comprehensive data on parking occupancy and utilization, which the City does not currently collect on a routine basis.

- **Funding.** The City does not have a dedicated funding stream for its parking programs, which limits the potential for active management and implementation of new programs such as brokering shared parking.

- **Conflicting City Policies.** The City's desire to improve business by advertising the availability of parking spaces may be seen as contrary to the City's encouragement of transit, walking and bicycling. It is important that the City articulate its parking policy within the context of promoting choice and proper balance among all modes.

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming is one of the most stated issues of concern for urban neighborhoods. While a grid-like street system provides increased access and connectivity, the residents see the though traffic as an invasion of their neighborhood community space. It has a considerable effect on quality of life as it contributes to residents' actual and perceived level of safety and ability to use the street for walking, biking and playing.



Successful traffic calming measures are able to maintain the connectivity for vehicles, but mitigate the negative effects of excessive traffic speed and volume for residents. The toolbox of techniques presented in this section is intended to provide the City with a broad range of options to match neighborhood concerns with appropriate measures.

In fall 2006, a traffic calming workshop was conducted as part of the Decatur CTP with four neighborhoods identified by City staff: Sycamore Drive, South Columbia Drive,

Garden Lane / Lamont Drive, and East Lake Drive / Second Avenue. At the workshop, participants were educated on general traffic calming principles and strategies, and together with the project team, asked to identify issues and potential solutions for their specific neighborhoods. (A summary of the workshop is located in Appendix B of this document.) The workshop served as a springboard for the development of a City-wide Residential Traffic Calming Program, also detailed in Appendix B.

The following provides information on a toolkit of traffic calming techniques and strategies and an overview of the Decatur residential program.

Traffic Calming Toolkit of Techniques & Strategies

Traffic calming techniques generally fall under two categories - physical and psychological. In general, wider roads encourage higher automobile speeds. Consequently, many traffic calming techniques are designed to physically change the width or alignment of the street. If a motorist can see far into the distance, his or her speed increases. The interruption of sight lines with changes in the road direction using techniques such as slow-points and mini traffic circles, or breaking the road into smaller visual units by changing the surface pavement using techniques such as brick pavers or stamped concrete, causes most drivers to slow down. It also means motorists widen their vision field becoming much more aware of pedestrians and bicyclists. Proper changes in the road design encourage traffic to travel at a slower, more even pace.

Traffic calming may also be achieved by changing the psychological feel of the street. Streets using different surface types, vertical landscaping or narrowed lanes create the appropriate space for a relaxed, pedestrian-friendly feel. These psychological changes give motorists cues that they are no longer on a major roadway but are in a different environment that is shared with people. Gateway features at the entrance to neighborhoods also give motorists cues that they are no longer on a major roadway.

All traffic calming techniques have a limited (typically a reduction in the 85th percentile speed of two to seven mph) range of effectiveness. To achieve traffic calming objectives, some techniques need to be placed every 500 feet. If traffic calming techniques are spaced too far apart, traffic may slow close to the installation, but the overall speed along the street will probably not decrease. If spaced too closely, residents of the neighborhood may grow frustrated and petition for removal. One traffic calming technique may be used multiple times or multiple techniques may be used in conjunction with one another. Most techniques will affect emergency service response, traffic noise, air quality, congestion,

fuel consumption and many other factors. Some can improve these conditions; others may cause these problems to increase.

Emergency vehicle access and response time must be carefully considered when designing and installing traffic calming measures. Emergency vehicles, particularly ambulances and fire vehicles, have more difficulty with “vertical” measures such as 14-foot long speed humps than with “horizontal” measures such as neckdowns. Longer fire vehicles and equipment such as ladder trucks may have trouble negotiating some “horizontal” measures. Studies have shown that traffic calming measures may slow response time up to ten (10) seconds per traffic calming measure.

Likewise, bicyclists, pedestrians and other expected street users must be kept in mind when developing a traffic calming strategy, as some measures can obstruct their movement. Many measures can be modified to allow bicyclists and pedestrians to bypass them. For instance, a choker can be fitted with a bicycle / pedestrian path to allow for those users’ particular access needs (which also keeps stormwater flowing near the curb during a storm).

A summary of available options for neighborhood traffic calming is provided in Table 10-2. The options have been structured into three levels. Level 1 is the least restrictive while Level 3 is the most restrictive. These options have been chosen for their impact on vehicle speeds on residential streets. Additional details for each option, including a sketch of the technique as well as its advantages and disadvantages are in Appendix B.

All the options shown in Table 10-2 are eligible for use on residential local streets; however, only the Level 1 and 2 options are eligible for use on collectors. Level 1 are the only options suitable for thoroughfares.

Table 10-2 **Residential Traffic Calming Measures**

Residential Traffic Calming Measures

Level	Traffic Calming Measure	Applies to Pilot Study Streets?	Applies to Neighborhood Conservation Streets?	Applies to Downtown Core and Urban Mixed Use Streets?	Applies to Regional Boulevards?	Typical Cost	Pros (Effectiveness expressed in terms of reduction in 85th percentile speed)	Cons
1	Neighborhood Education	All	Yes	Yes	Yes	$1,000 - $5,000	Sends message to residents of the area (negligible effect on speed, but positive relations are fostered)	Hard-to-reach residents may be the worst offenders. May not have lasting effect.
1	Higher visibility crosswalks	All	Yes	Yes	Yes	$1,000 - $5,000	Sends message to motorist	False sense of security for some pedestrians
1	Active Speed Zone Signs (solar powered pole-mounted signs that are permanent)	All	Yes	Yes	Yes	$5,000 - $9,000	Permanent installation (6 mph if mostly local traffic but negligible effect on speed on high volume streets)	May not have lasting effect
1	Radar Speed Trailer (mobile trailers that can be stationed and re-positioned as desired)	All	Yes	Yes	Yes	$10,000 - $15,000	Motorist would not know if police nearby or not (negligible long-term speed reduction after trailer is moved to other site)	Capital intensive with multiple trailers
1	Police Enforcement	All	Yes	Yes	Yes	90,000 / year officer and equipment	Rapid response (effective while Police on site, but not after)	No lasting effect Resource-intensive
2	Traffic Calming Sign and Roadway Striping	S, 2	Yes	Yes	No	$50 - $5,000	Sends message to motorists, may encourage more on-street parking (effects are debated)	Typically does not reduce speeds much
2	Commercial Vehicle Restrictions	S	Yes	Yes	No	$50 per sign	Reduce noise. Enhance perceived safety improvement	No speed reduction
2	Elongated Speed Humps	No	Yes	Yes	No	$2,500	Better than 14-foot speed humps for emergency vehicles (6 mph at the hump)	Requires emergency vehicles to slow to 20 mph to avoid damage
2	Raised Crosswalks	No	Yes	Yes	No	$3,000 - $4,000	Raised surface slows vehicles Textured paving and visible to drivers (3 mph at the hump)	Choice of paving material is critical to maximize visibility and safety
2	Speed Watch	All	Yes	Yes	No	$5,000	Success (10 mph) in Gwinnett Co. due to large investment of staff and neighbor time	Potential for assault if motorist is enraged
2	Neighborhood Traffic Circles	S, 2	Yes	Yes	No	$5,000 - $10,000	Block drivers view of a long street..Forces drivers to go around slowly. (4 mph)	May require special design to accommodate large trucks, such as moving vans
2	Center Island Narrowings	S, 2	Yes	Yes	No	$8,000 - $12,000	Can be nicely landscaped Refuge for pedestrians Neighborhood entrance marker (2 mph)	Loss of on-street parking spaces May block driveways
2	Realigned Intersections		Yes	Yes	No	$10,000 - $15,000	Few other options for “T” intersections	Limited application May require additional right-of-way
2	Neckdowns	S, 2	Yes	Yes	No	$10,000 - $20,000	Aesthetics Shorter distance for pedestrians to cross (negligible change in speed)	Difficult for large trucks to turn May affect stormwater drainage system, requiring expensive reconstruction
2	Chicane with on-street parking	2	Yes	Yes	No		Can be low cost just striping (4 mph)	
2	Parallel Shared-use Path	C	No	Yes	Yes		(no change in speed)	
3	25 Speed Limit	All	Yes	No	No	$50 per sign	Existing city policy	Ineffective unless combined with other measures
3	Speed Humps		Yes	No	No	$2,000	Cost Effective when well designed (7 mph at the hump)	Poor aesthetics Slows fire response Slows medical response

A *Traffic Calming State -of-the-Practice* report published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers and the Federal Highway Administration tested the safety impacts of traffic calming measures in the United States. The results are shown in Table 10-3.

Table 10-3 Safety Impacts of Traffic Calming Measures

	No. of observations	Average no. of collisions before/after treatment	% change in collisions
Humps	54	2.8/2.4	-14%
22'Tables	51	1.5/0.8	-47%
Circles outside Seattle Circles in Seattle	17 130	5.9/4.2 2.2/0.6	-29% -73%
All measures without adjustments With adjustments (changes in traffic volume)	235 47	2.2/1.1 1.8/1.2	-50% -33%

Objectives and Policies of the Decatur Residential Traffic Calming Program

Successful traffic calming programs include the planning process, overall community participation and local authority support. Because residents are the main initiators of traffic calming requests, it is critical that they be a part of the process as much as possible. Developing a program early on that addresses neighborhood traffic safety and livability concerns on an areawide basis encourages citizens to become actively involved in the improvement process. In this way, City staff and the residents can work together to create safer and more livable neighborhoods throughout Decatur.

The objectives of the Decatur Residential Traffic Calming Program are to improve Decatur residents' safety and quality of life by:

- Achieving appropriate vehicle speeds on residential streets.
- Enhancing conditions that will encourage bicycling and walking.
- Involving citizens in neighborhood traffic management activities.

As such the following polices form the backbone of the program:

1) The city will respond to all traffic calming applications.

2) The program is intended to be applied to local streets serving predominantly single-family residential neighborhoods. Urban mixed-use streets and Downtown Core streets may also be considered for less restrictive traffic calming measures. Streets that are designated as Regional Boulevards are not eligible for this program. Chapter 5 shows the Decatur street typology.

3) Reasonable emergency vehicle access within and through neighborhoods will be carefully considered in the evaluation of traffic management and must be preserved in some reasonable fashion. It is recognized that certain traffic calming techniques may result in increased emergency response times on some streets and these impacts must be understood and carefully considered in developing

the traffic calming program. The fire department, police department and other emergency responders will be actively involved in the process and notified of all installations.

4) Decatur shall employ a variety of traffic calming strategies and techniques to achieve the program objectives. Such traffic calming strategies and techniques shall be planned and designed in conformance with sound engineering and planning practices. Each location will be studied on an individual basis to determine the most appropriate applications for that situation.

5) To provide equal access to these public safety-oriented traffic calming measures in all areas of the city, a cost threshold should be set for any given neighborhood project. That threshold should allow the most basic traffic calming measures to be installed. Costs above the threshold should be considered as a possible co-pay for residents of the "affected area".

6) Successful traffic calming requires Education, Enforcement, Encouragement, and Infrastructure. No funding will be provided for infrastructure improvements without addressing all areas of traffic calming.

Rail Road Quiet Zone

Implementation of a quiet zone at rail-highway intersections can be an effective means for communities to alleviate some of the noise and annoyance of a neighboring railroad line. Essentially the quiet zone allows federally approved safety infrastructure improvements to take the place of train horns. The CSX railroad corridor along College and Howard Avenues is a prominent feature in the Decatur landscape. Residents and students complain of disruption to both sleep and concentration levels when trains blow warning horns, both which contribute vastly to the quality of mental and physical health. This section evaluates the creation of a railroad quiet zone for Decatur, and the potential safety and health implications.

As part of the CTP, research was conducted on the creation of a railroad quiet zone along the CSX rail corridor along College Avenue and Howard Avenue in Decatur. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has regulatory jurisdiction and defines quiet zones as "a segment of a rail line, within which is situated one or a number of consecutive public highway-rail crossings at which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded."

The establishment of a quiet zone would potentially reduce noise, distraction and annoyance to residences, schools, and businesses located near the rail line. In order to create a new quiet zone, the FRA has specific guidelines which must be met. These guidelines are included in the Appendix section of this document. A quiet zone could be created by using supplemental safety measures such as installing medians or additional

gates/arms. The following sections identify the potential issues associated with a new quiet zone in Decatur.

The CSX Rail Corridor through Decatur

The City of Decatur has three primary at-grade highway-rail crossings: Candler Street, McDonough Street, and Atlanta Avenue – all to the north of College Avenue. All three crossings have existing safety measures including cross-bucks, automatic warning gates in two quadrants at each crossing, and flashing lights which are standard at most major highway-railroad crossings. The corridor in between these crossings is either elevated (including overpasses over roadways such as Commerce Drive and East Lake Drive) or the rails run at- or nearly at-grade. Much of the at-grade track is unprotected; that is, without fencing, and is therefore subject to trespassing. Observations made for this study show that trespassing occurs, particularly during morning and afternoon periods when students walk to and from nearby schools. Decatur High School, Renfroe Middle School and Oakhurst Elementary School are all located within walking distance of the railroad tracks.

According to the FRA, quiet zone applications address only highway-rail crossings. Segments of the rail corridors between these crossings, where pedestrian or bicyclist could trespass, are not addressed in the quiet zone application. If a person is seen trespassing in the railroad right-of-way when a locomotive nears, the engineer will sound the horn whether or not a quiet zone exists. This is noted because a quiet zone could be created in Decatur by making physical changes to at-grade street crossings, as described in this chapter, but the risk to pedestrians who trespass across the tracks may actually increase. Currently, the absence of the horn sound indicates it is safe to cross the tracks. If the train becomes quiet, a trespassing pedestrian may be surprised by an approaching train and a fatal accident could occur.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The decision of whether to designate a quiet zone in the City of Decatur involves weighing the benefits and costs associated with such a project. A quiet zone would result in less distraction and annoyance to residences, schools, and businesses located near the rail line, and safety measures that are implemented as part of the quiet zone can improve safety conditions for vehicles and pedestrians at the railroad tracks.

However, potential safety issues exist as a result of quiet zone implementation. Decatur has many wide expanses of unprotected track, where pedestrians, including schoolchildren in particular, frequently cross the tracks. Although these pedestrians are technically trespassing on railroad property, there are no mechanisms currently in place to prevent this behavior, and the train horns sounding in proximity to the highway-rail crossings do serve as a warning system. Until the issue of pedestrians crossing the tracks is addressed the CTP acknowledges a new quiet zone may present a significant public safety hazard in Decatur.

The public survey conducted as part of the CTP revealed that the Decatur citizenry is essentially split on the issue of support for the quiet zone. Participants at the HIA Workshop were also split, although there was some concern that the potential safety impacts posed a more significant health risk than the noise impacts associated with train horns. Further analysis of the study results show that those residents with children are more likely to oppose it than those without. Extensive public involvement is recommended to accompany any continuing efforts by the City to further investigate the potential implementation of a quiet zone.

If the City decides to proceed with implementation of a quiet zone, action should be taken to address the issue of pedestrians trespassing along areas of open track. Even if the City decides not to proceed with a quiet zone, it is recommended that education and enforcement be implemented to help address the issue of trespassers. Specifically, Operation Life Saver (www.oli.org) is a national non-profit organization that focuses on educating the public on the dangers of disobeying railroad crossing signals as well as railroad trespassing. Additional measures that could be taken include constructing fences or barriers along segments of the corridor where trespassing occurs regularly.