

This photo demonstrates how a parking facility incorporates a pedestrian walkway and seating area inside the garage to aide in the transfer from motorist to pedestrian.



# HOW TO CREATE QUALITY LINKAGES:

## CONSIDERATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND VISUAL EXAMPLES

*Vicky Gagliano, LEED AP*

**D**o you understand all of the various components involved in linkages? Do you know what linkages are? The design considerations? The benefits and opportunities provided by quality linkages? Taking note of this small but important detail in parking planning and design will help to improve customers' overall impression and perception of your parking facilities.

A linkage is, by definition, an associative relation or the act of linking things together. Parking linkages are the roadways leading up and into a parking facility, as well as the walkways within and from a parking facility to a particular destination.

All parking facility owners should understand the importance of quality linkages between their users, the parking facilities, and the destinations the facilities serve. The experience between when you approach a parking facility,

exit your vehicle and arrive at your final destination plays a critical part in whether or not the trip was pleasant and simple or stressful and difficult. It can also mean your customers tell others about their great experience, or vow never to return again.

### **Modes of Transportation**

Linkages encompass several modes of transportation including walking, motorized walkways (power walks), bicycles, motorcycles, automobiles, shuttles, trolleys, buses, subways, railways and even airplanes. The linkages within and between each of these modes of transportation are as important as the linkage to the final destination. For example, a commuter who drives to a rail station would likely select a station that combines easy access to the parking facility from the road with a safe, efficient and short walk from their parked vehicle to the train

platform. If either of those two linkages is undesirable, that commuter will likely explore other locations.

There are three primary concepts that make up quality linkages for all parking systems.

### **Concept 1: Clear and Direct Signage**

The first and most important component of linkages in a parking system is signage and wayfinding. Motorists and pedestrians must be instructed by means of clearly written signage to inform them as to where they should go. The signage should be placed at every single location where a driver or pedestrian must make a decision, even if to simply indicate that the motorist/pedestrian should continue forward.

Think about the last time you went to the airport; many airports are excellent examples of clear and effective signage and wayfinding. All vehicular signage is usually placed at a regular

interval, beginning at the entry to the airport along the road, and duplicated along every possible route. The signage used is large with a large font, provides a simple message, is illuminated during the evening hours, and is visible from at least 250 feet away to allow motorists ample time to process the message and change direction if necessary. Once inside an airport parking facility, wayfinding is placed in numerous locations to ensure that the airport visitor understands where all airport services are located. Once again, pedestrian signage is located at regular intervals and at all decision points.



### Concept 2: A Seamless Process

One of the best examples of using seamless linkages is at Walt Disney World in Orlando. For instance, take a family from Ohio who flies into Orlando International Airport. Upon arrival in Orlando, Disney offers its guests service on the Disney Magical Express where guests simply head to the shuttle that takes them directly to their hotel. The service includes luggage retrieval from the airport and delivery straight to

their room without guests having to do a thing. Disney offers bus, monorail and ferry service throughout their property to seamlessly transport guests from one attraction to another. All services are branded to ensure that guests have the “Magical” Disney experience throughout their entire trip.

Visitors driving to Disney have a similar seamless experience beginning with the large Walt Disney

World gateway. Guests are directed to parking booths via well-placed and easy to read signage. They are then clearly directed to a designated parking area, and then along the walkway to the tram. Again, visitors are able to experience a pleasantly simple travel experience all the way into the park.

Although most of us are not parking Disney guests, nor can we all charge \$14.00 per vehicle, it does not mean that we can't implement the



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This photo demonstrates the negative perception a user may face when going from their vehicle within the parking garage to the corridor that leads to their destination. Not only is this area visually unappealing but there is large machinery adjacent to their path of travel, there is not a stairway to allow direct access, nor is there any visible signage to direct pedestrians how to get to their destination.

same seamless principles within all of our facilities. Branding a parking facility and the linkages with a destination creates a win-win situation for the customer, as well as the merchant/business destination.

### Concept 3: Effective Design Elements

In addition to signage and wayfinding, we have identified many planning and design elements which when properly integrated, will significantly improve the user experience:

*Streetscapes leading to the parking facility:* All roadways should be well lit, maintained (no pot holes), and naturally encourage the flow of vehicles into the parking facility. When possible, all community streetscape improvements should include provisions for the “back of house” area where vehicles are first introduced to their destination.

*Ease of ingress and egress to the parking facility:* Motorists should be able to immediately identify the entry and exit to the facility upon their first visit to the area. A poorly designed entry/exit will not only cause a motorist undue stress, but will also start and end their visit on a negative note.

*Cleanliness:* All aspects of the linkages should be clean and well maintained. Trash receptacles should be abundant in order to discourage litter within the parking facility and along the pedestrian linkage. All roadways and walkways should be free of trash and debris. Painted surfaces should be maintained and free of graffiti, gum, or vehicle damage.

*Lighting:* Lighting levels should be designed to easily locate entry/exits during the evening hours, to eliminate dark areas in and surrounding the

garage as well as the pedestrian linkages, and to ensure that the lighting levels are uniform in all areas. In most cases, a dimly lit roadway, parking facility or walkway will cause users to feel unsafe. In addition, poorly lit areas can increase the occurrence of crimes and should be a high priority for any parking facility owner.



*Safety:* Passive security measures should be integrated into all components from the roadway, through the parking facility, via the pedestrian walkway, to the final destination. Properly designed parking facilities have no — or have very minimal — hiding places and areas where a motorist may be isolated. Glass elevators, stairwells, and open air design are excellent passive security measures. Likewise, landscaping considerations should be included as plant selection can assist with creating an open area.

*Landscaping:* When possible, living design elements should be used. Trees, shrubs, vines and flowers not only provide green space, but also improve how pedestrians feel when walking down a walkway. Most community redevelopment initiatives begin with streetscape improvements, largely consisting of green space and walkway landscaping.

*Hardscaping:* Simple design elements such as a level walking surface, seating areas (which are especially important for those who may not be able to walk long distances), water features (such as a fountain), and façade elements help create the “experience” before the pedestrian actually arrives at their destination. Some shopping areas have used faux store front windows to advertise their merchants and display products. Despite being small in nature, this gives the pedestrian the feeling of window shopping rather than walking to the shopping center.

*Walkways:* Depending on the location and the season, covered or sheltered walkways can provide relief from the snow, rain, or sunshine. When connecting a parking structure with another enclosed area, a covered walkway is sometimes expected and helps to create a seamless experience. Likewise, in some applications a climate controlled walkway may be desired, such as in extreme hot or cold climates.

*Activity:* In general, the more activity that exists in an area or linkage, the more attractive it will be for all of the users, and the better it’s perceived.

### Benefits and Opportunities

In marketing any parking facility, the pedestrian and vehicular linkages are of the utmost importance. Driving down a dark alley to enter a parking facility would create a similar negative perception as walking down a dark alley to reach a storefront. By ignoring the linkages, a parking facility’s utilization may be less than optimal. Furthermore, a motorist is willing to pay higher parking fees for a parking facility that provides quality linkages, as they feel they are receiving a better experience.

Aside from the benefit of higher utilization, the design elements that help create the destination throughout the linkages can also be used to advertise and generate revenue. Murals, façade treatments, and display areas can all generate advertising revenue while also branding the facility as part of the destination.

Finally, with the current economic state, most destinations cannot afford to lose business due to customers not having a good experience traveling to their destination. When spending millions of dollars in capital to build a parking facility, an owner should always set aside a small allowance to enhance the linkages. Not doing so would be like building a parking facility on a remote island. ■

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