BALBOA PARK

land use, circulation, and parking study

SAN DIEGO PARK & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
AMERICA'S FINEST

Findings & Options White Paper

September 2003

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Special thanks to all those community members
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Introduction

The Findings and Options White Paper represents the mid-point of the Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation, and Parking Study planning effort. The information in this document represents the continued analysis process of the Jones & Jones/ Civitas Planning Team following the April 3 Discovery Forum.

It's important to note that many of the findings included here are not new. In fact, what the Planning Team has found is that much of the current Park improvement needs identified here have been previously recommended in the planning documents, from the 1989 Master Plan (Estrada) on through the several "precise plans" that followed. In place of objectives, findings are elements about the Park that are recognized by stakeholders and previous planning documents as needing improvements.

The planning approach for this study is to take a fresh look at the entire Park area and its surrounding vicinity. We have also looked at city and regional development issues relevant to Balboa Park. From that broader perspective, it was felt that future Park improvement recommendations will be affected by both internal Park needs, as in the case of access and parking, and by local, downtown, and regional factors as well.

Our approach to the Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation, and Parking Study focuses on:

- **Integrity of the parkland.** We feel that preserving, enhancing, and expanding the Park's landscape, whether it is cultivated lawn areas, formal gardens, or habitat areas on the hillsides and canyon floors, needs to be our highest priority.
- **Access and circulation** is the second organizing priority for Balboa Park. Strengthening the Park's connections to its surrounding neighborhoods and the region beyond is extremely important. Also important is the Park's internal circulation system of paths, trails, and roadways. Our findings concluded that much of the 1160 acres of Balboa Park's land is fragmented, in terms of flowing open space. The Findings and Options White Paper addresses several approaches to improve this and, most importantly, to re-connect the parkland into one whole accessible environment. Many areas have limited accessibility and remain under-utilized, while other areas become overwhelmed due to pedestrian and vehicular conflicts.
- **Parking and vehicular access** within Balboa Park is important to preserving the diversity of cultural institutions and passive recreational and educational activities. The Planning Team believes that although parking and access is an essential part of the functioning needs of Balboa Park, it should be considered a lesser priority in terms of the parkland integrity and pedestrian circulation.

Future improvements throughout Balboa Park need to be organized around getting people to destinations easily and safely, while doing it without degrading the open space and cultural experiences for which they come.

The Jones & Jones/Civitas Planning Team has developed several options for achieving this balance while providing for future expansion of parking and enhanced transit access.

Evolving Vision

- 1400 acres of land to be held in "trust" forever for the use and purpose of a public park and no other purpose
- 1915—introduction of Cultural Buildings
- The Nolan Plan established a Park Vision, a park integrating the landscape and the city with passive and active recreation
- 1935 World's Fair, merging of cultural institutions and public parkland
- Evolution of the City and Park
- Evolution of Culture within the Park
- Validates and determines the legacy of Balboa Park for the 21st Century

Mission

The mission for Balboa Park was established in the 1989 Master Plan:

"To nurture and enhance the cultural, recreational, and passive resources of the Park to meet the needs of the region and surrounding community, while respecting its physical, cultural, and historic environment."

The magic of the Park is in its balance of diverse open park & recreation land and its world-class collection of cultural and educational experiences. The long-term health of the Park as a whole is our primary focus, as well as to define its mission.

When considering the needs of our Study focus, "Land Use, Circulation, and Parking," we view these as support sets to the Park—our challenge is that these subsets, though important, are in many ways at odds with our previously stated mission of protecting, preserving, and enhancing the health of the Park.

Goals

The established goals of the 1989 Master Plan are still valid today and consistent with the focus of the Land Use, Circulation, and Parking Study:

- Create pedestrian-oriented environments
- Increase free and open parkland
- Restore existing landscapes
- Enhance mix of cultural, active, and passive recreation
- Create connections and linkages within the Park and out to the region and surrounding communities

The magic of Balboa Park comes from the balance of Park and cultural experiences.

aerial photograph of Balboa Park

Focus: to regain a balance of park and culture that

- enhances the quality of both
- improves integrity of parkland
- supports healthy cultural institutions
- increases public access to parkland.

The Park depends on the balance of all four elements.

plan—existing conditions

Park Integrity

The Park landscape is highly diverse, supporting intensive use in several locations. The cultivated mesa areas are rich in cultural landscapes and uses; the canyons remain wilder, diverse, and less accessible.

The Park landscape is diverse but fragmented.

The Park landscape is connected visually and physically to the regional landscape. The varied geography of the Park's mesa and canyons provides numerous opportunities for viewpoints and vistas that tie the Park to San Diego's other natural amenities (e.g., ocean/bay, mountains/hills) as well as visual landmarks such as the Downtown core and the Coronado Bridge.

Objectives

Our findings have shown that Balboa Park's vast acreage is heavily used in a few concentrated areas, while many other parts of the Park remain underused or unknown. The primary reason is that the Park is fragmented into many isolated pieces. There are many reasons and causes for the fragmentation, including the geography of the mesas and canyons, the highways and freeways that bisect the land, and the fact that large portions of the Park are fenced off and/or not accessible for public use.

Findings

- Improve connections between the Park's mesas, major activity cores, and the City beyond.
- Reduce wherever possible fragmentation of the Park pedestrian circulation network; make this system universally accessible and safe.
- Build on the legacy of existing historically recognized and protected landscapes to inspire new cultivated landscape areas.
- Use the natural landscape to reconnect Park habitats in the canyons as well as on the mesas; tie these to the regional landscapes beyond.
- Enhance views into and around the Park and vistas outward to the region.
- Reclaim damaged lands—the potential for the greatest positive visual and physical impacts for Balboa Park is the reclamation and re-naturalization of damaged parklands; examples include the landfill and surplused naval property at Inspiration Point, which would double the existing area of cultivated open parkland.

Connect to the Regional Landscape

Balboa Park is an integral part of San Diego's regional landscape. It is important that future improvements to the Park consider this and contribute to strengthening these connections while reinforcing Balboa Park's place within it.

Ecological Connectivity

- canyons
- wildlife
- urban forest

Sense of Regional Landscape

- cultural landscapes
- gardens and plazas
- streetscapes and trails

Views and Vistas

- visual connections to places and landmarks within the Park
- visual connections out to regional landmarks (e.g., the Bay, City, neighborhoods)

Objectives

Maintain the existing regional landscape network within Balboa Park.

Increase, wherever possible, the quantity and quality of the Park's naturalized areas.

Improve both physical and visual aspects of Balboa Park to extend the Park's reach out to the region.

Health of Cultural and Educational Institutions

What sets Balboa Park apart from other large urban parks in the United States is the diverse array of cultural and educational institutions integrated into the Park's landscape. Whether the institutions are large or small, whether they have been in the Park for decades or just a couple of years, they need to evolve in order to be vital and competitive.

The historical landmark structures within Balboa Park have served as incubators for a vast variety of cultural institutions. This marriage of the San Diego Park and Recreation Department's need to preserve the historically relevant Park structures and cultural institutions' need for affordable space has been part of the Park's legacy for over fifty years. This marriage should be strengthened wherever possible while still emphasizing the long-term preservation of the structures.

Objectives

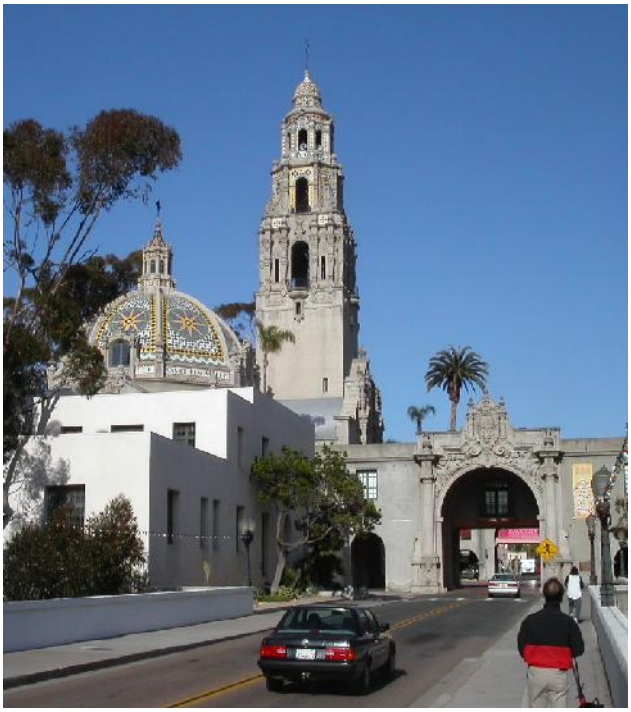
- Maintain the viability of the existing cultural institutions wherever possible; older buildings will always need maintenance, even if they are historic landmarks.
- Enhance recreational entertainment and educational experiences; not every structure in the Park needs to be a museum…maintaining a rich mix of uses ensures that the Park attracts a broad range of visitors.
- Build on expanding evening activities to complement the already-healthy daytime uses.
- Historic buildings are incubators for cultural and educational community-based uses; as these individual lease partners' needs grow beyond the physical constraints of the historic structures, they should be encouraged to move on and allow new uses to share an opportunity to grow in their place.

Historic preservation of the unique park architecture and formal landscapes is a core goal of this Study. As new improvements occur, their physical design and placement within the Park's landscape should respect the quality of Balboa Park's visual character. Each new structure, garden, or open space should be thought of as a future historic landmark.

The institutions are diverse and always evolving.

Findings

The balance of cultural activities and active and passive Park experiences is what gives Balboa Park its unique character. This mix of uses is the heart of the city of San Diego; future improvements in and around Balboa Park need to strengthen these elements and build on their diversity.

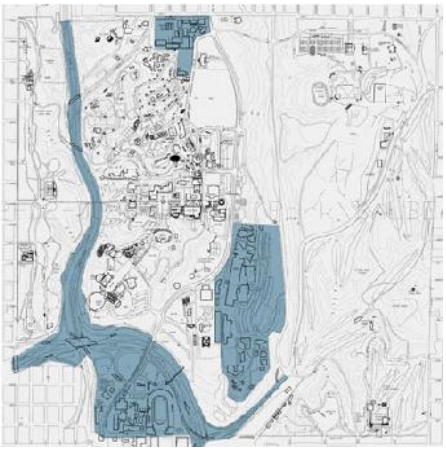


Culture is central to the Balboa Park Experience to millions of visitors each year.

Public Access

Access in and around Balboa Park should be extensive and equitable. The network of paths, trails, buildings, and plazas needs to be accessible to all Park visitors and strive to meet all recognized Universal Accessibility standards. The Park is a venue for thousands of planned events and incidental happenings each year, yet many of the Park's largest open tracts of land remain underutilized or inaccessible. There are also many different types of uses that provide open space and activity areas to which access is provided by either paid or unpaid venues.

- Today 605 Park acres are publicly accessible without restriction.
- 540 acres are available to the general public for a fee.



extracted land

restricted land

Balboa Park is a venue for thousands of planned events and incidental happenings.

Park access should be extensive and equitable.

Findings

To date, of the original 1400 acres:

- 217 acres of parkland have been extracted for use as public schools, road right-of-way, and the Naval Hospital.
- 158 acres have restricted access. The restricted areas are parklands that are fenced off and restrict access to the public. These areas include the maintenance yard, Park nursery, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, Campfire Boys & Girls, and other groups.

Objectives

- Maximize accessible use of the Park; concentrate future efforts on damaged areas and the connections to these areas from other core activity areas and parking reservoirs.
- Increase passive-accessible use of parkland.
- Prevent further restricted uses within the Park; when possible, return restricted uses to public use.
- Prevent further extraction of land from Park; return extracted land when change of status occurs.
- Maximize connection within the Park.
- Strengthen connection to local and regional transit.

Events

Balboa Park hosts thousands of events each year. These events range from small group gatherings such as receptions, weddings, antique car shows, and "fun runs," to large-scale events like Earth Day.

Objectives

- Maintain the viability and diversity of the events in the Park.
- Improve Park access by strengthening connections to regional transit.
- Improve Park circulation to minimize internal conflicts between event visitors and cultural institutions.
- Locate new parking structures at Park access points to minimize the impact of vehicles within the Central Mesa, Inspiration Point, and other activity areas.

Findings

- Extremely popular for the city and the region.
- Minimize conflicts between special events and daily Park uses.
- Parking overflow impacts the neighborhoods.
- Limits access to Park for other non-Park-related uses such as ballpark parking and other large downtown "off-site" events.

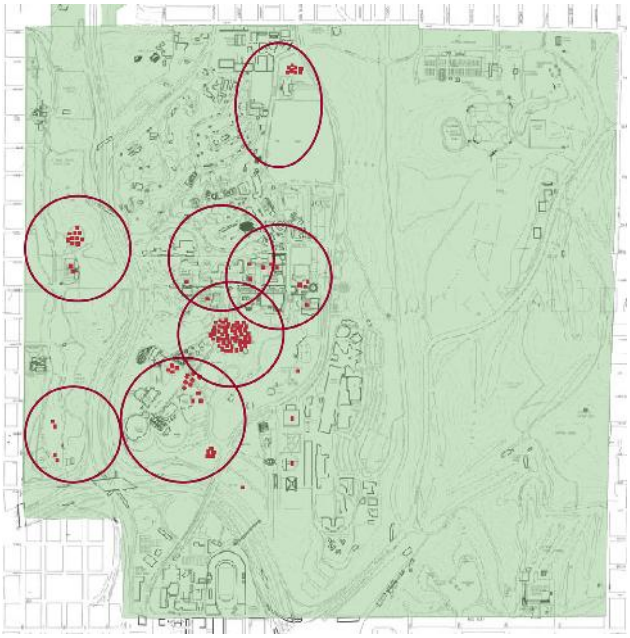


diagram illustrating Park event locations during a typical year

Over 2,575,000 people attended special events in the Park in 2002.

Activity Cores

Our review and findings regarding Balboa Park's land use are organized in sectors. There are three types of core areas within the Park that we have identified as **activity cores**, each one with varying degrees of cultural, social, and recreational interactivity.

- cultural cores
- mixed-use areas
- recreational cores

Prado: Cultural Core

The Prado is the Park's well-established cultural core and is widely considered the heart of the Park. Its concentrated mix of uses, including museums, botanical gardens, plazas, restaurants, promenades, and historically significant architecture, make this area the "must see" part of Balboa Park.

The Cabrillo Bridge entry to the east is the formal gateway to Balboa Park, providing regional vistas and a grand sense of arrival.

Character

the heart of Balboa Park

Strengths

- scenic
- diverse
- active

Options

- interpretation kiosk improvements
- strengthen pedestrian environment
- allow limited expansion capability
- strengthen services and concessions
- improve access to East Mesa
- infill with new uses
- strengthen evening hour uses

The Palisades: Mixed-Use Core

The Palisades is the second-largest re-emerging activity core. Also characterized as a mixed-use area with uses that include museums, recreational facilities, Park support offices, community meeting facilities, gardens, the Starlight Bowl, and the International Cottages. The Palisades has a large central open space that was once a major plaza with fountains; this space was converted to a parking lot many years ago. The Palisades' most notable and visible structure is the Ford Building, which currently houses the Aerospace Museum; it can be seen from Downtown and other viewpoints from the south.

The Palisades area is accessed via Park Boulevard off Presidents Way or from the north via Pan American Road East.

Character

the Park's second-largest activity core—diverse mix of uses, balance of day and evening activities

Strengths

- mix of uses, desirable views to Park and region
- ease of access, extensive parking available
- distinctive architectural character

Options

- future expansions to strengthen "sense of place"
- enhance evening uses
- improve wayfinding and interpretation kiosks
- restore and expand pedestrian environment
- enhance public services and concessions
- link to Marston Point and Inspiration Point
- reclaim damage or neglected parklands and gardens
- improve access to other Park areas not cut off by canyons and roadways

Inspiration Point: Mixed-Use Core

Inspiration Point is emerging as a mixed-use activity area with cultural, administrative, recreational, and institutional uses occupying a half-dozen structures. It also has the Park's second-largest parking reservoir, which at this point in time is only marginally used by Park visitors.

Recently the Naval Hospital returned the southern tip of Inspiration Point to the City of San Diego, providing an opportunity for activity areas such as expanding Park open space and making important new links to other portions of the Park currently cut off by canyons and roadways.

Inspiration Point's strengths include its high visibility from the city, and its western edge serves as the Park's southern gateway.

Character

emerging activity area with limited uses and dominated by parking lot; less visible and under-utilized; Inspiration Point exists below its potential as a Park destination

Strengths

- proximity to southern gateway and views of Downtown
- prominent architectural and landscape amenities highly accessible

Options

- enhance buildings
- new cultural institutions
- provide food and restaurants
- increase public services
- interpretation kiosks
- gardens
- strengthen pedestrian environment
- link to Golden Hill Park and Palisades

The East Mesa and Morley Field: Recreational Core

The East Mesa is primarily used for structured recreation; the Balboa Park Golf Course, the Velodrome, Ballfields, pool, tennis courts, and the disc-golf facility are all concentrated in this area.

The Florida Canyon and Arizona landfill sites are both highly visible and in many ways underutilized as parkland. Wildlife habitat is a key part of preserving these areas as open space, as both the Master Plan and East Mesa Precise Plan call for significant improvements to occur. Our findings agree with these recommendations.

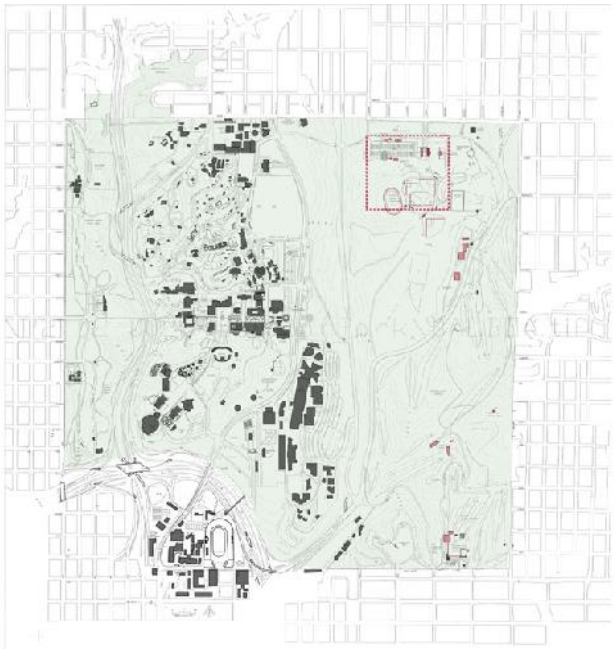
Much of the northern, eastern, and southern edges of the East Mesa are highly used by the adjacent community in the form of small "edge parks." The adjacent communities are deficient in parkland per the City General Plan Standards and look to Balboa Park to fill these needs. This use is encouraged and needs to be strengthened.

Character

serves as Balboa Park's recreation and habitat core; considered the best opportunity area for Balboa Park's future; the East Mesa is cut off from the greater Balboa Park experience, leaving many visitors with a sense of it not being part of Balboa Park

Strengths

- established active recreation uses
- cultivated edges provide neighboring communities with intimate Park settings
- sweeping views to Central Mesa and city beyond
- expansive trails in habitat of Florida Canyon



Options

Land Use

- enhance buildings
- reclaim Arizona landfill to parkland
- remove north portion of Florida Drive and restore to habitat and parkland

Circulation

- connect East Mesa to Central Mesa
- extend trail system through golf course to Grape Street Park and Switzer Canyon
- provide transit and shuttle connections to Central Mesa and region

Parking

- provide new capacity per East Mesa Precise Plan
- minimize impacts to surrounding open space

West Mesa and Marston Point: Recreational Cores

The West Mesa is viewed by many as the Uptown District's community park. The western edge provides the neighboring communities the ability to walk directly into the Park for passive enjoyment of the open space both day and night. This area is heavily used for special events and some structured recreation; these uses are very popular with the broader San Diego community and the local neighborhood alike. It is also host to several parades.

Marston Point provides wonderful viewpoints back to Downtown, Coronado, and the Bay. It also provides views to the key features of Balboa Park such as the Ford Building and the historic California Tower of the Museum of Man.

As attractive as Marston Point is, it is largely cut off from the rest of Balboa Park and its surrounding community. This is particularly due to the geography of the Point but has been further reinforced by I-5 to the south and SR163 to the east. Marston Point needs to be connected to the Central Mesa and the downtown core to allow it to be integrated into a complete Park experience and enhance circulation and accessibility.

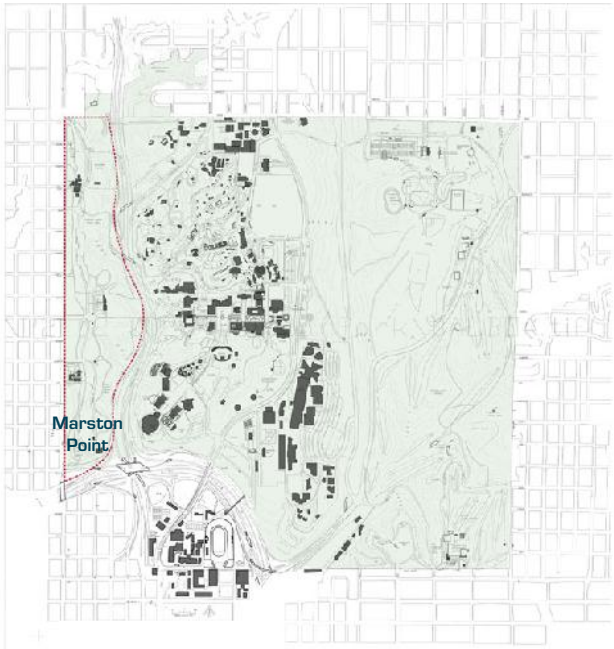
In general the West Mesa area could be characterized as a passive-use park: picnic areas, walking trails, vast lawn areas, and mature trees make up the visitor's experience.

Character

in many respects a bucolic neighborhood park, with cultivated parkland and strong community connections; the West Mesa feels separate from the high-visibility Park of the Central Mesa

Strengths

- mature cultivated landscape
- accessible paths and trails
- connected to the urban fabric
- diverse areas for active and passive recreation



Options

Land Use

- enhance existing buildings
- improve public services
- upgrade infrastructure as necessary

Circulation

- connect to Downtown and Central Mesa with bridges
- improve trail and path system to maximize universal access
- strengthen wayfinding and signage
- improve roads to parkways

Parking

- develop parking management strategy to maximize existing supply
- look for potential expansion sites should additional parking be needed in the future

Parkland

The open parkland is among the most cherished elements in Balboa Park. Over the decades intensive activity, construction, and evolving needs of the many Park users have left the open space system within Balboa Park fragmented. Our Planning Team has identified a number of findings that relate to the parkland and will be integrated into the proposed Options.

Findings

The land use findings of the Planning Team can be characterized in ten principles:

1. Define and enhance unique spaces in the Park
2. Support places for people—plazas are for people
3. Manage appropriate expansion of uses
4. Maintain service and access to buildings
5. Minimize conflicts between events and existing uses
6. Enhance the core pedestrian areas
7. Preserve and enhance open spaces
8. Eliminate non-public uses which limit access to parkland
9. Remove non-Park uses from the Park
10. Connect Marston Point to the downtown core and to the Central Mesa

Landscape: Reclaim Parkland

The Planning Team agrees with many of the recommendations of the previous Park planning efforts with regard to reclaiming damaged or restricted areas to parkland.

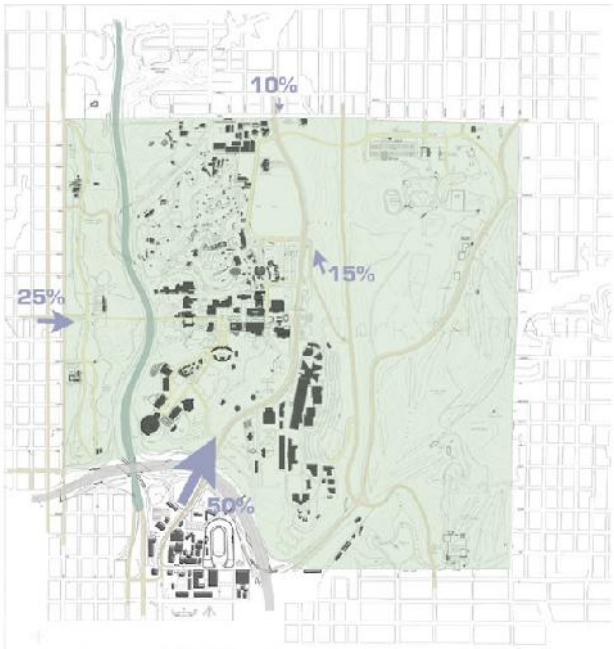
Landscape: Reclaim Nature

As with the parkland, the Planning Team also agrees with the previous findings that the natural areas in the canyons serve many important roles within Balboa Park. The natural areas need to be enhanced and, as in the case of north Florida Canyon, reclaimed from motor vehicle use.

Access

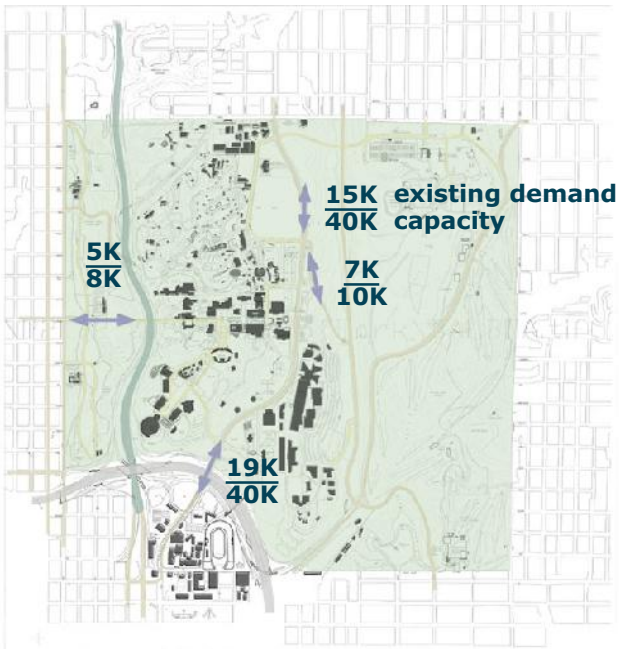
Auto Arrival Diagram: Central Mesa

The majority of vehicles entering the Central Mesa come from four key points. This diagram describes where they enter.



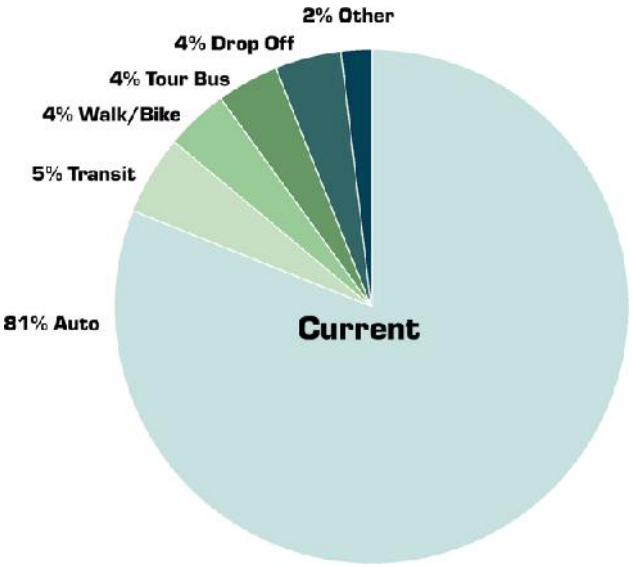
Average Daily Traffic

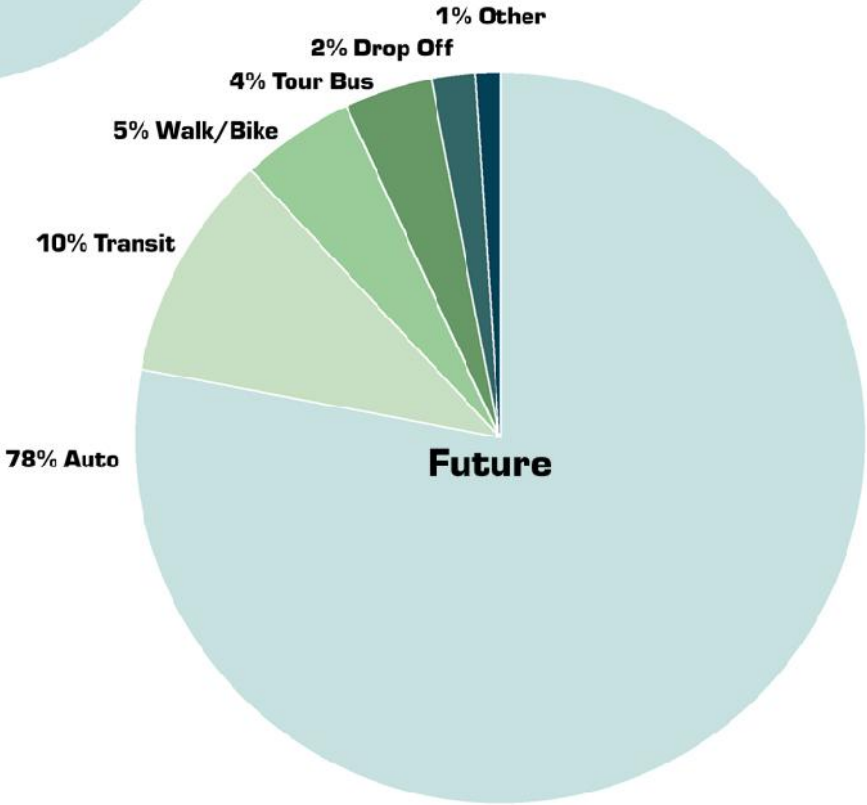
The capacity of streets exceeds current access needs for the Central Mesa. This capacity is considered ample for providing access well into the future as well.



Access—Findings

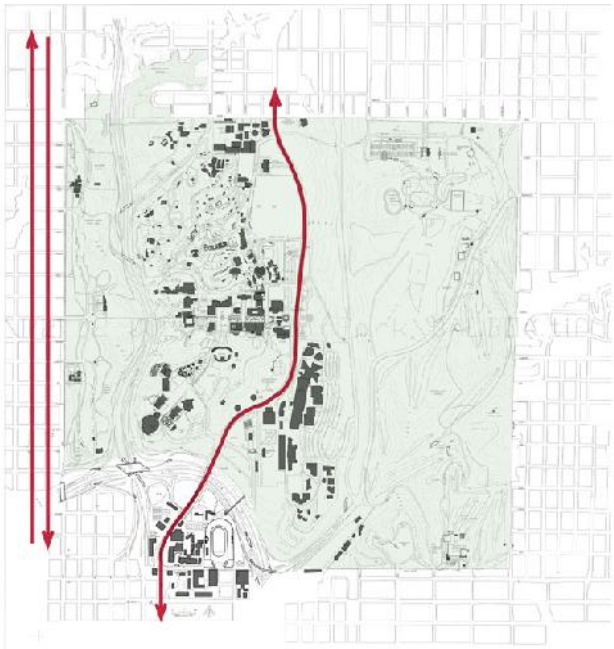
Even with a substantial increase in public transportation, more cars will still come to the Park. Based on our twenty-year projections, growth in auto use as the primary means of accessing Balboa Park will continue to increase, despite greater use of transit and other forms of movement.





Access and Circulation To and From the Region

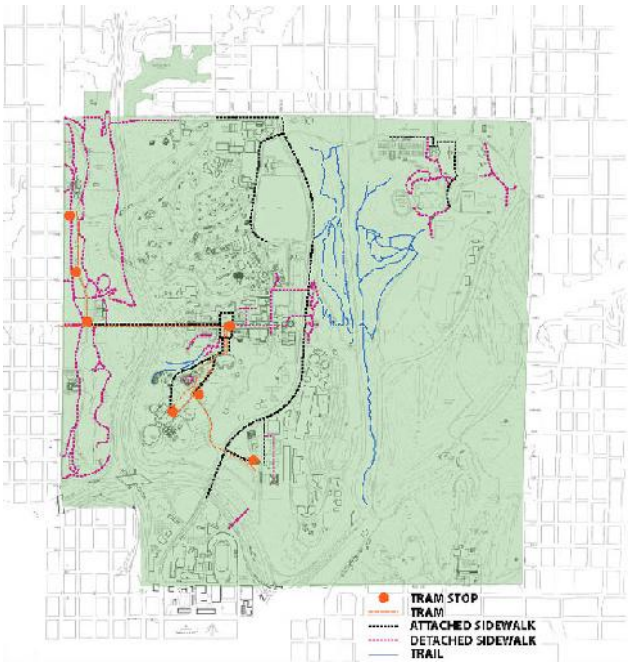
- existing transit
- bus and rail service
- roadway (vehicular)
- lack of vehicular connectivity to regional networks
- roadways through the Park



Over 307,000 people rode the Park tram in the last 12 months.

Existing Pedestrian Circulation

- network is fragmented
- many areas within the Park are under-served or isolated
- too few connections across Park canyons
- limited connections to the surrounding neighborhoods and the city center



Regional Access and Circulation

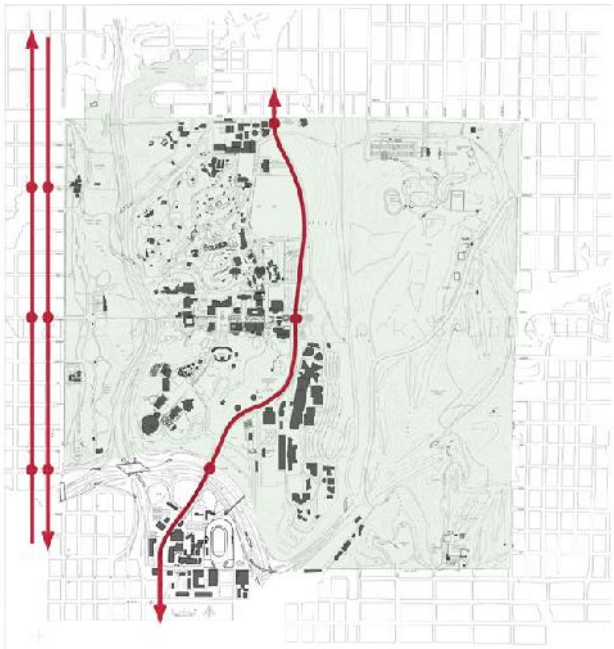
Findings

- enhance sense of arrival with strong gateways that are safe, inviting, and clear
- create meaningful connections, physical and visual
- connections should be convenient, clear, and universally accessible
- maximize access to transit
- create more access for pedestrians, bicycles, etc.
- maintain reasonable auto access and service
- improve links from parking to destinations
- connect regional transit and pedestrian cores
- connect all the parts of the Park together
- maximize pedestrian mobility inside the Park
- minimize auto circulation in pedestrian cores
- maximize the periphery of the Park for unrestricted public access

Options

Enhance Regional Transit

- strengthen connections to 4th and 5th Avenue corridor and connect regional networks to the Park
- increase transit service on Park Boulevard, including rapid bus and other regional options
- stronger connection to Bay-to-Park corridor
- extend shuttle connections to "smart corner" at 12th Avenue and C Street



proposed bus and rapid transit routes

Landscape

- roads become parkways
- Florida Drive becomes a system of trails
- create gateways at main Park entries
- make roadway right-of-ways pedestrian-friendly

Strengthening Links to Surrounding Neighborhoods

Balboa Park's network of accessible trails and bike paths needs to link to the surrounding neighborhoods, strengthening the existing connections and building new connections where needed.

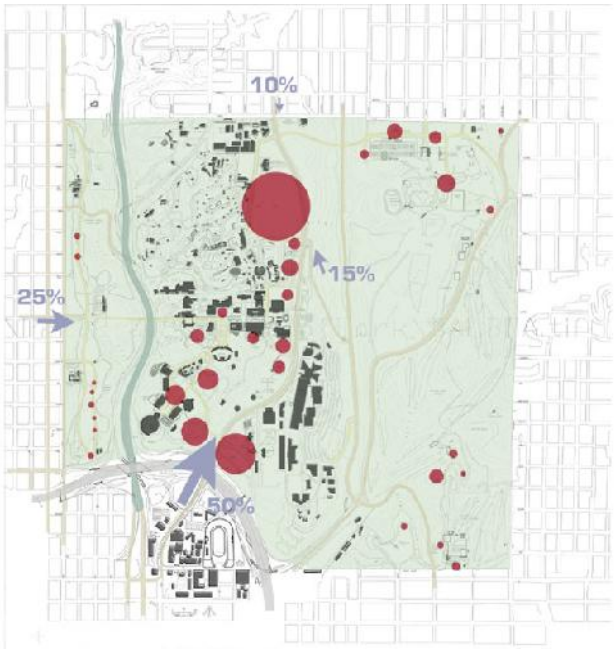
Enhance, Reinforce, and Create (Where Needed) Connections Across Mesas

As with the need to connect the Park to the surrounding neighborhoods, it is essential to reconnect the Park with itself.

Existing Parking

Distribution

The graphic illustrates the existing distribution of parking within Balboa Park. The size of the circles depicts the proportionate capacity of each parking area.

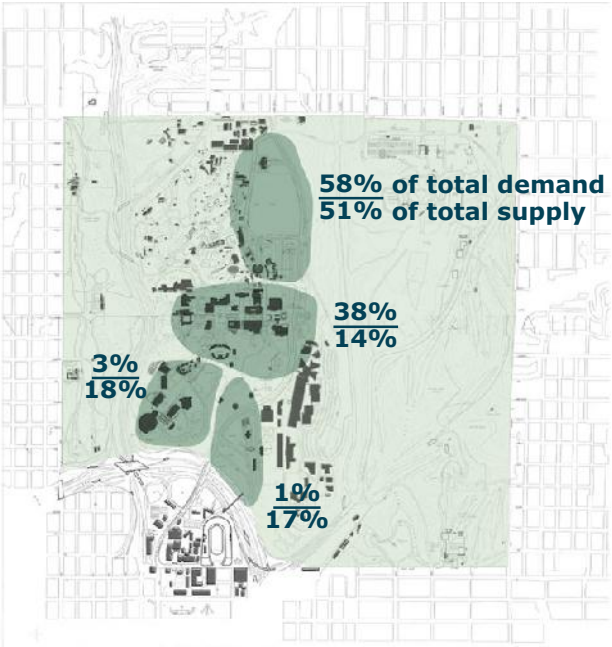


Existing Parking Location

Here the shaded areas illustrate the existing parking locations.

Overall Parking Demand and Supply

Central Mesa and Inspiration Point

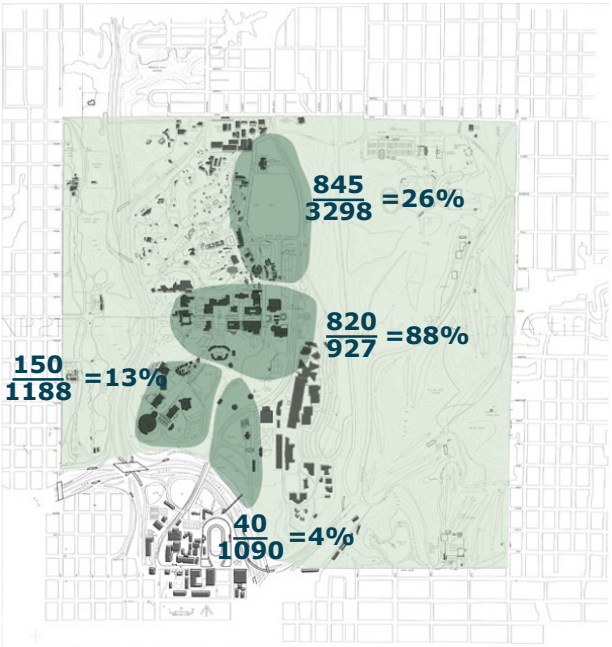


About one-third of people looking for parking cannot park at their destination.

Employee Parking

Cultural institutions:	1010
Zoo:	845

$$\frac{\text{Spaces used by employees}}{\text{Parking spaces}} = \text{\% employee usage per area}$$



Close-in employee parking forces visitors to park in more distant lots.

Parking Options

- minimize/manage parking in pedestrian cores—Prado, Palisades, etc.
- minimize land requirements of future parking needs
- minimize visual impacts (remove, bury, structure, buffer, etc.)
- distribute parking equitably
- manage and maintain on-street parking where appropriate
- limit expansion of parking to remove parking
- manage service access
- provide suitable disabled parking access
- distribute parking at main Park access points

Detailed Options

Option A

- centralized garage (Promenade Plan) with shuttle to remote parking at Inspiration Point
- remote parking for some Zoo employees

Option B

- multiple destination garages with shuttle loop connecting to activity cores

Option C

- centralized parking at Inspiration Point Garage
- Zoo parking within Zoo grounds
- parking structure at Organ Pavilion
- with shuttle loop to destinations

Summary

Each of the options includes a large number of common elements; the primary differences between options are the phasing of the overall plan, the strategy governing the location of parking, and the overall quantity of parking provided.

Option A places prioritizes immediate shortfalls in the parking and circulation system, both in number and distribution. Option B focuses on balancing user needs (parking, circulation) and park integrity (habitat quality, open space fragmentation) by making concurrent improvements to both. Option C enhances and restores the Park fabric itself before addressing user-specific needs.

It is worth noting that image enhancements, such as the creation of formal Park gateways and a landscaped pedestrian buffer along Park Boulevard, are initial phase improvements in each option. The team feels that these enhancements "kick off" and set the tone for long-term Park improvements, and as such are key to garnering the public support, enthusiasm, and economic buy-in necessary to carry redevelopment through to its final phases.

Option A: Parking Priority

Parking

This option concentrates parking in two large garages, one central and the other remote, and focuses initial efforts on resolving the park's immediate circulation and parking issues. The parking reservoirs in this option provide the greatest overall number of parking spaces between the three options and provide for future user growth with little assumed use of public transportation.

Both parking garages are assigned to the initial phase of development. The central garage, providing 4800 spaces, would occupy the zoo's existing southern surface lot and would offer parking equally convenient to the zoo entrance and East Prado attractions. A second, remote parking garage providing 3200–3500 spaces would be located in Inspiration Point. This structure would serve employees, volunteer, and overflow visitor needs, with an enhanced Park circulator shuttling riders to and from this location.

A Zoo staff parking facility (with approximately 460 spaces), located off Richmond Street, would be built, pending demand (if the Inspiration Point structure reaches capacity in the final phase of development).

Circulation

This option reserves circulation improvements for final phase development. Pedestrian bridges connecting mesas and loop trail systems circling each mesa and the park itself are constructed after parking and parkland issues have been addressed.

Land Use

With the exception of the existing zoo parking lot, returned to general park uses in the first phase, this option initiates the majority of land use changes in its second phase. With new parking structures in place, development reclaims surface lots, among them the Pan American Plaza, the Organ Pavilion lot, the Alcazar lot, and portions of Inspiration Point, for garden and general park uses. Arizona Landfill is likewise reclaimed in this second phase.

The final phase of development closes the northern portion of Florida Canyon to vehicles and enhances existing habitat and trails in this portion of the park.

Option A: Parking Priority

— An auto-focused approach that seeks to solve immediate parking and circulation issues before addressing larger Park improvements.

— Accommodates all future user increases internally; assumes no increase in public transportation.

Short-Term Improvements

- Parking

  4800-car parking structure in Zoo/Prado area

  3200–3500-car parking structure at Inspiration Point

  460-car employee surface parking off Richmond Street, as necessary

- Circulation

  New Park-wide circulator system concentrating on Prado/Palisades/Zoo area

  Open north end of Spanish Village for through-pedestrian traffic

  Extend Prado axis to East Mesa via pedestrian/circulator bridge

  Strengthen transit access to East Mesa

- Land Use

  Return existing Zoo surface lot to Zoo/Park use

  200' Park Promenade (buffered pedestrian zone) along Park Boulevard

  Gateway enhancements

  Convert Alcazar surface parking to parkland

  Convert Organ Pavilion surface parking to parkland

  Convert edges of Inspiration Point to parkland

  Remove parking from Pan-American Plaza; restore to historic pleasure garden use

  Redesign Plaza de Panama: more pedestrian-friendly

Long-Term Improvements

- Circulation

  Universally accessible trail system looping each mesa

  Universally accessible trail system looping entire Park

  Connect Palisades & Marston Point with pedestrian bridge

  Connect Inspiration Point & Golden Hill with pedestrian bridge

  Connect West and Central Mesas across Cabrillo Canyon at key locations

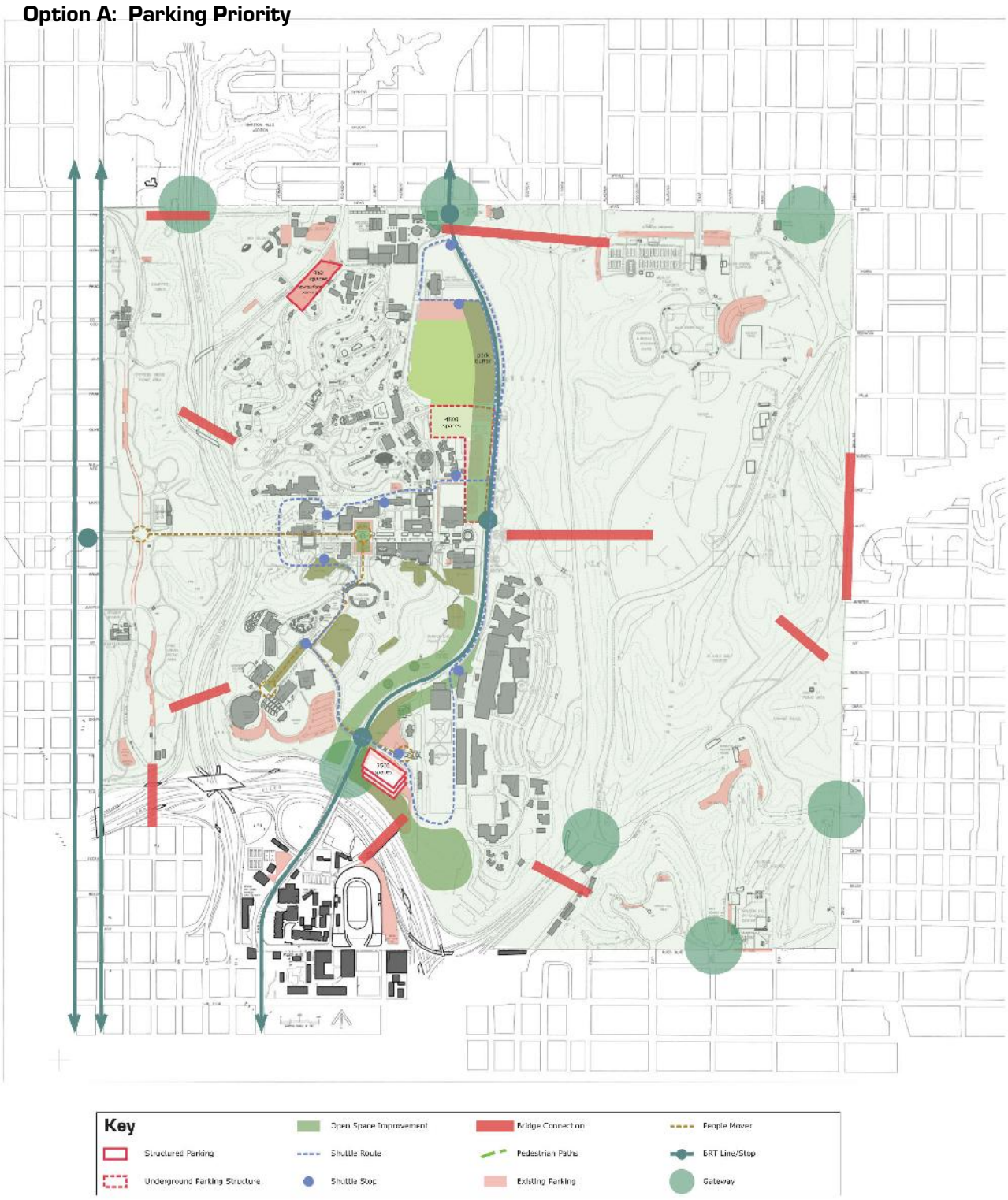
  Create planted median and bike lane amenities on Pershing Drive

- Land Use

  Reclaim Arizona Landfill; return to general Park use

  Close northern portion of Florida Canyon to vehicles; enhance habitat

Option A: Parking Priority



Option B: Balanced Priorities

Parking

This option removes parking from the Prado and Palisades cores and redistributes it among a series of small garages on the periphery of these high-activity areas. Parkland reclamation and parking improvements are implemented concurrently. This option offers a compromise on parking, providing less than Option A but more than Option C; this provision of parking assumes a modest increase in the use of public transportation.

Option B begins park improvements by constructing a central parking structure, containing 3200–3500 spaces, on the site of the Zoo's southern parking lot. The Zoo's large central surface lot would be returned to parkland, while a 100± -space surface parking lot on the northern portion of that facility would be retained to support the war Memorial Building.

Second phase parking improvements would include a 2200–2500-space remote parking facility in Inspiration Point, serviced by an enhanced park circulator, serving volunteer, employee, and overflow parking. Smaller structures of approximately 500–750 spaces would be constructed in the final phase; these structures would be located adjacent to the Globe Theater (under the Cabrillo Bridge on the site of the current archery range), near the Fleet Science Center, and behind the Hall of Champions. Dependent upon demand on the Inspiration Point structure, an additional, similarly sized surface off Richmond Street would also be built in this final phase, providing staff parking for the Zoo.

Circulation

This option splits circulation improvements between mid and final phases of development.

Phase two opts for an important triad of mesa linkages: the Prado axis is extended via a bridge to the East Mesa, a Palisades pedestrian bridge connects with Marston Point, and then onward to the Downtown along the 8th Street corridor and an Inspiration Point land bridge stretches to Golden Hill. This selection of bridges increases access to the Central Mesa at each of its three important edges. The development of these new bridge connections needs to be accompanied by the enhancement of Balboa Parks path system. The goal to make the Park universally accessible to all shall be a priority.

Land Use

Parallel to its circulation strategy, Option B splits land use improvements between mid and final development phases. Phase two improvements include a large-scale reclamation in each of the three activity cores; Plaza de Panama will be returned to a pedestrian plaza with some allowance for valet and accessible parking needs, the Organ Pavilion surface lot will revert to parkland, the Pan American Plaza will also be restored to pedestrian space supported by the newly constructed parking structure behind the Hall of Champions and Inspiration Point's south, and west edges will be naturalized.

One of the best opportunities for expanding usable open space within the Park and addressing the future demands on Balboa Park is to recapture the Arizona Landfill as parkland. By implementing the recommendations of the East Mesa Precise Plan is strongly supported by this Option. The re-vegetated Arizona Landfill creates an improved terminus for the Prado axis extension also taking place in this phase.

Final phase improvements target remaining surface lots. The northern portion of Florida Canyon will be closed to vehicles, with enhanced habitat complementing the inter- and intra-mesa trails systems also created in this phase.

Conversion of the Zoo's existing primary surface lot would take place in the initial phase of development.

Option B: Balanced Priorities

— An integrated approach that seeks to improve Park integrity and address parking/circulation issues concurrently.

— Encourages public transportation use, but allows for modest future increases in user traffic.

Short-Term Improvements

- Parking

  3200–3500-car parking structure in Zoo/Prado area

  2200–2500-car parking structure at Inspiration Point

  500–750-car parking structure adjacent to Globe Theatre, under bridge on archery range

  500–750-car parking structure near Fleet Science Center

  500–750-car parking structure behind Hall of Champions

  460-car employee surface parking lot off Richmond Street, if required

- Circulation

  Open north end of Spanish Village for through-pedestrian traffic

- Land Use

  Return existing Zoo surface lot to general Park use

  200' Park Promenade (buffered pedestrian zone) along Park Boulevard

  Gateway enhancements

  Remove parking from Pan-American Plaza; restore to historic pleasure garden use

  Redesign Plaza de Panama to be more pedestrian-friendly

  Convert Organ pavilion surface parking to parkland

  Reclaim Arizona Landfill; return to general Park use

Long-Term Improvements

- Circulation

  New Park-wide circulator system concentrating on Prado/Palisades/Zoo area

  Universally accessible trail system looping each mesa

  Universally accessible trail system looping the entire Park

  Extend Prado axis to East Mesa via pedestrian/circulator bridge

  Strengthen transit access to East Mesa

  Connect Palisades & Marston Point with pedestrian bridge

  Connect Inspiration Point & Golden Hill with pedestrian bridge

  Connect West and Central Mesas across Cabrillo Canyon at key locations

  Create planted median and bike lane amenities on Pershing Drive

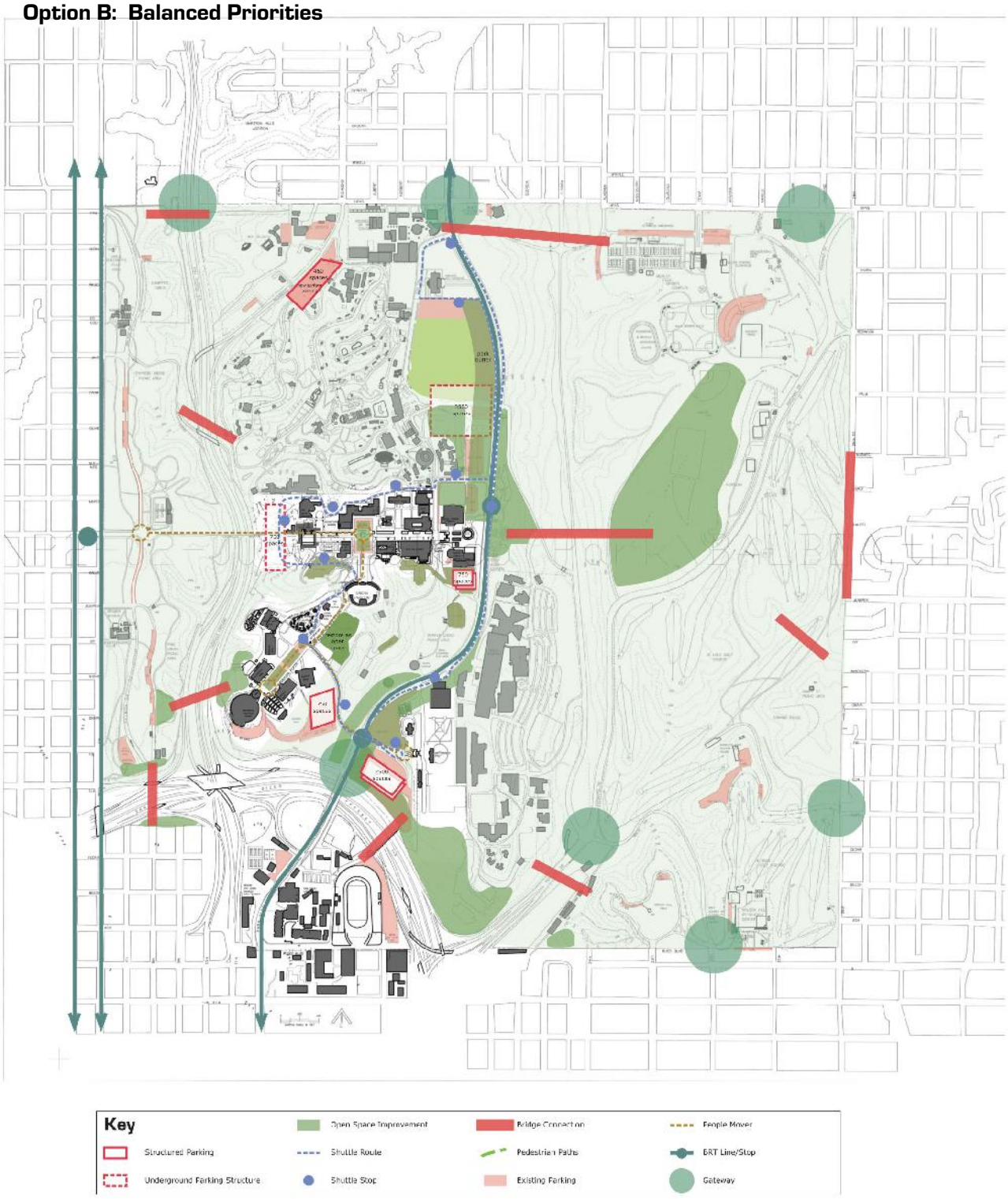
- Land Use

  Close northern portion of Florida Canyon to vehicles; enhance habitat

  Convert edges of Inspiration Point to parkland

  Convert Alcazar surface parking to parkland

Option B: Balanced Priorities



Option C: Parkland Priority

Parking

This option addresses parkland connectivity and landscape integrity before implementing parking and circulation improvements. Parking improvements emphasizing an employee and volunteer parking management strategy, Option C concentrates the parking demand in two large garages at the periphery of the Central Mesa. This option offers the smallest parking reservoir of the three options, and relies heavily on increased use of public transportation to meet future user growth.

An enhanced park circulator encourages more efficient use of existing parking, particularly the remote parking facility in Inspiration Point, in phase one. No new parking is created in this initial development phase.

Phase two constructs a central garage, providing 3200–3500 spaces, utilizing the bulk of the zoo's existing surface lot. Land not occupied by the new garage or Zoo exhibits would return to general Park use during this phase. Final improvements would replace the Inspiration Point surface lots with structured parking, offering 2200–2500 spaces, and replace the Organ Pavilion lot with a 500–750-car parking structure behind the Hall of Champions. Dependent upon need, a 460-space employee parking structure off Richmond Street would also be built in this final phase.

Circulation

Option C looks to maximize internal park connections and external park access. Phase one improvements include pedestrian bridges connecting all three mesas, and a reconfiguration of the golf course to draw the public into the East Mesa, the Prado axis is extended via a bridge to the East Mesa, a Palisades pedestrian bridge connects with Marston Point, and then onward to the Downtown along the 8th Street corridor and an Inspiration Point land bridge stretches to Golden Hill. This selection of bridges increases access to the Central Mesa at each of its three important edges. The development of these new bridge connections needs to be accompanied by the enhancement of Balboa Parks path system. The goal to make the Park universally accessible to all shall be a priority. Phase two improvements would include trail systems looping each mesa and the entire park.

Land Use

Option C prioritizes park improvements that may be immediately realized and that are not dependent on companion improvements in parking or circulation. This approach focuses on improving parkland physically through restoration and reclamation and functionally by improving connectivity and extending trail and habitat systems.

Initial improvements reclaim two large portions of parkland by restoring the Arizona Landfill and closing the northern portion of Florida canyon to vehicular traffic. Portions of Inspiration Point would also be re-planted for passive park uses in this first phase of redevelopment.

Phase two takes advantage of the creation of replacement parking in a central structure to convert surface lots, including the Plaza de Panama and Pan American Plaza, to parkland, plazas and gardens. The final phase of development reclaims as parkland those lots not converted in Phase two, including the Organ Pavilion lot.

Option C: Park Improvement Plan

— An aggressively environmental approach that seeks to improve overall Park integrity before addressing parking/circulation issues.

— Encourages increased public transportation use as key component of short- and long-term solutions to parking/circulation issues.

Short-Term Improvements

- Parking

  460-car employee surface parking lot off Richmond Street, if necessary

  3200-car parking structure in Zoo/Prado area

  3000-car parking structure at Inspiration Point

  1000-car parking structure at West Mesa

- Circulation

  Create planted median and bike lane amenities on Pershing Drive

  New Park-wide circulator system concentrating on Prado/Palisades/Zoo area

  Extend Prado axis to East Mesa via pedestrian/ circulator bridge

  Connect Palisades & Marston Point with pedestrian bridge

  Connect Inspiration Point & Golden Hill with pedestrian bridge

  Connect West and Central Mesas across Cabrillo Canyon at key locations

- Land Use

  Return existing Zoo surface lot to Zoo/Park use

  Reclaim Arizona Landfill; return to general Park use

  Redesign Plaza de Panama: more pedestrian-friendly

  Close northern portion of Florida Canyon to vehicles; enhance habitat

  Convert edges of Inspiration Point to parkland

  200' Park Promenade (buffered pedestrian zone) along Park Boulevard

  Gateway enhancements

Long-Term Improvements

- Circulation

  Open north end of Spanish Village for through-pedestrian traffic

  Universally accessible perimeter trail system around each mesa

  Universally accessible perimeter trail system around Park

  Strengthen transit access to East Mesa

- Land Use

  Remove parking from Pan-American Plaza; restore to historic pleasure garden use

  Convert Alcazar surface parking to parkland

  Convert Organ pavilion surface parking to parkland

Option C: Park Improvement Plan