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Infrastructure

The World's Largest Parking Lots

Erica Westly 04.10.08, 3:30 PM ET



In Pictures: The World's Largest Parking Lots

For years, traffic got all the attention: Cars in motion were exciting; cars at rest were boring. Hardly anyone talked about parking. In the past 10 years or so, though, parking has become a paramount concern among city planners and company heads. Space is limited, and yet the demand for parking places keeps increasing.

Everyone--from the big players, like airports and theme parks, to smaller office complexes--is feeling the heat, says Dale Denda, director of research for the Parking Market Research Company in McLean, Va. "It's happening down the whole line," he says.

That's why behemoth parking lots (Denda calls them "seas of asphalt") are out and mega-garages are in.

In Pictures: The World's Largest Parking Lots

Packing cars into buildings is more efficient space-wise, and, provided they're built properly, concrete garages last considerably longer than asphalt lots, which usually give out after about 20 years.

Garages, however, can last up to 50 years without any major construction, says Mary Smith, a senior vice president at Walker Parking Consultants, one of the major parking-garage developers in the world.

Over the past few years, Smith has helped design six garages with 10,000 spaces or more. One of her key projects was the garage in Detroit Airport's McNamera terminal, which at 11,500 spaces is the largest parking structure built all at one time.

The Walker company has also worked with the Mall of America, which has two 6,000-car garages and an 8,000-car unit in the works. For now, though, the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada, remains king of shopping-center parking. With 20,000 spaces in its wrap-around parking structure, West Edmonton holds the Guinness world record for the largest parking lot.

Does that mean West Edmonton has the largest parking structure in the world, then? It all depends on your definition. Some argue that the mall's garage-lot hybrid shouldn't count as a single structure, which would make Seattle's airport garage the winner with its 13,000 spaces under a single roof.

Then, there are those who think in terms of largest parking facilities. With its

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twain garage structure, each containing about 10,000 spaces, Universal Studios tops the list of largest parking complexes. Most airports have multiple mega-garages too. The Denver International Airport has two 7,000-car giants, and Baltimore's airport boasts both an 8,400-car and a 5,300-car structure.

But it's not just airports and theme parks building jumbo parking garages. **Microsoft** (nasdaq: [MSFT](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) is constructing a 5,000-car underground garage near its Redmond, Wash., headquarters, and **Best Buy** (nyse: [BBY](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) recently completed a 6,800-car garage for its base in Richfield, Minn.

Meanwhile, large projects that combine residential and office areas with retail outlets are sprouting up in cities across the country. Atlanta's recent Atlantic Station development includes a 7,500-car garage that's mostly underground, and New Jersey's Meadowlands Xanadu complex will have a whopping 12,885 spaces in its parking facility when it opens next year.

At around \$15,000 per space, building these parking garages isn't cheap. Airports and other venues that charge for parking stand to make some of their investment back, but for other garages, the money has to come from somewhere else, such as retail sales or big-ticket events.

All the more reason, then, to overlap use, says Shannon McDonald, an Atlanta-based architect who recently published a book on parking garages. "A lot of these garages were built for office workers, so then they sit empty two-thirds of the day," she explains.

Some parking garage designers, including Walker's Smith, have constructed entire facilities based on this idea of shared usage. In fact, Smith recently worked on one in Dubai that, at nearly 40,000 spaces, could easily become the world's largest once it's completed. Watch your back, West Edmonton.

In Pictures: The World's Largest Parking Lots

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