

City of Los Altos Downtown Wide Traffic and Parking Impact Analysis

Submitted to:



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3.0 EXISTING PARKING CONDITIONS

Public parking is provided throughout most of Los Altos downtown. Off-street parking can be found in three Plazas; North, Central and South, divided into a total of 10 segments (between First Street and San Antonio Road). There is an additional off-street public parking lot, next to the Safeway Store, accessible from First Street. There are other parking spaces in the same area meant for Safeway shoppers but they are excluded from this study. Public on-street parking is available along Main Street, State Street, First Street, Second Street and Third Street (between Whitney Street and Plaza North). Figure 3.1 presents the parking locations for the downtown area.

For the purpose of this study, parking surveys were conducted hourly on Thursday, March 15, 2007, and Saturday, March 24, 2007 between 10am and 10pm. There are a total of 1493 parking spaces in the downtown area included in this study, both regular (1442) and handicap (51) spaces. Of the regular parking spaces, 1108 off-street spaces are located within the ten Plazas and 54 are near the Safeway. There are 280 on-street spaces. All handicap parking spaces are off-street, distributed throughout the downtown area; there is no on-street handicap parking in the downtown area. The specific number of spaces available in each area is tabulated in Table 3.1.

Table 3-1 Number of Parking Spaces

Location	Regular Spaces	Handicap Spaces
Plaza 1	127	4
Plaza 2	126	6
Plaza 3	204	5
Plaza 4	61	1
Plaza 5	53	6
Plaza 6	68	4
Plaza 7	123	6
Plaza 8	122	9
Plaza 9	134	7
Plaza 10	90	2
PLAZA Subtotal	1108	50
Public Parking @ First & Main	54	1
<i>State Street*</i>	67	0
<i>Main Street</i>	144	0
<i>1st Street</i>	44	0
<i>2nd Street</i>	13	0
<i>3rd Street</i>	12	0
Total (1493)	1442	51

*One on-street parking spot along State Street is unavailable for use due to construction
 Italic denotes on-street parking

3.1 Existing Parking Condition

Most commercial activities in the Los Altos downtown are concentrated along First Street, State Street and Main Street. Retail businesses that include restaurants, eateries, grocery stores, apparel shops, hobby stores, etc are mostly found along these

DOWNTOWN LOS ALTOS PARKING

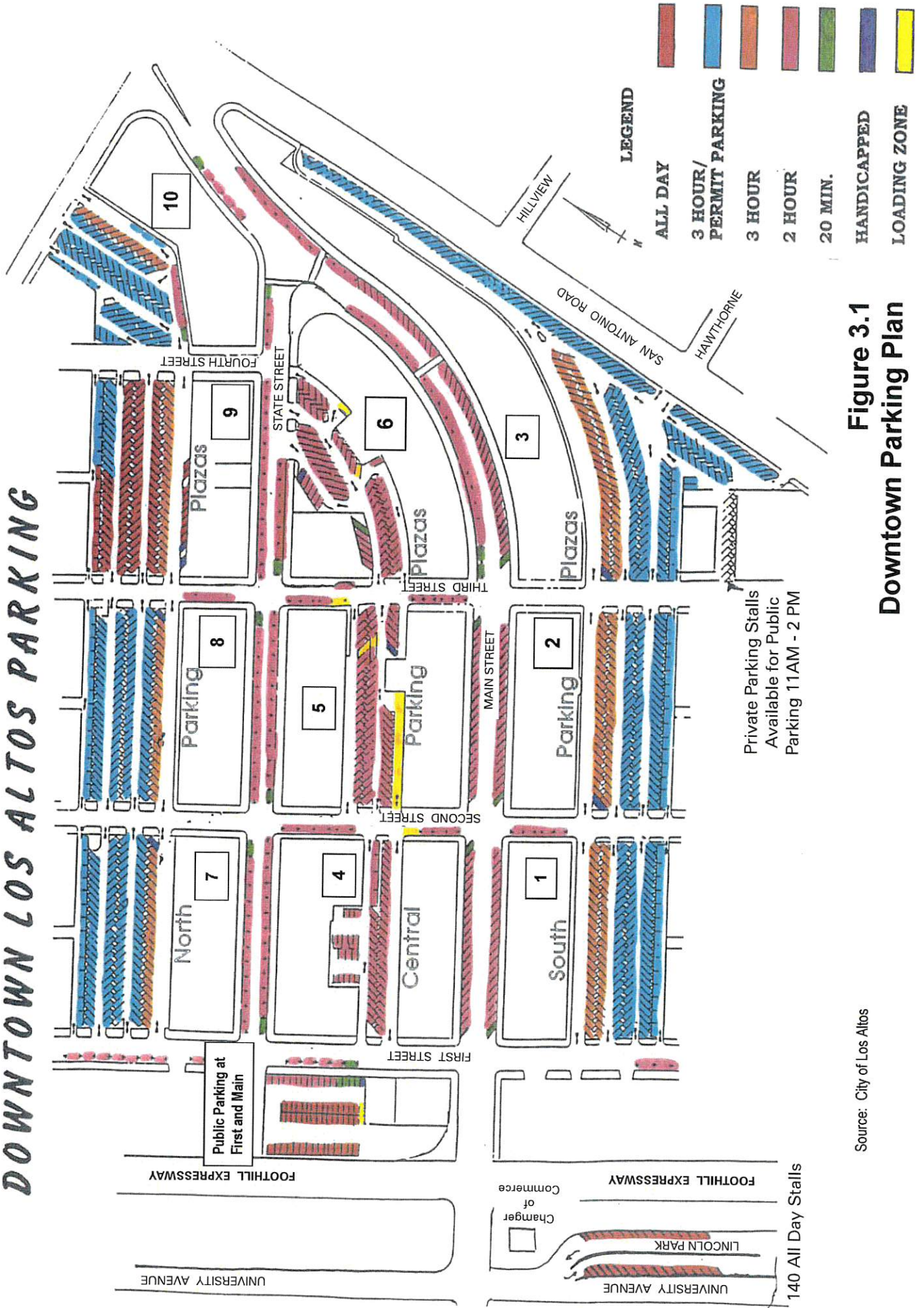


Figure 3.1
Downtown Parking Plan

Source: City of Los Altos

streets. Hence, on-street parking along First Street, State Street and Main Street is essential to the businesses. Additional parking in City-owned parking lots (the plazas) also plays an important role in supporting the downtown businesses. Offices are scattered throughout the downtown area, but are mostly located near the edge of the downtown triangle. Apart from the off-street parking plazas, on-street parking along Second Street and Third Street provides direct access to commercial activities in the downtown area.

The following discussion will focus on the demand for regular parking spaces. The average occupancy for the different parking areas is summarized in Table 3.2. Graphical representations of the parking survey results are shown in Figures 3.2a-b and Figures 3.3a-b. Detailed information is provided in Appendix B.

Table 3-2 Average Parking Occupancy

	Weekday			Weekend		
	Off-Street	On-Street	Overall	Off-Street	On-Street	Overall
10am	68.5	56.9	61.1	52.0	75.8	59.4
11am	77.1	63.3	68.5	61.2	79.9	66.0
12 noon	86.3	84.5	80.7	69.2	77.9	70.4
1pm	90.2	85.2	83.4	73.0	85.6	75.4
2pm	85.0	75.0	77.0	68.5	70.5	67.4
3pm	76.4	68.8	69.7	60.8	70.1	62.2
4pm	73.9	68.6	68.0	48.2	67.0	52.0
5pm	70.6	51.3	60.7	40.5	53.0	42.7
6pm	58.9	71.6	59.2	32.5	54.7	38.2
7pm	30.9	65.0	39.1	23.7	45.8	32.2
8pm	29.4	39.8	30.7	22.1	38.2	28.7
9pm	20.2	21.7	19.5	15.0	25.2	20.2
10pm	10.7	5.5	8.6	9.0	9.9	10.6

According to the ITE Transportation Planning Handbook, 85% occupancy of a parking lot is considered full for all practical purposes in parking studies. Under this condition, a driver looking for a parking space would have to circulate through several aisles of a parking lot or structure, or drive around one or more blocks for on-street parking, to find an available space. Driver frustration and complaints of insufficient parking increase rapidly when parking areas experience 85% or more occupancy. Hence, the 85% criterion is used to determine the level of demand in this report. It was observed that the overall average demand for parking in the downtown area is higher for a weekday than a weekend. Average occupancy as a whole ranges from 65% to 80% most of the time on weekday. For weekends, the average occupancy ranges from 50% to 75%.

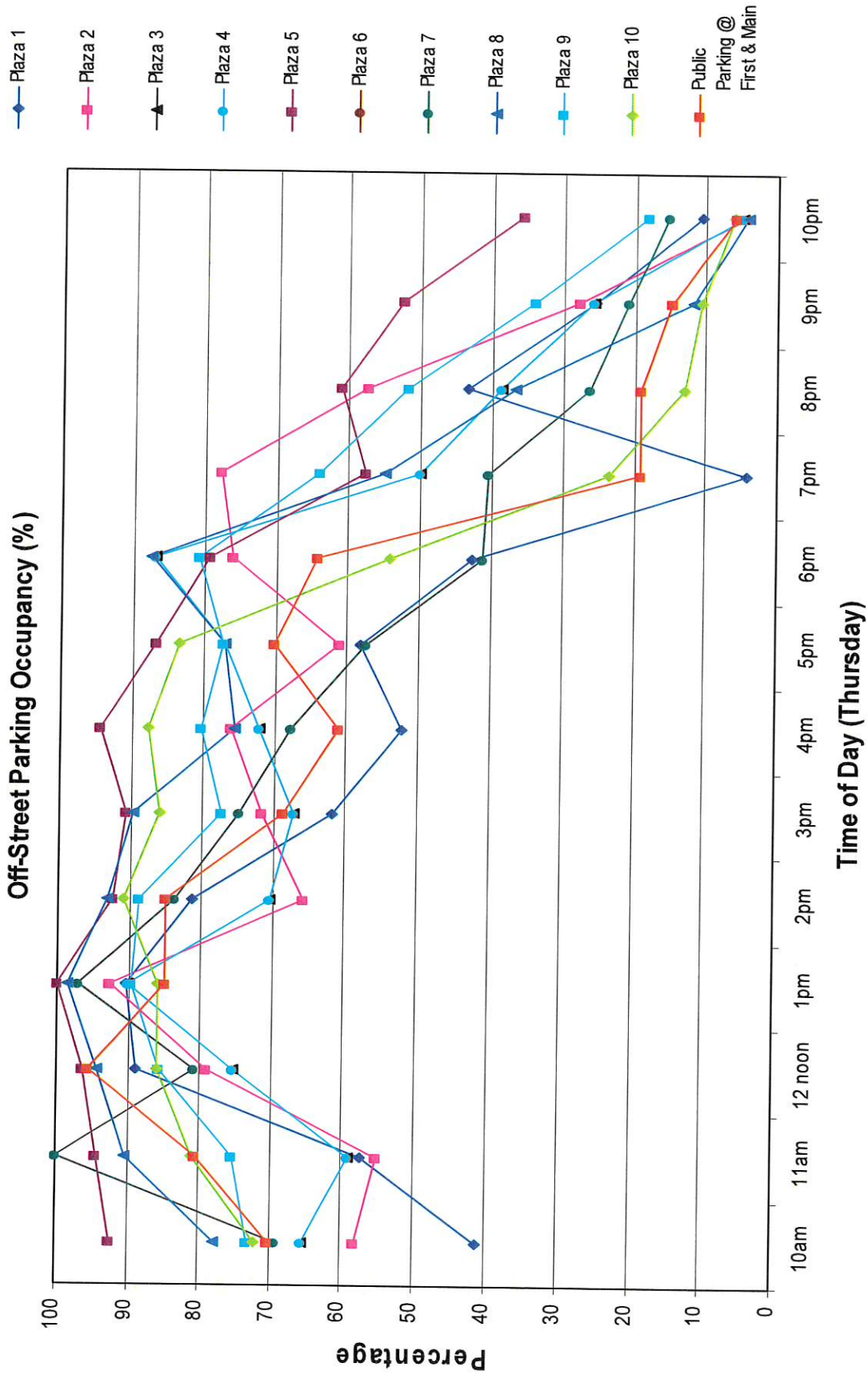


Figure 3-2a Off-Street Parking Occupancy (%) for Thursday

On-Street Parking Occupancy (%)

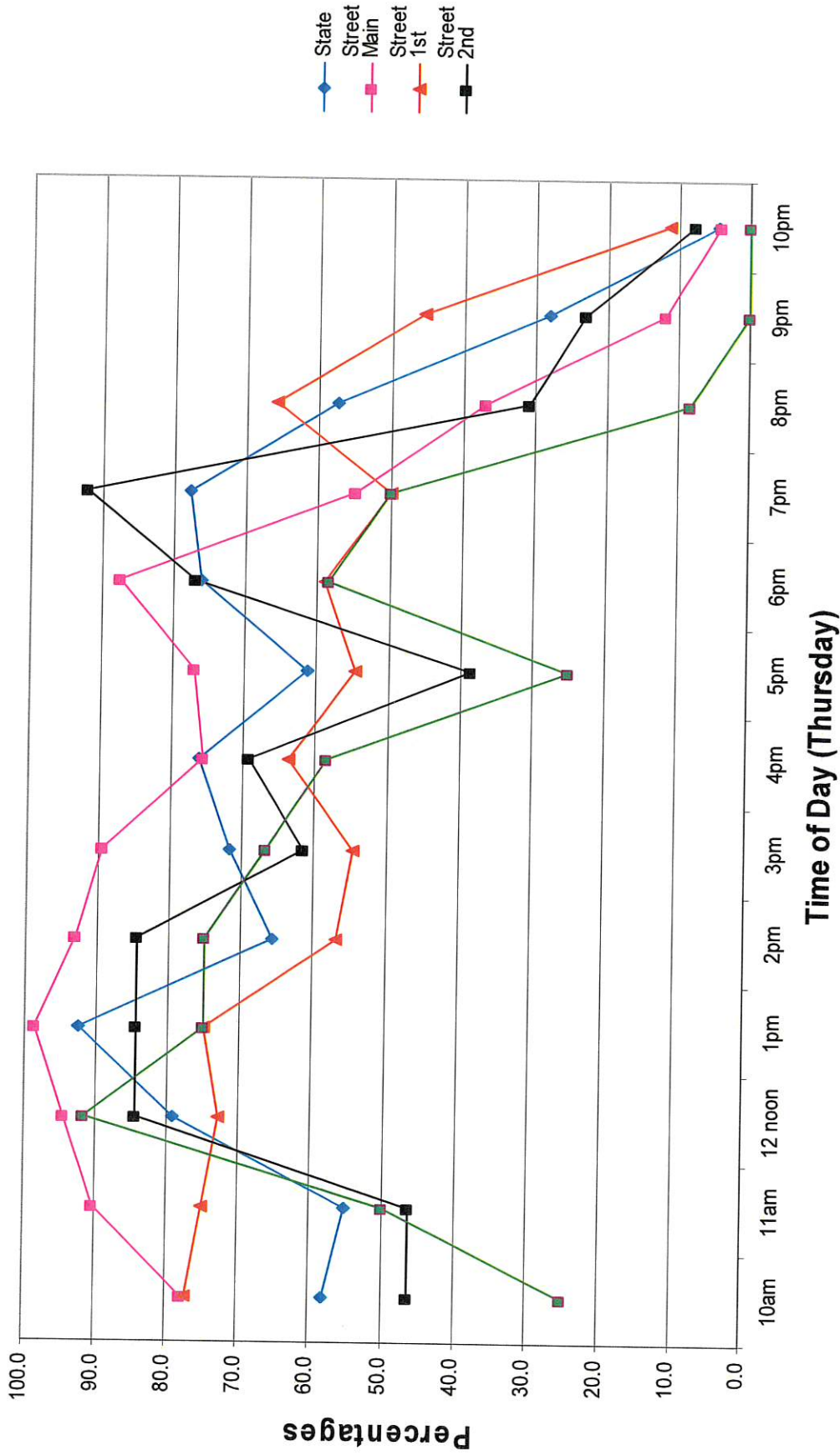


Figure 3-2b On-Street Parking Occupancy (%) for Thursday

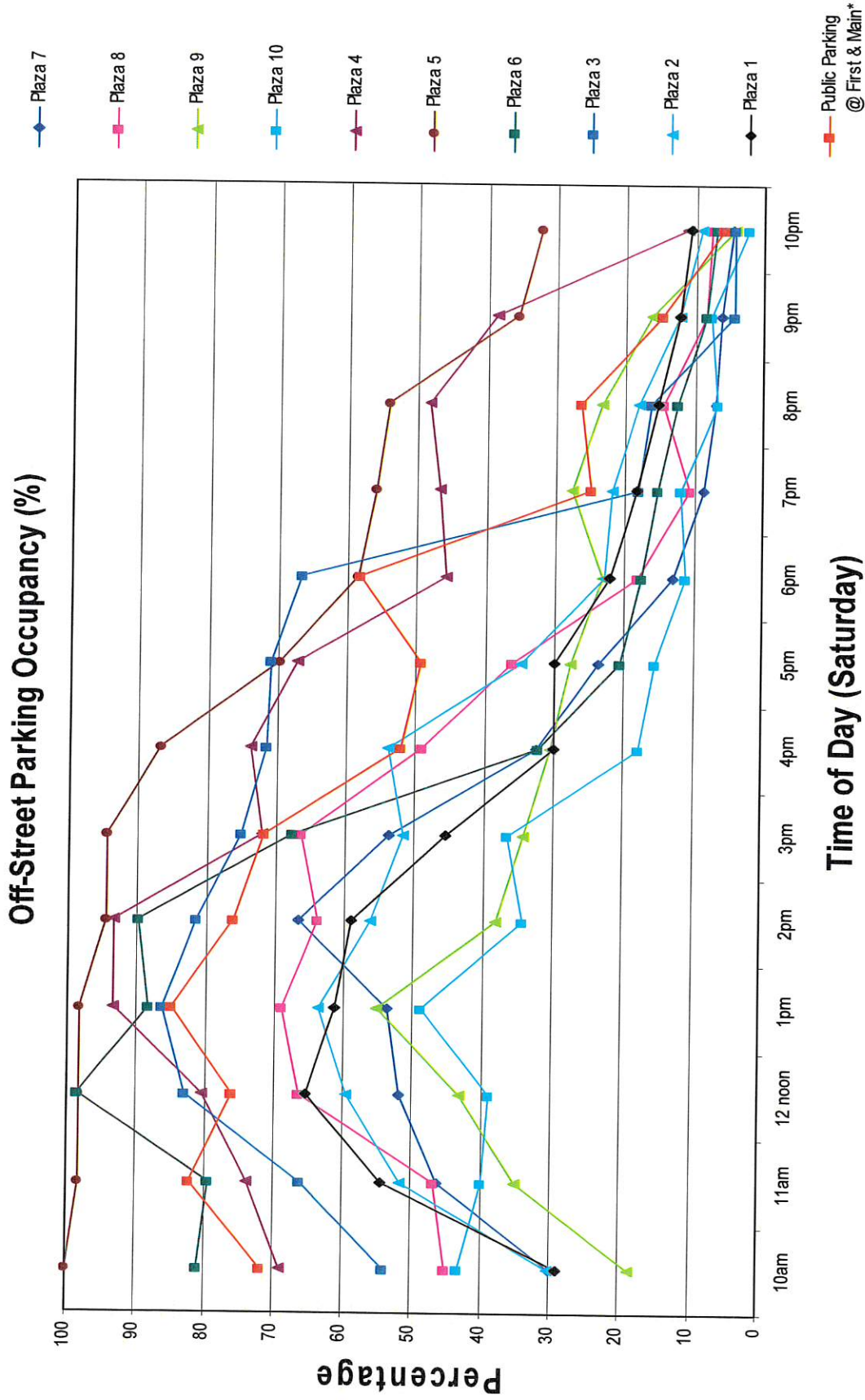


Figure 3-3a Off-Street Parking Occupancy (%) for Saturday

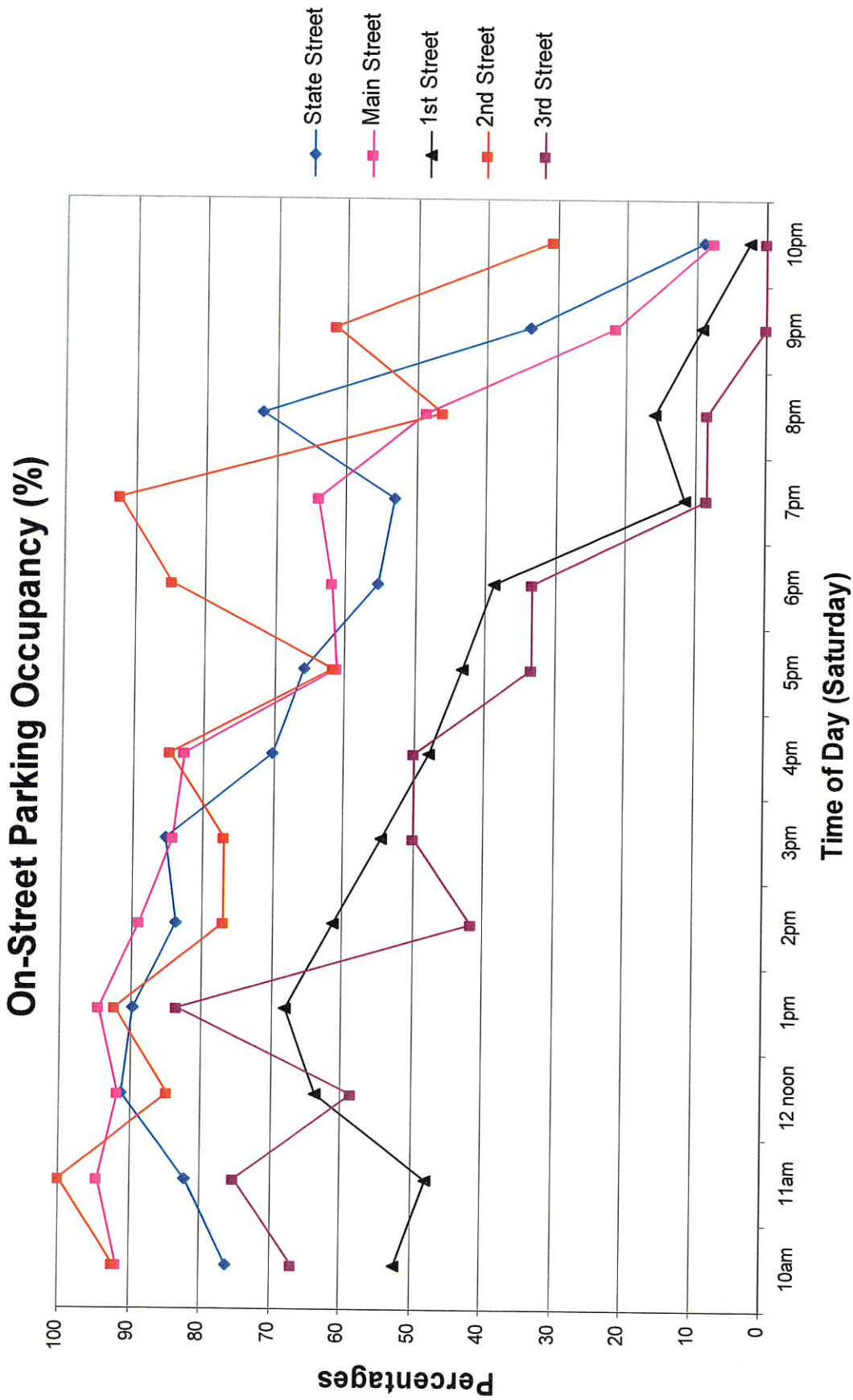


Figure 3-3b On-Street Parking Occupancy (%) for Saturday

Off-Street Parking

On a weekday, almost all off-street parking areas reached a 85% occupancy or higher by lunch time (between 12noon – 2pm), with the peak at around 1pm. Plaza 1 was the only parking area that did not reach this level but attained close to 80% around 1pm. While most parking areas started to see a decrease in occupancy as the day processed, Plazas 5, 8 and 10 remained full (over 85% occupancy) until about 5pm. Plaza 5, located in the middle of downtown Los Altos, is a natural destination for drivers with several errands to run in the downtown area. It is therefore not surprising to see a high occupancy rate for this parking area throughout the day. In fact, it reached 100% occupancy at 1pm and remained more than 50% occupied at 9pm. Plaza 8 and Plaza 10 are primarily used by offices located adjacent to these areas. High occupancy at these areas is expected for most of the “office hours”. All off-street parking locations dropped below the 85% rate during the evening except for Plaza 4 which was still at 87% occupancy at 6pm. One reason could be its proximity to the many eateries and retail shops along First Street, Main Street and State Streets. Most parking areas saw occupancy rates reduced to 50% by 7pm because retail businesses, with the exception of the grocery stores, close by around 6pm. Most eateries and restaurants stayed open to around 8:30pm, except Los Altos Grill located near Plaza 3, which stayed open past 9pm. Hence, Plaza 3 remained one of the higher used parking areas during the evening hours.

Similar trends were observed on the weekend. Plaza 5 located at the heart of the downtown was the most utilized parking area. It was fully occupied from 10am to 4pm and remained close to 50% occupied into the evening hours. Parking demand peaked during lunch time, as expected. Parking at Safeway, Plazas 3, 4 and 6 had occupancy rates around the 85% mark during this peak period. All other parking areas hovered around the 50% level during the noon peak hour. As most retail businesses closed by 6 pm, demand for parking dropped to below 30% for most areas starting around 5pm. The exception was the parking area right next to Safeway along First Street, which stayed over 50% occupancy until after 6pm. Most eateries along First Street remained open to about 8 pm, which could be the reason Plaza 4 had close to 50% occupancy throughout the evening.

On-street Parking

Peak demand for on-street parking occurred during the noon peak period for both weekday and weekend. Parking on Main Street exceeded the 85% mark half the time on the weekday and was also the most used on-street parking strip during the weekend. On-street parking saw another peak during the evening dinner-time period. This peak was more apparent for on-street parking than for off-street parking especially during weekdays. The demand for on-street parking remained fairly close to 60% for most of the weekday. However, parking occupancy fluctuated more for on-street parking because of the lower number of parking spaces available in each on-street location.

On the weekend, parking demand on First Street and Third Street is lower than for the other on-street parking areas. Third Street has the least number of parking spaces

available. Second Street was highly utilized because most of its parking spaces are between Main Street and State Street where most commercial activities can be found. On-street parking has a higher occupancy on weekend than off-street parking. Given the absence of office-type usage over the weekend, this trend is not surprising.

Handicap Parking Demand

Considering the whole downtown area, handicap parking demand never exceeded 20% occupancy. While some areas are more popular than others, there is sufficient handicap parking to meet the users' need.

Illegal Parking Situation

Some illegal parking was observed on both weekday and weekends throughout the downtown area. However, illegal parking was not a serious problem. In most cases business owners parked their vehicle at loading bays fronting their shops for long periods of time. The illegal parking was not caused by insufficient parking supply, but by merchants wanting the convenience of stopping right at their doorstep. It was also not a reflection of the parking demand in the area. As such, this factor does not affect the results of this study.

3.2 Mitigation Measures

On the whole there is sufficient parking supply in the Los Altos downtown area. Certain parking areas are more popular due to their more central location and proximity to specific businesses. There is no critical need to provide more parking spaces for the weekday noon-time period as supply almost equals demand during this period. There is significant surplus of parking spaces during the weekday evening period and during the most of the weekend.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The existing level of service of the signalized intersections around the Los Altos downtown area is at LOS C or better. This is within the satisfactory levels set out by both the City and CMP. Two unsignalized intersections have LOS F due to the high traffic volume on San Antonio Road. Improvement can be achieved by signalizing the intersection of San Antonio Road / Pepper Drive, thereby bringing the performance to LOS A. The performance of all other unsignalized intersections is LOS C or better. Therefore, there is room to increase traffic volume in the study area while maintaining an acceptable performance level. However, the extent would need to be examined in more details. Also, corridor computer simulation should be conducted prior to adding signals to San Antonio Road.

There is sufficient parking supply, both regular and handicap spaces, to meet its current demand within the downtown area. Both on-street and off-street parking areas were well-utilized during the day throughout the downtown area. Parking demand peaked during lunch time with many areas having full occupancy. However, there was no indication that parking spaces were undersupplied even though illegal parking was observed during the surveys. While changes or intensification in land use can be considered, they should not conflict the high demand during 'office hours' of a regular work week. Land use that generates parking in the evening or on weekends seems more viable at this preliminary stage. However, further studies are still needed to determine the actual impact of any land use change on traffic and parking situation in the downtown area of Los Altos.