

4. VEHICULAR CIRCULATION SYSTEM

During the master planning process, De Leuw, Cather & Company of Virginia conducted a Downtown Circulation Study for Lynchburg. The purpose of the study was to assess the effects of improvements to Ninth Street and Jefferson Street on vehicular circulation in the downtown. The study also identified current routes for internal and cross-town traffic, especially truck traffic, and made recommendations regarding appropriate routes in the future (see Figure 4). The study concluded that downtown intersections operate at an acceptable level under existing and proposed future conditions. Given this, the existing northbound and southbound right-turn lanes on Ninth Street can be eliminated in the proposed street corridor improvements. Developing a suitable truck route across downtown will require short-term, mid-term, and long-term solutions, however. The Appendix includes a series of technical memoranda relating to the circulation issues downtown.

Two-way traffic in lieu of the current one-way system was requested by retail merchants on Main Street to (1) slow traffic, and (2) double their exposure. In addition, stop signs can be used in lieu of traffic lights to prevent speeding through yellow lights and to save the cost of installing and maintaining lights. These are future decisions to be made by City staff (traffic engineer, DPW director, and planning director) in conjunction with businesses and citizens.

4.1 Truck Routes

The objectives of the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan are to discourage truck traffic along Jefferson Street and Ninth Street, and more generally, to identify the most appropriate truck route across town. Jefferson Street will become the spine of the Riverfront Park, and Ninth Street will become a key pedestrian corridor, especially between Main Street and Amazement Square. The De Leuw, Cather study determined that under existing conditions, most trucks emanating from the Concord Turnpike prefer using this route along Jefferson Street and Ninth Street whether they are eastbound to the Expressway or westbound to Business Route 29. The poor sight distance and lack of signalization at the intersection of Washington Street and Main Street is a major deterrent for trucks turning left to reach the Expressway.

While truck traffic generated by the Riverfront area may decrease over time, the plan acknowledges that businesses along the Concord Turnpike will continue to generate truck traffic for the foreseeable future. The future Route 29/Madison Heights Bypass will provide a better link to the regional highway system for these trucks; however, the Bypass may not be completed for ten years or more.

Short Term

According to De Leuw, Cather, the narrowed travel lanes and other streetscape improvements along Jefferson Street and Ninth Street will deter only a small percentage of trucks and other traffic from this well-traveled route through downtown. Recognizing the need for through-truck traffic in the short term, the new streets need to be designed to accommodate some truck traffic until improvements can be made for more suitable routes. The design plans for the Ninth Street Corridor maintain the primary truck routes through downtown as follows:

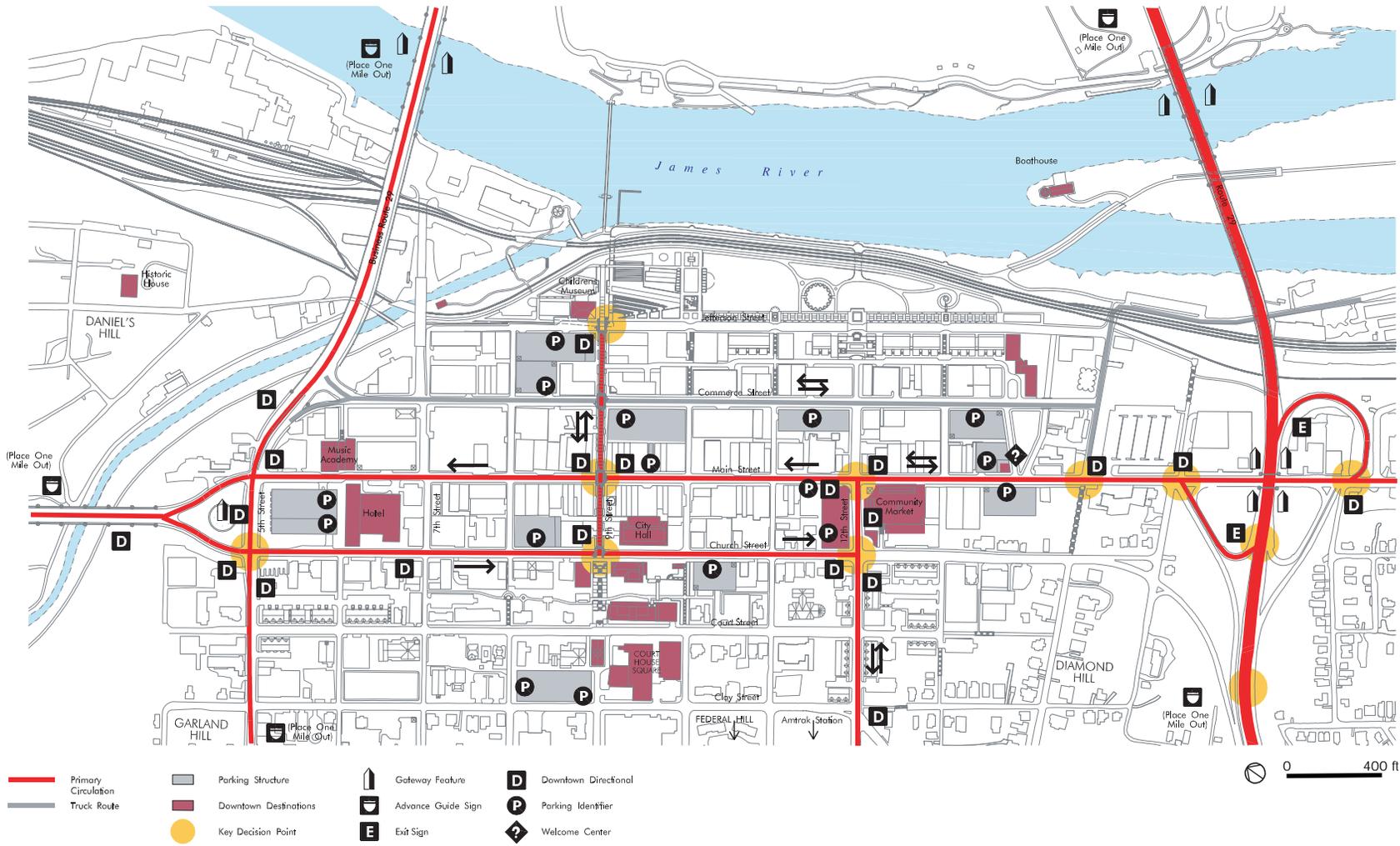


Figure 4. Vehicular Circulation Plan

- The uphill route: A left turn from westbound Jefferson Street onto Ninth Street and then a right turn from southbound Ninth Street (uphill) onto westbound Commerce Street.
- The reverse downhill route: A left turn from eastbound Commerce Street onto Ninth Street and then a right turn from northbound Ninth Street (downhill) onto eastbound Jefferson Street (see Appendix).

Midterm

In the midterm, geometric and signalization improvements should be made to the intersection of Washington Street and Main Street. These improvements will allow better truck turning movements into and out of Washington Street in all directions and will address the poor sight distance along Main Street to the east. By enhancing turning movements at this location, trucks will be less likely to follow their current circuitous routes. With signage and an enforcement program, westbound truck traffic could be directed along Washington Street, to Main Street, to Commerce Street, which was designed as a truck corridor.

Long Term

Ultimately, the installation of a well-designed and efficient truck route will reduce the need for enforcement and will minimize the amount of trucks using well-traveled pedestrian routes in the heart of downtown. Ultimately, the extension of Commerce Street to Washington Street, on its old alignment, will provide the simplest and most direct route for trucks crossing downtown (see Figure 4). Washington Street, which is narrow but has acceptable grades of 11% (Ninth Street is at 12%), will become a direct link for trucks traveling from the Concord Turnpike to the Expressway via eastbound Main Street. For trucks moving west-

bound across downtown, the easiest route will be Washington Street, turning westbound onto Commerce Street and continuing directly to the intersection with Business Route 29. In order to extend Commerce Street, a bridge will be required over Horseford Street due to grade considerations in this area.

Discouraging through-truck traffic through downtown will require a clear signage system and a rigorous enforcement program. All through-truck traffic, which now uses Church Street (eastbound) and Main Street (westbound), should be directed to Commerce Street (with the exception of deliveries). Enforcement of truck prohibitions represents a cost, and the vigor of enforcement may significantly affect the effectiveness of the program. At the same time, the establishment of truck restrictions is a relatively low-cost measure that will improve conditions even if sporadically enforced.

Implementation Issues

- The geometry of Ninth Street has already been revised to accommodate the necessary truck movements.
- Funding should be sought as soon as possible for a signal at Washington Street and ideally for intersection geometry improvements as well.
- Every effort should be made to maintain the option to extend Commerce Street, although this is likely to be a long-range solution.
- Signage should be installed for truck routes and a program of enforcement instituted.

4.2 Other Streetscape Improvements

To complement the new street corridor improvements along Ninth Street, the City should program improvements for Main, Twelfth and Fifth Streets in the future. All of these street corridors function as key gateways into and out of the downtown and should reflect a positive image and attitude about the City. The Ninth Street Corridor is envisioned as a major public space in the heart of downtown, linking key pedestrian destinations along a minor vehicular route. The Main, Twelfth, and Fifth Street Corridors, on the other hand, should be organized and improved to serve as arterial vehicular routes while creating generous and attractive pedestrian routes. If possible, bicycle lanes should be incorporated into the Twelfth Street right-of-way since it connects the downtown/riverfront area directly to the Kemper Street area and surrounding neighborhoods.



Streets corridors should provide elegant gateways from residential areas into the downtown.

In the downtown area, Twelfth Street is a key axis that will link the riverfront, the Overlook Terrace, the Community Market, and residential areas. In general, Twelfth Street should be designed to accommodate one lane of traffic in each direction, bicycle routes, on-street parking, a continuous planting strip for street trees, and a wider sidewalk. At key intersections such as Main Street, left-turn lanes may be necessary in place of on-street parking.

Coming from the south, the Fifth Street corridor has a distinguished character as it climbs the hill passing through neighborhoods with its continuous line of street trees. At the top of the hill, however, this character changes dramatically. Since Fifth Street was realigned to meet the new John Lynch Bridge, this once-thriving commercial street was transformed into a highway that is now a barrier between Garland Hill and downtown.

The objective of the new streetscape improvements on Fifth Street should be to discourage high-speed traffic south of Commerce Street and to facilitate pedestrian character and pedestrian crossings. Fifth Street should be designed with improvements that emphasize its character as a downtown street, which provides a setting for commercial businesses and which allows pedestrians to cross back and forth from Garland Hill and other neighborhoods to the downtown.

While many improvements have been made to Main Street over the years, this important corridor needs to be constantly cleaned and maintained to send a positive message about downtown. Brick sidewalks, new signage, trash cans, benches, lighting and trees should be considered.

Implementation Issues

- Continue the corridor study and community development effort along Fifth Street. Based on this study, prioritize first phase improvements and establish funding.
- Establish funding for Main Street and Twelfth Street improvements and initiate design studies.