Discussion Paper
Public Access and Parking Capacity at Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks
August 2014

Introduction:

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the issue of public access and the challenges of limited parking capacity for winter park visitors in Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks, including both commercial ski area clients and non-client park visitors. Parking demand exceeds available parking on peak days each winter, impacting visitor satisfaction, threatening visitor safety as it relates to congested parking areas, and impacting ski area profitability.

BC Parks is working with the ski area operators at Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks to find strategies to minimize the impact of limited parking capacity on ski area revenues and client satisfaction, and to ensure continued safe access for all user groups to the ski areas and areas of the park beyond the Controlled Recreation Areas (CRAs). Key stakeholders have participated in discussions in an effort to find solutions to ensure that public access to the parks is not unduly impacted. A range of options has been explored, including long-term solutions which may require significant budgets and approval processes, and potentially legislative and regulatory amendments. This is a complex issue, and there are no apparent "quick fixes".
A provincial committee is developing a BC Parks commercial alpine ski area policy. There are many unique aspects to the delivery of ski area operations within our provincial parks system. This policy will consider the similarities and differences of operating ski areas within provincial parks in comparison to authorizations for ski areas on Crown land. The issues and potential solutions for managing public access may relate to the broader scope of the ski area policy committee. However, separate discussions focused on identifying site-specific resolutions to the parking capacity issues at Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks is required.

The Issue:

The parking areas at Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks are shared by commercial ski area clients and other non-client park visitors accessing areas of the parks beyond the Controlled Recreation Areas. Parking capacity is often exceeded on peak winter days; there are approximately 20 – 30 peak days per winter season. Ski area operators state that congestion and lack of convenient parking causes many potential ski area clients to turn away, or to walk significant distance from overflow parking areas encumbered with ski and snowboard

equipment. This impacts customer satisfaction, as well as the commercial viability of the ski areas, which rely heavily on peak periods for revenue generation.

The exponential growth in the popularity of snowshoeing over the past decade appears to be the greatest factor contributing to the increased number of day-use visitors, accessing areas of the park not controlled by the ski areas. Along with this, there is a growing urban population in Metro Vancouver, many of whom are seeking an opportunity to simply play in the snow. A free winter experience is conveniently located and easily accessible at either of these two parks.

The majority of non-client park visitors with snowshoes are seeking an easily-accessible opportunity to put on their snowshoes and walk a moderate distance in a natural setting. This differs from the relatively smaller number of park visitors that are seeking a true "backcountry" destination for ski touring in a more remote setting.

Background:

In the winter of 2011/12, to address the challenges of parking capacity on peak-days, the ski area operator at Mount Seymour implemented an alternate parking strategy. Some negative public reaction prompted a meeting hosted by BC Parks between ski area operators and some stakeholders to discuss the reasons for the new parking patterns. Although no changes were implemented at Cypress, the ski area operator participated in the discussion, and raised awareness regarding similar issues at Cypress.

When BC Parks and the ski area operators began discussions to develop the ski area policy in spring 2012, the parking capacity issue at Cypress and Mount Seymour was identified as a key issue of concern, and a sub-committee was struck to attempt to resolve the issue. A series of meetings occurred over the winter of 2012/13, some involving BC Parks and the ski area operators, and some which also included various stakeholders (e.g. Friends of Cypress, BC Federation of Mountain Clubs, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC).

During the winter of 2012/13, Mount Seymour continued to implement the alternate parking strategy that was adopted in 2011/12, making efforts to improve the effectiveness of the strategy. Public acceptance of the strategy was reasonably well received.

At Cypress, following the intensely busy 2012 Christmas holiday period, the ski area operator installed a sign indicating "Snowshoer Parking in Lot 3B ⇦ ", (a lower parking lot outside the CRA), in an effort to maintain the upper parking closer to the ski area for ski area clients. The Friends of Cypress objected, citing the impracticality of imposing a strategy that addressed maximum capacity conditions that only occurred on peak days. Stakeholders were also concerned with potential safety issues, associated with walking up the road. There was no

enforcement of the sign, and most people ignored it on days when it was obvious that ample parking beyond this lot, closer to the trailhead, was available. The ski area operator removed the sign after discussion with stakeholders and BC Parks.

The winter of 2013/14 was a-typical with an extremely poor snowpack, particularly at the high season over Christmas. Conditions did improve as the winter progressed, but the number of peak days was greatly reduced. In a different way, this exacerbated the issue of economic viability for the ski area operators, accentuating the importance of maximizing the number of ski area visitors on good snow days.

At Mount Seymour, a "High Volume Traffic Plan" was prepared for implementation in winter 2013/14, including continuation of the 2012/13 plan to restrict non-client visitors to P5 at all times, and to lower P5 during peak periods. Other measures were also proposed, including additional shuttle bus service from additional parking at Mile 0, at the bottom of Mount Seymour. Given the challenging snow conditions for much of the 2013/14 winter season, some measures were not implemented.

At Cypress, operational changes for winter 2013/14 included management strategies to re-direct non-client visitors to the Black Mountain Lodge to acquire the "Backcountry Access Release of Liability/Assumption of Risk" tag, and for use of washrooms and "brown bag" facilities. In an effort to enable priority access to ski area clients, non-client visitors were discouraged from accessing the Cypress Creek Lodge. The ski area operator considered charging a parking fee this season, but that option was deferred. If satisfactory options are not forthcoming, the ski area operator reserves the right to implement this option as per the terms of their park use permit.

Improvements were made to the BC Parks website for each of the parks, in an attempt to provide additional information about the parking capacity challenges and to encourage people to minimize the number of cars arriving at the ski areas.

Discussion:

There are several key points to consider in the analysis of this issue. There are some common elements between the two ski areas, and there are some unique differences. Independent solutions will be required at each of the parks.

1. Parking space is limited at both ski areas during peak winter operating periods. Many parking spaces are filled by non-client park visitors accessing areas of the parks outside the CRA, reducing the parking spaces available to ski area clients. The displacement of paying clients has a negative impact on the ski areas' economic viability.

2. "Peak days" are primarily winter weekends and holidays, as well as good-weather days when the snow conditions are optimal. Many other days the parking lots are not full and the parking capacity can easily accommodate both types of park visitors.
3. The popularity of snowshoeing is a critical factor underlying this issue. The rapid growth of this sport has pushed the limits of capacity at both ski areas, beyond what could have been anticipated at the time the ski areas became commercial operations.
4. Both Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks are easily accessible and therefore a key destination for the Metro Vancouver population to experience winter recreation.
5. Both ski areas provide snowshoe trails as a commercial service for a fee within the CRAs. However, the majority of park visitors use park trails outside of the CRA boundary, where no fee is charged.
6. The skill level of the majority of snowshoers is beginner to intermediate, and many are comfortable with snowshoe activity that occurs close to the serviced areas of the parks (i.e. the ski area facilities). The easy access and relative sense of security provided at the parks is likely what attracts the majority of snowshoers in such high numbers.
7. Most park trails being used for snowshoeing are technically frontcountry trails. According to the *Park Act Regulations*, "frontcountry" means "*an area in a park within one kilometre of either side of the centreline of a park road or highway*." It is estimated that as much as 90% of the non-commercial winter activity in the parks is frontcountry use, occurring outside the boundaries of the ski areas (CRA), but using facilities shared with commercial ski area clients.
8. The ski area operators do not wish to restrict *backcountry* access but to ensure that the CRA is used fairly, and that parking spaces accommodate ski area clients.
9. The costs associated with maintaining the parking lots and visitor services facilities should be borne equitably by all user groups.
10. Ski area operators have management control over parking areas within the CRAs. They have the option within their park use permits to charge fees for parking within the CRAs. Currently, the only parking fees that are charged are for a 145-car lot constructed by Cypress, immediately adjacent to the Cypress Creek Lodge. A $10 fee is charged and the lot is well utilized.
11. At Mount Seymour, the ski area operator desires use of all available parking for ski area clients, and therefore does not wish to charge a parking fee. The interest is in having sufficient parking for ski area clients, rather than about charging a fee for non-client park visitors.
12. A potential contributing factor may also be the ski areas' success in promoting their businesses, including the services they provide for recreational snowshoeing. The economic benefit of attracting visitors to the area is compromised when there are free opportunities provided by BC Parks in the same location.

13. The business model for the ski areas, running a capital-intensive operation within the constraints of a provincial park, may create potentially competing objectives with respect to developing or expanding parking areas.
14. The ski area operators have management responsibilities within their park use permits associated with providing services and facilities for non-client park visitors. Providing services within these areas has a significant cost, which is being borne primarily by the ski area clients.
15. The Province contributes an annual payment towards the cost of maintenance and snow clearing of the main access roads to the ski areas. Both ski area clients and non-client park visitors derive the benefit of this provincial contribution.
16. Some non-client park visitors expect free, unfettered access to the backcountry. There would likely be a negative reaction by many backcountry users if a parking fee were charged or if unduly imposed restrictions on access were implemented.
17. There is some unauthorized commercial use occurring in the parks, including guided snowshoeing, guided ski touring and other activities. This contributes to the burden on parking capacity, and is also in conflict with the ski area operators' exclusive rights to provide commercial activities within the CRA.
18. Unauthorized commercial activities must be authorized under a park use permit. The issuance of a permit protects the Province, the ski areas and the general public by ensuring all commercial activities have appropriate insurance, emergency plans, and abilities to undertake their intended activities.
19. Enforcement of the *Park Act* is BC Parks' responsibility. However, capacity to conduct compliance and enforcement by BC Parks staff is limited.
20. At Cypress, a backcountry waiver for non-client park visitors travelling through the downhill ski area is required. No waiver is required in the nordic area due to the existence of a backcountry access trail outside of the CRA.
21. A backcountry waiver system for non-client park visitors is not required at Mount Seymour as the majority of non-client park visitors is able to access the backcountry trails without significant passage through the CRA.

Potential Solutions:

The following potential solutions were discussed with ski area operators and stakeholders. Key considerations associated with each solution are highlighted. The "considerations" may include both pros and cons. Some solutions will be more effective in combination with one or more other solutions. Regardless which solutions may be implemented, an underlying objective at both parks should be to minimize the number of vehicles driving up the mountains to the ski areas.

Options for both parks:

1. Charge parking fees within the CRAs.
    - Ski areas implement the rights within their park use permits to charge for parking within their respective CRAs.

    Considerations:
    - Ski area operators do not wish to impose an additional fee on their ski area clients, as fees for commercial activities already include a contribution towards the costs of maintaining safe, snow-free parking and amenities.
    - In the case of Mount Seymour, the ski area operator desires all parking within the CRA to be available for ski area clients. Charging a fee would not be a desirable part of this model.
    - There may be public resistance to paying fees to access a provincial park, even if the fees are intended to offset the operational costs of providing services such as snow-clearing, trail and facility maintenance, safety and security.
    - Parking fees in provincial parks were recently eliminated, based on current government direction. A parking fee charged by ski area operators would appear inconsistent with this direction, regardless of the right to do so within their permits.
    - Additional costs and logistics of managing a parking fee, such as a gate house, parking fee machines, on-line system, and enforcement of payment.

2. Charge a winter day-use fee at Cypress and Mount Seymour Parks
    - All park visitors pay a fee for winter activity at the park.

    Considerations:
    - Ski area clients would pay their fee to the ski area operators in the form of a ski lift ticket, a Nordic ski ticket, or a snowshoe or snowsliding fee.
    - Non-client park visitors would pay a fee for backcountry skiing, snowshoeing or snow-hiking, etc.
    - There may be public resistance to paying fees to access a provincial park, even if the fees are intended to offset the operational costs of providing services such as snow-clearing, trail and facility maintenance, safety and security.
    - This may require a policy or regulation change.

3. Develop “quota” for backcountry skiing and snowshoeing outside the CRA.
    - Implement registration system for using park trails, without imposing a user fee.

Considerations:

- It is important to understand what the quota would be based on. It is not certain whether there is a carrying-capacity issue on the trails or only in the parking lots.
- A quota of "preferred parking" passes could be made available on-line or through a registration system, enabling pass holders to park anywhere in the CRA lots. All other park visitors not having a preferred parking pass would be required to park in an alternate parking lot (e.g. P3B at Cypress; or P1 at Mt. Seymour)
- The quota limit would likely only be necessary on "peak days," and on those days would still affect the ski areas' interest in maximizing capacity for ski area clients.
- This option is not clearly understood and would require additional expertise and analysis to develop a feasible quota system option.

4. Shuttle service from strategic locations, both within and without the parks.
   - Provide a shuttle bus from nearby large parking areas (e.g. schools, shopping malls) or from vacant parking areas within the parks.
     - e.g. P5 at Cypress or 2010 Olympics "generator field"
     - e.g. P1 at Mt. Seymour (group site parking lot) or Mile 0 at base of mountain.

   Considerations:

   - Costly and resource intensive option, requiring capital investment in vehicles, staff, and potentially development of "down-mountain" parking area.
   - Could be offered as a commercial opportunity, but may have limited success due to estimated cost/profit deficit.
   - May have limited effectiveness as the vast majority of people prefer to come in their own cars.
   - Success would require significant information and promotional campaign to try to influence visitor behaviour. Could be combined with campaign to encourage more carpooling.
   - Could be implemented for staff working at the ski areas, as a minimum.

5. Promotional campaign to encourage significant increase in carpooling.
   - BC Parks and ski area operators work together to develop coordinated information campaign to increase carpooling.

   Considerations:

- May have limited success if there is not a motivating factor, such as a parking fee, to influence visitor behaviour.
- May be more effective with certain user groups such as clubs and organized groups.
- Likely needs to be combined with other solution(s).

6. Increase compliance of commercial operators having valid park use permits for activities in the park.
    - Install additional warning signs.
    - Conduct additional compliance checks.

    Considerations:
    - Requires expanded effort of BC Parks staff to monitor activity in CRA.

Options for Mount Seymour Park

7. "Designated Purpose" parking arrangement (as per 2013/14 modifications to 2011 – 2013 plan):
    - Parking Lots 3 & 4 – downhill skiers
    - Parking Lot 2 – snowplay visitors
    - Parking Lot "5" – additional parking created along the roadside below P2
    - Non-ski area clients (snowshoers, backcountry skiers, etc.) are prohibited from parking in the above lots.
    - Parking Lot 1 – non-client park visitors park here
    - Parking Lot "0" (currently unutilized parking lot between Hamber Place and Indian River Rd) – approx. 40 additional parking stalls with free shuttle provided to base area

    Considerations:
    - A similar parking arrangement was implemented in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 winters, with moderate success. Additional changes were proposed by the ski area operator for the 2013/14 winter season, to improve ski area viability.
    - Consider feasibility of using parking lot at Vancouver Picnic Site as additional parking area from which to shuttle people to upper mountain.
    - Staff is needed to direct people to the correct parking location.
    - A traffic bottleneck is created by each arriving vehicle being directed to the correct parking location. Delays result in park visitors turning away, including paying clients; this affects the operator's viability.

- A designated traffic lane for ski area clients would improve access and traffic flow.
- Parking arrangement needs to be consistent to be successful. However, it is possible that with good information and communication, consistency could be maintained even while applying different arrangements on weekdays vs. weekends and holidays (e.g. non-client park visitors could be accommodated within P5 on non-peak days.
- Improved information should be provided about parking arrangement and reasons why it is required (signage, websites, smartphone apps, etc.)

8. Separate parking and access point for ski area clients and non-client park visitors.
    - Option 1: Develop backcountry trail linkage from P1 (group site parking lot outside CRA) to backcountry trail networks at Dog Mountain and Seymour Main trails.

      Considerations:
    - P1 is lower elevation and snow conditions would not always be favourable.
    - Costly to develop and maintain new trails from P1.
    - Limited parking at P1; this lot is also required for users of the group site.
    - New trails at P1 might also be popular with hikers in summer, and would provide an additional attraction for group campsite.

    Separate parking and access point for ski area clients and non-client park visitors.
    - Option 2: Develop new parking lot outside CRA for park visitors accessing backcountry trails.

      Considerations:
    - Costly to develop and maintain new parking lot at high elevation.
    - Potential for environmental impacts; impact assessment would be required.
    - Additional parking is only required on peak winter days.
    - Location should be at same or similar elevation as P4 for optimal snow conditions.

9. Engage Metro Vancouver and District of North Vancouver to explore possible solutions that may involve lands within their jurisdiction.
    - Identify new options to address parking capacity issue.

      Considerations:

- Many of the non-client park visitors are also visitors to the Dog Mountain area of Metro Vancouver's Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve. The only parking available for this area is the parking in the park.
- Regional government plays a key role in providing recreation activities and amenities to local residents. There may be other ideas and opportunities to work collaboratively on solutions.

Options for Cypress Park

10. Restrict non-client park visitors to P3B, and create an improved access trail to the backcountry skiing and snowshoe trails.
    - Develop an improved access trail on the northeast side of the road, or;
    - Develop an improved access trail on the southwest side of the road.

    Considerations (general)
    - Would require amendment to park use permit to enable parking lots to be designated for different user groups (permit currently states parking is on first-come first-served basis in all of the parking lots).

    Considerations (northeast side of road):
    - The Baden Powell Trail already passes through the area on the northeast side of the road but is currently insufficient for winter use as a ski and snowshoe trail.
    - Expanding a trail in this area would likely impact old-growth forest and may require bridge infrastructure to get visitors safely across the ravines.
    - A trail on northeast side of the road would need to address potential conflicts with interface of downhill ski area. For example, backcountry skiers and snowshoers entering the downhill area along ski runs could pose a safety issue, and a controlled access issue.
    - Accessing a trail on opposite side of road from current location of P3B could present a public safety hazard while crossing the road.
    - It should be examined if road and parking area could be reconfigured to switch parking area to northeast side of road, to eliminate road crossing.

    Considerations (southwest side of road):
    - Terrain may not be suitable for developing an access trail from P3B to connect with trail network.
    - Improving the condition of the groomed snow trail from P3B to Alpine Area would encourage more use, and would minimize safety concerns of people

walking on the road. Consider re-routing snow-grooming equipment to alternate route to enable improved condition of snow trail.

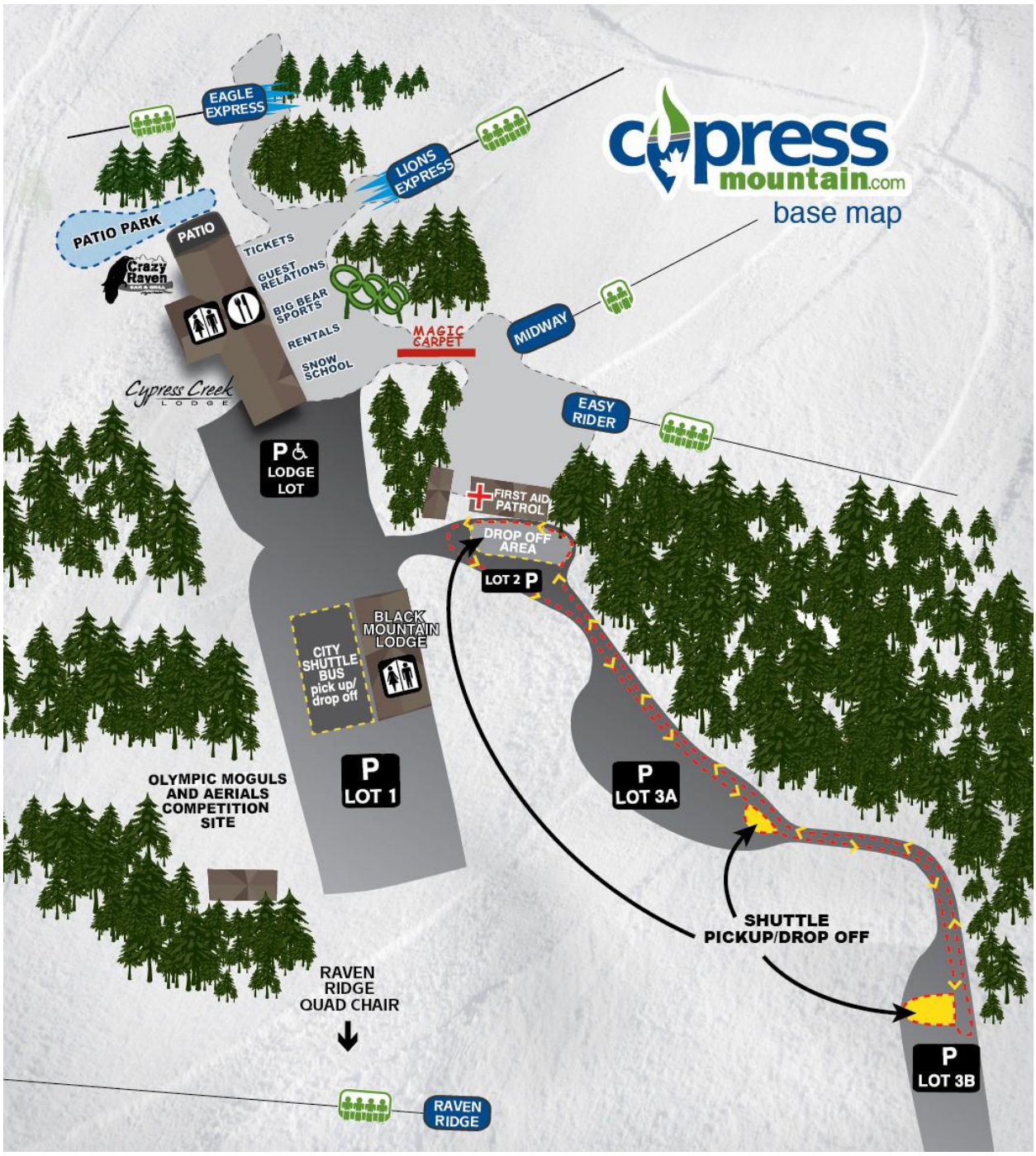
11. Create new snowshoe area outside of CRA.
    - Establish P5 as snowshoe parking and access point.
    - Develop snowshoe trails along the Trans Canada Trail or Cypress Works Yard (or in the vicinity, as feasible)

    Considerations:
    - May require negotiations with other jurisdictions to enable expanded public access in this area.
    - May be possible to connect trails with Black Mountain trail network.
    - Access through the West Vancouver Old Growth Conservancy is not feasible.
    - Elevation may be too low for favourable snow conditions.
    - Terrain may not be suitable for snowshoe trails.

Next Steps:

1. Finalize Discussion Paper based on feedback and discussion from meetings. (June 2014)
2. Conduct feasibility assessment of proposed recommendations. Develop cost-estimates. (July 2014)
3. Confirm recommendations and seek decision on proposed approach. (August 2014)
4. Implement recommendations. (2014 and future) Work with ski area operators and stakeholders to implement solutions.

Appendix 1 – Map of Cypress parking areas



Appendix 2 – Map of Mount Seymour parking areas

Appendix 3 – Parking Capacity of various lots at each park

Parking Capacity at Cypress:

Parking Lot	Capacity	Location/Description	Comments
Lodge Parking	145	New lot constructed by Cypress, immediately adjacent to day lodge, where fee is charged.	
P1	600	Main paved parking lot in the downhill area at the upper termination of the Cypress Bowl Road	
P2	80	Paved right-angle parking in the downhill area along the creek-side of the access road.	
P3 A	360	Paved parking lot in the downhill ski area, contiguous with the main access road.	
P3 B	450	Paved long, linear parking lot on uphill driver's left, contiguous with the main access road.	This is outside CRA, furthest from base.
P 4	550	Paved cross-country skiing and tubing area parking lot. Extends from the main access road south to the park boundary at end of lot.	Includes right-angle and roadside parking.
P 5	~80	Small gravel parking lot located on uphill driver's left at Km 10.5 of the main access road.	This area is not currently used for ski area parking.
Roadside	200	Parking along shoulder on uphill right-hand side of main access road, along Lots 3B, D1, and 2.	Available as snow and ploughing conditions allow.

Parking Capacity at Mount Seymour:

Parking Lot	Capacity	Location/Description	Comments
P1	85	Lower elevation lot providing access to Group Site.	Outside CRA, furthest from base.
P2	155	Small lot near old Enquist Lodge.	
P3	165	Small lot just below P4.	
P4	480	Main parking lot in the base area at the termination of the Mount Seymour Park Road.	
P5	250	Additional area created by Mount Seymour Resorts along uphill left-hand side of road.	Available as snow and ploughing conditions allow.
P "0"	40	Mile 0 parking lot between Hamber Rd and Indian River Rd.	Un-utilized area to be reactivated.