

PARKING STRUCTURE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Circulation and Ramping

The basic circulation element for a parking structure is the continuous ramp with parking on both sides of the drive aisle. In continuous ramp structures, some of the parking floors are sloped in order for traffic to circulate from one level to another. Only on a sloping site that permits direct access to each level from the exterior roadways are ramps unnecessary; but they still may be desirable for internal circulation.

The basic criteria for choosing a circulation system are the simplicity or complexity of the system and the architectural compatibility. Ingress and egress capacities are also a consideration in the selection of a circulation system. Some circulation systems provide the opportunity for level façades which may be desirable.

A parking ramp slope of 5% or less is preferred, although parking ramp slopes up to 7% are tolerated by the public in very dense urban areas. Parking ramp slopes should not exceed a 6.67% slope, which is the maximum parking slope permitted in the International Building Code (IBC).

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Non-parking ramps are often employed at airports, casinos, large retail structures, for special event structures, and on small and irregularly shaped sites. Non-parking ramps consist of circular helixes (most common), express ramps (external), and speed ramps (internal). Non-parking ramp slopes should have a maximum slope in the 12% to 14% range. Non-parking ramp slopes up to 20% are sometimes considered if covered or equipped with snow melt systems.

Parking structures with non-parking ramps tend to be less efficient in terms of square feet of structure per parking space which directly increases the construction cost per parking space.

A grade difference of 8% or more requires transition slopes so vehicles do not bottom out. Recommended are minimum 10'-0" transition slopes at the top and bottom of the ramp that are one-half of the differential slope. For instance, two 10'-0" transition ramps sloped at 6.25% would be required at the bottom and the top of a ramp sloped at 12.5%.

