PARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR HEALTH CLUBS

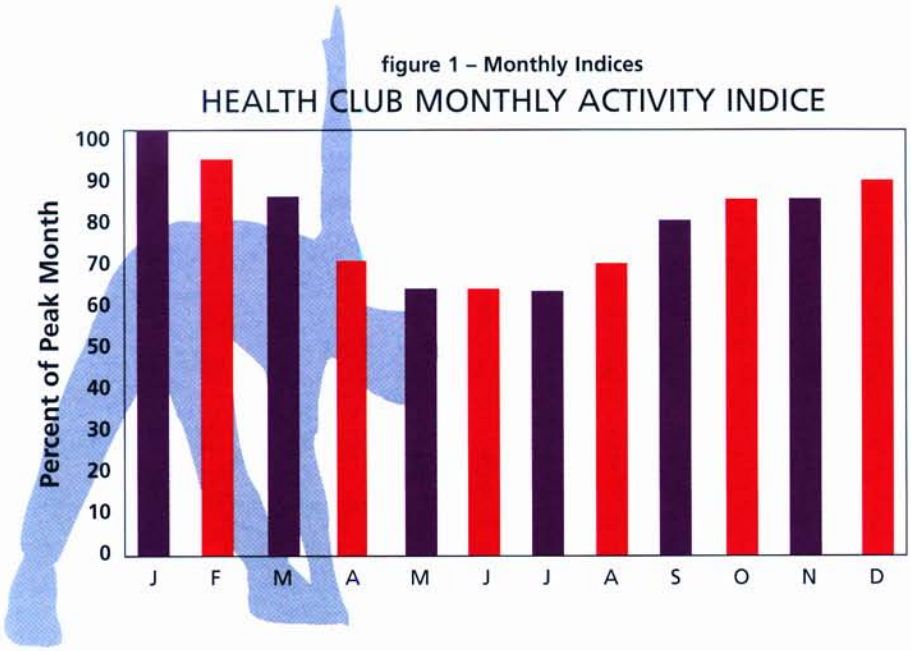
BY JOHN W. DORSETT

BASED ON A RESEARCH PROJECT conducted by staff members of Walker Parking Consultants, the following can be concluded regarding parking requirements for health clubs:

■ The recommended parking ratio for a freestanding health club is 7.70 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. This ratio provides an operating cushion equal to about ten percent of the parking supply and a design standard equal to 85th percentile of peak parking conditions, both industry standards.

■ As evidenced by the following statements, health club

figure 1 – Monthly Indices



parking demand varies by hour of day, day of week, and month of year:

1. January is commonly the busiest month;
2. Mondays are usually the busiest day of the week;
3. For suburban health clubs, typically 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. is the peak hour; and
4. Health clubs located in an urban, mixed-use environment commonly experience a peak hour during the lunch hour, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m..

■ Although there was a bit more variation with this study's data, the findings coincide closely with those findings of the Second Edition of the Institute of Transportation Engineers' ("ITE") *Parking Generation*, suggesting few changes have occurred to health club parking demand over the last twenty years.

METHODOLOGY

Exploratory research, consisting of a review of secondary research materials and interviews with several health club managers, was employed to determine the following:

■ General trends in health clubs located within the U.S.

■ An identification of health clubs located within the Indianapolis metropolitan area and featuring parking areas that were isolated from adjacent land uses

■ Probable peak month, day, and hour of operation

The sampling method used for this study featured a census of freestanding health clubs located in metropolitan Indianapolis. The data collectors consisted of parking planning professionals employed as staff members of Walker Parking Consultants.

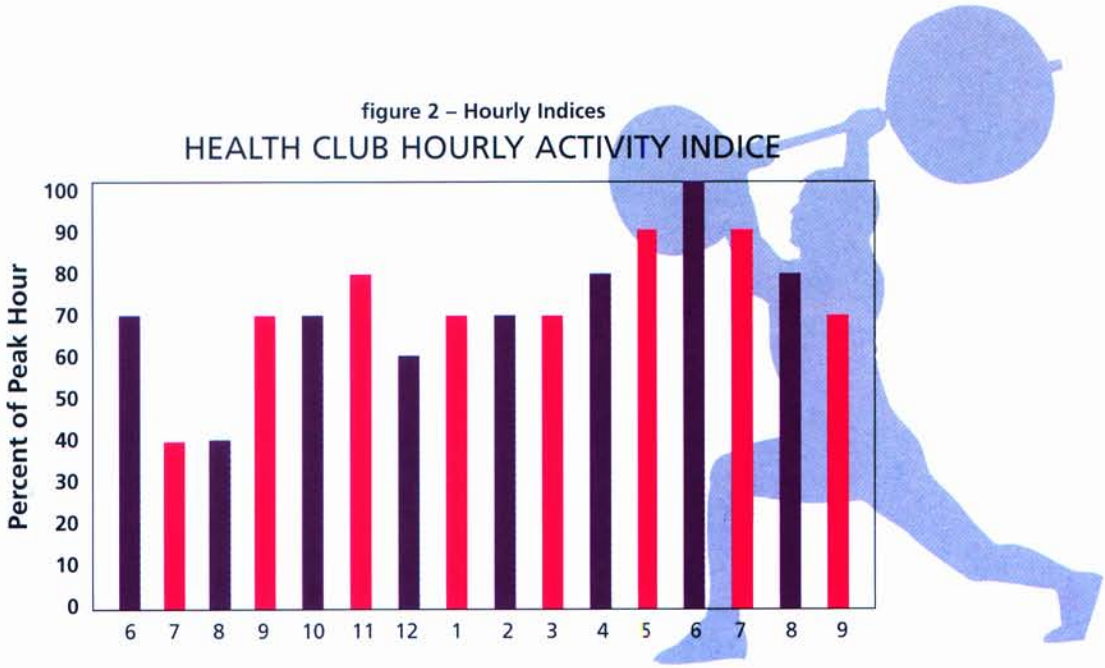
To confirm the peak hour parking occupancy reported by ten of the health club managers, hourly parking occupancy counts were performed for 4 of the 16 health clubs beginning at 6:00 a.m. and concluding with the 9:00 p.m. hourly count.

Once the peak hour was identified to be 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., all 16 health clubs were surveyed on a January Monday during the peak hour to determine the number of parked vehicles per 1,000 square feet of building area.

SURVEY RESULTS

The health club industry has shown significant growth since 1987. The International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association ("IHRSA") reported that as of January

figure 2 – Hourly Indices



2002, there were 17,807 health clubs within the U.S. Membership of U.S. health clubs has increased from an estimated 17.4 million members in year 1987 to 36.3 million members in year 2002. During this same time frame, the average member attended the health club more often. For example, in 1987, members averaged 72 days per year. By 2002, this figure increased to 92 days per year. Moreover, the estimated 5.3 million U.S. health club members with 100 or more days of attendance in year 1987 increased to 14.6 million members in year 2002.

ITE's *Parking Generation*[1] featured data collected for 43 health clubs. The average size of those facilities surveyed was 38,000 square feet. The range of parking generation rates ranged from a low of 1.66 to a high of 11.70 occupied parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. The mean or average rate of parking generation was 4.37 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. The standard deviation was 2.00.

Figure 1 illustrates the monthly indices developed based on information provided by health club management. Based on interviews with the management of ten health clubs, the month of January was discovered to be the busiest month of the year for health club usage. This is most likely the result of New Year's resolutions to lose weight and/or get in shape, particularly following the overindulgences around the holidays. Moreover, Monday was determined to be the busiest day of the week most likely due to overindulgences during the preceding weekend. Finally, management suggested that peak usage periods occurred during weekday evenings, after the dinner hour.

To validate the opinions of health club management regarding the peak hour of usage, hourly parking occupancy counts were performed for 4 of the 16 facilities on a weekday in January beginning at 6:00 a.m. and concluding at 9:00 p.m. Parking occupancy at three of these four facilities peaked from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and the remaining facility peaked from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. This data supports the opinions of several managers who reported that 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. was their busiest hour. Figure 2 illustrates the typical hourly parking demand curve for a health club.

figure 3

Metric	This Survey	ITE
No. of Studies	16	43
Avg. Size of Facility:	29,324 s.f.	38,000 s.f.
Range:	1.40-13.39 spaces/ksf	1.66-11.70 spaces/ksf
Mean:	4.65 spaces/ksf	4.37 spaces/ksf
Median:	4.53 spaces/ksf	Not available
85th Percentile:	6.92 spaces/ksf	Not available
Standard Deviation:	3.01 spaces/ksf	2.00 spaces/ksf

Figure 3 is a summary of key statistics related to peak hour parking demand characteristics for the 16 health clubs surveyed in comparison to ITE's *Parking Generation* data for sports club/health spas. ■

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[1] Institute of Transportation Engineers, Parking Generation, 2nd Edition, August 1987, p. 74.