

Saugatuck Remote Parking, The Interurban, and Shared Parking Agreements

Introduction

This narrative provides an accounting of remote parking efforts in downtown Saugatuck and the Interurban, which provides on-demand service and connects the Saugatuck High School parking lot to various downtown points.

The Interurban

The Interurban Transit Authority (ITA) operates the Interurban, a demand-response public bus system serving Saugatuck Township, including the cities of Saugatuck and Douglas, Laketown Township, and limited downtown Fennville locations. The Interurban’s mission is to provide safe, reliable, efficient, and affordable transportation that connects the community, promotes sustainability, and enhances quality of life.

Rides may be scheduled on demand as early as 15 minutes, or reservations may be made for a specific date and time in the future. Curb-to-curb service means that the Interurban may be summoned to pick up and drop off passengers anywhere in its service area.

Operating hours for 2026 are as follows:

Table 1: Interurban 2026 Operating Hours

Season	Days	Hours	Notes / Special Conditions
September – June 5	Monday–Friday	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	—
September – June 5	Saturday–Sunday	9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	—
June 6 – August 31	Monday–Thursday	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	—
June 6 – August 31	Friday	7:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.	Late-night rides from 7:00–11:00 p.m. cost \$3
June 6 – August 31	Saturday	9:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.	Late-night rides from 7:00–11:00 p.m. cost \$3
June 6 – August 31	Sunday	9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Select Sundays extended to 9:00 p.m.

Source: <https://www.saugatuckinterurban.org/>

Holiday and Special Event Notes:

- Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day
- Closed at 2:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve
- New Year’s Eve: Free rides from 6:00 p.m. – 1:00 a.m.
- Independence Day, Venetian Festival, and Halloween Parade feature extended hours

Ridership fares are \$1 for adults and children 12 and older, and \$0.50 for senior citizens 62 and older, children under 12, or persons with disabilities.

The table below summarizes remote parking and shuttle services available offered by the ITA for downtown Saugatuck, including seasonal operations, pickup and drop-off locations, and fare information.

Table 2: Interurban Service Summary for Downtown Saugatuck

Service	Months in Service	Days / Hours of Operation	Pickup Locations	Drop-off Locations	Fare / How to Ride
Weekend Downtown Shuttle (Remote Parking ⇄ Downtown)	Peak season (summer); weekends	Weekends; aligns with Interurban seasonal hours (late evening service Fri/Sat during peak months)	Saugatuck High School (designated remote park-and-ride lot)	Downtown Saugatuck (multiple central drop-offs as directed by driver)	Free shuttle; operated through the Interurban system via phone (269-857-1418) or mobile app
Interurban Demand-Response (Curb-to-Curb)	Year-round (seasonal hours)	Variable by season; typical service operates daily with extended hours during the summer months	Curb-to-curb pickup anywhere within the service area (advance request required)	Any address within the service area	\$1 adult fare; discounted fares for seniors, children, and persons with disabilities

Source: <https://www.saugatuckinterurban.org/>

Figure 1: Photograph of an Interurban Bus in Use



The ITA owns eight buses, seven of which provide consistent service, and one that serves as a spare or maintenance backup. The vehicle shown to the left is a typical vehicle, a cutaway shuttle bus, a small transit vehicle commonly used for demand-response and paratransit service. Based on its size and ADA ramp configuration, this type of bus typically seats approximately 12 to 14 passengers, with seating capacity reduced when wheelchair positions are in use. The exact capacity depends on the interior layout selected by the operator.

Federal Transit Authority records show that the ITA system provided about 75,000 annual passenger trips in 2024, spread over 191,191 vehicle revenue miles and 14,489 vehicle revenue hours. Operating expenses in 2024 were reported to be \$1,184,664. Fare revenues in 2024 were reported to be \$61,657. The sources of 2024 operating funds expended are as follows: \$109,025 from direct generation, \$216,406 from the federal government, \$383,378 from local government, and \$475,855 from state government. Capital funds expended in 2024 include \$134,181 by the federal government and \$33,545 by the state government.

Enhanced shuttle service is planned for the summer. The interurban has been run as a hop-on/hop-off, demand-based service. Over the last couple of years, ridership has reportedly been declining.

ITA Operational Notes

1. Currently, the ITA does not have a written parking agreement with Saugatuck Public Schools; however, discussions are underway to create one.
2. ITA can increase remote parking options. It recently added three used transit vans to its fleet, and these will be in service by June 1st, 2026.
3. ITA would need additional funds to increase parking options and the fleet size for the parking shuttle service.
4. ITA can provide a standard route with specific stops and times (hop-on, hop-off). For example, ITA would need additional funding to add the following serviceable route: 200 Blue Star to DES to Berry Field (Douglas), crossing the bridge to Saugatuck, stopping at Riverside Church of Saugatuck (6591 Old Allegan), continuing to SPS High School, then onto Saugatuck Drug Store at the corner of Mason and Butler. Returning to 200 Blue Star to start the loop again. (Adding remote parking for Oval Beach access may also be beneficial.)
5. Operating cost (March 2026): \$142.39 per vehicle-hour (with FY25/26 average cost of \$105.39 per vehicle-hour).

Table 3: ITA Non-Financial Operations Summary (March 2026 and FY25/26 Average)

Metric	March 2026	FY25/26 Average
Vehicle hours	1,365	1,227
Vehicle miles	20,190	44,144
Total passengers	4,842	5,086
Days operated	31	30
System vehicles operated	9	9
Fuel gallons consumed	3,077	2,241
Revenue vehicle operators	15	15
Number of accidents	0	0
Number of road calls	0	1
Farebox revenue	\$3,813	\$8,976
Eligible operating expenses	\$194,362	\$129,333
Farebox recovery (farebox revenue/expenses)	1.96%	6.94%

Notes:

- Cost and revenue: March 2026 cost was \$142.39 per vehicle-hour versus \$2.79 revenue per vehicle-hour (farebox recovery of 1.96%).
- Service productivity: March 2026 carried 4,842 passengers, averaging 3.55 passengers per vehicle-hour (and 0.24 passengers per vehicle-mile).
- Scale of service: March 2026 operations totaled 1,365 vehicle-hours and 20,190 vehicle-miles over 31 operating days, using 9 vehicles and 15 operators.

Source: ITA

Remote Parking – Saugatuck High School

The ITA has an agreement with the Saugatuck School District to use the 116-space high school parking lot during summer weekends¹. Motorists may park their vehicles in this lot at no charge and then walk or ride the Interurban to downtown Saugatuck. At present, this is the sole remote parking option that is formally advertised and serviced by the Interurban.

Alternative Remote Parking Locations

The Saugatuck Parking Improvements Task Force is exploring expanding the number and capacity of remote parking locations for employee and visitor usage. The following are some options with a brief discussion of each:

- Dykstra Funeral Home. This property is located at 520 Lake Street in Saugatuck. It offers cremation services and burials, with visitation rooms and an on-site chapel. A parking lot is located on the premises, with an estimated capacity of 30 spaces. The funeral home has allowed its lot to be used for public parking in the past. However, there is no active agreement or practice to make this lot available for public use.
- Riverside Church of Saugatuck. This church is located at 6591 Old Allegan Road in Saugatuck and has about 72 spaces.
- Saugatuck Department of Public Works (DPW) – Located at 3338 Blue Star Highway, the DPW occupies an estimated three-acre site that includes an open area that may be partially available for parking about 30 cars. DPW is performing additional analysis.
- Douglas Elementary School. Located at 261 West Randolph in Douglas, this property has about 75 parking spaces.
- St. Peter’s Catholic Church. Located at 100 St. Peters Drive in Douglas, this church has about 100 spaces.

Shared Parking Agreements

The remote parking options identified above are regularly available and are candidates for remote parking that could be coupled with a shuttle service, such as the one offered by the ITA. As a result, we encourage the city to consider opportunities for shared parking between public and private lot owners. This collaborative approach could substantially increase downtown Saugatuck’s parking capacity without the cost of building additional spaces, help address parking challenges, improve walkability, and distribute parking demand more effectively across the area.

Shared parking is a cost-effective solution that allows the city to lease or acquire access to additional spaces while providing owners with a steady monthly income for surplus spaces (if a financial arrangement is established). There are several benefits to this approach:

1. From a land use and environmental standpoint, utilizing existing parking resources is preferable to constructing new ones.

¹ There are 180 parking spaces at the high school. These 116 spaces constitute the largest parking lot at the high school.

2. Financially, owners may reduce insurance and operating costs while the city gains parking access without incurring upfront capital expenses for new resources.

Many municipalities nationwide utilize shared parking. Lease agreements can address concerns about ensuring tenants have access to spaces and the liability associated with public parking on private lots. In such agreements, the leaseholder assumes liability, carries insurance for public parking, and covers expenses like lighting and maintenance. A limitation of liability is crucial.

The city can negotiate with private property owners to make their parking available to the public. While this will incur costs, it is substantially more economical than building new parking lots or a multi-level parking structure. The city would manage liability and compensate owners for any wear and tear on their property. To make the offer attractive to owners, the agreements should specify when parking will be unavailable to the public. Owners should also have the right to limit public usage during specified times, such as special events, funerals, weddings, or other occasions.

Once agreements with private property owners are in place and the owner consents, public parking signage could be erected, and a parking communications program advertising the public availability of these spaces through parking maps and websites can help identify shared-use parking as available to the public.

Attached is a sample shared parking application used by the City of Ferndale, Michigan. Although this agreement form addresses assisting a private owner in gaining access to another private owner's parking spaces to meet its parking minimums (which do not apply in downtown Saugatuck), the principals of this agreement could be amended to apply to Saugatuck. The value of this application is that it provides evidence that shared parking agreements have precedent in the State of Michigan.

Following the Ferndale shared parking application is a suggested contract outline for a shared parking agreement between the City of Saugatuck and a private property owner. The city attorney could amend and finalize.

Summary

This narrative describes existing and potential strategies to address parking demand in downtown Saugatuck through a combination of remote parking and shuttle service provided by the Interurban Transit Authority (ITA). The Interurban is a demand-response, curb-to-curb public transit system serving Saugatuck, Douglas, and surrounding townships, with service hours that vary by season and expand during peak summer months. Riders may schedule trips on demand or in advance, with generally low fares and occasional free or extended service during special events and holidays.

The Interurban currently serves as the primary link between remote parking and downtown. The most established remote parking facility is the Saugatuck High School parking lot, which provides 116 spaces available for public use during summer weekends at no cost. Patrons may walk or ride the Interurban from this lot to downtown destinations. At present, this is the only formally advertised and Interurban-served remote parking location in Saugatuck.

The narrative identifies several additional properties that could potentially function as remote parking locations if agreements are reached, including churches, schools, municipal properties, and a large vacant

parcel along Blue Star Highway. These sites vary in size and could substantially expand parking capacity without the need to construct new downtown facilities.

In addition to remote parking, the narrative emphasizes the value of shared parking agreements between the City and private property owners. Shared parking allows underutilized private lots to be made available to the public during defined days and hours, offering a cost-effective alternative to building new parking infrastructure while addressing liability and insurance considerations through formal agreements.

Overall, the narrative concludes that a coordinated approach combining expanded remote parking, enhanced shuttle service, and shared parking agreements could increase parking availability, reduce congestion, support walkability, and avoid significant capital expenditures, while maintaining flexibility for private property owners.



Shared Parking Agreement Application

Private parking facilities may be shared by multiple users whose activities are not normally conducted during the same hours, or when hours of peak use vary. No reduction in the number of spaces reserved for persons with disabilities is permitted. A waiver of the maximum allowable distance between the user and associated shared parking may be approved by the CED Director (up to 500-feet), with written justification and supporting information provided by the applicant. Users sharing a parking facility must provide for safe, convenient walking between land uses and parking, including safe, well-marked pedestrian crossings, signage, and adequate lighting. Pedestrian paths must be as direct and short as possible, without compromising safety. A pedestrian circulation plan that shows connections and walkways between the parking facilities and subject uses must be provided.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Email:

Phone:

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Email:

Phone:

A. Proof from Applicant. Evidence must be submitted that demonstrates shared parking will not result in inadequate parking. Below is a list of required application information:

1. Please provide an analysis of available and used parking spaces based on parking counts taken at certain time intervals and days to verify parking usage patterns. (May be included as an attachment)

2. The type and hours of operation and parking demand for each land use.



A. Proof from Applicant. Evidence must be submitted that demonstrates shared parking will not result in inadequate parking. Below is a list of required application information:

3. A description of the character of land use and parking patterns of adjacent land uses

4. An estimate of anticipated turnover in parking space use over the course of 12 - 24 hours at the site.

Please attach the following information in separate attachments along with this application:

1. A sketch or site plan displaying shared use spaces in the lot and walking distance to the uses sharing the lot, indicating the area of the parking lot, pedestrian and drive circulation.
2. Provide a legal description of the land upon which the parking area(s) and building(s) appurtenant to the parking areas are located.
3. Provide details regarding the maintenance of the shared parking areas, including snow removal.

NOTE: Should any of the shared parking uses be changed or should the CED Department find that any of the conditions described in the approved shared parking study or agreement no longer exist, or if insufficient parking is an issue due to complaints, the owner can submit a revised shared parking study and an amended shared parking agreement or provide the number of spaces required for each use as if computed separately. If the CED Department determines that the revised shared parking study or agreement does not satisfy the parking needs of the uses, the shared parking request will be denied.

PROPOSED SHARED PARKING AGREEMENT FRAMEWORK (City of Saugatuck Use of Privately Owned Parking)

This Shared Parking Agreement (“Agreement”) is entered into as of [Effective Date], by and between:

City: The City of Saugatuck, a Michigan municipal corporation organized under the laws of the State of Michigan, with offices at [City Address] (“City”), and

Owner: [Owner Name], the fee simple owner of certain real property located at [Property Address], [City/Village], Michigan (“Owner”).

The City and Owner are sometimes referred to individually as a “Party” and collectively as the “Parties.”

1. PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

This Agreement is entered into pursuant to the City’s authority under Michigan law to regulate parking, manage transportation facilities, and enter into contracts for public purposes. The purpose of this Agreement is to expand the supply of publicly available parking by allowing the City to utilize privately owned parking spaces during specified days and hours while preserving the Owner’s primary use of the property.

2. PROPERTY AND PARKING SPACES

Property Address: [Full Address]

Parking Spaces: [Number] existing, legally conforming parking spaces

Exhibit A: Site plan identifying approved parking spaces

3. DAYS, HOURS, AND CONDITIONS OF PUBLIC USE

The Owner grants the City a revocable, non-exclusive license to allow public parking in the designated spaces during the following periods:

Days: [Days]

Hours: [Hours]

Seasonal Limits (if any): [Dates]

4. CITY MANAGEMENT, REGULATION, AND ADVERTISING

During authorized public-use periods, the City may advertise the spaces as public parking, regulate parking use and duration, enforce parking rules, and install signage subject to Owner approval of placement.

5. COMPENSATION

The City shall pay the Owner \$[Amount] per [Month/Season/Year] as compensation for shared use of the parking spaces.

6. LIABILITY, INDEMNIFICATION, AND IMMUNITY

During authorized public-use periods, the City assumes responsibility for public use of the parking spaces, subject to the Michigan Governmental Tort Liability Act (MCL 691.1401 et seq.). The City shall indemnify and hold the Owner harmless from claims arising from public use, except for claims caused by the Owner's gross negligence or willful misconduct.

7. INSURANCE

The City shall maintain commercial general liability insurance with limits of not less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$2,000,000 aggregate, naming the Owner as an additional insured during public-use periods.

8. MAINTENANCE

The Owner shall maintain pavement, lighting, and structural integrity. The City shall be responsible for cleanliness and damage attributable to public use during City-controlled periods.

9. OWNER PRIORITY AND BLACKOUT PERIODS

The Owner may restrict parking availability for special events or operational needs with reasonable notice to the City.

10. TERM AND TERMINATION

Initial Term: [Term]

Termination: Either Party may terminate with [30–60] days written notice. Immediate termination is permitted for safety or insurance lapses.

11. NO PROPERTY INTEREST CREATED

This Agreement grants a license only and does not create a lease, easement, or dedication of property.

12. GOVERNING LAW AND VENUE

This Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of Michigan, with venue in the Circuit Court of Allegan County.

13. ENTIRE AGREEMENT

This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the Parties and may be amended only in writing signed by both Parties.

SIGNATURES

CITY OF SAUGATUCK

By: _____

Name/Title: _____

Date: _____

[PROPERTY OWNER NAME]

By: _____

Name/Title: _____

Date: _____