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Downtown will be on lockdown during NATO, G-8 summits

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A large security perimeter will prevent motorists from driving and parking on some downtown streets during the NATO and G-8 summits, but the host committee agreed Wednesday to cover the cost of lost parking meter revenues.

The 75-year, \$1.15 billion lease that privatized Chicago parking meters requires the city to compensate the concessionaire — at the newly increased downtown rate of \$5.75 an hour — whenever metered spaces are temporarily taken out of commission.

In the case of the May 19-21 event expected to draw President Barack Obama and other world leaders to McCormick Place, that compensation could be substantial.

Specific boundaries will be dictated by the U.S. Secret Service and won't be known until four weeks before the event. But city officials acknowledged Wednesday that parts of the downtown area would be off-limits to motorists to protect visiting dignitaries.

They are expected to stay in downtown hotels, eat in downtown restaurants and move to and from McCormick Place and about the city as Mayor Rahm Emanuel seeks to showcase Chicago on the world stage.

On Wednesday, host committee spokeswoman Jennifer Martinez acknowledged that access to the Loop would be restricted, and motorists would be temporarily inconvenienced. She further acknowledged that Chicago Parking Meters LLC would have to be compensated for lost revenue tied to scores of metered downtown spaces.

But, she said, “We are committed, through private and federal resources, to pay for the costs associated with the summit so it’s not a burden on taxpayers. This would be a cost associated with the summit. And we are committed to paying for it.”

Martinez noted that there was a security perimeter at the November meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation in Hawaii, but specific boundaries were not released until four weeks before dignitaries arrived in Honolulu. Chicagoans should expect the same tight time frame, she said.

“The city should be prepared. But, we don’t know what the security perimeter will be. We’re taking our lead from the federal government. These are their events, and we are the host city,” Martinez said.

Ald. Pat O’Connor (40th), the mayor’s City Council floor leader, was asked whether Chicagoans would be

willing to endure the inconvenience of being unable to drive or park in the downtown area.

“It would depend on what the proposals are, and I have not seen them yet,” O’Connor said.

“These types of conferences have attendees, and they have protesters. The idea is to try and allow the city to function and do our day-to-day stuff and make sure people are safe. People will put up with being safe and as minimally inconvenienced as possible.”

Talk of the downtown perimeter comes as the mayor’s office prepares to brief aldermen Thursday on the extraordinary security measures Emanuel wants to put in place to handle thousands of protesters expected to descend on Chicago during the summits.

The measures are contentious — and not just because Emanuel wants to leave them in place long after the summit of world leaders ends.

Protesters contend the measures could stifle public dissent in Chicago for years to come. They include: dramatically higher fines for resisting arrest, more surveillance cameras, parks and beaches closed until 6 a.m., sweeping parade restrictions and higher fees for those events and empowering Police Supt. Garry McCarthy to “deputize law enforcement personnel” and forge cooperative agreements with state, federal and local law enforcement agencies.

A pair of City Council committees are expected to vote on the restrictions next week.

In Seattle, about 35,000 people protested a World Trade Organization meeting in 1999 and caused more than \$2 million in damage to businesses. There were violent clashes between protesters and police in Pittsburgh during a G-20 summit in 2009.

Protest leaders have demanded that Emanuel roll back the changes or risk waking up the ghosts of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

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