

Sensible Transportation

Wake Up, D.O.T.! More Parking Causes More Traffic

NEW YORK CITY HAS THE MOST dysfunctional and backwards parking policy of any major modern city. In business districts throughout the five boroughs, valuable curbside spots are 12 to 16 times cheaper than garage rates, a price disparity that saturates the curb with bargain-hunting drivers and breeds double parking and needless traffic. Thousands of municipal employees armed with coveted parking placards (both genuine and counterfeit) park their personal vehicles free of charge, wherever and whenever they please, even on sidewalks. And plans for new mega developments like the Yankee Stadium and the Nets Arena include gigantic parking lots that will erode transit ridership and generate thousands of avoidable driving trips.

City Hall has not yet mustered the backbone to solve New York's parking crisis. The City's tendency to give too much leeway to developers who do not care if neighborhood streets are polluted with traffic so long as their box seat ticket holders can park conveniently is one aspect of the problem.

But the true problem lies with the transportation "experts" on whom City Hall and the Department of Transportation depend. DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall's reply to key City Council members at a recent hearing was that they should leave transportation decisions to her "expert engineers." There is seldom a decision made about out streets that does not cross the desk of Commissioner Weinshall's "expert engineers."

Unfortunately many of these so-called experts seem to be stuck in the car-crazed days of Robert Moses, failing to recognize modern transportation policy and practice. In the 90's, these engineers delayed life-saving safety improvements on Queens Boulevard for fear that such improvements would hem in drivers and "cause traffic to be backed up all the way to Montauk." They were dead wrong; after improvements were made, fatalities were prevented and the traffic nightmares did not materialize.

Today New York City's "expert" engineers' traffic studies still fail to acknowledge what their colleagues in the field have long recognized as indisputable truth: the demand for driving is elastic, dependent upon the amount of driving and parking space that is made available. More parking and driving

space reduces the temporal and monetary cost of parking and driving, increasing demand.

Most DOT traffic engineers still do not believe that if you reduce driving and parking space, drivers will find another way to get around. Yet traffic engineers and policy makers around the world have proven that the most effective way get motorists to eliminate discretionary driving and switch to transit, walking and cycling is to reduce the supply of parking (see sidebar).

The DOT staff's unique traffic theories were on display recently at a hearing on the Yankee Stadium plan. The plan includes \$70 million in taxpayer money to build parking garages that will yield about 4,000 more parking spaces than presently exist, a 75% increase in stadium parking. In an attempt to counter concerns about the traffic and pollution impact of this massive parking increase, DOT staff stated that more parking does not induce more driving and traffic. Again, the DOT is dead wrong.

For the sake of the lungs and sanity of residents in the South Bronx and Downtown Brooklyn, we suggest that the DOT's traffic engineers spend a quiet afternoon or two curled up with some good books. Transportation Alternatives recommends

Donald Shoup's *The High Cost of Free Parking* and Todd Litman's upcoming *Parking Management Best Practices*, both of which summarize much of the recent parking research* that is successfully being put to practice in other cities. These primers confirm yet again that more parking is bad for New York City because it generates more traffic and erodes transit ridership. But what about the economic impact of reducing parking? Will less parking stave off fans and shoppers? Not according to Donald Shoup, recognized as the leading parking expert in the United States, "If restraints on the parking supply really did limit economic vitality, one would expect to find some evidence, but there is none."

* Gerard Mildner, James Strathman and Martha Bianco, "Parking Policies and Commuting Behavior," *Transportation Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Winter 1997, pp. 111-125.

John Morrall and Dan Bolger, "The Relationship Between Downtown Parking Supply and Transit Use," *ITE Journal*, February 1996, pp. 32-36.

More Parking vs. Less Parking

The greater the parking supply, the more commuters tend to drive. While this is now self-evident truth to most experts, in New York we are still stuck in the old parking paradigm. The City DOT's First Deputy Commissioner of Traffic Operations Michael Primeggia told City Councilmembers at a recent meeting that parking does not induce driving. Here is what his colleagues say:

Donald Shoup

Professor of urban planning at UCLA and author of the recently released "The High Cost of Free Parking," widely regarded as a paradigm shifting work in the world of transportation:



"Road construction increases vehicle travel by increasing its speed and reducing its time price. The phenomenon of vehicle travel induced by new parking spaces [is] similar..."

The availability of parking is one of the determinants of mode choice. If it's easy (and cheap) to park, then people will drive."

Adam Millard-Ball

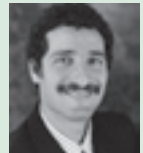


Transportation planner with Nelson/Nygaard, a consulting firm specializing in transit, multimodal transportation, and transit oriented development:

"Current parking planning practices tend to create...excessive parking supply, underpricing (abundant supply results in most parking being free) and increased automobile-dependency...These practices are...inequitable since they force non-drivers to subsidize parking costs and reduce travel options for non-drivers..."

Todd Litman

Author of *Parking Management Best Practices*, and founder and executive director of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute,



an independent research organization dedicated to developing innovative solutions to transport problems:

"The current paradigm assumes that more parking supply is always better. It reflects predict and provide planning, in which past trends are extrapolated to predict future demand, which planners then try to satisfy. This often creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, since abundant parking supply increases vehicle use...causing parking demand and parking supply to ratchet further upward."

TakeAction!

Write to Mayor Bloomberg and tell him to set strong caps on parking, raise curbside parking rates, and end city employee parking abuse

Mayor Michael Bloomberg
nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html