

UNCIVIL SERVANTS

A Survey of Government Worker Parking Abuse
in NYC's Chinatown and Civic Center



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Transportation
ALTERNATIVES

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On the morning of March 29, 2006, between the hours of 9 AM and 10 AM, Transportation Alternatives surveyed permit parking abuse on every street in the area between Canal Street and the Brooklyn Bridge, from Centre Street to the Bowery. This survey was prompted by complaints from community residents and business owners in the area. The resulting "snapshot" of illegal sidewalk parking conditions on a typical workday morning is startling in its severity. **In total, the survey found one hundred and fifteen cars illegally parked on the sidewalk in the sample area, many of them blocking fire hydrants.** This illegal parking has significant negative impact on pedestrian and public safety, commerce, emergency vehicle response and public perception of government employees.



To improve safety, quality of life and commerce in Chinatown and Civic Center, government employees must immediately cease illegally parking on sidewalks, in front of fire hydrants and in No Parking zones. The NYPD must uphold the law and ticket motorists who park illegally, and City Hall, the Department of Transportation and the NYPD must investigate the widespread use of fraudulent on-street parking permits.

In the long term, the City of New York must end the free parking free-for-all. Free parking provides a strong disincentive for city employees to take transit and other more efficient and city-friendly modes of transportation.

Background



US Census tract 2900, the area from Canal Street to the Brooklyn Bridge, between Centre Street and the Bowery, has the most drive-to-work commuters in Manhattan. Forty-six percent of this area's 24,780 workers commute to work by car, whereas the average total rate of drive-to-work commuting in Manhattan's Central Business District is just sixteen percent.¹

Census tract 2900 also has a large concentration of government workers, as it is home to New York City's city, state and federal courts, New York Police Department Headquarters, the NYPD's 5th Precinct house and the Municipal Building, which houses the offices of a number of City agencies. Over half of all

workers in this area are government employees.²

The New York City Department of Transportation issues on-street parking permits that allow government employees to park for free at any legal metered spot while conducting official business.³ Given the significant cost of both on-street and garage parking in Manhattan, the great disparity between the rates of drive-to-work commuting among government employees versus commuters as a whole suggests a strong correlation between free on-street permit parking and increased drive-to-work commuting.

Free parking, coupled with the convenience, comfort, status and autonomy of private door-to-door travel, is simply too attractive to resist for many motorists, even if there are transit options with comparable trip time lengths available to them. In fact, 90% of Manhattan bound driving commuters have time-competitive transit options.⁴

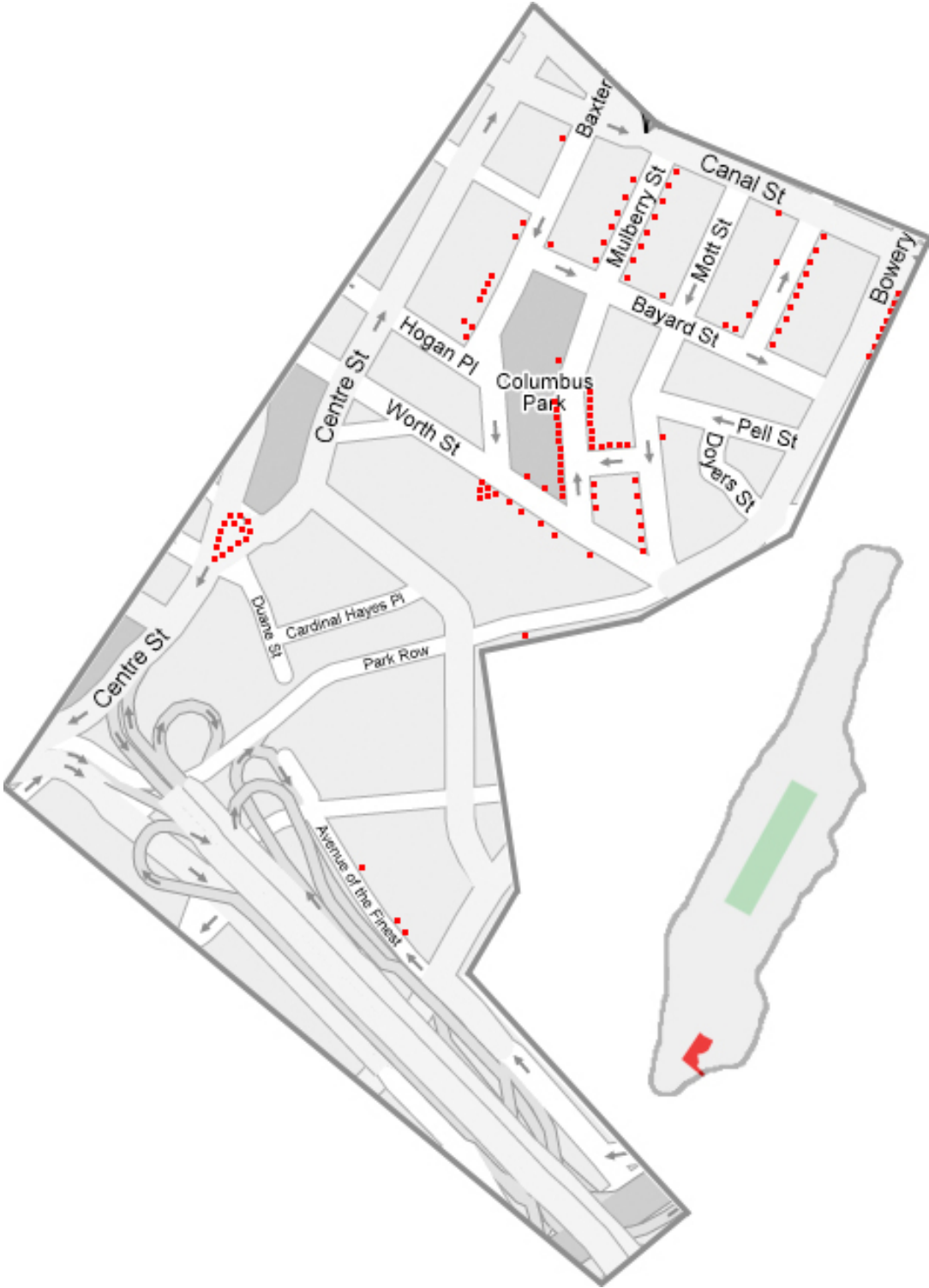
The permit parking program encourages commuters to drive to work and thus increases traffic congestion, pollution, and noise. Additionally, the permit parking system is rife with abuse. Fraudulent permits are common, and permit holders, whether legitimate or not, park illegally in No Parking zones, in front of fire hydrants and on sidewalks. That NYPD traffic enforcement officers are hesitant or unwilling to ticket their fellow officers and government colleagues only exacerbates the problem.



Sidewalk parking in particular has significant deleterious effects on the neighborhood. The narrow, heavily trafficked sidewalks of Chinatown are already difficult to negotiate for delivery people and pedestrians. Illegally parked cars make it near impossible. Illegal parking near pedestrian crossings

blocks critical lines of sight between motorists and pedestrians. Illegal sidewalk parking endangers pedestrians by encroaching on what should be guaranteed safe, car-free space and ruins local businesses by preventing or delaying deliveries and forcing potential customers to seek out more easily traveled areas. Elderly and disabled pedestrians are particularly affected by this illegal and often-overlooked violation, as their mobility is restricted and they are often forced to walk in the street. Furthermore, sidewalk parking damages the sidewalks, which, according to City laws, the property owner must then repair.

Illegal Sidewalk Parking in NYC's Chinatown and Civic Center



Each red dot indicates a vehicle illegally parked on the sidewalk.⁵ The inset map shows the location of the survey area on the island of Manhattan. All data was recorded between 9 and 10 AM on March 29, 2006

Short Term Recommendations

Government employees must immediately cease illegally parking on sidewalks, in front of fire hydrants and in No Parking zones. Additionally, the New York Police Department must actively enforce the laws that prohibit this practice, and the NYPD and the Department of Transportation must investigate the surfeit of fraudulent on-street parking permits.

Long Term Recommendations

The City must end the free on-street permit parking program. Free parking for government employees encourages more people to drive, increases traffic congestion, noise and pollution, and denies the City revenue from metered parking spaces. Moreover, abuse of the program and lack of enforcement of this abuse is rampant.

The permit parking program and its abuse are causally related, as the program increases the incentive for government workers to drive to work which leads to many more vehicles than can be accommodated by the number of legal parking spaces in the area. Many of the surveyed streets are only wide enough for one parking lane and one travel lane, but drivers skirt this problem by parking half on the street and half on the sidewalk on both sides of the street; this doubles the number parking spaces and leaves the travel lane free and clear, but completely or partially blocks the sidewalks. This chronic disregard for the law, especially by the very individuals who are sworn to enforce it, contributes to an overall sense of powerlessness in the community and displays a fundamental lack of respect for both the law and the residents of this district.



There are very good reasons why illegal parking is illegal. Illegally parked vehicles, whether they are owned by city workers or private sector workers, have the same negative impact: they endanger pedestrians and public safety, obstruct commerce and reduce public respect for government authority and the law. The true costs of free parking in New York City are simply too high to bear.



Placard-bearing vehicles routinely ignore the No Standing sign on Mosco Street, completely barricading both truck deliveries and pedestrian access to this extremely narrow street



NYPD car parked for hours unattended & obstructing the Mosco St. sidewalk

Merchants in Chinatown have been especially hard hit by illegal parking, as dangerous and inconvenient shopping experiences drive away customers



TWO illegally parked NYPD vehicles, neither driver was around to move his car to provide access for ambulance workers aiding a woman who fell down the stairs in my building. 8/19/04

Illegally parked vehicles obstruct emergency vehicle response



The church reflected in the windshield of this illegally parked vehicle on Mosco Street has had weddings and funerals ruined by illegal sidewalk parking.



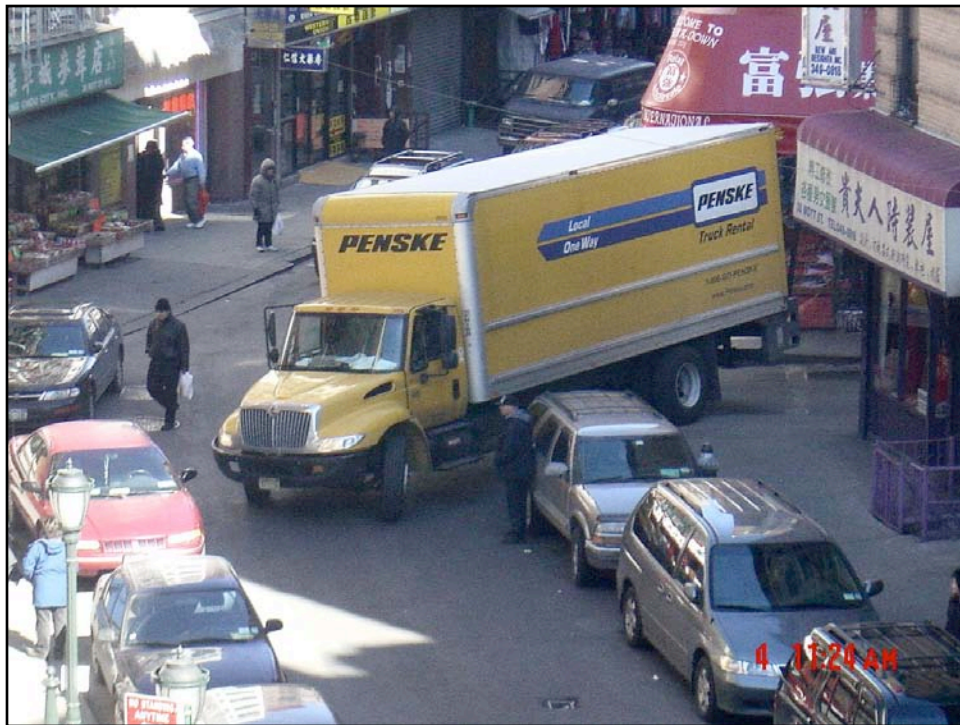
NYPD 5th Precinct officers illegally park on the sidewalk and block a fire hydrant while picking up lunch



An SUV illegally parked on the sidewalk menaces elderly residents walking to and from Columbus Park for their daily exercise



A tight squeeze for pedestrians on Mosco Street



Illegally parked vehicles completely obstruct this turning truck at Mott Street

Manhattan

NO PERMIT AREAS
NO OFFICIAL DEFENSE WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE NO PERMIT AREA

Brooklyn

WARNING!
The unauthorized use of this placard is a crime. The duplication of this placard, or the use of an altered, reproduced, or counterfeited placard is a felony.
Summonses served on State oriented vehicle use on official business will not be accepted by the Parking Violations Bureau for VALID VERIFIABLE DEFENSE consideration in the following instances

- a) DOUBLE PARKING
- b) FIRE HYDRANTS OR FIRE ZONES
- c) BUS STOPS
- d) SIDEWALKS
- e) CROSSWALKS & DRIVEWAYS
- f) OBSTRUCTING TRAFFIC
- g) NO STANDING ZONES (EXCEPT "NO STANDING EXCEPT TRUCKS LOADING AND UNLOADING")
- h) SNOW EMERGENCY
- i) NO PARKING - TAXI STAND
- j) NO STOPPING
- k) NO PARKING - EXCEPT AUTHORIZED VEHICLES
- l) **WITHIN THE AREA INDICATED AT LEFT MON - FRI. 7 AM - 7 PM**

USE AT TOLL BOOTHS IS PROHIBITED.

IF THIS CARD IS FOUND, PLEASE CALL 212-428-2752

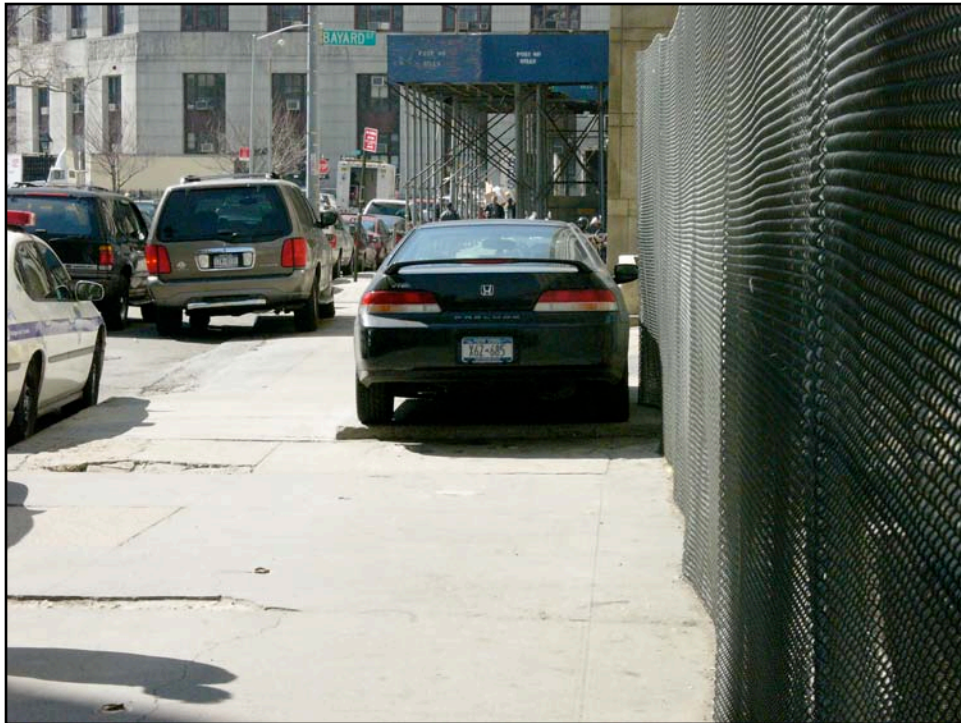
Illegal parking persists, despite warnings like this one on the back of a government issued parking permit



Sidewalk parking endangers mothers and their children



One of eleven illegally parked cars on just one side of one block on Mulberry Street



A Criminal Court employee cuts the width of this sidewalk in half



A T.A. volunteer notes three vehicles blocking the sidewalk at the Criminal Court building



Permit parking abusers turned this pedestrian island into their personal parking lot



Chinatown streets are crowded enough without illegal sidewalk parking

1. Schaller Consulting, "Top 10 Drive to Work Census Tracts," 2005
2. US Census Data, 2000
3. NYC Department of Transportation, 2006, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/permits/epermits.html>
4. Schaller Consulting, "Necessity or Choice? Why People Drive in Manhattan," 2005
5. Google Maps, 2006, <http://maps.google.com>

The field data used in this report were collected by Transportation Alternatives. Photographs by Claude Kalid, Jan Lee and David Snetman.