

## Sensible Transportation

# Holding the NYPD Accountable



T.A.'s new study finds an epidemic of parking permit abuse citywide.

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**O**n June 21st, 2006, Transportation Alternatives surveyed the extent of permit parking abuse in nine neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs. Teams of T.A. researchers walked the streets of Downtown and Prospect Heights in Brooklyn, Civic Center, Chinatown and Washington Heights in Manhattan, Concourse Village in the Bronx, Astoria and Jamaica in Queens and Saint George in Staten Island.

The study found that citywide more than three out of every four permit holders—approximately 77%—used their permits illegally. Of those, the NYPD was responsible for 46% of the abuse, by far the largest share from any single agency. In addition, nearly one out of every five permits was used in a vehicle that created safety hazards—212 vehicles on sidewalks, 46 blocking fire hydrants, 23 in crosswalks, 22 in bus stops, eight in intersections and 10 in bike lanes.

While Mayor Bloomberg has vowed to reduce the number of permits on the street, the problem persists. Transportation Alternatives estimates that over 150,000 drivers have access to free parking in the form of valid government-issued parking permits (including the more than 30,000 NYPD “Self-Enforcement Zone” permits and 75,000 teacher permits). Thousands more illicitly enjoy the same privileges by photocopying permits, or by minting their own.

Until the Mayor addresses the primary offenders of permit abuse and mandates that the NYPD halt what amounts to parking nonfeasance, the problem will fester. Though it may not be explicit policy, the NYPD’s traffic enforcement division essentially operates under the premise that citywide there is a “no hit” policy on vehicles with permits in the window. By default, the ability to abuse a parking permit has become an unwritten perk of holding certain government jobs.

The simplest and most effective solution for

ending this pandemic of privilege and abuse is to mandate that the NYPD enforce existing traffic laws. No one should be above the law, especially the agencies sworn to uphold it. Permit holders who abuse their permits should immediately be ticketed, not issued warnings. If they continue to abuse their permits, they should be towed, just as any other vehicle would.

Bearers of fraudulent permits should be ticketed and those permit holders should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Further, unions representing Court Officers, Corrections, Court Clerks, FDNY, and others should be mandated to immediately stop printing fraudulent parking permits for their membership and pull existing fraudulent

**I've always been a believer that everybody should be treated the same. And if we are going to have parking placards, we should have parking placards for the people who the city employees--including me--work for, not for the city employees. We've got this mixed up. We're supposed to be providing services and support for the public...But having said that, we have parking laws, we have signs up. Everybody should obey them.**

– MAYOR BLOOMBERG AUGUST 9TH, 2006

permits off the streets.

In addition, Mayor Bloomberg should create a publicly available database on the City’s website that shows the total number of permits issued by all agencies and recognized by the City of New York as legal. The City should take a regular inventory throughout

the city every six months to one year—similar to the survey conducted for the One Police Plaza Environmental Impact Statement—that shows the extent of permit parking abuse in the effort to curb the problem. The City should track permit abuse problems as a specific 311 complaint and publish a continuous tally of abuse by neighborhood.

Furthermore, the City should establish strict, uniform, and transparent standards by which a permit holder can obtain a government-issued permit, such as stringent safeguards around the issuance of DOT Disability permits; those who do not meet the warrants should not be issued permits.

Because permit parking has long been seen as a victimless violation and an implicit perk of the job, the city needs to educate municipal workers and New Yorkers in general about the real cost and impact of illegal permit parking. Holders of legitimate permits must understand that parking on sidewalks, in front of fire hydrants, in crosswalks, in intersections, in bike lanes and in bus stops endangers pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers, and inhibits municipal functioning such as bus movement and emergency response.

Further, the NYPD’s parking privilege should not conflict with the safety of the neighborhood where the precincts are located. Permits should only be used for essential personnel on official business; commuting to work by private vehicle must not be considered “official business.” Because law enforcement agents can ride public transportation for free, limiting parking for private commuter vehicles will not hinder their ability to get to and from work. Further, given that the study found so few official vehicles (and so many commuter vehicles) parked illegally, the argument that this parking perk is necessary to do the job is dubious. □

