

*Parking Memo for Boston City Council
May 2018*

Summary

Few issues in Boston evoke stronger feelings than parking. From street redesign projects to real estate development, parking is often a top-level concern for residents and road-users. **The last time Boston went through a citywide effort to reform parking was during the 1980's when the city's population was at a historic low of 562,994. Since 1980, Boston has added nearly 100,000 residents. By 2030, Imagine Boston projects that there will be an additional 50,000 residents and 100,000 jobs in city limits.**

At the same time, we are experiencing a dramatic shift in demand when it comes to curbside needs. According to the recently released [Rideshare in Massachusetts data report](#), there were approximately 64.8 million rideshare trips started in Massachusetts in 2017, and of that total, **more than half - 34.9 million rides - originated in Boston alone**. This is roughly five times the next highest municipality, Cambridge, with just more than 6.8 million. In addition to TNC's like Uber and Lyft competing for pick-up and drop-off areas, there's been a proliferation of home delivery services like Amazon, and we're seeing increasing need to provide space for visiting nurses and home health aides to care for aging residents. We need to balance all these growing demands while working within the same physical constraints of our streets, which means we have to think strategically about temporal needs, how curbside space is being used, and how that usage fits into the overall use of our street network. As a city, we won't be able to adapt to these changes unless we develop a comprehensive strategy.

The future of parking in Boston without reform will mean more frustration, fewer spaces available, and less mobility for everyone. Better managed parking can result in higher turn-over in commercial areas, meaning more parking availability for customers supporting local businesses. Better managed parking can also make it easier and less expensive for seniors to age in their communities and ease constraints in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of development.

We have the tools to fix the problem today. New Urban Mechanics' recent performance parking pilot showed that increasing parking meter fees in the Back Bay resulted in a higher turn-over and ultimately greater space availability, in addition to less double-parking and fewer parking violations in residential permit zones. The Mayor's proposed transportation department staffing increase includes staff who will be looking into where there should be TNC pick-up / drop-off areas citywide.

Cambridge, Somerville, and Quincy all charge for on-street residential parking permits, and Brookline has strict limits on on-street overnight parking. We can learn from our neighbors and peer cities to figure out what comprehensive parking reform could look like for Boston. Here are some ideas for addressing these issues.

Commercial Parking and Pick-up / Drop-off Zones Recommendations

- **Survey merchants in commercial districts to understand where and when commercial loading zones are needed.** Delivery services have dramatically changed in the last few years, and often times existing commercial loading zones don't reflect today's needs. Determining what the loading zone needs for businesses are on each block and providing a suitable plan can result in less double-parking and thereby less congestion on vital commercial corridors. Other alternatives could include creating delivery nodes in commercial areas to centralize pick-up areas in certain districts.
- **Create incentives to encourage businesses to coordinate off-peak deliveries to remove large trucks from congested commercial corridors during business hours.** In New York, [NYC DOT's Office of Freight Mobility](#) has been leading an initiative to incentivize late-night and early morning deliveries, which has resulted in more than 400 businesses across Midtown and Lower Manhattan shifting portions of their deliveries to the off hours. It is also estimated that 40-50 daily delivery tours in Manhattan have switched as a result of this project, for a total carrier savings of over \$2,250,000/year.
- **Open up more pick-up zones for taxis and TNC's and get creative about time of day regulations.** To discourage double-parking and other parking violations for for-hire vehicles, the City could make more curbside space available to them in high-demand areas and/or during peak service times. District DOT in Washington, D.C. has been leading [a pilot](#) to open up large stretches of streets during high-demand time periods for these kinds of pick-up/drop-off areas to accommodate nightlife traffic. Opening up curbside space near major transit stations and prioritizing bikeshare, taxis / TNC's, and other services would help further "Micro Hubs," which was one of the most popular transportation policies included in the Go Boston 2030 Action Plan.
- **Explore parking permits for employees through employers outside of the inner core.** Store employees and owners often use prime parking locations in commercial areas for long sections of the day, making it difficult for customers to find spaces to park while they shop. To address this issue, [Somerville has developed a business permit parking program](#), where small businesses pay a low annual fee for employees to have access for a relatively low-demand parking space (municipal lot, side street, etc.) for 10 hours at a time. A similar program could ease parking demand in Boston's neighborhood commercial areas.

Metered Parking Recommendations

- **Establish a citywide policy to guide where new parking meters should be installed.** As neighborhoods are seeing more development and changes in transportation patterns, Boston is experiencing shifts in parking demand outside of the city's inner core. Currently, metered parking spaces are not spread out geographically, and are concentrated in the Back Bay, Fenway, Downtown, South End, Allston, and West End. We should expand where metered spaces are available on main streets in neighborhood centers. Establishing a framework for where meters should be installed should be consistent and based on demand for parking in that area.
- **Manage parking meters by geographic zones shaped by occupancy-based standards and find the "right price" for meters in each of them.** There's no one-size fits all approach for

parking because options and demand differ by neighborhood. New Urban Mechanics' recent performance parking pilot showed that increasing parking meter fees in the Back Bay resulted in a higher turn-over and ultimately greater space availability, in addition to less double-parking and fewer parking violations in residential permit zones. \$3.75 per hour was an effective rate for the Back Bay, but that price might be different in Charlestown, West Roxbury, or Grove Hall depending on availability of off-street parking, private parking lots, etc. Each zone should take these factors into account and contribute to the price. To encourage parking availability in commercial areas, [Seattle's City Council](#) established an ordinance where meter parking ranges from \$5 to \$.50 per hour. The rate is closer to \$5 in neighborhoods with higher demand, and the overall goal in each zone is to find a price that encourages one or two open spaces are available on each block face throughout the day. Consequently, there are many [different rates in different neighborhoods](#) that reflect each area's unique parking needs and demand.

- **Partner with Main Streets organizations to explore "parking benefit districts."** The recently passed Municipal Modernization Act allows Massachusetts municipalities to create zones where a portion of parking meter revenue may be directly re-invested into the immediate neighborhood. Connecting these fees with tangible improvements can build support among business owners and residents and engage them in the benefits of better parking management. The City could partner with Main Streets citywide to determine how each respective neighborhood would like to see the revenue spent - whether it's sidewalk repairs, planters, benches, etc. Salem, MA, and Nashua, NH, have successfully implemented parking benefit districts.

Residential Parking Recommendations

- **Cap the number of permits citywide based on a census of existing spaces.** Currently, there is no consistent policy for how or where residential permits are regulated. Neighborhoods themselves have to initiate the process to ask for residential permit zones, irrespective of parking availability, household type (homes with / without driveway access), and overall transportation needs. Ideally, the capped number would be lower than the actual number in order to better ensure availability for residents with permits.
- **Permits should be citywide but split into multiple zones.** Currently, permit zones typically reflect neighborhood limits, but don't take into account the typology of parking availability (only on-street with mostly multiple unit housing, housing with driveways, etc.). These zones could vary in size depending on demand.
- **Permits should last no more than 12 months before renewal is required.** Surrounding communities require renewal on a yearly basis, in part to ensure permit holders are still residents and did not move while still using resident parking, instead of paid meters or off-street lots.
- **Establish a graduated fee structure for permits registered for each household.** Car ownership itself in Boston is not equitable. According to Go Boston 2030, among households with no vehicles, more than half have annual incomes less than \$25,000. Only 7% of zero-vehicle households make over \$100,000. Fees for the second and third car per

household should be at increasingly higher rates to ensure there's more availability for each household.

- **Explore parking programs for visitors and healthcare workers.** To make it easier for guests to visit and park in neighborhoods, create an easy-to-use, fee-based parking permit program to comply with overnight parking regulations. [Cambridge's program](#) could serve as a model. Also, to support home healthcare workers who often have to park on residential streets in residential permit areas, [Somerville developed a medical care permit](#) to prevent them from being fined. Similar programs could be adopted in Boston.
- **Have equity exemptions for seniors and people with disabilities.** To prevent onerous fees for populations who often rely on their vehicles for basic mobility needs, [Cambridge](#) and [Somerville](#) have waived parking permit fees for people over 65 years old and those with disabilities. Boston could explore what kinds of equity exemptions it would like to prioritize in rethinking its parking policies.

Early Action Items to Consider for 2018:

- **Conduct a parking census and establish a citywide cap on residential permits.** We shouldn't be giving out more permits than are available. To do that, we need to know how many spaces are out there and then create zones for effectively managing that supply.
- **Take the onus off of residents and establish clear policies for where residential permits should be in place, and how that should contribute to our transportation networks.** The current patchwork approach to permits covers some streets but not others. Let's stop waiting on residents to organize themselves. If we know that a street should be covered by a neighborhood permit zone, the City should act and make it so rather than wait on neighbors to go through a multi-month-long process to make it so.
- **Start charging graduated fees for residential permits.** A household with five or more cars shouldn't necessarily be prevented from getting access to permits but they should be charged for the toll they're taking on parking availability in their neighborhoods. It's important to note that car ownership itself in Boston is not equitable, and households with multiple cars are some of the wealthiest in the city. According to Go Boston 2030, among households with no vehicles, more than half have annual incomes less than \$25,000. Only 7% of zero-vehicle households make over \$100,000. In beginning to charge fees, we should create equity exemptions where fees are waived for seniors and people with disabilities.
- **Consider reforms to metered parking spaces. Our parking system doesn't exist in isolated neighborhood zones.** Work with Main Streets to discuss potential partnerships for piloting and establishing Parking Benefit districts. Expand New Urban Mechanics' Performance Parking Pilot beyond the Back Bay.