

Applicant: CITY OF SEATTLE Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)	Page 1 of 5	Supersedes: N/A
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Subject: Free-floating car share permit program	Code and Section Reference: Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 11.23.160	
	Type of Rule: Code Interpretation	
	Ordinance Authority: SMC 3.12.020	
Index: Technical and Procedural Requirements	Approved	Date
	Scott Kubly, Director Seattle Department of Transportation	

Background

Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 11.23.160 addresses the City of Seattle's free-floating car share permit program. The program allows the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to issue permits for car share operators. This permit grants the vehicle operator the right to park on city streets without regard to time limits, payment at on-street parking devices, or Restricted Parking Zone limits. A portion of the permit fee paid by free-floating car share operators accounts for their use of paid parking. Through an annual "true-up", operators pay for any additional paid parking actually used and not included in the initial permit fee. In January 2015, the Seattle City Council adopted legislation expanding the free-floating car share program, establishing revised permit

fees, and delegating to SDOT the authority to set caps on the number of free-floating car share permits and operators by Director's Rule. SMC 11.23.160.C provides:

In 2015, SDOT may issue free-floating car sharing permits to no more than four free-floating car sharing operators. In 2015, each free-floating car sharing operator may receive up to 500 free-floating car share permits, or up to 750 free-floating car sharing permits with the establishment of a service area for the entire city. For subsequent years, SDOT shall determine by Director's Rule the number of permits and operators based on data received as a part of the operator reporting requirements specified in the free-floating car sharing permit. In determining the number of permits and operators, SDOT will consider effects on reductions in personal vehicle ownership, effects on neighborhood business district customer access, whether free-floating car share is sufficiently serving low income communities, and other considerations that affect the public's use of the right of way and travel behavior.

Car share operators have indicated a desire to expand the number of permitted vehicles within Seattle based on market demand. They have stated that their preference is to establish a fleet size that best meets customer demand for vehicle proximity and availability given that the city spans 83 square miles and has approximately 500,000 on-street parking spaces.

To determine whether to cap the number of permits for 2016 and beyond, SDOT analyzed data from the 2015 annual free-floating car share member survey; the City's 2014 and 2015 annual paid parking study; inquiries received by the public; and membership data provided by the current permitted operator. Based on the data collected and analysis, SDOT does not believe that the number of operators or permits per operator should be capped.

Personal Vehicle Ownership

Based on data collected as a part of the 2015 annual free-floating car share survey, done in coordination with the existing permitted operator (car2go), the University of California at Berkeley, and the City of Seattle, 14% of free-floating car share members in Seattle indicated that they have given up a vehicle since joining the service. Fifty percent of this group, or 7% of the total of those surveyed, indicated that this was at

least partially due to the availability of free-floating car share. The total sample size of the 2015 survey was 3,486 members. There are approximately 65,000 free-floating car share members in Seattle. Extrapolating this rate to the entire membership base indicates members may have given up approximately 9,100 vehicles with approximately 4,550 of them related directly to the availability of free-floating car share services.

Neighborhood Business District Customer Access

In commercial areas, curb space is prioritized for loading and short-term parking in order to facilitate business access. To monitor performance, as a part of Seattle's annual paid parking study, SDOT collects data on business district paid parking occupancy and duration. For 2014 and 2015, the data collection also included a count of free-floating car share vehicles in each paid parking area. The 2015 data indicated that the occupancy of free-floating car share vehicles was generally less than 5% of available parking spaces. The duration studies showed that free-floating car share vehicles typically parked for less time than most other vehicles, usually one hour or less. Further, in 2015, SDOT received only one complaint from a neighborhood business district related to free-floating car share use of business district parking.

Based on this data, free-floating car share vehicles have been shown to occupy a relatively small amount of business district on-street parking and those vehicles typically turn over more frequently, allowing other uses of and consistent customer and visitor access to the curb space. This indicates that free-floating car share vehicle parking has not adversely impacted neighborhood business district access and furthers established curb space priorities for commercial areas.

Service for Low Income Communities

The 2015 free-floating car share member survey data indicates that on average free-floating car share members are typically higher income than the average Seattle resident. Though twenty-five percent of free-floating car share member households reported incomes at or below \$50,000 annually, below the area median.

The 2015 expansion of the free-floating car share program, which allowed up to 750 permits per operator (an increase of 250 permits), required operators who have received free-floating car share permits for two or more years to establish a citywide service area. The existing 2015 operator expanded its services accordingly and now has 750 vehicles available for the entire city. Prior to the 2015 legislation, the operator's service area extended to approximately 80% of the total city. The increase in the number of vehicles by 250, with the concurrent expansion of the service area to citywide, meant an overall increase in the density of vehicles per service area from approximately 7.7 to 9.4 per square mile.

The 2015 membership data from the operator indicates lower membership rates in the southern portion of the city, the area not previously covered in the operator's service area. This expanded service area includes zip codes with higher percentages of low-income households. The operator has indicated that there is a need to increase the density of available vehicles to both better serve the existing customers and to market the service to potential new customers in these areas. Data collected on the average availability of free-floating car share vehicles throughout the city also indicates that there are fewer vehicles available in south Seattle. Therefore, increasing the number of permits per operator, together with the expanded service area, could potentially better serve lower income communities.

Free-floating car share company and vehicle permit caps

Based on the data available at the time of this rule, the positive effects of a larger free-floating car share fleet outweigh the need to cap the number of vehicle permits or operators. Given this, for 2016 and future years, unless amended by a subsequent rule based on a similar data analysis, SDOT believes there should be no City-established cap on the number of free-floating car share vehicle permits or operators. The City will further work to establish incentive programs to ensure operators are distributing vehicles to provide equitable access throughout the city.

In considering the effectiveness of free floating car share in the city, and in determining

guidance on vehicle distribution throughout the city, the Director will evaluate data annually to determine the extent to which the program is achieving the free-floating car share program goals as established in the SMC to:

- 1. Provide Seattle residents an alternative to personal vehicle ownership, complement the use of public transportation, and reduce personal vehicle ownership, the overall number of car trips and/or vehicle miles traveled within the City, consistent with the City of Seattle's Transportation Strategic Plan;*
- 2. Achieve emission reduction goals through use of car sharing, as outlined by the City of Seattle's Climate Action Plan;*
- 3. Achieve curb space priority objectives in commercial districts and residential districts, as outlined by the City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan; and*
- 4. Provide low-income access to transportation options.*