



City of Seattle

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Parking Policy Frequently Asked Questions

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- ***What did HALA recommend about parking?***

Parking is a key cost in building new housing. It adds to monthly rents, up to \$300-500/month to residents' rents. See page 3 for more on this topic.

HALA recommends:

- Keep but clarify today's rules that allow projects the option of no parking in some areas with frequent transit
- Consider lower parking requirements in other areas
- Examine changes to on-street parking management and "restricted parking zones" (RPZs) to ease parking congestion and balance use of streets

We have also looked into ways to:

- Promote and accelerate increases in transit ridership, biking and walking to provide options for how people move about the city
- Promote more shared parking in garages
- Improve bike parking in new development

- ***What are the City's current regulations regarding off-street parking for new development?***

In our central neighborhoods, and those best served by transit, the parking rules allow builders to provide parking based on the anticipated demand of their tenants. This can occur everywhere in City-designated Urban Centers and in "station area" vicinities near light rail stations. It can also occur in the parts of designated Urban Villages that are within 1/4-mile walking distance of frequently-served transit stops.

- In other areas outside of those densely populated and transit-rich areas, the minimum parking required is one space per dwelling unit; except for
- Frequent transit service corridors outside of urban villages, such as Rainier Avenue S., where a 50% reduction in the minimum parking is allowed

- ***What was the reasoning behind requiring less parking near transit service?***

Fostering new housing growth in such areas is encouraged by the City's Comprehensive Plan, regional plans that emphasize "transit-oriented development" and the personal savings and reduced environmental impacts of compact development patterns and the combined objectives of the City's housing and transportation plans. At the same time, there is increasing recognition that constructing parking is expensive for housing providers, and it is oversupplied by around 30% on average throughout King County. See King County's Right Size Parking evaluation and its model that estimates lower parking demands throughout much of Seattle compared to other parts of the county. Therefore, too much parking is creating too much of a burden on the ability to live in Seattle with housing choices that are affordable.

The idea is to let the amount of parking be tailored to the needs of the expected residents. Most developments are providing parking spaces. However, to allow development of housing without parking, in certain areas, is consistent with City policies that encourage people to take advantage of a variety of ways to move around the city, including transit.

- ***What is meant by Frequent Transit Service (FTS)?***

Presence of "frequent transit service" determines where low parking levels are allowed in Seattle's codes, within a walkable ¼ mile distance of transit stops. Today, the transit routes with FTS are those with service every 15 minutes for at least one-half (12 hours) of the day (6 days per week), and at least 30-minute service for 18 hours (every day of the week).

Bus service counted toward frequent service in the City's development reviews must strictly meet those 15- or 30-minute timeframes, or they cannot be counted. Metro's system maps are shown at <http://metro.kingcounty.gov/maps/>

The proposal would update how the scheduled bus service is measured to determine FTS, providing more flexibility to recognize minor variations in Metro's scheduling. For example, buses arriving every 16, 17 or 18 minutes, instead of 15 minutes, could be counted toward FTS. The proposal would also adopt a map of FTS for the City to use in applying parking requirements to new development. The changes would make the City's definition more consistent with Metro's bus scheduling practices and with SDOT's transit planning.

- ***How can we define standards according to bus service when bus service might change over time?***

The areas defined with the most flexible parking rules are in the city's larger urban centers and urban villages, and along major transit corridors connecting each major part of town. These frequent transit corridors are the backbone of the transit system, and continuing City and Metro monitoring and policy guidance will ensure that these routes will remain the highest priority for service.

- ***When did the current approach to parking get adopted?***

Seattle has been incrementally changing legislation so less parking is required in places with more frequent transit service, and as other travel options have improved. No parking has been required for housing Downtown since the mid-to-late 1980s, in recognition of the proximity of housing to employment options and effects on regional commuting. In the last decade, a series of changes to commercial and multifamily zones in 2007, 2011 and 2012 extended the no-minimum parking requirement to more uses and more Urban Center, Urban Village and transit-served areas.

- ***How much parking is new development providing?***

From mid-2012 through late 2016, about 87% of the dwelling units are in developments with parking, even where no parking is required (average is 0.73 spaces per dwelling unit in those developments). Only about 13% of the 50,000 new units are built or proposed to be built without parking.

- ***How does parking influence the cost of housing?***

The cost to build parking in residential garages is in the range of \$30,000 – \$50,000 per stall or more, and it consumes property space that limits the number of housing units that can be provided.

A Portland, Oregon study (Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, 2013) found that garage parking at \$55,000/stall and the consumption of space on properties would lead to rent that is \$500 higher per month for renters in a typical lowrise apartment development. Apartment owners cannot fully recoup the cost of building or operating the parking through rental of the parking spaces themselves. Also, even if parking is provided at separate cost to tenants, many may choose to park on-street as a more affordable option.

Many Seattle families and individuals cannot absorb such added costs, and are seeking affordable housing choices in Seattle. Continuing to enable housing choices without parking is a way to accommodate and encourage new housing that will address affordable housing needs.

The average household in Seattle spends around 17% of their budget on transportation, and accomplishing more residential living opportunities in places that have more personal mobility options (frequent transit and other choices) would help people reduce that burden.

- ***Why does Seattle promote transportation options other than driving a personal vehicle?***

Seattle is planning for at least 70,000 new households (more than 100,000 people) that will arrive over the next 20 years. Seattle's 2016 population is 704,352. If all new city residents and workers were to drive every day, traffic congestion would quickly grow and be detrimental to our transportation system and our economy. We simply do not have the roadway space to accommodate a personal vehicle for every person who lives or works in Seattle.

Instead, recent and ongoing policy decisions by the City are facilitating easier access to other transportation options that are both affordable and convenient. Seattle is increasing bus service, building street car and light rail service, allowing expansion of Transportation Network Companies (such as Uber, Lyft, Sidecar) and taxi service, and growing free-floating car-sharing such as Car2Go and ReachNow. The City is also planning transportation system improvements following voter approval of the Levy to Move Seattle, and addressing air quality and climate change by implementing its Climate Action Plan.

- ***With Seattle's growing population, is there any concern about on-street parking availability?***

Whether you're a longtime resident or new to the neighborhood, on-street parking is public and open to everyone, but it's not an unlimited resource. Seattle manages on-street parking to balance competing needs (transit, customers, residents, shared vehicles); move people and goods efficiently; support business district vitality, and create livable neighborhoods. This includes SDOT programs such as "Performance-Based Parking Pricing" and Restricted Parking Zones (RPZ).

Also, most new development includes some amount of parking: about 87% of the dwelling units since 2012 in the affected areas (where parking is optional) are or will be in developments with parking. There are also often other off-street parking options available in neighborhood business districts. We are studying ways to open up availability of parking and more efficient parking choices that will lead to:

- better use of existing parking,
- "right-sizing" of off-street parking, and
- finding ways to temper on-street parking use through demand management strategies.

SDCI is also working with SDOT to help ensure that people have access to a variety of convenient and reliable transportation options that can reduce dependence on a personal vehicle.

- ***How do on-street residential parking conditions and Restricted Parking Zones (RPZ) fit into the new Parking Recommendations?***

SDOT is in the process of updating the RPZ Program, with a policy review underway. Possible RPZ program changes may include: permit pricing adjustments; permit limits per household; increased performance monitoring and potential adjustments in RPZ boundaries and program operations; and potential tie-ins to future access and mobility investments. Much like SDOT's performance-based pricing program, these actions would help SDOT more closely manage the RPZ program. The potential changes could also allow for performance-related adjustments to address the variety of on-street parking needs in the affected neighborhoods.

The intent is to help the entire parking system work better over time by providing more opportunities for convenient off-street parking to be used more effectively in combination with improved management of on-street parking.

- ***What are the City and partners (such as Metro, Sound Transit) doing to provide more transportation options?***

The City, King County Metro and Sound Transit have rolled out new light rail service to Husky Stadium along with restructuring several bus routes to get people to and from new light rail stations in Capitol Hill and Montlake. The approved ST3 vote also is funding expansions to provide light rail coverage more broadly across the region, including West Seattle and Ballard.

Also, Seattle voters in recent years approved Proposition 1 and the Levy to Move Seattle that support improved bus service in Seattle (with 270,000 service hours already added), and planned expansions of the Metro RapidRide bus rapid transit network. The City has also supported expanded car sharing options, taxi, and other ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft. More specifically:

- Bus service has been prioritized where most needed to improve frequency, reliability, and overcrowding;
- Continuing to build quality pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure throughout the city;
- Developing integrated land use and transportation policies that improve the convenience of people to access groceries, child care, and employment opportunities through walking, biking, transit, and shared transportation options.
- Move Seattle is a 9-year strategic plan that is funding projects that will holistically maintain and improve Seattle's transportation networks and provide interconnected and reliable transportation choices.

- ***What are the environmental benefits of choosing transit and other transportation choices?***

Continuing to enable a range of livable housing options and greater use of transit and transportation choices in Seattle will help people avoid longer commutes and congestion that contribute significantly to Washington's share of climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions and to air pollution. This will continue to be important in accomplishing our Climate Action Plan objectives. Choosing transit also reduces fossil fuel consumption and reduces pollutant generation on roads that washes off into local streams, lakes and Puget Sound. Flexibility in parking standards reduces the cost to construct housing and encourages housing development in areas of the city with the best access to frequent bus service.

- ***How many on-street parking spaces are there in Seattle?***

There are approximately 500,000 on-street parking spaces in Seattle. There are around 12,000 paid spaces and another approximately 35,000 that we manage through time limits or other strategies.

- ***How many private paid-parking spaces exist in Seattle?***

Based on City data there are 90,000 off-street spaces. The Puget Sound Regional Council did a recent study in the Central Business District, Chinatown International District, Denny Triangle, and the waterfront that identified 48,900 stalls.

For more information, please visit the SDCI Parking Policy website:

<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/codesrules/changestocode/parkingrecommendations/whatwhy/>