



Accessible parking policies and practices in other jurisdictions >> advocate and staff interviews

To provide a deeper understanding of the policies and practices implemented in other jurisdictions, the SFMTA interviewed advocates and city staff in Philadelphia, Arlington, New York, Detroit, and Phoenix.

Philadelphia, PA

Policies as of 2001:

- Accessible parking zones: one zone per block in areas with new multispace meters
- Meter payment and time limits: all pay but disabled placard holders receive one free hour after time limit (vehicles with wheelchair lifts exempt)
- Strong enforcement of off-street accessible parking, both proper use and sufficient provision
- Pennsylvania allows jurisdictions local control regarding meter payment for placard holders

ROCCO IACULLO, STAFF ATTORNEY, DISABILITY RIGHTS NETWORK OF PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. Iacullo was not involved in the Philadelphia's parking placard policy changes in 2001. However, he is a driver and wheelchair user as well as a Philadelphia disability rights lawyer, and he is aware of the policy changes and their outcomes.

Mr. Iacullo said that prior to 2001 Philadelphia had a significant problem with placard abuse limiting parking access for people with disabilities, and that the new policies greatly improved the situation. He is unaware of significant concerns from the disability community regarding the change from no time limits to a one-hour grace period beyond the posted time limits. He said although some people are probably unhappy with the meter payment requirement there was no significant outcry against it because it dramatically improved access. He suggests this is a trade-off that people have quietly accepted as a net positive.

Unforeseen issues that arose after the implementation of the policies

Philadelphia offers a payment and time limit exemption to vehicles with wheelchair lifts. When the policy was first implemented, parking control officers mistakenly wrote citations for many of these vehicles. The city then conducted special training for the officers, significantly reducing the number of incorrect citations.

Philadelphia also received merchant complaints after installing one accessible parking zone per block in two downtown neighborhoods. The business community said that many of these parking spaces were often empty, and the city pursued the idea of removing some of designated spaces. However, disability rights advocates raised concerns, explaining that spots which are full most of the time do not provide meaningful access. Since that time, the city has dropped all removal plans.

Staff asked Mr. Iacullo, as well as Nancy Salandra, Director of Independent Living Services at Liberty Resources in Philadelphia, if they were aware of any lawsuits filed as a result of the changes in placard parking policies. Both said that they had not heard of any.

RICHARD D. DICKSON, JR., DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PHILADELPHIA PARKING AUTHORITY

Mr. Dickson was the primary city staff member that worked on creating and implementing Philadelphia's 2001 disabled parking policy amendments. At the time, 65% of metered parking in some areas was occupied by vehicles with placards.

Outreach during policy development

During policy development, the city held numerous meetings with disability rights advocates and the business community. Both groups were concerned about the lack of access to metered parking due to people misusing disabled parking placards to benefit from free unrestricted parking. Visiting sites with advocates to document issues was a big part of the initial discussions and Mr. Dickson feels it was a significant part of the success.

Mr. Dickson feels the process learned from a two false starts in which previous staff attempted to propose changes without building support and consensus on the solutions.

Outreach during implementation

Philadelphia did extensive media outreach when they instituted parking rates for placard holders and increased enforcement for off-street accessible parking zones. Additionally, for one month parking enforcement officers handed out warnings rather than citations.

Community reaction

Once the program was implemented the increased access to parking was dramatic, and Mr. Dickson says no one has asked to return to the previous policies of payment exemption. There is a broad understanding of the policies in Philadelphia and some smaller, nearby cities have adopted similar policies. Mr. Dickson is unaware of any significant issues relating to confusion by visitors from cities that exempt placards from payment or time limits.

Ongoing issues

Because the placards allow for additional time at the meter, they still have a value that causes abuse. Placard abuse is diminished, but it continues.

Arlington, VA

Policies as of 1998:

- Accessible parking zones: increased number of accessible zones, with goal of four percent of metered parking
- Meter payment: all must pay, in-vehicle “parking meter” is available to ensure access for all, and meters in accessible zones are 42” tall for those with reach constraints
- Time limits: time limits in accessible zones are twice the posted time limit
- Increased enforcement of placard misuse

DORIS RAY, DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH, ENDEPENENCE CENTER OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA (ECNV)

Ms. Ray did not participate directly in the policy changes in Arlington, but was involved as an observer and advocate at the state level.

Outreach and community involvement

The City’s Commission on Disabilities was engaged early in the process and most of its members supported the proposals. Members identified mobility and dexterity issues with meter payment and helped develop in-vehicle parking meter program. The Commission also pushed to include more active enforcement of accessible parking.

From Ms. Ray’s perspective, the process neglected to engage the broader disability community early enough in the process. This led to strong push-back on the meter payment component when the proposals were brought to the Arlington County Board.

No lawsuits were filed against Arlington or the Commonwealth of Virginia based on the policy changes that were made. As time has passed, concerns about paying to park have dissipated in the community except among the most die-hard opponents to parking payment, who were apparently involved in Washington DC’s decision in early 2012 to reconsider their proposed payment program.

Ongoing issues

Multispace meters are difficult for people with reach issues, and returning to the vehicle with proof of payment is a hurdle for some people.¹ Initial access benefits have been undercut by general parking congestion caused by parking space removal after 9/11 and in rapidly growing neighborhoods like Clarendon. Ms. Ray said that crowded parking encourages non-placard users to park in accessible spots, and that they often don’t get cited because enforcement appears to have dropped. Calls to the police department typically do not result in an officer arriving to cite the vehicle.

¹ Note: San Francisco multispace meters do not require users to return to their vehicles.

Ideas for improving the current policies

In an ideal world, Ms. Ray would like to see one to two accessible parking zones per block in heavily parked areas. Additionally, she likes the idea of a volunteer enforcement program that would allow interested people to cite cars that are parked in accessible parking zones without a placard.

FRANK O'LEARY, ARLINGTON COUNTY TREASURER

Mr. O'Leary was the primary architect of the policy changes that Arlington and the Commonwealth of Virginia put into place in 1998.

Outreach during policy development

After issues with placard abuse were identified, Mr. O'Leary approached the head of the Commission on Disabilities to discuss the issue, and they agreed that Arlington had a problem with placard abuse. The Commonwealth of Virginia had 400,000-500,000 placards for a population of 7.2 million people; 45% of vehicles parked in the Crystal City neighborhood were displaying placards.

Knowing that changing the payment exemption policy could be seen as punitive, the proposal also included setting aside meters for accessible parking zones and empowering the Commission and community to determine where new spaces should be installed. However, while Arlington has increased the number of accessible parking zones, it has never had more than 2% of its meters marked as accessible only. He states that this is because they install spaces by request, and they haven't gotten sufficient requests to go beyond 2%.

Outreach after implementation

Before instituting the policies, the City conducted publicity outreach that included stories on major TV stations and in all of the papers. Additionally, they added decals to the meters saying "all may park, all must pay". Members of the Commission on Disabilities helped write this message, intending to convey a message of equality amongst all users. The meters continue to have these stickers.

Community reaction

Some of the commissioners who supported the changes were nonetheless skeptical about whether they would open up parking spaces and reduce placard abuse. But once the new policies were in effect, Mr. O'Leary said that most of the feedback he received was positive.

Inconsistency among neighboring jurisdictions

Arlington is one of the only municipalities in the region to charge for parking, and they have many visitors—tourism is Arlington's second largest business sector. Although they do receive a small number of complaints regarding tickets received for meter non-payment, confusion about whether to pay hasn't been a significant issue. Most people seem to understand the policy.

New York City

Current policies:

- Disabled placards: vehicles must display a city-issued permit certified by a New York City Department of Health physician
- Accessible parking zones: none, but city disabled parking permit holders can park in many otherwise restricted spaces
- Meter payment and time limits: city permit holders are exempt

JIM WEISMAN, GENERAL COUNSEL, UNITED SPINAL

Because New York City's policies have remained essentially the same for "decades", there have been a few opportunities to provide input on parking issues, but Mr. Weisman feels that there are significant issues that should be addressed.

The accessible parking issue is just one problem related to accessible transportation in New York. Only 230 out of 13,000 taxis are accessible, and the subway is not accessible. This leaves only the bus system, which Mr. Weisman called "great."

The city permit is very difficult to get, and even people with lifelong disabilities are required to re-qualify every four years. Additionally, Mr. Weisman says that many people think the Department of Health doctors are inconsistent in their determinations. He knows a number of instances where people were approved for placards only to be denied during recertification, though their disabilities hadn't changed.

It is most difficult for people with disabilities to find parking in Manhattan because people with disabled parking permits must compete for spaces with those displaying permits for commercial vehicles, diplomats, city workers, and more.

GUILLERMO LEIVA, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION BUREAU OF PARKING

Mr. Leiva helped explain the extremely unique parking situation in Manhattan, which largely bans parking on weekdays during business hours south of 59th Street, except for vehicles with commercial license plates, city-issued/city-doctor-verified disabled parking placards, and other special permits.

City disabled parking placard holders can park at any meter for free, and in addition can park in no loading, no standing and other restricted spaces throughout the city. It is the position of the city that this exemption provides a greater benefit to placard holders than setting aside accessible parking zones.

As with other cities, New York's placard program suffers some abuse, but the tight controls on who qualifies for a placard and who can certify them limit the scope of the abuse. Abuse is limited to people borrowing someone else's placard rather than people receiving their own placard for which they do not qualify. The City of New York issued approximately 28,000 placards in fiscal year 2012.

The majority of concerns that are raised about the program are related to the duration of the evaluation and certification process, currently 60 days from submission of complete application. This is an improved turnaround after adjustments to the process were made in response to community concerns.

State issued placards from New York State and other states do not provide access to on-street spaces in NYC.

Asked what changes to the program he might make, Mr. Leiva feels that New York's program is successful and wouldn't make any significant changes. He might consider ways to make permit distribution, verification, and enforcement easier.

Detroit

Current policies:

- Meter payment: people who cannot physically pay at a meter are exempt

RICK SIDES, PROGRAM MANAGER, DISABILITY NETWORK, WAYNE COUNTY-DETROIT

Detroit is currently under a consent decree for inadequate compliance with ADA regulations regarding curb-cuts and other infrastructure. The city used to have a Commission on Disabilities, but it was disbanded a few years ago due to budget issues and political strife between the Commission and the mayor. Mr. Sides works in Detroit, but lives in Warren, MI and is a former commissioner on his hometown's Commission on Disabilities.

According to Mr. Sides, the number one parking access issue in Detroit is a lack of enforcement for accessible parking zones. In the downtown area, people often illegally park in accessible zones without receiving tickets. He suggested the problem is more severe in the winter, when cold weather makes people want to find spaces close to their destinations.

In contrast, Mr. Sides says that accessible parking zones are available more often in Warren, where enforcement is better. He attributes this to Warren's use of sworn police officers who can access state databases to confirm placards; while Detroit's parking enforcement officers do not have this ability.

Phoenix

Current policies:

- Accessible parking zones: increased number of accessible zones
- Meter payment: all must pay
- Time limits: Placard holders are allowed a one-hour grace period after meter time limit
- Enforcement of placard misuse: volunteer enforcement program (ACE) cite for off-street disabled parking violations
- Mayor's Commission on Disabilities runs "Save Our Space" education program, public can report accessible parking zone violations by phone, violators are sent information on importance of access for those who need it.

DARREL CHRISTENSON, VICE PRESIDENT/DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY INTEGRATION, ARIZONA BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENT LIVING

In a brief conversation, Mr. Christenson said that he was unaware of any lawsuits that were filed because of changes to Phoenix's placard policies. He referred staff to Jennifer Longdon, the Chair of the Mayor's Commission on Disabilities, who would have more information on how the program has succeeded. Staff is continuing to try and reach her.