



Amenity or Necessity? Street Standards as Parking Policy

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MTI Project 1001 - Part II
June 2012

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Single family homes, cul de sacs, spacious garages, wide streets, etc. are among the typical features of suburban developments across the United States. Despite the abundant parking spaces available on

the premises (inside garages or in driveways), many residents become accustomed to parking on the streets, a common practice that barely raises any questions from residents or policy makers. This report challenges this phenomenon, asking why street parking is required by most local governments in new subdivisions, especially given that the minimum parking standard for residential developments is widely adopted.

Study Methods

The research investigates two popular beliefs that such a requirement is a technical necessity to guarantee traffic safety and/or a response to market demand to provide an amenity. The researchers interviewed/surveyed directors of the departments of public works or transportation from 97 primary cities in the top 51 metropolitan areas in the US. They supplemented it with reviews of street standards from more than 22 cities nationwide.

Findings

The results show that these policy makers believe that street parking is provided largely as an amenity but under the guise of technical necessity. Further comparison between public streets and private streets suggests that neither amenity nor necessity can truly explain the street parking requirement. Street standards behave more like a political decision instead of the common belief that it is a technical decision. Such a decision distorts both the parking and housing markets. If street parking is unbundled from street standards, many residents are unlikely to pay for street parking, streets will become narrower, and housing prices will become more affordable.

Policy Recommendations

This research explored an important but generally overlooked parking policy, street standards for new subdivisions, which have provided an enormous number of street parking spaces nationwide. Despite the substantial cost and externalities involved in this policy, the public remains largely unaware of it, which has prevented public discussion and oversight. The present study investigated the rationale underlying the parking mandate implicit in street standards and tested two commonly held beliefs: that these requirements were a technical necessity based on safety concerns and/or an amenity based on market demand for extra parking. Decision makers

The parking mandate in street standards is neither a technical necessity nor a market amenity. It shields residents from the price signal of street parking and distorts both the parking and housing markets.

from 97 U.S. cities responded to a survey of street standards; the analysis found considerable ambiguity and inconsistency regarding these two beliefs and demonstrated that the parking mandate was neither a necessity nor an amenity.

- Parking should be unbundled from street standards that are intended to improve traffic safety
- Parking should become optional instead of required for residential streets in new subdivisions



About the Authors

Zhan Guo is assistant professor of urban planning and transportation policy at the Wagner School of Public Policy, New York University; Charles Rivasplata and Richard Lee are lecturers of urban and regional planning at San Jose State University; David Keyon is a Master's student at San Jose State; and Luis Schloeter is a Master's student at New York University.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1001-2.html