

Accessible Parking Policy Advisory Committee

Notes from meeting on October 23, 2012

The first meeting of the Accessible Parking Policy Advisory Committee was held on October 23, 2012 from 2 to 4 p.m. at the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's (SFMTA) office building.

The SFMTA formed the Advisory Committee to help the SFMTA review and make recommendations regarding on-street accessible parking policies, including those governing disabled placards and blue zones.

The meeting brought together fifteen people with widely varying experience and concerns in the areas of disability advocacy and parking, including representatives from the Independent Living Resource Center (ILRC), the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the Mayor's Office on Disability, the San Francisco Council of District Merchants Associations, Access Northern California, the Paratransit Coordinating Council (PCC), Building Owners and Managers Association, Multi-Modal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC), the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, the San Francisco Medical Society, and the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

At the meeting, background information about accessible parking issues was presented and discussed and members made nominations for the subcommittee.

1. Introductions

The meeting began with introductory comments from the committee co-chairs: Ed Reiskin, SFMTA's Director of Transportation; and Carla Johnson, Interim Director of the Mayor's Office on Disability. Mr. Reiskin outlined the purpose of the committee as a way to get input for recommendations to:

- Improve access for people with disabilities, and
- Improve parking and transportation problems caused by the increasing use of disabled parking placards.

2. Explanation of process/ground rules

Richard Weiner of Nelson\Nygaard, the meeting facilitator, invited participants to introduce themselves, set up ground rules for the advisory committee, and talked about what the process would entail. The meeting's goals were to listen to and discuss background data, form a subcommittee that would guide the larger committee's agenda and drill down into issues in a way that is not as easy in a large group, and begin to work towards defining the problem to be tackled by the advisory committee. Because the committee represents a very diverse group of interested stakeholders, there may not be a problem definition arrived at during the first two meetings.

3. Background data presentation

Lisa Foster from the SFMTA presented background data on blue zones (blue-painted curbs for disabled parking) in San Francisco, the use of disabled placards and plates, and enforcement issues. The presentation is available here: <http://sfpark.org/resources/accessible-parking-background-information-presentation/>.

4. Highlights of stakeholder interviews regarding problem definition

Richard then presented the highlights from eleven stakeholder interviews that were conducted by the Nelson\Nygaard team, including six representing a disability perspective.

- Parking policy is weak and ineffective; there are not enough blue zones, not enough enforcement, and it's too easy to get a placard
- There are big financial incentives for placard abuse
- Handing out placards has no ramifications for DMV so they "hand them out like candy," don't check to make sure they are sending them to correct address
- Placard abuse issue creates unfair bad publicity for disability community
- Those with placards spend a lot of time circling in search of a parking spot
- SFMTA complains too readily that enforcement doesn't work
- Parking Control Officers get assaulted and insulted
- A large proportion of the disability community is unemployed and/or low income
- Even legitimate use creates demand problem for accessible spaces

5. Committee members' input on problem definition

After presenting the background data, the facilitator asked members to comment on the issues as they heard them. The comments covered a wide range of issues, and are summarized and roughly grouped into subject area below.

GENERAL ISSUES

- The spirit of placards is to facilitate equal access; placards level the playing field. We have recently had the problem of people being unable to park to get services from our agency. Anecdotally, the reason seems to be because there are too many placards.
- We need to try to get past our perspective of the problem and get to what problem really is. Disabled community is very complex and so is the problem. Essence of problem is: there is not enough parking. Demand is incredibly high. Is this really a success story turned on its head? Has the disabled community achieved so much success that they've become very visible?
- There is a lack of info for people with placards on what constitutes a legitimate use of placards.

- Population of people with disabled placards using parking spaces has increased in the last six years. To what extent is this because when ADA began, the number was artificially low? Now that there are more accessibility programs, disabled people are moving around and being more visible.
- It's a problem that the number of blue zones has remained static at the same time that more disabled people are moving around and getting out.
- Why has there been a spike all of a sudden in the number of placards? Not due to aging population.
- There are some solutions in other states that recognize differences in disabilities. There are nuanced solutions out there.

COSTS, PAYING FOR PARKING

- Implications of lost revenue. What could SFMTA do with this lost revenue from meters? What happens when a person dies and the placard is not returned or deactivated? What was the legislative intent of CA to comply with federal law?
- I am struck with how placards are free, and that there is no income generation at all. There must be a way to raise revenue to offset cost of program/enforcement
- Should people with disabilities pay for parking? Some people say no.
- I spend my life work making sure people with disabilities are seen and part of the fabric of life; that means people both with visible and invisible disabilities. Excluding somebody could mean excluding them from being able to park. Disabled community took it to the Supreme Court, saying equal access is not something you have to pay for. On the other hand we have to recognize that there are people abusing this.
- Realistic approach would show that more people are disabled and poor than statistics. We need to use a different definition of poverty than the federal poverty line; it's expensive to live in SF.
- Why are only disabled people incentivized (exempted from paying)? Why not low income people of all kinds?

ENFORCEMENT

- There is a big disconnect between enforcement at different levels: how placards are issued, how they are enforced on street. State of CA has ultimate decision on issuance of placards. There are too many cars, and we're trying to use parking policies to limit number of cars at regional and local level. The real incentive to abuse placards is coming from outside the city—it's a regional, not just a local issue.

PERSPECTIVES ON DMV PLACARD ISSUANCE

- DMV seems like the pawn in the situation.
- DMV issues placards to people who present qualified documents.
- A request was made for a possible future presentation on DMV's discretionary and administrative authority. If we could know what DMV could do, it would help.

PERSPECTIVES ON MEDICAL PLACARD APPROVAL

- A doctor's default is to grant placard if the patient seems to need it, relying on people to be truthful and reasonable.
- We have heard anecdotally about abuse, for example that medical staff has placards.
- There is a reverse incentive for doctors in an HMO to just give the placard out.
- There could be better scrutiny of issuance of placards.

6. Meeting evaluation, next steps for upcoming meetings

At the conclusion of the meeting, participants were asked to either nominate themselves or another committee member to serve on the sub-committee, and to submit comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the meeting.