

Draft Policies for On-Street Parking Management

Visually accessible version

San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency

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Executive Summary

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) uses a combination of parking meters, Residential Parking Permits (RPP), time limits, and color curb regulations to manage on-street parking. On-street parking is part of San Francisco's transportation system and how the SFMTA manages that parking affects the overall success of the system. Coherent and effective on-street parking management helps create parking availability, thereby making it easier to park, reducing congestion and illegal parking, improving Muni's speed and reliability, and increasing public safety and economic vitality.

This document summarizes the SFMTA's considerations when determining what parking management strategies to use on a specific blockface or frontage. These guidelines articulate and clarify past practice to help parking management across San Francisco be more transparent, effective, and consistent with the SFMTA's overall mission and goals. They also establish a basis for improving these policies as part of the Agency's 2012 Strategic Plan.

The criteria for SFMTA decisions on where to use parking meters, RPP, and time limits are summarized below. When parking occupancy merits, the SFMTA manages on-street parking via the following tools:

- **Parking meters** manage on-street demand in commercial areas (downtown, neighborhood commercial districts, mixed use areas, and standalone businesses); public spaces and facilities that are major trip generators (parks, hospitals, universities, sports venues, concert halls, or transit stations); major transportation corridors; and high-density residential areas or buildings.
- **Residential parking permits (RPP)** are used to discourage commuters or visitors from parking long-term in low-density residential areas.
- **Posted time limits** (without parking meters) are used where parking demand does not warrant the installation of meters or where conditions on the street make installing meters impractical.
- **Color curb regulations** such as disabled parking (blue), passenger loading (white), commercial loading (yellow), time limited parking (green), or no parking (red) address site-specific needs.

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Introduction

“An effective, efficient, and safe transportation system is vital for San Francisco to achieve its goals for quality of life, environmental sustainability, public health, social justice, and economic growth.”¹ The SFMTA strives to manage on-street parking to support San Francisco’s overall goals for the transportation system,² including:

- **Improve safety for all road users.** Reduce circling and double-parking, lessening hazards for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other drivers presented by distracted drivers looking for parking.
- **Improve Muni’s speed and reliability.** Reduce circling and double-parking, helping Muni and other transit operators operate more reliably and safely, especially on busy commercial corridors.
- **Improve neighborhood quality of life.** Manage parking to improve access, reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance quality of life in San Francisco’s diverse neighborhoods.
- **Increase economic vitality and competitiveness.** Improve access to commercial areas whether by car, foot, bicycle, or transit. This facilitates deliveries, commerce, and overall economic activity for San Francisco’s businesses.

To achieve these on-street parking management goals, the SFMTA uses four tools:

- **Parking meters.**
- **Residential parking permits (RPP).**
- **Time limits.**
- **Color curb regulations³.**

¹ San Francisco City Charter, Sec. 8A.100.

² Ibid., “The Municipal Transportation Agency must manage San Francisco’s transportation system – which includes automobile, freight, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian networks – to help the City meet those goals.”

³ The policies for color curb regulations are beyond the scope of this document as they manage site-specific circumstances rather than parking across a geographic area.

These guidelines summarize where and when the SFMTA uses these tools, documenting and clarifying longstanding on-street parking management practices on San Francisco's limited rights of way. Clear guidelines help the SFMTA communicate how and where various management strategies are used, ensure practices are aligned with the Agency's overall mission, and increase the transparency of its parking management decisions. Likewise, clear guidelines facilitate dialogue among stakeholders during the public outreach and hearings that are a part of the parking management decision-making process.

The SFMTA uses the following principles to guide parking management decisions to achieve its goals:

- **Limited right of way should be well-used.**⁴ San Francisco is a dense city with a finite amount of public right of way, which is a valuable public asset. The SFMTA's parking management strives to maximize the utility of any right of way dedicated to parking vehicles and discourages long-term on-street vehicle storage in order to improve the use of the public right of way and the usable parking supply.
- **Parking availability is critical.**⁵ Maintaining a minimum level of parking availability is critical for delivering the SFMTA's goals for parking and transportation and is a core measure of parking management success. When a minimum level of availability is achieved, it is easier to find a parking space, drivers double park and circle less, access to businesses, and public safety are improved, as is transit performance.
- **Maintaining a minimum level of availability creates a desirable level of turnover.**⁶ Parking turnover is a consequence of maintaining parking availability. On blocks with low parking demand, availability can be maintained with little turnover. Conversely, blocks with high parking demand require more turnover in order to maintain a minimum level of availability. Thus, the desirable amount of turnover can vary block to block and will result from achieving a minimum level of parking availability.⁷

⁴ Right of way refers to the public area between property lines on opposite sides of a street (e.g., the sidewalks and street between parallel blockfaces).

⁵ Parking availability is defined as the percentage of legal parking spaces in an area that are not in use at a given time. For example, a block with 20 curbside spaces where 18 are occupied and two are empty has a parking availability of 10 percent.

⁶ Turnover refers to the number of cars that park on a block or block-face over some period of time. For example, if there were ten spaces on a block-face and a total of twenty cars parked in these spaces over a period of 8 hours then the average turnover per space would be $2.0/8.0 = 0.25$ cars per hour per space.

⁷ To illustrate how the right amount of turnover flows from creating availability (rather than availability flowing from turnover), consider the example of an area where there is high parking demand managed by time limits without parking meters. Drivers who need to park longer than two hours do the "two hour shuffle," moving their car every two hours in response to time limits. This creates turnover, but does not create parking availability.

- **Parking policies are designed to encourage travel by public transit and sustainable modes of transportation.** The SFMTA manages parking to prioritize public transit, walking, bicycling, and the needs of paratransit and commercial deliveries. City policy notes that “parking policies for areas well served by public transit shall be designed to encourage travel by public transit and alternative transportation” and that “decisions regarding the use of limited public street and sidewalk space shall encourage the use of public rights of way by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit, and shall strive to reduce traffic and improve public health and safety.”⁸
- **Managing parking demand promotes San Francisco’s commercial vitality.** On-street parking spaces in commercial and mixed use⁹ areas—defined as any place where business occurs—are intended for commercial use when businesses are open. Parking needs for commerce—loading and unloading, as well as customer access—are a high priority. Managing parking demand helps to ensure that traffic and parking congestion do not limit economic opportunities and growth.
- **Managing parking demand improves quality of life in San Francisco’s residential neighborhoods.** In 1976 the City established a permit system to restrict long-term parking of cars by commuters and employees in certain designated areas while exempting residents from those restrictions. This reduces the number of drivers that park or search for parking in residential areas.
- **Parking management is a tool to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants.** The SFMTA manages parking to minimize environmental impacts: “Because the Agency has significant influence on San Francisco’s transportation sector, which is responsible for fully half of the carbon emissions produced within the City, the voters direct the Agency to develop and implement strategies for substantially reducing those emissions.”¹⁰
- **Parking management helps fund public transit in San Francisco.** The City Charter requires that the SFMTA “ensure that parking policies and facilities contribute to the long term financial health of the Agency”¹¹, and all parking revenues return to the SFMTA to fund Muni.¹² Although parking revenues help the SFMTA to fulfill its responsibilities, revenue considerations alone do not determine parking policy.

⁸ San Francisco City Charter, Sec. 8A.115.

⁹ A mixed use block is defined as a block containing both commercial and residential uses and often contains residential units located above street level commercial units or residential units between commercial units.

¹⁰ San Francisco City Charter, Sec. 8A.100.

¹¹ San Francisco City Charter, Section 8A.113.

¹² Revenues from the implementation of parking management, like parking meters, are dedicated to fund public transit. Revenues from Residential Parking Permits only cover the operating costs of the program.

- **Parking policies strive to maintain consistency across the City.** The SFMTA strives to have consistent parking regulations (i.e., operating hours/days) across the City and, where possible, to reflect this consistency at the street or blockface level so that drivers have a predictable, simple, and positive experience when parking in San Francisco. When implementing parking regulations, this consistency is prioritized over attempting to more precisely match parking management (e.g., meter operating hours) to demand.

Guidelines for Parking Meters

This section describes how the SFMTA determines whether or not to use parking meters as a parking management tool for a particular blockface or frontage. Parking meters are tools to manage demand for a finite supply of on-street parking spaces and, therefore, to achieve parking availability goals.

Parking occupancy—a core measure for assessing parking policy—and zoning are the SFMTA’s primary considerations when determining if parking meters are the right parking management tool (See Appendix A).¹³ In certain zoning designations, if peak parking occupancies of 80 percent or greater are observed during standard meter operating hours, parking meters are likely appropriate in order to ensure that drivers can conveniently find a space.¹⁴ Conversely, if peak parking occupancy is low (less than 60 percent peak occupancy), the SFMTA typically does not use meters because there is not a parking management issue to address. In areas where new development (based on zoning or adopted plans) is expected to intensify demand for parking, meters may be installed even when occupancy is low in anticipation of future parking demand (See Figure 1). In cases that are ambiguous, the SFMTA also considers a host of contextual factors, summarized below, in addition to parking occupancy and zoning.

Although each parking management situation is unique, metering decisions can be divided into three broad categories:

- Areas appropriate for metering.
- Areas not appropriate for metering.
- Additional factors for consideration.

Areas appropriate for metering

Meters are used where high parking demand or zoning (See Appendix A) imply a need for active parking management to ensure a minimum level of parking availability to improve access, promote commercial activity, discourage long-term car storage, and anticipate future parking problems. The SFMTA generally considers the following areas or cases appropriate for metering:

¹³ Occupancy is the inverse of availability. For example, if 18 of 20 parking spaces on a block are occupied, then the parking occupancy is 90 percent. Parking occupancy can exceed 100 percent when cars are parked illegally, for example in red zones or in front of driveways.

¹⁴ Peak parking occupancy, in this case, refers to the percentage of occupied spaces on an unregulated blockface during business hours.

Commercial areas

San Francisco is defined by its vibrant commercial corridors and businesses. Parking meters promote economic vitality by facilitating access to local business by customers and distributors. Most downtown and neighborhood commercial districts, including those with residences above commercial establishments, are already metered throughout San Francisco. In some cases, meters will round the corner from commercial districts onto the commercial frontage of cross streets (See Appendix B, Figure 1 for an example).

Access to public facilities

Many public institutions—including transit stations, stadiums, civic buildings, libraries, tourist attractions, universities, and hospitals—are major trip generators and generate high parking demand. Parking meters are an efficient and effective way to maximize motor vehicle access to these public resources; if demand does not merit metering, the SFMTA may use time limits without meters (See Appendix B, Figure 2 for an example).

Access to public parks, recreational facilities, and open space

Public parks and open spaces are vital places of recreation for the City's diverse communities and visitors. Ensuring access to these shared spaces and their facilities, like tennis courts, playgrounds, or swimming pools, is an important consideration in managing on-street parking around public parks (See Appendix B, Figure 2 for an example).

Major transportation corridors

Congestion related to circling and double parking is a serious issue along San Francisco's core transit, bicycle, and driving routes. It introduces congestion and unpredictable delay into Muni operations, degrading its speed and reliability, and undermines the safety of cyclists and pedestrians. To reduce parking-related circling and double parking, the SFMTA may use parking meters to achieve a minimum level of parking availability along core transportation corridors. This is consistent with the goals for facilitating travel by more sustainable modes of transportation and improving the safety and experience of those who walk, bicycle, and take transit.

High-density residential buildings

High-density residential buildings generate a high demand for parking by visitors, deliveries, and residents alike, requiring active management of limited on- and off-street spaces. Meters may be used in such areas to discourage on-street residential car storage (as the number of potential vehicles can overwhelm nearby on-street parking supply), maintain access for deliveries and visitors to the building and broader area, reduce car ownership rates, and encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation (See Appendix B, Figure 4 for an example).

Areas not appropriate for metering

Parking meters are a tool to manage on-street parking demand. If an area has low parking demand throughout the day, the SFMTA generally does not use meters, and blockfaces that contain only single family homes are also considered inappropriate for metering. Despite the prevalence of meters in downtown San Francisco and other neighborhood commercial areas, over 90 percent of San Francisco's on-street parking spaces are unmetered. Non-residential areas without high peak parking demand—for example, some industrial areas—are also unmetered.

Posted time limits (without parking meters or RPP) may be used as an on-street parking management tool where parking demand does not warrant the installation of meters or where conditions on the street, such as a lack of sidewalks, make installing meters impractical. The SFMTA avoids using posted time limits as a widespread parking management tool because they do not effectively manage parking demand, are inconvenient for many drivers, and are labor intensive to enforce, which means lower levels of enforcement.

Additional factors for consideration

When determining where meters are appropriate tools, sometimes the SFMTA faces ambiguous cases, such as where parking occupancy and zoning merit meters but the current land use does not match the zoning. To evaluate ambiguous cases, the SFMTA uses the following factors to determine whether or not to use meters as a parking management tool:

- **Occupancy:** Metering helps create parking availability in areas with high parking demand.
- **Zoning and land use:** In evaluating the need for metering, SFMTA considers mismatches between current land use and zoning. Zoning is the primary consideration because it signals the planned use of that land, but current land use is also a consideration.
- **Community input:** Parking management decisions go through a public hearing process to ensure transparent public participation, and community input is a factor in determining how to manage parking.
- **Trip generator:** Being near a major trip generator may justify the use of meters even if immediately adjacent zoning does not obviously call for meters (See Appendix B, Figure 3 for an example).

- **Adjacency:** In areas with high parking demand where spillover from commercial use or a major trip generator is likely, meters are sometimes used to manage overflow parking onto residential streets and create more parking availability for local businesses (See Appendix B, Figure 5 for an example).
- **Continuity:** The SFMTA attempts to have a reasonable level of continuity and consistency on a given block or blockface. For example, if a blockface is predominantly commercial with a few residences scattered within, parking meters may be used on the entire blockface (See Appendix B, Figure 6 for an example).

Guidelines for Residential Parking Permits

This section summarizes how the SFMTA determines whether or not a block, blockface, or frontage is eligible for establishment of Residential Parking Permits (RPP) and the Agency's ability to administratively improve the effectiveness of this parking management tool.

In 1976 the Board of Supervisors determined that “one factor that has contributed to this deterioration in the City and County is the excessive and burdensome practice of nonresidents of certain areas and neighborhoods parking their motor vehicles for extended periods of time therein.”¹⁵ At that time, RPP were implemented as a way to discourage commuters or visitors from parking long-term in residential areas during the day. The RPP program operates on a cost recovery basis with incremental adjustments for inflation.¹⁶

Although RPP can help reduce parking demand in a residential neighborhood from those who do not live there, the existing RPP program does not and is not intended to ensure adequate parking availability for residents. The City has a limited supply of on-street parking and parking management tools are implemented to ensure access to that public right of way, while prioritizing the needs of sustainable transportation modes and commerce (See Appendix A).

When considering a block for RPP, the SFMTA assesses:

- Zoning and current land uses.
- Parking demand.
- Community input.
- Contextual factors such as nearby schools, hospitals, major sports venues, new developments, or public parks.

¹⁵ Board of Supervisors Ordinance 312-76.

¹⁶ Based on an interpretation of the California Vehicle Code Sec. 22507.1 that states, “The local authority may charge a nonrefundable fee to defray the costs of issuing and administering the permits.”

RPP is most commonly implemented on blocks or blockfaces (including alleys and secondary streets) that are primarily residential. Adjacency to commercial areas or other major parking demand generators where significant numbers of commuters and visitors compete with residents for available on-street parking is also considered.¹⁷ However, on residential blocks between adjacent commercial corridors where parking occupancy is consistently high, the SFMTA may not consider RPP the best tool to manage spillover parking (See Appendix B, Figure 5).¹⁸

The SFMTA may also establish RPP adjacent to residential blocks in order to discourage long-term commuter parking or other parking problems. Although the SFMTA does not typically establish RPP areas on non-residential streets, on blockfaces proximate to existing RPP areas where no competing source of parking demand is evident, RPP may be administratively extended beyond immediate residential boundaries. In cases where land use is not in alignment with zoning (e.g., unauthorized habitation in commercial, PDR, or light industrial parcels), the SFMTA uses the San Francisco Planning Department's zoning designations to make decisions regarding eligibility for the establishment of RPP.

Conversely, RPP is not recommended when:

- SFMTA surveys indicate no significant daytime parking occupancy issues or preponderance of commuter or non-resident visitors.
- In front of places where business or commerce takes place or public spaces and institutions.

Mixed use blocks, which serve many functions in San Francisco and support a broad array of commercial and light industrial activities as well as providing housing, often present ambiguous cases for RPP. Blocks or blockfaces with ground floor commercial uses, many of which have residents above, are typically ineligible for RPP; however, in some cases residents on such blocks can petition for inclusion in adjacent RPP areas.¹⁹ Regardless of the ratio of commercial uses to residences on such mixed use blocks, during business hours residential parking does not take priority over commercial parking (See Appendix A). RPP

¹⁷ When applying for an extension of an RPP area the proposed block(s) must be contiguous to an existing residential permit parking area. A petition signed by more than fifty percent of the households (one signature per household) on each proposed block must be submitted to Transportation Engineering, a subdivision of Sustainable Streets. To apply for the establishment of a new permit area in a neighborhood the proposed block(s) must be contiguous to each other and must contain a minimum of one mile of street frontage. A petition signed by at least 250 households (one signature per household) in the proposed area must be submitted to Transportation Engineering.

¹⁸ For example, the residential streets between the commercial corridors of Mission Street and Valencia Street.

¹⁹ Residents can petition for parking management along the blockface on which their property is located, but blockfaces that are not adjacent to their property line can be considered for the RPP program.

encourages long-term on-street parking by residents, which is in direct conflict with the needs of commerce for parking availability.

To improve the effectiveness of RPP as a parking management tool, the SFMTA may also exercise its ability to administratively create, expand, or reform RPP areas. The petition-based RPP process has, in some cases, led to disjointed areas that do not always align with the goals of RPP or broader parking and transportation goals. In such cases or where proactive planning for future developments would help to improve the effectiveness of this parking management tool, SFMTA can go through a public process to create, expand, or reform RPP areas.

Appendix A: Parking Management Matrix

This matrix summarizes how zoning and occupancy are used to suggest the appropriate parking management tool. The matrix does not reflect all possible cases, such as a single residential parcel in the midst of a dense commercial corridor that would be appropriate for meters for the sake of continuity. In this matrix, peak parking occupancy refers to the percentage of occupied parking spaces on an unregulated (prior to the implementation of parking management) block or blockface. Figure 1 outlines the specific zoning designations that make up each zoning group.

Figure 1: Zoning and parking occupancy

Zoning	Peak Occupancy > 80%	Peak Occupancy 60% - 80%	Peak Occupancy < 60%
Residential—Low and Medium Density	RPP ¹	Unregulated	Unregulated
Residential—High Density	Meter	Further Analysis ²	Unregulated
Mixed Use	Meter	Further Analysis ²	Unregulated or time limit
Industrial/PDR	Meter	Further Analysis ²	Unregulated or time limit
Neighborhood Commercial	Meter	Meter or time limit	Unregulated or time limit
Public	Meter	Meter or time limit	Unregulated or time limit
Downtown	Meter	Meter or time limit	Meter or time limit

Note: “Unregulated” parking areas are subject to the 72-hour time limit, tow-away times, and street cleaning hours.²⁰ Parking regulation in new or planned developments, e.g., Mission Bay, may reflect anticipated parking demand.

¹ For a block/area to qualify for RPP more than 50 percent of parked cars must be attributable to commuters.

² These cases may require additional SFMTA analysis as outlined in this document.

²⁰ California state law (California CVC code 22651(K))

Figure 2: Zoning categories

Zoning Category	Zoning Designation*
Residential—Low and Medium Density	RH-1, RH-1(D), RH-1(S), RH-2, RH-3, RM-1, RM-2, RM-3, RED, RTO, and RTO-M
Residential—High Density	RM-4, RC-3, RC-4, RH-DTR, SB-DTR, TB-DTR, and PM-R
Mixed Use	CRNC, CVR, CCB, MB-O, MUG, MUO, MUR, RSD, SLI, SLR, SPD, SSI, SSO, and UMU
Industrial/PDR	C-M, M-1, M-2, PDR-1-B, PRD-1-D, PDR-1-G, and PDR-2
Neighborhood Commercial	NC-1, NC-2, NC-3, NC-S, NCT, NCT-1, NCT-2, NCT-3, PM-MU1, PM-MU2 and all individual NCD and NCT districts
Public	P and MB-OS
Downtown	C-2, C-3-G, C-3-O, C-3-O(SD), C-3-S, and C-3-R

* Areas marked for large scale development, such as the Mission Bay Redevelopment Area (MB-RA) and the Hunters Point Shipyard Redevelopment Area (HP-RA), are not under the purview of the San Francisco Planning Department and absent from this table. For further clarification within these areas see specific redevelopment plans. To the extent that the SFMTA is involved with planning parking solutions in these areas, the SFMTA will align development guidelines with existing zoning designations recognized by the Planning Department.

Appendix B: Zoning Analysis

Zoning Designations

 C-2 (Community Business)	 RM-1 (Residential-Mixed, Low Density)
 M-2 (Heavy Industrial)	 RM-2 (Residential-Mixed, Moderate Density)
 MB-RA (Mission Bay South Redevelopment)	 RM-3 (Residential-Mixed, Medium Density)
 MUO (Mixed Use Office)	 RM-4 (Residential-Mixed, High Density)
 NCD (Neighborhood Commercial District)	 RTO-M (Residential Transit Oriented - Mission)
 P (Public)	 SB-DTR (South Beach Downtown Residential)
 RC-4 (Residential Commercial, High Density)	 SLI (SoMa Service Light Industrial)
 RH-2 (Residential House, Two Family)	 SPD (South Park)

• Parking Meter

Note: Points on the maps below represent approximate meter locations. Continuous metering of appropriate areas is subject to varying street conditions (e.g., Muni stops, disabled parking spaces and other colored curb regulations, driveways, bulbouts, parklets, etc.).

Figure 1. Meters on Irving Street between 7th Avenue and 8th Avenue round the corners from the commercial district onto the adjacent residential blocks along the commercial parcels.



Figure 2. The blockfaces bordering the public park at Washington Square are metered.



Figure 3. On the blocks roughly bordered by Jefferson to the North, Bay to the South, Powell to the East, and Jones to the West parking meters are used to manage the high demand around Fisherman's Wharf, a major trip generator.



Figure 4. Metering is used to manage parking around the high density residential buildings on Sacramento and Clay Streets, between Polk and Larkin Streets.



Figure 5. On 25th and 18th Streets, residential areas have been metered to manage overflow from the commercial zones on Mission and Valencia.



Figure 6. On Union Street at Franklin Street, meters have been added adjacent to parcels of all zoning designations to achieve a reasonable level of continuity and consistency.

