

So here we find another Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free initiative the city passed on but qualified San Francisco for some \$158 million. Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free already advocated increasing on-street parking meter charges and metering of currently free parking spots. Keep NYC Congestion Free describes it as "Value pricing for curbside parking." See pages 7 and 19 of our [Alternatives](#) report. Why did USDOT tell New Yorkers to impose a tax to cross all of our East River bridges and tunnels? Why did the supporters of the Congestion Tax fail to argue for this alternative that Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free proposed and got San Francisco the dollars. The public ought to know; the public deserves to know.

<http://wheels.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/fix-parking-cure-congestion/>

 Wheels Blog

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Can Parking Policy Ease Congestion?

By [Azadeh Ensha](#)

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This fall, San Francisco hopes to do what New York City didn't: successfully combat congestion.

But the city's plan isn't to control the number of people entering the city. Instead, San Francisco hopes to cut congestion by reducing the number of drivers roaming the blocks in search of curbside parking.

[SFpark](#) is a pilot program that aims to test better parking management policies by installing [multi-space meters](#), like those all over Europe, in close to 25 percent of the city's approximately 24,000 metered spaces. That's an area roughly comparable to the 6,500 metered curbside spaces south of 60th Street in Manhattan.

In-street sensors would communicate with the meters to measure occupancy rates. Pricing would be based on the number of vacant spaces. Higher rates would be charged during peak hours; lower rates when demand was less. Currently, occupancy rates can only be measured using a hand count.

“This program is trying to test the idea that demand pricing can reduce congestion,” said Judson True, a spokesman for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, which is managing the program, with support from Mayor Gavin Newsom. “We will address the meter prices gradually. We’re looking at changing rates up or down 25 cents as often as every month.”

The goal of the program was to have an 85 percent meter occupancy rate with one to two available spaces per block. Last week, the contract to support the [Urban Partnership Program](#) grant needed to acquire the meters was passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. The city was hoping to replace all its meters with multispace ones in the next two to three years.

Mr. True said the transportation agency was also exploring options that would send text messages to drivers when their meter is running out, along with ways for drivers to receive parking information via a P.D.A. or other handheld devices. He added that the multispace meters will accept credit cards.

Donald Shoup, professor of urban planning at the University of California at Los Angeles and author of “[The High Cost of Free Parking](#),” advised the agency on its program and said he believed New York City should be monitoring SFpark very carefully.

“I think SFpark would work better in New York than any other city on earth,” Professor Shoup said. “No one can say if it works in San Francisco, it won’t work in New York. Everybody in New York says New York is different, but every city is different. Every city I go to thinks they’re unique, but one thing that’s the same is the parking problem. It’s not a green policy to put solar panels on buildings and have people circling their block for hours.”

“The only reason people are driving around in circles in New York and San Francisco is that the price of curb parking is so much lower than adjacent off-street parking, and if you want to park for an hour it’s a lot cheaper to drive around for 10 minutes looking for a spot,” he said.

This was an opinion shared by Wiley Norvell, spokesman for [Transportation Alternatives](#), a New York advocacy group that promotes alternatives to driving.

“The San Francisco initiative is really impressive in that it comprises such a large expansive portion of their parking spots,” Mr. Norvell said. “It harnesses what’s missing in New York. Meter grades in New York during peak hours are too low and so generate a lot of congestion. We’re in the age of reducing needless congestion, and parking is where we can manage it most effectively right now.”

A recent [Transportation Alternatives study](#) on underpriced curbside parking on the Upper West Side found that drivers on Columbus Avenue cruise a total of 366,000 miles a year, producing 325 tons of carbon dioxide, at a cost to drivers of \$130,000 per year in wasted fuel and more than 50,000 hours spent circling in traffic.

New York’s recent attempts at congestion pricing [failed to launch](#) after Democrats refused to put the bill to a public vote on the floor of the State Assembly.

Professor Shoup said he believed that the key to success for SFpark and other demand-based parking programs is to put meter revenue back into public services. He pointed to cities like Pasadena, Calif., which in 1993 began to use all meter revenue for city services.

“You have to show people this is a great idea to spend the meter money by putting it back in the neighborhood so that even people who don’t care about global warming will see the neighborhood improving,” Professor Shoup said. “Most people like this policy where it’s been tried because of the money they see being spent in their neighborhood.”

Apart from a return in their investment, there is also the concern that drivers do not want to pay any increased rates, a sentiment that Mr. Norvell felt was off-base.

“People feel like the key to making a city work is free, abundant parking,” Mr. Norvell said. “That’s the 1950s model, and New York has proved that wrong. For average drivers, it’s going to take some political leadership to convince people that demand pricing is good for the economy, the environment and for life. Parking in New York is so broken that hopefully there’s a window for innovation. Hopefully, the time for change is fast approaching.”