



## The City Raised Bus Fares. Time to Tackle Parking

<https://carfreecities.com/2020/05/12/the-city-raised-bus-fares-time-to-tackle-parking/>

In instituting a new fare for visitors using the “Free and Frequent” Duval Loop bus service, the Mayor said “We’re in some very strange and unusual times right now. We’re going to have to make some unprecedented decisions.” Taking her and her fellow Commissioners at their word, we ask them then, to turn their attention to managing our parking supply fairly. There are approximately 3,000 on-street parking spaces in Old Town below White Street. About 1/3 of these spaces are metered, 1/3 are marked Residential and 1/3 are unmarked. Residential Permits can be had for \$20 annually or \$0.05 cents per day. The unmarked spaces are FREE. That means two thirds of downtown’s public, on-street parking spaces are virtually FREE. And the metered-spaces are priced too low.

In addition, City and County employees are provided free parking downtown and people with those \$0.05 cents a day Residential Permit Parking passes can park FREE for four-hours in many close-in City and County lots and the beaches. What’s the result of all this under-priced parking?



*Yogi Berra: “Nobody goes there anymore. It’s too crowded.”*

Traffic and parking congestion is the result. It ruins everything. In a citizen survey, 58% of residents named erosion of quality of life as the top concern regarding changes in Key West, and traffic congestion ranked number one among residents’ quality of life concerns (Harris and Harris 2004). In a City-sponsored survey in 2015, traffic was ranked the number three “biggest issue” on the island, behind affordable housing and cost of living. We often hear residents lament something along the lines of the the old Yogi Berra saying in referring to downtown Key West. “Nobody goes there anymore. It’s too crowded.” They don’t want to go out to eat or a movie or shopping because they perceive it’s too crowded. The streets are too congested. It’s too hard to find parking. There are too many cars. Many people don’t consider alternatives because they perceive all that traffic and parking congestion makes it less safe and easy to bike downtown. And **our City bus system is in need of a radical overhaul if we expect people to actually use it.** So why do we have so much free and nearly free parking? Why are we making it so easy to drive when it just makes downtown too crowded to want to go to?

If we want to make a dent in traffic and parking congestion we need to apply the right parking strategies. We must manage our community's parking to its maximum. We can't give it away or subsidize it (under-price it), as this exacerbates congestion AND works against people using alternatives to driving.

## Some Reasons for Right-Pricing Parking

*When you have a scarce resource like parking spaces and you have a lot of demand for that resource, the best way to manage that is to price it properly. It's a simple economic principal.*

- Matthew Roth, Streetblog.org



## Discourage Cruising for Free On-Street Parking

When a city undervalues parking by providing free, nearly free, and under-priced metered parking, many people think like George Costanza, and always believe if they just try hard enough, they'll find a spot. When you undervalue street parking it encourages driving and causes congestion. Research indicates that in some congested downtowns up to 1/3 of cars are cruising for under-priced curb parking. This cruising causes congestion and pollution.

"A surprising amount of traffic isn't caused by people who are on their way somewhere. Rather it is caused by people who have already arrived. Our streets are congested, in part, by people who have gotten where they want to be but are cruising around looking for a place to park." says Parking Guru and UCLA Professor Donald Shoup in this article: Cruising for Parking.

## Encourage Turnover for Retail

Metered parking should be tailored to encourage turnover in retail areas to help merchants. People who want to park for longer periods should be directed to long-term parking lots. Consider that metered parking reflect location and time of day/week/season. For example, metered parking one block from retail shouldn't be the same price as metered parking three blocks away. Likewise, parking rates Christmas through Easter should be higher than in the off-season. Right-pricing metered parking is a science according to Donald Shoup. So what's the right price for curbside parking? According to the professor and author of *The High Cost of Free Parking*, "the right price is the lowest price you can charge and still have one or two spaces available on each block." He says the sweet spot for pricing meters is where 85% of parking spaces in a given area, at a given time, are occupied or one or two open spaces per block. If the spaces are always full or empty than you've missed the mark.

In our case, people visiting downtown look for either an unmarked free space or if they have a Residential Parking Permit, they can look for those too. The problem is, close-in residential streets are where everyone wants to find this free parking. This makes it very difficult for those who live in the core to park in their own neighborhood, let alone their own block or in front of their home. Likewise when we under-price metered parking, it encourages people who should be using long-term lots or even could be using the bus or biking, to drive and park for work. This doesn't help retail, restaurants and attractions.

## Encourage Visitors to Park in Long-Term Lots and Keep Em There

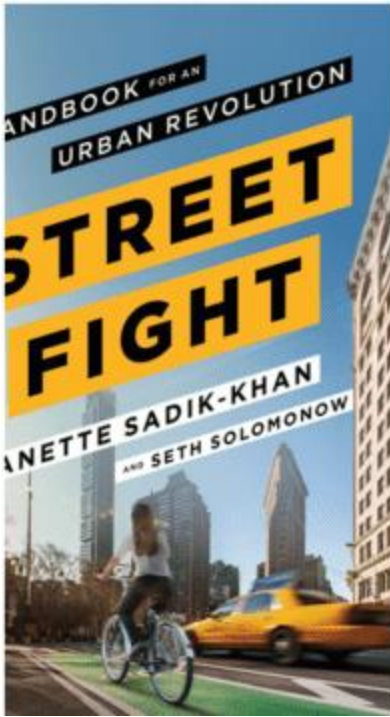
According to a 2019 Study published in the *Journal of Transportation Demand Management* at the University of South Florida entitled "Toward Car-Free Key West" by Mary Bishop, 82% of visitors to Key West arrive by vehicle, either their own or a rental. The same study referenced the Key West Chamber saying there were 2.7 million visitors to Key West in 2015. In answering the question "How did you get to the Keys for this trip?" in a 2018 TDC Visitor Profile Survey overnight visitors said: 35% by personal vehicle, 28% rental vehicle, 10% fly into Miami and rent a car for a total of 73% by car. Twenty-three percent (23%) flew directly into Key West Airport, 1.5% into Marathon Airport and 1.5% came by tour bus. A Visitor Volume and Spending study from the same year said there were 2.6 million visitors to the Keys and 2.16 million of those were overnight visitors.

However you slice and dice the data, THAT'S a lot of cars on our little island. Overnight and day visitors, like George Costanza, prefer to find free parking. Many of our downtown hotels, inns and B&Bs don't provide adequate parking. So faced with a choice of hunting for those elusive 1,000 unmarked free spots downtown or paying upwards of \$20 a day or night for parking, it isn't surprising that many overnight and day visitors choose to try and park in the neighborhood. The only solution to direct them toward long-terms lots is to take that choice away (#4 below).

## Fairness and Equity

Former New York City Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Kahn said: "Streets are some of the most valuable resources that a city has, and yet it's an asset that's largely hidden in plain sight." Streets and sidewalks take up 25 to 50 percent of a typical U.S. city's land. New York City, for example, is on the lower end of that scale at 28 percent and Chicago (42 percent), Washington D.C. (43) and Portland, Oregon (47) are at the higher end. I wish I could figure out Key West's percentage but it is likely in this range. Is it fair that so much of our community's valuable asset is provided so cheaply for the sole purpose of providing car storage for people who can afford to own and maintain cars? Simply put, the answer is no.





Janette Sadik-Khan

Providing parking isn't free. And no, the gas tax you pay doesn't cover the cost of maintaining our roads. General taxes on everyone pay as much or more. The cost of land, pavement, street cleaning, and other services related to free parking spots come directly out of tax dollars (usually municipal or state funding sources). Each on-street parking space is estimated to cost around \$1,750 to build and \$400 to maintain annually. In a place like Key West, the cost is likely higher because this doesn't include the cost of the real estate underneath the asphalt. "That parking doesn't just come out of thin air," Shoup says. "So this means people who don't own cars pay for other peoples' parking. Every time you walk somewhere, or ride a bike, or take a bus, you're getting shafted."

## It's a Wasteful Use of Valuable Land

According to Zillow the average value of real estate in Key West is \$692 per square foot. We realize that real estate downtown around Duval Street is worth even more, but we'll be conservative here. Say that typically on Duval, half of that value is for the land or \$346 per square foot. A typical parking space is 160 square feet (20" x 8"). Do the math. That parking space is worth \$55,360. Would you give this away free or underprice it? How would you price the value of something we say we want less of?



*When land is this valuable, isn't it better to use for people instead of cars? Yes! The roaring success of the Duval Street Pocket Park proves the point that we should use this valuable community asset for people. And that when we do use it for cars we need to price it much higher.*

## Additional Revenue for Transportation Alternatives

While not the main goal of right-pricing parking, it will bring in additional revenue. A good portion of that additional revenue should go into the City's Transportation Alternatives Fund that provides things like the Duval Loop, the Transportation Coordinator's salary, bicycle racks, bus stop signage, protected bicycle lanes, wayfinding signage and more.

## What We Should Do

The following proposals are meant as a starting point for discussion. Thoughtful people can fine tune the details and numbers, and this is especially true during an economic downtown. But we stand by the thrust of the basic points. We should point out that we aren't proposing these measures to simply raise revenue. We should do these things because they will improve our quality of life, business prosperity, and environment. The fact that taken as a whole they may raise some additional revenue is a bonus. We should also stress that you need to do all these things together in a coordinated fashion. They work together. They support each other. They build upon each other.

### 1. Raise the Price on Metered Parking

In most places downtown, \$4 an hour is too cheap to price this valuable real estate asset. Especially when the minimum to park in most garages or lots is more. Raise the rates to \$5 or more immediately. Vary the prices so that it is more expensive during peak periods of the day and peak times of the year. For the very most convenient spaces, consider using a progressive price structure to favor short-term users. For example, charge \$5.00 for the first hour, \$6.00 for the second hour, and \$7.00 for the next and so on.

**Meters Must Be Priced Higher Than Garages/Lots.** If the City is considering raising garage and parking lot rates at its facilities, we must remember the on-street metered rates always need to be more than surrounding garages and lots, and that needs to be common knowledge. Otherwise people will want to try and park on the street first and that leads to the Constanza cruising congestion problem.

### 2. Raise the Price on Residential Parking Permits

\$20 for an annual permit comes out to \$0.05 cents a day. \$0.05 CENTS A DAY! To ease into this how about next year charging \$120 for the first vehicle. At \$10 a month, this is still a bargain. Charge \$250 for a household's second vehicle and progressively on up. Then raise these rates automatically with inflation.

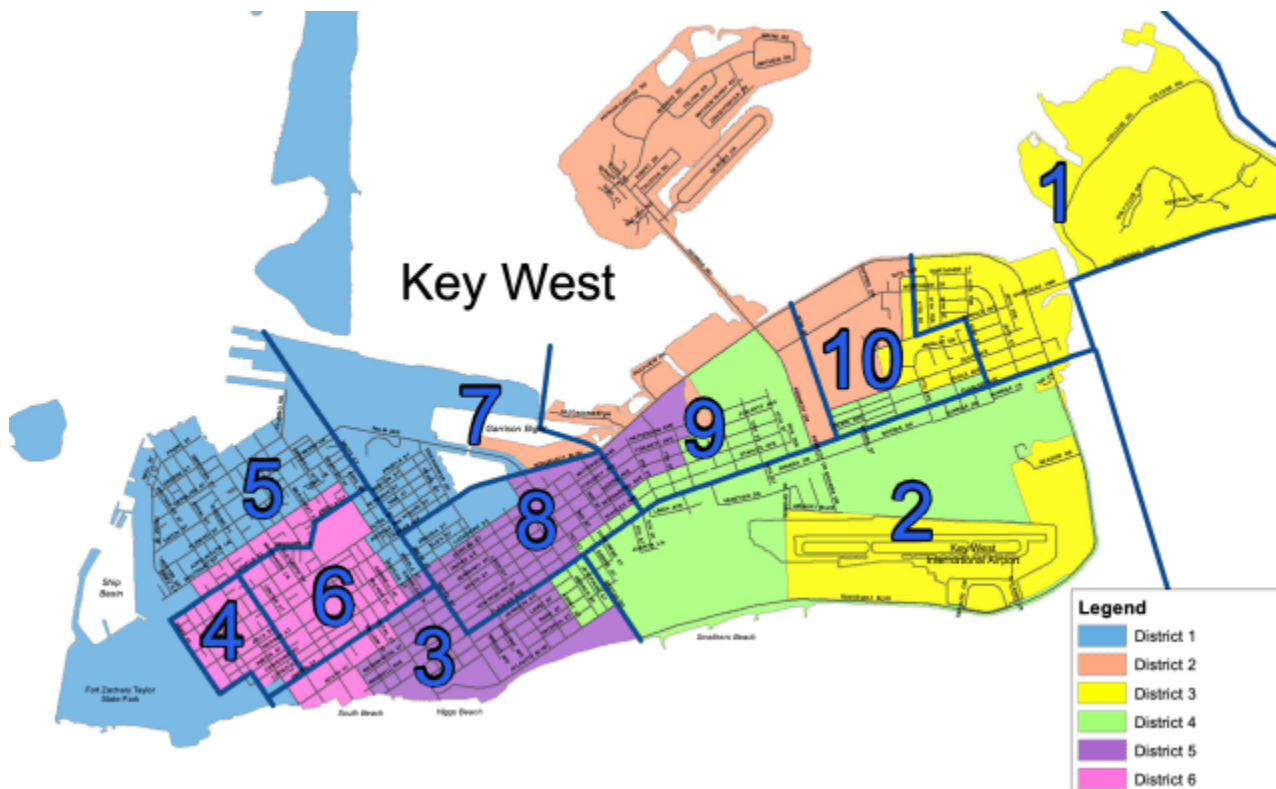
### 3. Institute Residential Permit Parking By Zone

Residential Permit Parking is intended for residents to be able to park within a few blocks of their home. Zones should be small and only available to people who reside or have a business within that zone. This is common practice throughout North America.. Wikipedia says "residential zoned parking is a local government practice of designating certain on-street automobile parking spaces for the exclusive use of nearby residents. It is a tool for addressing overspill parking from neighboring population centers such as a business or tourist district. "

In Key West there's only one Zone. It covers the entire City, including Stock Island. Anyone can purchase this pass for \$20 or \$0.05 cents a day. The permit allows folks on Stock Island to drive into downtown and use one of those 1,000 on-street Residential Permit Parking spaces for virtually FREE. As long as they like. For people living north of White Street, the only reason to get a pass is to be able to park for 5 cents a day downtown. The people who live in the core are the ones that need a permit to ensure parking near their home. But with 10,000

to 12,000 annual permits out there and only 1,000 Residential Permit Parking spaces, those spaces are hard to come by, especially in season. It isn't fair to the people who live downtown. Lets just call these passes what they are, Residents Please Drive and Park Anywhere You Like for Free Passes and not pretend to call them what they aren't. Most people aren't using them to park NEAR THEIR HOME but they might be using them to park near your home. We often hear the tired argument that "I pay city taxes, so I should be able to park for free anywhere in the City I want." But if these people lived on Fleming or Thomas Streets, would they really say the same thing? Doubtful.

\*If you live outside of downtown, we may have a transitional solution that will ease people into this, so stick with us and read #4 below before you dismiss this.



*To do Residential Permit Parking By Zone we could start by using the six Commissioner Districts represented by the colors or the ten voting precincts represented by the numbers, as these boundaries are already drawn.*

#### 4. Put Limits on the Unmarked Spaces Downtown

There are about 1,000 unmarked, free spaces downtown. One can park in these spaces for three days or 72 hours before having to move a vehicle. These are the parking spots that the George Costantza's among us, whether they be overnight or day visitors, look for. Limit the parking in these spaces to a certain number of hours, say 4 hours between the hours of 9 am and 11 pm. Turn more of these spaces over to Residential Parking Permit and more to metered parking spaces.

**\* Transitional Idea.** Say the City went ahead and instituted a Residential Parking Permit By Zone so that people could park near their home. Say further that the City put a 4-hour limit on the 1,000 unmarked spaces downtown, BUT exempted vehicles with any zone's Residential Parking Permit. Using the voting precinct numbered parking districts above, for example, a person who holds a Zone 1 Residential Parking Permit could park in any unmarked space in the City, including the 1,000 unmarked spaces downtown. So instead of competing with homeowners for their spaces, they are competing with visitors but have just as many spaces to choose from. The sign in the picture below could say, for example, "4-Hour Parking, 9 am to 11 pm, Except Vehicles With Any Zoned Residential Parking Permit." The Permits would still get you 4-hours free at the

beaches and select lots, but would no longer compete with people who actually live on a block. And yes, all the Zones should be the same \$120.

## **5. Make It Easy to Find Long-Term Parking with Better Wayfinding**

Direct people to long-term garages and parking lots with better wayfinding signage and marketing before they get to downtown and through downtown, all the way to the destination. This way visitors aren't hunting all over the place for on-street parking. Even better, coordinate with all the lots and garages and direct people to those less full with dynamic signage. Don't forget to develop a truck/delivery plan for downtown so it is less congested with delivery and trash and recycle vehicles at all times of the day. Coordinate the merchants and plan the hours.

## **6. Build a Park-n-Ride Lot on Stock Island and Bus People In**

The 10-Year Key West Transit Development Plan calls for expanding the current Key West Transit facility on Stock Island to establish an Intermodal Center with bus transfer facilities and a park-and-ride for personal vehicles and tour buses. The plan calls for busing visitors to downtown every 15 minutes, seven days a week on a free Key West Intermodal Connector bus "allowing the reduction of ever-increasing congestion and parking demand."

## **7. Give the Parking Department Additional Resources**

In order to do this, we need to better equip our small Parking Department with the resources to collect better data, do more robust research analysis of the data, do community outreach and ever importantly enforce the rules. And enforcement more than pays for the staff necessary to do these things. So yes, even in a downturn, get more people to do this, it pays for itself.

## **8. Make It Easier and Safer to Bike, Walk and Take the Bus**

Coupled with all of this parking management activity is the knowledge that if we expect more people to switch from driving alone everywhere, we need to radically remake Key West Transit so that all routes resemble the Duval Loop – free, frequent and simple. We need to make it safe to bike everywhere in town by slowing cars down and providing protected bicycle lanes, greenways, trails and lots more bike parking. We also need to make it more safe to walk. We need to slow the cars and give preference to pedestrians on our crowded downtown streets – not cars.

## **Result**

When we right-price our valued downtown on-street parking via these parking management techniques and coordinate them with robust bike, walk and transit alternatives, it makes our streets more efficient and less crowded.

With less cars on our streets we just might get to turn over more of this valuable community asset to encourage more space on our main commercial streets downtown for wider sidewalks for people to sit, chat, eat and people gaze. It doesn't have to be entire streets. It can be parts of streets or even just parklets. We might be able to turn over more of that asset for protected bicycle lanes and bicycle parking too. Or use it for trees. Even art.

Doing all this will be more friendly to our environment and help combat climate change. It makes us healthier. And happier too. Very importantly it helps local businesses prosper. It will help us build a thriving, vibrant downtown that visitors and residents will be happy to go to because it won't be perceived as so crowded – with cars – anymore.

# More Resources

## **Professor Donald Shoup's Parking Website**

**The Right Price for Parking.** A Streetfilms.org article and video.

**Parking Management – Comprehensive Implementation Guide;** 2 April 2020; by Todd Litman; Victoria Transport Policy Institute

**The High Cost of Free Parking.** An article and video at Vox.com

**Why Free Parking Is Bad for Everyone.** An article at Vox.com

**Draft 2005 City of Key West sponsored Park Study** *There's some good stuff in here.*

**City of Key West Carrying Capacity Traffic Study,** December 2011 – *This oft-referenced study measures the City of Key West capacity to “carry” or move and park cars conveniently using measures such as **Level of Service (LOS)** that are better used on highways, not where people live. No doubt that traffic flow can be “optimized” with better signal timing and the like, but physical improvements to the roads to make it quicker to get in and out and park, is now a thoroughly debunked science in good city planning. This stuff is better left to car-dependent mainland Florida places, not Key West.*

**Toward Car Free Key West by Mary Bishop University of South Florida**[Download](#)  
**March 2020 Transportation Report SAB**[Download](#)

*“When we design a society so that it is more convenient for cars we make it less habitable for humans.” A two-minute video that explains Parking Guru Donald Shoup's thesis.*