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Author

Cunneen-Franco, Morgan

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The Future of Urban Paid Parking: Learning from Davis's Seven Year Debate

Author Morgan Cunneen-Franco, University of California, Berkeley

Advisors Karen Trapenberg Frick and Daniel Rodriguez, University
of California, Berkeley

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16. Abstract In an era of urgent climate action and housing crises across California, parking policy has emerged as a powerful lever for transforming cities. While pricing parking is widely recognized by transportation experts as an effective tool for managing urban space and reducing vehicle emissions, implementing such policies remains politically challenging. The stakes of resolving parking policy deadlocks extend far beyond local politics. Unpriced on-street parking in high demand areas creates a cascade of significant negative externalities: drivers waste time circling, traffic and pollution increases, and drivers are disincentivized from shifting travel modes. My research uses a combination of both primary data (interview) and secondary data (archival text) to investigate a revealing case study: the protracted seven-year debate over a 2013 proposal to implement paid downtown parking in Davis, California. Why did Davis's paid parking initiative fail despite strong evidence supporting its benefits? And what policy design and political strategy lessons can we learn from this case to make paid parking policy implementation more feasible in other medium-sized cities? This study yields actionable recommendations for other cities seeking to implement paid on-street parking, including: the importance of capitalizing on momentum once paid parking is proposed, the need for elected officials to demonstrate political courage, the value of having multiple champions both inside and outside of government, the beneficial role of public education, and the impact of strong policy implementation. My research findings provide a roadmap for local governments to increase the efficiency of their transportation systems and advance California's broader climate objectives while navigating the complex dynamics that often derail initiatives to price parking.			
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The Future of Urban Paid Parking: Learning from Davis's Seven Year Debate



BY

MORGAN CUNNEEN-FRANCO

MAY 2025

UC BERKELEY
MASTER OF CITY PLANNING
Capstone Project

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Methodology	3
Literature Review.....	4
What Is Not Known.....	9
Background.....	9
Downtown Employee Parking Problem	15
2014 Downtown Parking Task Force Report and Outcomes.....	16
The Opposition.....	19
The Support	21
Findings	22
Reasons Paid Parking Proposal Failed	22
Lessons Learned.....	25
Conclusion	27
References.....	29

Figures

Figure 1: Barriers to Parking Reform from Kong et al., “Parking Policies in Six Continents”	7
Figure 2: Location of Yolo County and the City of Davis	12
Figure 3: The City of Davis and Downtown.....	13
Figure 4: Downtown Davis.....	14

Tables

Table 1: 2014 Downtown Parking Management Plan Recommendations.....	17
Table 2: Key Timeline of Events	19

Executive Summary

Despite the City of Davis's reputation as the Bicycle Capital of the United States, the vast majority of trips taken are by automobile. Davis has a very popular downtown where cars can park in free time-limited spots, including in on-street parking spots that are available on all block faces. The combination of a popular downtown with high car use has led to a parking management problem: **particularly during peak times, it is difficult to find on-street parking** which is the most desirable parking because it can get drivers closest to their destination.

To address this issue, a Downtown Parking Task Force (DPTF) was appointed to develop a Downtown Parking Management Plan (DPMP). Their October 2013 report recommended implementing priced on-street parking, but the ensuing debate continued for over five years until the proposal ultimately stalled.

Many other cities across the nation have had a similar need for paid parking to balance supply and demand but have similarly been unable to implement the policy. Davis's story affords a salient opportunity to study how paid parking may fail and learn how to get paid parking implemented when it is necessary.

I investigate why Davis's paid parking initiative failed despite strong evidence supporting its benefits. Additionally, I extract policy design and political strategy lessons that other cities could learn from if they wish to enact paid parking.

My research reveals several **possible reasons the paid parking proposal failed**:

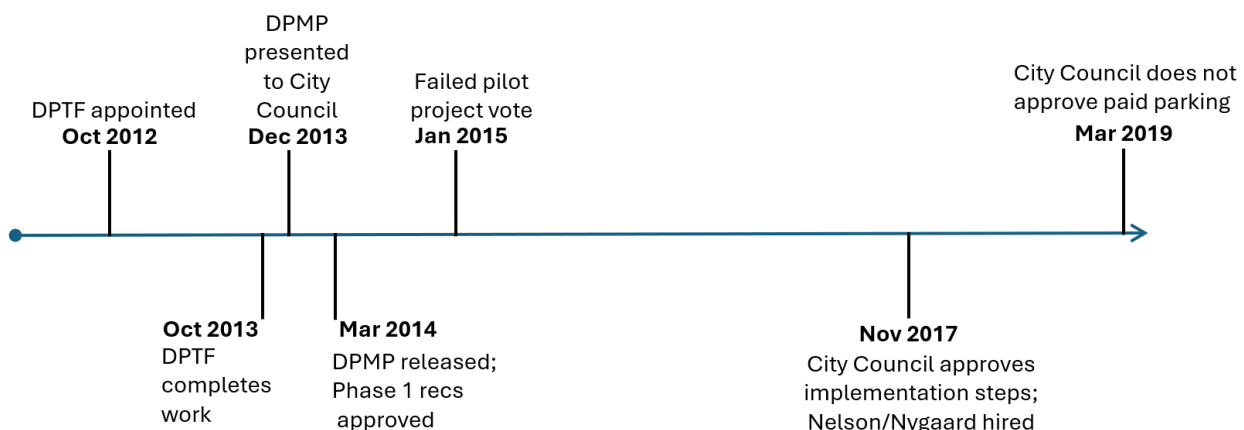
- Close relationship between downtown restaurant and business owners and City Council
- Lost momentum
- Lack of organized support

There are several **lessons for other cities who want to implement paid parking**:

- Strike while the iron is hot
- Educate public on paid parking
- Political courage is necessary
- Be strategic about timing
- Need consistent champions
- Good policy implementation is key

Scale: 1in = 1yr

Timeline



Introduction

People do not like to pay for things that were previously free. This statement is truer for parking than almost anything else. Businesses and governments in the United States have provided access to free, plentiful parking under the assumption that it is necessary for people to visit, and drivers have gotten used to it. However, land is a scarce and expensive resource which can oftentimes go towards higher value uses than parking, such as housing or businesses. Therefore, parking demand management is needed to ensure efficient use of existing parking which can discourage the building of new parking supply and avoid the externalities that come with it.

Implementing paid parking in downtown districts is one of the most challenging yet impactful transportation policy changes a city can undertake. While transportation experts widely agree that pricing parking can reduce congestion and increase parking turnover^{1,2}, cities across the US (and especially the western US) struggle to execute such programs due to passionate and organized public opposition.³

This brings us to Davis, California, a city with a thriving downtown that provides ample opportunities for dining, entertainment, and shopping.⁴ Due to downtown's desirability, finding on-street parking during peak times is difficult. The City does not charge for on-street parking, creating little turnover in parking spaces and leading to driver frustration and increased traffic from cruising for parking.

In October 2012, the Davis City Council appointed a Downtown Parking Task Force (DPTF) to develop a parking management plan. The resulting report recommended implementing priced on-street parking, however the ensuing debate continued through 2019, where the proposal ultimately stalled, over five years after it was proposed. Throughout the debate, many downtown businesses and Davis residents expressed opposition to paid parking, citing perceived future economic harms—concerns that mirror those raised by citizens elsewhere when similar policy changes are proposed.

This case study investigates the protracted seven-year debate over a 2013 proposal to implement paid downtown parking in Davis, California, a medium-sized Californian city with a discrete downtown. Why did Davis's paid parking initiative fail despite strong evidence supporting its benefits? And what policy design and political strategy lessons can we learn from this case to make paid parking policy implementation more feasible in other medium-sized cities? There is little guidance for how cities can overcome local opposition to a paid on-street parking proposal and successfully carry out this policy change, so this report will be a beneficial addition to the literature.

The report is structured as follows: methodology, literature review, background, followed by a discussion of the task force report, an analysis of those opposed to and supportive of the paid

¹ Donald Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*, Updated [edition]. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351179539>.

² Michael Manville, "Parking Pricing," in *Parking Issues and Policies*, vol. 5, Transport and Sustainability (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2014), 137–55, <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2044-994120140000005019>.

³ Manville.

⁴ Downtown Parking Task Force, "Downtown Parking Management Plan" (City of Davis, 2014), <https://www.cityofdavis.org/home/showpublisheddocument/11000/636700237486770000>.

parking proposal, my findings of why the paid parking proposal failed and lessons learned, followed by my concluding thoughts.

Methodology

This case study uses a combination of both primary data (interview) and secondary data (archival text). For my primary data collection, I conducted nine interviews with former and current city staff, former elected officials, community leaders, and community members who were involved in the parking debates. Interviewees included both supporters and detractors of the paid parking proposal. Additionally, I expanded my interviewee pool by using the snowball technique and asked each interviewee who else I should talk to. These interviews have helped me understand what political tactics were employed, who the stakeholders involved in the debate were, what key events helped lead to the demise of paid parking in Davis, and why expert opinions were not believed or how the expert opinions were rendered politically meaningless.

I also reviewed secondary data including the DPTF report, City Council staff reports, City Council minutes, DPTF minutes, and other communications, letters, news articles, and reports relevant to the paid parking discussion. The time period of these document searches spans from 2012, when the Task Force was established, through 2019, when the Task Force recommendations were put indefinitely on hold. Arguments have been made that charging for on-street parking is regressive and negatively impacts low-income people the most.⁵ Therefore, I analyzed archival text through an equity lens to understand if, and how, equity considerations were discussed and addressed in the proposal, how they were discussed during the ensuing years long debate, and if they contributed to the proposal's demise.

Nine interviews with eight people helped inform this report. These were with:

1. Brian Abbanat, former Senior Transportation Planner, City of Davis
2. Ron Glick, Davis Community Member
3. David Greenwald, Executive Editor, Davis Vanguard
4. Joe Krovoza, former Mayor, City of Davis
5. Brett Lee, former Davis City Councilmember and current Executive Director, Davis Downtown Business Association
6. Katie Yancey, Economic Development Director, City of Davis
7. Anonymous member 1 of the DPFT
8. Anonymous member 2 of the DPTF and downtown business owner

⁵ Manville, "Parking Pricing."

Literature Review

Research has consistently shown that most curb parking in American cities is free or underpriced causing a host of externalities: drivers waste time circling, traffic and pollution increases, and drivers are disincentivized from shifting travel modes.⁶ Research has also shown that charging the right price for parking can ameliorate these externalities.⁷ I reviewed Donald Shoup's pivotal book, *The High Cost of Free Parking*,⁸ and other texts that outline useful policy recommendations to reform parking such as setting the right price for curb parking and returning the parking revenue to the area it was charged. Although both the externalities associated with free or low-cost curb parking and the policy solutions are well known, little has changed in planning practice.

Most cities have been steadfast in their commitment to supplying free and plentiful parking because of the preconceived notion that people will be less likely to visit a business if there is little parking or paid parking.⁹ This literature review will provide an overview of 1) the negative externalities associated with free parking, 2) equity concerns, 3) policies used to address those externalities, 4) barriers to transportation policy change, and 5) the mechanisms through which policy implementation can happen.

Negative Externalities

Cruising, is when drivers search for street parking when it is not readily available, usually in busy central cities. Shoup synthesized the findings of 16 studies conducted between 1927 and 2001 on the effects of congestion in downtown areas and finds that on average 30 percent of all traffic are vehicles cruising for parking and they spend on average 8.1 minutes doing so.¹⁰ In the same article Shoup shows that drivers are more likely to cruise for curb parking if curb pricing is cheap, off-street parking is expensive, fuel is inexpensive, and the driver wants to park for a long time, is a solo driver, and values their time little. Another study shows that cruising time increases with travel length and parking duration, and falls as income increases.¹¹ Cruising also contributes to traffic congestion, including slowing down through traffic.^{12,13} Shoup and other researchers have argued that if curb parking was properly priced (where at least one or two parking spaces are available per block), drivers who are willing to pay could find a parking space, while more price-sensitive drivers would park further away or use cheaper off-street parking lots, thereby reducing cruising.¹⁴ A review of SFpark, which was an experiment in market-priced parking in San Francisco, found that cities may

⁶ Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*.

⁷ Donald Shoup, "Preface," in *The High Cost of Free Parking: Updated Edition*, 2017, <https://shorturl.at/zEeqs>.

⁸ Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*.

⁹ Shoup, "Preface."

¹⁰ Donald Shoup, "Cruising for Parking," *Transport Policy*, Parking, 13, no. 6 (November 1, 2006): 479–86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2006.05.005>.

¹¹ Jos N. van Ommeren, Derk Wentink, and Piet Rietveld, "Empirical Evidence on Cruising for Parking," *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 46, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 123–30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2011.09.011>.

¹² Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*.

¹³ Simon P. Anderson and Andre de Palma, "The Economics of Pricing Parking," *Journal of Urban Economics* 55 (2004): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2003.06.004>.

¹⁴ Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking*.

need to adjust prices based on the amount of time at least one space was available on the block; in many cases the meter cost needs to be higher to increase vacancy.¹⁵

Equity Concerns

Many argue that charging for parking is regressive, inequitable, and will harm low-income residents the most (vertical inequity).¹⁶ To the contrary, Manville argues that paid parking adheres to the “users pay” principle of equity.¹⁷ Paying for parking is in effect paying for a good, just as much as paying for a gallon of milk is and therefore is fair. Additionally, while a parking charge is regressive in its purest form, it is only regressive for drivers. Drivers are usually more well off, and many low-income people do not drive.¹⁸ However, to redress the harms experienced by low-income people who do have to drive, income eligible parking discounts can be offered. Additionally, parking revenue could be invested to improve and expand transit service to make it a more feasible transportation option.

Policies to Address Externalities

On-street parking fees should at least be equal to the cost of off-street parking to balance the demand for on and off-street parking options.¹⁹ Simply limiting how long someone can park, whereby they can park up to 2 hours, for example, for free and then must leave induces cruising and is therefore less efficient than a pricing mechanism. Arnott and Rowse’s modeling shows that people will cruise for parking as long as curbside parking is less expensive than garage parking.²⁰ By increasing the cost of street parking, it can incentivize drivers to free up on-street parking spots and park in a garage, thereby reducing cruising.

It is clear that cruising for parking creates welfare losses that can be ameliorated by charging for on-street parking. Additionally, it is evident that street parking is underpriced if cruising happens. In that case, prices should rise until cruising is eliminated.

Barriers to Transportation Policy Change

There are differing views on how successful policy is at changing people’s behavior. In practice and according to academic literature policy change is characterized as being slow and incremental because of people’s resistance to change.²¹ However, Marsden and Docherty argue that people are

¹⁵ Daniel G. Chatman and Michael Manville, “Theory versus Implementation in Congestion-Priced Parking: An Evaluation of SFpark, 2011–2012,” *Research in Transportation Economics*, Road Pricing in the United States, 44 (June 1, 2014): 52–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.retrec.2014.04.005>.

¹⁶ Manville, “Parking Pricing.”

¹⁷ Manville.

¹⁸ Manville.

¹⁹ Edward Calthrop and Stef Proost, “Regulating On-Street Parking,” *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2005.04.002>.

²⁰ Richard Arnott and John Rowse, “Downtown Parking in Auto City,” *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.08.001>.

²¹ Michael Howlett and Benjamin Cashore, “The Dependent Variable Problem in the Study of Policy Change: Understanding Policy Change as a Methodological Problem,” *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 33–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980802648144>.

more adaptable than previously assumed allowing for radical transportation policy changes.²² They use the 2006 Stockholm congestion charging trial as an example of a semi-permanent disruption causing people to permanently shift their behavior patterns as the program architects intended. Before the congestion charging trial started, the congestion charging policy was overwhelmingly opposed by Stockholm residents.²³ During the 6-month trial, traffic decreased by 22 percent inside the congestion charging cordon and public opinion of the trial improved. At the end of the trial, a public referendum was held and 53 percent of voters favored it, thereby ensuring the policy's permanence. The trial was successful at demonstrating the transportation policy change's benefits, thereby changing public opinion in favor of it, and permanently altering behavior.

Starting in 2003, the city of London instituted a congestion charging policy in the central city.²⁴ In early 2001 public opinion was firmly against the proposed policy with a 30 percent approval rating; however, it increased dramatically to 58 percent when Londoners were informed that the revenue would be reinvested in public transit. Immediately after the congestion charging policy began, traffic flow within the cordon decreased by 15 percent and transit ridership increased, fulfilling the policy's goals. Policy makers were able to overcome the public's initial opposition to congestion pricing by tying revenue to transit improvements showing that direct benefits can help overcome opposition to progressive transportation reform.

Public resistance as well as political and governance complexities are major barriers to parking reform.²⁵ Kong et al illustrate the various barriers that arise to implementing parking reform, whether that be paid on-street parking or removing minimum parking requirements (see *Figure 1* below). The authors surveyed private, public, and academic parking professionals across the world and found that among parking reform efforts, implementing on-street paid parking faced the most challenges. According to the practitioners this was due to people not wanting to pay for something previously free and business owners and property developers often objecting to any kind of parking reform.

Practical barriers may arise when the desire to provide on-street parking comes into conflict with other potential desired uses for the space such as outdoor dining.²⁶ Cost, staffing shortage, and lack of political will can cause lax enforcement thereby disincentivizing people from complying and creating another barrier to successful parking reform enactment. Institutional barriers to parking reform may include governance complexity, lack of political will, and weak collaboration among government departments.

²² Greg Marsden and Iain Docherty, "Insights on Disruptions as Opportunities for Transport Policy Change," *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 51 (May 1, 2013): 46–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2013.03.004>.

²³ Jonas Eliasson, "The Stockholm Congestion Charges: An Overview," *Stockholm, Sweden: Centre for Transport Studies*, 2014.

²⁴ John Peirson and Roger Vickerman, "The London Congestion Charging Scheme: The Evidence," in *Road Pricing, the Economy and the Environment*, ed. Chris Jensen-Butler et al. (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2008), 79–91, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-77150-0_5.

²⁵ Weichang Kong et al., "Parking Policies in Six Continents: Mixed Outcomes and Multifaceted Barriers to Reform," *Policy Design and Practice* 7, no. 3 (July 2, 2024): 343–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2024.2333602>.

²⁶ Kong et al.

Parking reform may also only be possible alongside legal reform.²⁷ Because parking reform often requires legal changes and therefore cannot be instituted by technocratic municipal staff alone, it becomes a political process, necessarily so. For example, changing local parking minimums may not be possible without amending a city ordinance which requires a City Council vote and can be a feat unto itself.

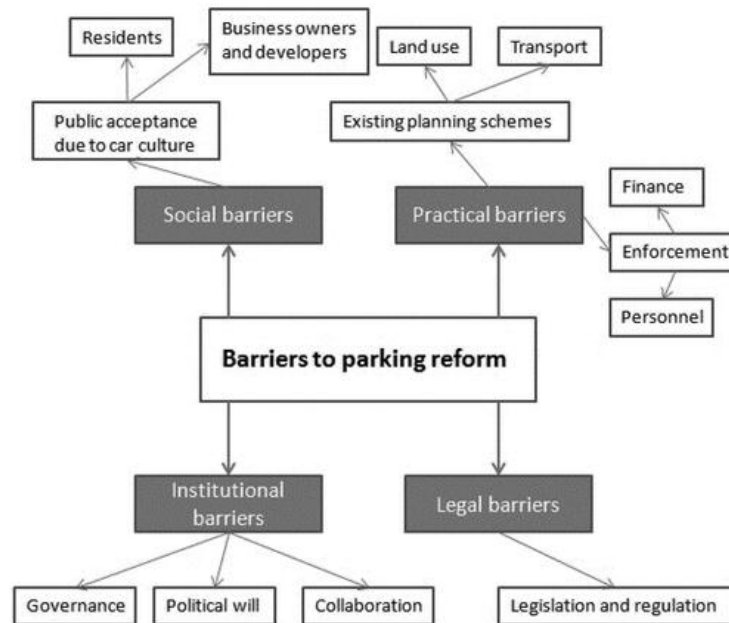


Figure 1: Barriers to Parking Reform from Kong et al., “Parking Policies in Six Continents”²⁸

Huber and Wicki explore transportation policy support in Switzerland and find that people oppose market-based policies whose costs vary based on the use amount, such as road pricing.²⁹ They find that high trust in government translates to support for transportation policies while people who rely on a car to get around are less supportive of transportation policies which they see as impinging on their ability to freely drive. The authors suggest that to ameliorate public opposition, policymakers should provide compensation to those most affected by the transportation policies.

Wicki et al. study whether putting together policy measures into policy packages increases public support for these measures and therefore increases the chances of successful policy enactment.³⁰ They find that command-and-control measures, such as vehicle emission or technology standards, are more popular compared to market-based measures, such as road pricing, which aligns with Huber and Wicki’s findings.³¹ Wicki et al. find that people are more supportive of policy packages

²⁷ Kong et al.

²⁸ Kong et al.

²⁹ Robert A. Huber and Michael Wicki, “What Explains Citizen Support for Transport Policy? The Roles of Policy Design, Trust in Government and Proximity among Swiss Citizens,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 75 (May 1, 2021): 101973, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.101973>.

³⁰ Michael Wicki, Robert Alexander Huber, and Thomas Bernauer, “Can Policy-Packaging Increase Public Support for Costly Policies? Insights from a Choice Experiment on Policies against Vehicle Emissions,” *Journal of Public Policy* 40, no. 4 (December 2020): 599–625, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X19000205>.

³¹ Huber and Wicki, “What Explains Citizen Support for Transport Policy?”

that include ancillary measures, such as an accompanying public information campaign, pilot phasing of the policy, and experts' involvement in the policy design, which work to offset or overcome potentially negative public sentiment of primary measures, such as road pricing.

Klein et al. look at the influence of political partisanship on support for transportation reform.³² They find that moderate and left-leaning urban populations are more supportive of transportation reforms but may find it difficult to gain support at the regional, state, or federal level due to partisan geographic sorting (people move to places where people with similar political beliefs live). Respondents were evenly divided on removing downtown parking for other uses and were overwhelmingly opposed to any measures that would force a reduction in driving. In general, they found that few conservatives support changes to the transportation status quo at all. Specific to charging for parking, conservatives were slightly more likely than liberals to say that drivers would just pay that increased cost without changing behavior. Additionally, due to increasing partisanship they highlight the importance of coalition building to pass progressive transportation policy.

Finally, Acheampong et al. investigate the possible role of autonomous vehicles in increasing the sustainability of cities' transportation networks.³³ They find that new sustainability related transportation policies should be paired with public education: people who exhibit high environmental awareness and incorporate sustainability into their everyday lives are more likely to support sustainable urban transportation policies such as autonomous vehicles. Succinctly, they state, "the road to environmental awareness leads to the road toward sustainable urban mobility."

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation can happen through a number of avenues. John Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework emphasizes the complex nature of policy development and theorizes that three streams influence the process: the Policy Problems Stream, Policy Solutions Stream, and Political Stream.³⁴ A situation must be defined as a problem, policy solutions must be developed, and political will, among the public, elected officials, and interest groups, is needed to act. Kingdon argues that policy change only occurs when these three streams converge within a policy window. Crucially, the Multiple Streams Framework recognizes that policymaking is not rational. Instead, it depends on "skilled framing and coupling of both identified and defined problems and general solutions to appeal to a majority of decision-makers during a brief time when action is possible."³⁵

Additionally, coalitions of diverse groups and people are often needed to pass public policy. However, because of this feature successful coalition-based action is difficult. Partner

³² Nicholas J. Klein et al., "Political Partisanship and Transportation Reform," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 88, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 163–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2021.1965495>.

³³ Ransford A. Acheampong et al., "Can Autonomous Vehicles Enable Sustainable Mobility in Future Cities? Insights and Policy Challenges from User Preferences over Different Urban Transport Options," *Cities* 112 (May 1, 2021): 103134, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103134>.

³⁴ John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2010).

³⁵ Richard Hoefer, "The Multiple Streams Framework: Understanding and Applying the Problems, Policies, and Politics Approach," *Journal of Policy Practice and Research* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42972-022-00049-2>.

organizations must have strong relationships and have a common interest.³⁶ Coalitions are more likely to succeed when they work at multiple scales (for example at the local group and government level) and have political entrepreneurs to broker relationships between organizations and coordinate coalition activities.^{37,38} Finally, the Multiple Stream Framework argues that coalitions in which local groups and activists are joined by subject matter expert intellectuals will be in a stronger position to successfully oppose policies.³⁹ However, this model does frequently break down. Oftentimes the inclusion of subject matter experts has no or even negative effects on coalition strength.

What Is Not Known

As described in the previous section, there is little that is not known about how paid on-street parking can influence behavior to reduce cruising, free up on-street parking spaces for patrons, and improve air quality. However, there is little guidance for how cities can overcome local opposition to a paid on-street parking proposal and successfully implement this policy change. My report examines this issue in the context of a medium-sized Californian city with a discrete downtown. Using a specific case study, my report will add to the literature by providing other cities with recommendations regarding program design and implementation and lessons learned from Davis's failed attempt at implementing paid on-street parking to help them succeed.

Background

The City of Davis is a medium sized city (~10 square miles) in the Sacramento Valley, located 14 miles west of Sacramento, California's state capital (see

³⁶ Amanda Tattersall, "Coalitions and Community Unionism," ed. Denise Faifua, *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 21, no. 4 (January 1, 2008): 415–32, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810810884821>.

³⁷ Tattersall.

³⁸ Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁹ John F. Devlin and Nonita T. and Yap, "Contentious Politics in Environmental Assessment: Blocked Projects and Winning Coalitions," *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 17–27, <https://doi.org/10.3152/146155108X279939>.



Figure 2). Davis, a city of approximately 66,000 residents⁴⁰, is surrounded by unincorporated Yolo County, and is characterized by its proximity to the University of California, Davis's sprawling campus located on the city's southwestern edge (see *Figure 3*). The city's proximity to the University causes Davis's population to ebb and flow based on the time of year as well as University enrollment.

While the majority of students live off-campus, the percentage of students that live on campus has steadily increased over the last 10 years as the campus increased housing construction. During the 2014-2015 academic year, UC Davis housed 29 percent of its approximate 32,130 students on campus.^{41,42} This increased to 41 percent of the approximately 40,000 enrolled students during the 2024-25 school year.^{43,44} Because the campus is outside of city limits, these students are not accounted for in the city's population numbers but are still visiting the City of Davis, including downtown Davis, and therefore are functionally part of Davis's economy.

Downtown Davis, is defined differently depending on the document consulted. For the purposes of this report, Downtown Davis is defined as between First Street, B Street, Fifth Street, and the railroad tracks, a 32-block area (see *Figure 4*).

⁴⁰ "QuickFacts: Davis City, California," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 13, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/daviscitycalifornia/PST045224>.

⁴¹ Andy Fell, "UC Davis Updates Scenario for Long-Range Development Plan," UC Davis, May 16, 2016, <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/uc-davis-updates-scenario-long-range-development-plan>.

⁴² "Fall Enrollment at a Glance," University of California, January 7, 2025, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/fall-enrollment-glance>.

⁴³ Julia Ann Easley, "Survey: Davis Apartment Vacancy Rate Continues To Improve," UC Davis, February 4, 2025, <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/survey-davis-apartment-vacancy-rate-continues-improve>.

⁴⁴ "Fall Enrollment at a Glance."



Figure 2: Location of Yolo County and the City of Davis

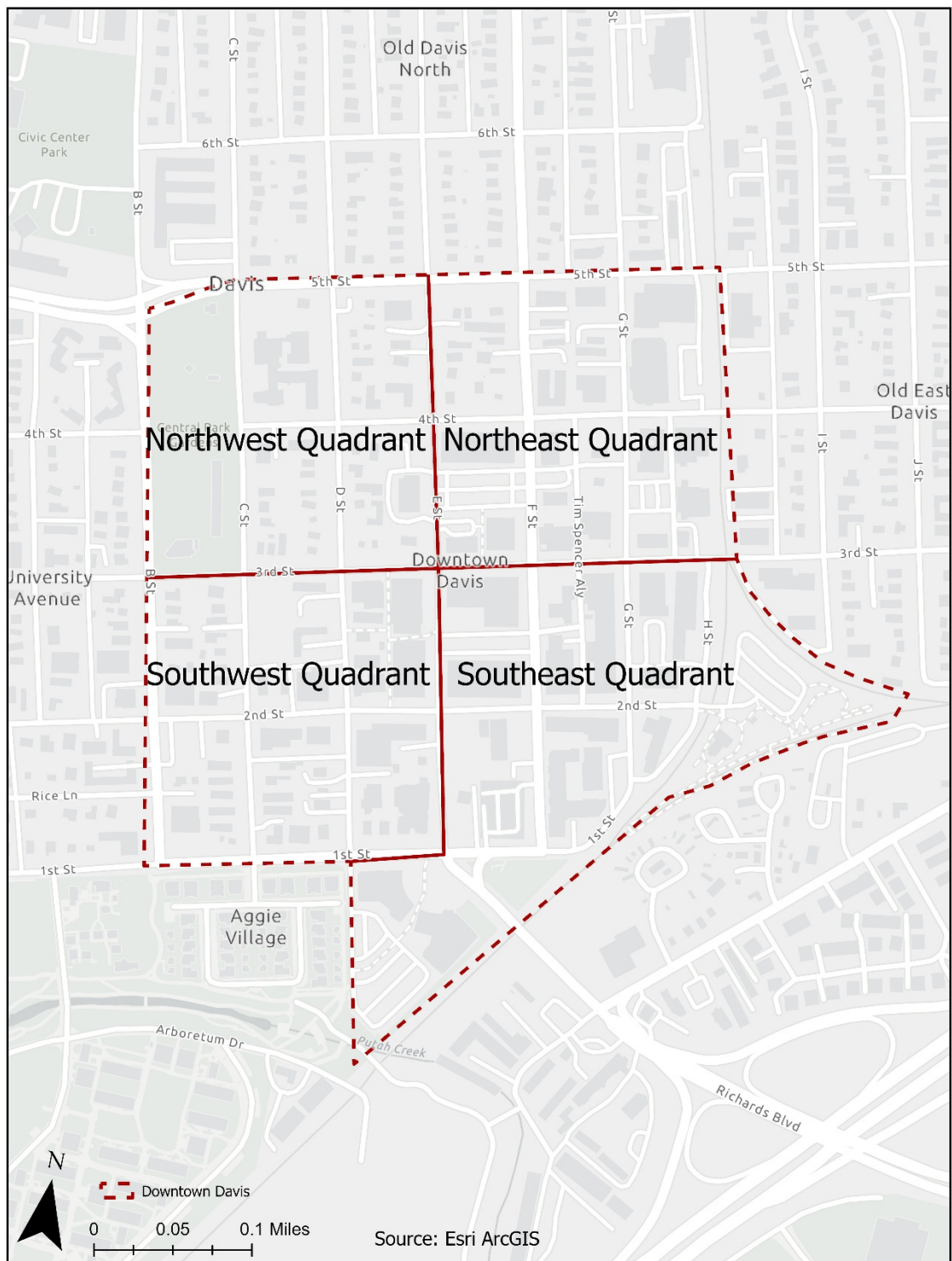


Figure 4: Downtown Davis

Davis is considered the bicycle capital of the United States, having earned the Platinum award from the League of American Bicyclists for being a bicycle friendly community.⁴⁵ The city prides itself on having built the first bike lane in the United States in 1967 and since then has built out an extensive network of protected multi-use paths and cul-de-sac cut throughs to improve connectivity.⁴⁶ Davis currently boasts 102 miles of bike lanes and 63 additional miles of multi-use paths that connect neighborhoods throughout the city.⁴⁷ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, around 17 percent of Davis workers commute by bike, however this does not take into consideration the many children who bike to school or people who run errands using their bike.⁴⁸

Despite Davis's bicycle friendliness and high percentage of people who use their bike to get around, Davis's predominantly low-density single-family development pattern has resulted in the majority of trips being taken by car. This leads to frequent traffic congestion during peak hours and difficulty finding parking downtown during peak times, usually in the afternoons and evenings, and especially on the weekends.

Downtown Davis is designed in a grid street pattern popularized in pre-World War II America with free on-street parking. However, this design did not anticipate needing to accommodate a population of 66,000 in addition to those who live on the UC Davis campus and visitors. Constrained space, high parking demand, and limited parking supply collectively cause downtown's parking headache.

This challenge is one of Davis's most persistent, dating back to the 1950s when the city commissioned its first ever parking study.⁴⁹ A total of nine downtown parking studies have been commissioned, each providing many similar recommendations in an attempt to help alleviate the parking issue. Over the years two public parking garages have been built to accommodate visitors in addition to a number of surface lots. However, as the community continued to grow, downtown's parking woes continued.

Downtown Employee Parking Problem

Many of the prime on-street parking spots in front of businesses are used by employees of said businesses.⁵⁰ These spaces are two-hour maximum spots, so to avoid a parking ticket, employees often move their cars to another block after the two hours are up, a reality both paid parking proponents and opponents understand. This takes up valuable spots that potential customers could use. The City of Davis does offer parking permits for downtown employees at \$10 per month

⁴⁵ "BFA Awards Database," *League of American Bicyclists* (blog), accessed March 21, 2025, <https://bikeleague.org/bfa/award-database/>.

⁴⁶ "First Bicycle Lanes in Davis," City of Davis, accessed March 6, 2025, <https://www.cityofdavis.org/about-davis/history-symbols/first-bicycle-lanes-in-davis>.

⁴⁷ "Davis Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure," City of Davis, accessed March 9, 2025, <https://www.cityofdavis.org/city-hall/public-works-engineering-and-transportation/bike-pedestrian-program/davis-bike-and-pedestrian-infrastructure>.

⁴⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, "B08006: Sex of Workers by Means of Transportation to Work," 2019, [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2019.B08006?t=Commuting&g=010XX00US\\$1600000&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B08006](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2019.B08006?t=Commuting&g=010XX00US$1600000&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B08006).

⁴⁹ Downtown Parking Task Force, "Downtown Parking Management Plan."

⁵⁰ Downtown Parking Task Force.

which are restricted to one parking garage, one parking lot, and some on-street parking in the Southeast and Southwest Quadrants.^{51,52} However, because on-street parking is free, many downtown business owners and employees choose to park in the free on-street spots instead of buying a parking permit that restricts their parking options to certain areas.

2014 Downtown Parking Task Force Report and Outcomes

On October 30, 2012 the Davis City Council appointed a Downtown Parking Task Force (DPTF) to guide development of a comprehensive downtown parking management plan.⁵³ The 12 person DPTF was made up of downtown business owners and property owners, environmental sustainability and climate advocates, and community members who had a background in transportation policy, among others. The DPTF membership was strategically designed to “reduce perceptions of bias”⁵⁴ in the final recommendations by the community. Two City Councilmembers, Brett Lee and Lucas Frerichs, were selected to serve as City Council liaisons to the DPTF.

The DPTF met monthly over the course of a year which concluded in the Fall of 2013. In Spring 2014, the Davis City Council received the Downtown Parking Management Plan (DPMP), the city’s ninth downtown parking study. The DPTF unanimously supported the package of 19 recommendations, as seen in *Table 1* below, to improve downtown parking management and supply, including paid parking, which most viewed as a necessary tool for effective parking management and a way to ration scarce parking spots.⁵⁵ Specifically, it recommended establishing paid on-street parking only in the Southeast Quadrant (see *Figure 4*). Crucially, the report notes that all recommendations were dependent on the application of paid parking to effectively address downtown’s parking challenges.

⁵¹ City of Davis, “X” Preferential Parking Permit Area (City of Davis), accessed November 14, 2024, <https://www.cityofdavis.org/home/showpublisheddocument/15130/637351450113470000>.

⁵² “Parking Permits,” Government, City of Davis, accessed November 14, 2024, <https://www.cityofdavis.org/city-hall/police-department/parking-enforcement/parking-permits>.

⁵³ “Minutes of the Davis City Council: Meeting of October 30, 2012” (City of Davis, October 30, 2012).

⁵⁴ Brian Abbanat, interview by Morgan Cunneen-Franco, In-person, November 15, 2024.

⁵⁵ Brian Abbanat et al., “Downtown Parking Task Force / Downtown Parking Management Plan Workshop Staff Report,” City Council Staff Report (City of Davis, December 3, 2013).

2014 Downtown Parking Management Plan Recommendations	
1	<i>Establish paid parking in Southeast Quadrant.</i>
2	Increase employee parking location options.
3	Increase employee permit fees and streamline employee parking to single “X” permit.
4	Convert Amtrak Lot to paid parking.
5	Restrict delivery vehicle double-parking between 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. for the area bounded by Second Street, Fourth Street, D Street and G Street (data could be used to refine limitations over time).
6	Eliminate on-street green waste in downtown for the area bounded by First Street, Fifth Street, B Street, and the railroad tracks.
7	Shift parking enforcement hours to 10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., Monday – Saturday.
8	Establish tiered-fine citation system.
9	Upgrade parking enforcement technology.
10	Invest in electronic information systems.
11	Develop transportation and parking alternatives campaign.
12	Collect quarterly parking occupancy and turnover data.
13	Explore voluntary private shared-parking district.
14	Provide van-accessible parking upon street resurfacing.
15	Streetscape Improvements.
16	Expand Parking Supply.
17	Provide administrative resources necessary for successful implementation of the Downtown Parking Management Plan.
18	Improve transit options into downtown.
19	Re-examine parking in-lieu parking fee policies and procedures.

Table 1: 2014 Downtown Parking Management Plan Recommendations⁵⁶

Staff presented the DPMP to the City Council on March 25, 2014. At this meeting the City Council decided to split the recommendations into Phase 1 and Phase 2 and move forward carrying out Phase 1.⁵⁷ Phase 1 included the “low hanging fruit” recommendations such as eliminating on-street green waste and investing in electronic information systems for the two parking garages. Crucially, paid parking was not included in Phase 1. The DPMP, however, was designed to pay for the implementation of recommendations with meter revenue not used to operate the paid parking program. Separating Phase 1 recommendations from their intended funding source, paid parking, caused funding challenges.⁵⁸

Over the course of five years, recommendations were prioritized, amended, and reprioritized. By 2019, most of these recommendations were put into motion or completed. Some were not, either because they were controversial, expensive, or other non-city entities were unwilling to

⁵⁶ Downtown Parking Task Force, “Downtown Parking Management Plan.”

⁵⁷ Robert Clarke et al., “Downtown Parking Management Plan: Phase 1 Status Update Staff Report,” City Council Staff Report (City of Davis, January 13, 2015).

⁵⁸ Clarke et al.

cooperate.⁵⁹ These include #1 (paid on-street parking), #4 (paid Amtrak Lot), #7 (extend parking enforcement hours), #13 (shared-parking district), #16 (increase parking supply), and #18 (improve transit). Because on-street paid parking was the most impactful policy to address the parking supply and demand imbalance, downtown's parking problems persisted.

While City Council continued to debate the merits of paid parking they hired the consultant Nelson/Nygaard in 2018 to assist with paid parking implementation planning to help address policy, budget, outreach, and design issues integral for proper roll out of paid parking.⁶⁰

Nelson/Nygaard authored a report "Davis Downtown Parking Strategy: Policy and Implementation Recommendations" which provided specific recommendations about where and when to institute paid parking, and the type of meter technology to use.

Additionally, city staff conducted a cost/revenue analysis. Costs include:

1. Parking meter equipment and American with Disabilities Act requirements
2. Additional Parking Enforcement Officers and scooters
3. Information security, finance operating expenses, and overhead
4. Parking meter operating costs
5. Hiring Parking Manager to oversee parking technology and policy
6. Vehicle maintenance, warranty, and insurance

Estimated revenues were less certain, as they were dependent on City Council's direction. Staff recommended a \$.50/hour parking rate during off-peak hours and a \$1.00/hour parking rate during peak hours.⁶¹ If this pricing strategy and all other staff recommendations about when and where on-street parking should be charged for were implemented, staff expected to collect an estimated \$3,555,000 in revenue over a 10-year time period. However, if City Council chose to charge for paid parking from 10 am-8 pm, instead of the suggested 10 am-10 pm, revenues could have been reduced by an estimated \$990,000.

Despite staff support, some City Council support, and the citizen-led DPMP to justify implementing paid parking in the Southeast Quadrant, City Council voted it down in the spring of 2019. Shortly thereafter, the COVID-19 pandemic struck and downtown businesses were economically hamstrung with a precipitous reduction in customer traffic. The number of people driving downtown plummeted and rethinking on-street parking management was put on hold in favor of more pressing concerns such as providing economic assistance to downtown businesses.

⁵⁹ Robert Clarke et al., "Downtown Paid Parking," City Council Staff Report (City of Davis, March 5, 2019).

⁶⁰ Clarke et al.

⁶¹ Clarke et al.

Action	Date	Time Ellapsed Between Actions
Downtown Parking Task Force (DPTF) appointed	October 2012	-
DPTF completes work	October 2013	1 year
Downtown Parking Management Plan (DPMP) presented to City Council	December 2013	2 months
Official DPMP report released	March 2014	4 months
City Council splits recommendations into Phase 1 and Phase 2, approving implementation of Phase 1	March 2014	<1 month
Failed City Council vote to direct staff to create plan for pilot project for paid parking on one block	January 2015	10 months
City Council approves expansion of downtown paid parking into the Southeast Quadrant and directs staff to draft implementing resolutions and ordinances	November 2017	2 years 9 months
Nelson/Nygaard hired to assist with paid parking implementation planning	November 2017	-
City Council does not approve paid on-street parking	March 2019	1 year 4 months
Total Time Ellapsed	6 years 5 months	

Table 2: Key timeline of events leading up to City Council not approving paid on-street parking

The Opposition

Opposition to the paid on-street parking proposal came mostly from downtown business and property owners in addition to some community members.

A number of key arguments were made by those in opposition to the paid parking proposal. I interviewed two vocal critics of the paid parking proposal which helped inform my findings: a DPTF member and downtown business owner, and Ron Glick, a retired teacher who likes to frequent a popular coffee shop downtown.

The most common argument critics deployed was that adding paid on-street parking downtown would irreparably harm downtown businesses because they believe people will no longer drive downtown to visit businesses and spend money. Instead, they will drive to outlying shopping centers that have free parking. This was one interviewee's foremost concern.⁶² A self-professed active community member, they were vocal in their opposition to paid parking. Their standing in the community and displeasure with the state of parking downtown led them to be appointed to the DPTF. Despite participating in the DPTF which recommended adding paid on-street parking in the Southwest Quadrant, they came out in opposition to this recommendation after the DPMP was released. They were regular City Council attendees, never failing to comment in opposition to paid

⁶² Anonymous Member 2 of Downtown Parking Task Force and Business Owner, interview by Morgan Cunneen-Franco, Phone call, January 28, 2025.

parking. The interviewee met with City Council members individually and spoke of their opposition with other business owners through the Davis Downtown Business Association (DDBA) and Davis Chamber of Commerce.

Interestingly, the interviewee reflected on how much driver anxiety may be caused by cruising for parking, contending that more free parking needs to be built so that drivers can find parking quickly. In contrast, cruising for parking is often used by paid parking proponents as an argument to price on-street parking to ensure turnover.⁶³ The interviewee's belief that paid parking will drive away customers leads them to the opposite remedy to an agreed upon problem.

Many who opposed paid on-street parking conceded that paid parking works as a way to manage limited parking in other cities but believed that it would not work in Davis: "some of the people that you had direct conversation with just were adamant that Davis is different. Sure, case studies show success in other places, but we're unique."⁶⁴ During the DPTF process, other cities which have successfully added paid on-street parking were studied including college towns such as Berkeley, Chico, and San Luis Obispo, CA which helped inform the DPMP's recommendations. Despite this, opponents such as one I interviewed claim that the case studies were irrelevant because Davis is different. For example, they argue that paid on-street parking only works in San Luis Obispo because free parking lots are widely available.⁶⁵

I spoke with another paid parking opponent, Ron Glick, who likes to go to the same coffee shop in downtown Davis every morning. He has a mobility impairment and because there is not a convenient bus line that passes his house and travels to downtown, he drives his personal vehicle downtown and parks in front of the coffee shop. He specifically objected to parking meters because he viewed them as a tool for "behavior modification."⁶⁶ Glick makes clear that his issue is not about the money, it's about what the parking meters aim to do- change behavior. He contends that, "there's nothing wrong with my behavior. I don't need my behavior modified. I don't want to be on a meter...I don't like it as a tool for civilian control."

Glick likes to be involved in the policy discussions regarding Davis issues: "I've been around long enough that I know what the issues are, and I like to make my voice heard." Glick, in his own words, decided to become a thorn in the side of City Council, a "gadfly." He attended most City Council meetings that had the paid parking proposal on the agenda, he actively met with City Councilmembers, and posted often in the comment section of a local online news blog that is popular with politically active Davis residents. Glick chafes at parking meters as a coercive mechanism to change people's parking and driving habits.

Additionally, some people opposed paid parking because they argued it would disproportionately harm low-income people. While this argument was not dominant (the argument that paid parking would lead to the decline of businesses was), it still played a crucial role in the defeat of the paid parking proposal since one City Councilmember gave this as their explicit reason for voting against paid parking. This is despite the paid parking proposal being designed with equity concerns in mind

⁶³ Shoup, "Cruising for Parking."

⁶⁴ Brett Lee, interview by Morgan Cunneen-Franco, In-person, November 15, 2024.

⁶⁵ Anonymous Member 2 of Downtown Parking Task Force and Business Owner.

⁶⁶ Ron Glick, interview by Morgan Cunneen-Franco, Phone call, November 1, 2024.

by only adding paid on-street parking in the Southeast Quadrant of downtown. People who could not, or did not want to, pay for parking could find free surface parking a couple of blocks away or in one of the parking garages (see *Figure 4*).

The Support

From the beginning the paid parking recommendation was championed by Mayor Joe Krovoza. He primarily viewed the proposal as a way to increase business foot traffic by freeing up short-term street parking spots for customers. Krovoza also saw paid parking as a way to “make downtown more bike friendly” as it would encourage more people to bike downtown instead of drive. With fewer cars cruising for parking, there would be fewer conflict points between cars and bicycles. His ability to be the legislative champion came to an end when he left office in June 2014, three months after the DPMP was published.

Councilmember Brett Lee, who was one of two City Council liaisons for the DPTF, took it upon himself to push for the paid parking proposal after Krovoza left office. However, he did not find himself with any allies on the City Council willing to resist the opposition and push for paid on-street parking. With a five-member City Council, having only one person in support of a proposal is not a recipe for success.

There was never a core constituency of supporters who pushed to enact paid parking. In contrast to the opposition, which believed that paid parking would sound the death knell for small businesses, those in support saw it as a positive for the community, but not catastrophic if it was not instituted. As one task force member notes, “I don’t recall there being a real strong advocacy for it. I think that’s kind of a natural thing that you know people who are afraid about paid parking consider it an existential threat. People that are for paid parking think...‘that makes sense’...But they’re not going to get super worked up about it and go down and really advocate and put themselves out there saying, we need to do this.”⁶⁷

The supporters were also less publicly vocal than the opponents of paid parking. The high conflict environment surrounding paid parking meant that many supporters who favored the idea, but didn’t view it as imperative tended to lean out. Supporters who didn’t view the continued absence of paid parking as an existential threat to downtown only minimally advocated at City Council meetings, wrote opinion articles, or met with City Councilmembers. Plainly, the opponents were more vocal than the supporters. For example, a taskforce member I interviewed supported the paid parking proposal but did not actively advocate for the proposal after the conclusion of the DPTF. They felt that they completed the job as a member of the DPTF, which was time consuming and labor intensive. “I fully believe in all the concepts [of paid parking] and all that. But I felt like [advocating] wasn’t what I signed on for. I took enough heat just being [on] the [DPTF].”⁶⁸

The DDBA board, which was included in discussions about the need for paid parking in advance of the paid parking policy proposal release, saw the merits of it and voted to support it. However, dissent within rank-and-file membership, who were not brought along for these conversations,

⁶⁷ Anonymous Member 1 of Downtown Parking Task Force, interview by Morgan Cunneen-Franco, Zoom, December 17, 2024.

⁶⁸ Anonymous Member 1 of Downtown Parking Task Force.

quickly brewed: “they kind of went out on a limb and...then their members were like, ‘how dare you?’”⁶⁹ With membership voicing their strong opposition, DDBA backed off of supporting the proposal.

Therefore, there was not a clear legislative champion of the paid parking proposal nor a group of advocates pushing for the passage of paid on-street parking.

Findings

Reasons Paid Parking Proposal Failed

Various possible reasons the paid on-street parking proposal ultimately failed in 2019 emerged from the interviews and archival research.

Close relationship between downtown and City Council

Strong ties between the Davis City Council and both downtown business and property owners contributed to the conditions that ultimately led to the failure of the paid on-street parking proposal. Downtown Davis is the heart of the city’s cultural and commercial activity and its prosperity is viewed as essential to the city’s success as a whole.

However, downtown does not contribute significantly to the city’s sales tax base. In fact, the City of Davis does not have a strong sales tax base at all. For the 2013-2014 budget year, when the paid parking proposal was put forth, the City of Davis, with a population of around 66,000, had sales tax revenue of \$10,739,209, a per capita sales tax of approximately \$163.⁷⁰ In comparison, West Sacramento, a neighboring city in Yolo County with a smaller population size (around 51,000) had over two times more sales tax revenue (\$23,155,231), with a per capita sales tax rate of \$454.⁷¹ The Davis downtown core and periphery core areas, which roughly map onto this report’s study area (see *Figure 4*), generated \$1,281,128 in sales tax in 2014, representing only 12 percent of the city’s total sales tax receipts in 2014.^{72,73}

While downtown Davis’s sales tax receipts do not represent a large share of the total sales tax, downtown business and property owners collectively built a significant amount of political influence due to the cultural importance of downtown to the city as a whole. Downtown is the symbolic heart of the city, a very visible concentration of economic activity within a gridded street networks that provides the “small town” charm the city is known for.

Downtown businesses are also civically engaged and contribute to City Council campaigns. This gives the downtown businesses significant political power which some City Councilmembers were unwilling to buck: “the [City] Council and the downtown are super close, and so it’s hard to cross

⁶⁹ Brett Lee.

⁷⁰ “OpenGov – Davis Finance and Budget Visualization,” OpenGov, accessed January 31, 2025, <https://shorturl.at/1nVD6>.

⁷¹ “OpenGov – West Sacramento Finance and Budget Visualization,” OpenGov, accessed January 31, 2025, <https://shorturl.at/4JpVn>.

⁷² “Downtown Core Area Benefit Zone - 2014 Sales Tax” (City of Davis, n.d.).

⁷³ “Periphery Core Area Benefit Zone - 2014 Sales Tax” (City of Davis, n.d.).

them.”⁷⁴ Additionally, the DDBA provides a forum for business owners to express their opinions, talk with each other, and organize around issues that they believe will affect them. Business and property owners did just that and showed up to testify at City Council meetings in opposition to the paid parking proposal.

This led City Council to refuse to carry out all DPMP recommendations at once, and instead opt to act on less controversial recommendations such as building another parking lot on a city-owned parcel outside of downtown to increase parking supply, thereby excluding the paid parking recommendation. This did not improve the parking situation downtown because drivers usually want to park as close to their destination as possible, which in downtown are the on-street parking spots. The DPMP was in fact designed for all the recommendations to work in concert to improve parking management in downtown.⁷⁵ The DPMP states, “many recommendations have cause-and-effect and push/pull relationships that, if separated from the package, may result in less than optimal results.”⁷⁶ The Davis City Council did not heed this directive. By divorcing paid parking from the less controversial recommendations, the desired effect (effectively managed downtown parking) was not attained.

Lost momentum

The Davis City Council did not have the political will to move forward on implementing paid parking which staff, the citizen-led DPMP, and parking experts agreed would help improve parking management downtown. As the paid parking recommendation was continuously delayed, the momentum built by the DPTF was lost. By the time the on-street paid parking proposal was voted down over five years after it was proposed, there were few people who retained the energy and enthusiasm in support that they had when the DPMP was originally published.

Despite business opposition to paid parking in almost every city it has been proposed in, when implemented correctly, paid parking usually gains support from merchants when they see the benefits it can bring. In Davis’s case, the downtown business opposition to paid parking was strong and the City Council decided to heed their advice, despite the academic, DPTF, and consultant provided evidence showing paid parking would be beneficial to the area.

Lack of organized support

Finally, there was a lack of organized support for paid parking.⁷⁷ As with many local issues, those in opposition are more motivated to organize and show up to City Council meetings than those in favor. This lack of support was in part because the city did not do a good job educating the public about the benefits of paid parking.⁷⁸ This includes clearly explaining how, if implemented correctly, paid parking can optimize parking utilization, incentivize shopping, and support local businesses.

It is worth noting that Davis has found success passing progressive transportation policy due to strong, organized support in the past. In the 1980s UC Davis professor Mark Francis organized an

⁷⁴ Joe Krovoza, interview by Morgan Cunneen-Franco, Zoom, January 2, 2025.

⁷⁵ Brian Abbanat.

⁷⁶ Downtown Parking Task Force, “Downtown Parking Management Plan.”

⁷⁷ Joe Krovoza.

⁷⁸ Brett Lee.

advocacy coalition of students, colleagues, the UC Davis Chancellor, and several City Councilmembers to successfully advocate for the inclusion of a greenbelt in the city's general plan.⁷⁹ The now-completed greenbelt connects neighborhoods to the perimeter and is a crowning jewel of the city. While organized support did not coalesce for the paid parking proposal, the successful greenbelt advocacy effort shows that given the right circumstances passing progressive transportation policy is possible in Davis.

While the theory outlined above has the most credence, a number of others were put forth by interviewees regarding the reasons for the paid parking proposal's ultimate demise. While these could have contributed to its failure, they are less likely to have been the primary drivers. These reasons are as follows:

1. The Downtown Parking Management Plan was released several months before the March 2014 local elections. With several City Councilmembers up for election, a Davis transportation planner at the time noted, "you have to balance whether or not to try to continue to build on your momentum or try to read what your Councilmembers are going to do when you're entering into an election cycle."⁸⁰ Staff decided to move forward with bringing the DPMP to City Council, however there was a perception that some City Councilmembers did not want to act on controversial issues before an election which could lead to potential pushback from the voters they were trying to court.⁸¹

Because paid parking was the most controversial recommendation to come out of the DPMP, Councilmembers decided not to act on it right away. By kicking the can down the road, the paid on-street parking proposal lost the momentum built by the recently disbanded task force. After years of delay, the voices in opposition overshadowed the few people left in support of the proposal. This gave the City Council political cover not to move forward with adding paid on-street parking.

2. From the start the paid parking proposal should have been designed to earmark parking revenue that is not used to fund the parking management program for beautification of the downtown areas where parking is being charged for, which parallels scholarship and other cities in practice. People and businesses often complain about the perceived lack of cleanliness of downtown Davis.⁸² Using parking funds to pay for the improvement of these areas could have helped mitigate the concerns of business owners and customers and even foster ongoing political support for paid on-street parking.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ted Buehler and Susan Handy, "Fifty Years of Bicycle Policy in Davis, California," *Transportation Research Record* 2074, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 52–57, <https://doi.org/10.3141/2074-07>.

⁸⁰ Brian Abbanat.

⁸¹ Brian Abbanat.

⁸² Rich Rifkin, "Rich Rifkin: There Are Reasons Why Downtown Davis Is in Good Order," *Davis Enterprise*, November 11, 2024, https://www.davisenterprise.com/forum/rich-rifkin-there-are-reasons-why-downtown-davis-is-in-good-order/article_2045ddde-9fde-11ef-a084-3fb1bfd152fc.html.

⁸³ Douglas Kolozsvari and Donald Shoup, "Parking Matters in Old Pasadena," in *Parking and the City* (Routledge, 2018).

A parking validation program should have also been included in the proposal from the beginning as a sweetener for those skeptical of the paid parking proposal. Downtown visitors would be offered a parking discount if they purchase something at a downtown business. For example, the first hour of parking could be discounted by 50% if the downtown visitor buys something for \$10 or more. The cost of parking validation would be paid for by the city.

Although these policies were identified in 2018 and 2019 as necessary complements to any potential paid on-street parking program downtown, their addition came too late.

3. The public was insufficiently educated about why there is a downtown parking problem and how paid parking will help address it.⁸⁴ One interviewee noted, “to do it again I think [we should] get some place like the Varsity [a popular independent movie theater in town], invite everyone to a couple information sharing sessions where there can be question and answers and at least try to get them to neutral.”⁸⁵ At these sessions the city could explain why paid on-street parking would be beneficial, how it has worked in other cities, the proposed rate structure, and how revenue would finance parking validation, beautification, and upkeep within the downtown area. As the interviewee continued, “that didn't really happen with the downtown. It was really more of a ‘Oh, it's going to be good for businesses. Just don't worry.’ Some people need to kind of go on that journey.”⁸⁶ The amount of opposition the paid on-street proposal faced could have been minimized by creating an open forum for answering questions and clearing up misconceptions.

Lessons Learned

The following is a narrative of lessons other cities could learn from Davis’s failed attempt at implementing paid on-street parking in downtown Davis. I hope that these lessons will help other cities which are contemplating instituting paid on-street parking succeed.

Strike while the iron is hot

Once a paid parking proposal is made, it is crucial that implementation swiftly follows to capitalize on the momentum. In Davis, the DPMP was released in March of 2014 and City Council voted against carrying it out in its entirety, choosing instead to focus on “low hanging fruit” recommendations which did not engender the same amount of public controversy that paid parking does. A few months later a City Council election led to the paid parking champion on the City Council to leave and a new City Councilmember to be elected. The paid parking proposal lost momentum when the DPMP was not adopted in full after release, and then again when the champion left the City Council. Proponents were never able to regain control thereafter as paid parking implementation was continuously delayed for five years.

Additionally, as more time lapses after a paid parking proposal is made, people who were neutral or in support of the paid parking proposal may be swayed to oppose it. Many people in support can

⁸⁴ Brett Lee.

⁸⁵ Brett Lee.

⁸⁶ Brett Lee.

lose interest in advocating for it as life gets in the way or be deterred from advocating as opposition increases. When momentum is lost and opposition intensifies, it is difficult to regain the original energy that led the paid parking proposal to be made in the first place.

Political courage is necessary

City Councilmembers must have political courage to take a chance on paid parking. As with any policy, no matter how much outreach there is there will always be people that oppose it and will insist that it will cause irreparable harm, in this case make businesses unprofitable due to customer loss. City Councilmembers must be able to act on a policy that many constituents may be skeptical of by, for example, examining case studies where paid parking has been put into effect. The DPTF did so before crafting the recommendations and the DPMP included a comprehensive summary of these case studies. Having City Councilmembers talk with staff and elected officials from these jurisdictions could be helpful to understand how they have benefited from adding paid parking and any lessons they could impart.

Need consistent champions

A consistent champion, preferably multiple champions, is paramount for the successful implementation of paid on-street parking. Upon the release of the DPMP, the mayor was the champion of the paid parking proposal. However, he left City Council three months afterwards, leaving the City Council without a champion. Another City Councilmember rose to be the legislative champion, however he did not have any allies on this issue. Having multiple legislative champions is important for successful passage of such a polarizing policy issue.

Outside of City Council, there were no organized groups or sufficient number of individuals in Davis who consistently advocated in favor of paid on-street parking. With few champions in and outside of City Council, passing paid on-street parking was made difficult.

Additionally, if a city chooses to appoint a parking taskforce to create a comprehensive parking management plan, the members may not become the champions of on-street parking. Being part of a taskforce is a large time commitment. Many may not feel that they want to enter a political process and publicly advocate for paid parking after the conclusion of the task force. They fulfilled their commitment to the task force, and any additional engagement may be outside of their comfort zone.

Public needs to be educated on paid parking

When paid parking is proposed, workshops should be set up to educate the public about why there is a downtown parking problem and how paid parking will help address it. Staff should conduct specific outreach to businesses located near where paid parking is being proposed to ensure they are aware of the workshop and encourage them to attend. It will also provide an open forum for people to have their questions answered. This could help reduce the knee-jerk opposition that many express when paid parking is proposed. Examples from other cities could be brought in to show how paid parking has been effectively executed. Of course, no amount of education will bring everyone to be neutral or supportive of a policy change, however workshops could be beneficial to reduce opposition.

Be strategic about timing

The DPTF wrapped up its work in October 2013, staff presented the task force's findings in December 2013, and in March 2014 the DPMP was released. These actions all happened in the run up to local elections held in March 2014 with several City Councilmembers up for election. As discussed earlier, some City Councilmembers may have been more cautious with taking on paid street parking, a controversial policy issue, than they would have been otherwise.

Therefore, staff and policy proponents need to be keenly aware of how election timelines map onto policy timelines. It is advised that a paid parking proposal be brought to City Council for consideration after a local election and not leading up to one because City Councilmembers may feel more free to cast a difficult vote to support paid parking and not have reactionary blowback at the polls soon thereafter.

Good policy implementation is key

Crucially, when a city does vote to implement paid parking, execution is key. Actualizing the paid parking policy to ensure it works as intended, in this case improving the ability to find street parking, is important for long term success: "we see the glossy brochures about how parking could work, but it's also possible to implement it poorly."⁸⁷ Paying for parking needs to be easy, convenient, and glitch free. Parking meters and a parking app should always work and be easy and intuitive to use. In general, a driver should be able to find and pay for parking easily and seamlessly. The consumer experience must be flawless. Passing a paid parking proposal is difficult enough because proponents must overcome people's opposition to paying for something that was previously free, among other hurdles. Once it is implemented technology cannot create a reason for people to oppose the policy. This can create another avenue for opponents to push for paid on-street parking to be halted.

While Davis did not reach the implementation phase, doubts about the city's ability to effectively implement the paid parking proposal were part of the debate. Having a detailed implementation plan in place and technology that has been tested and proven to be effective in other jurisdictions is important for long-term policy success.

Conclusion

Since the paid parking proposal stalled in 2019, there has been no renewed effort to address downtown parking management. Downtown visitation dipped precipitously in 2020 and began to slowly recover the year after. Now that a number of years have passed since the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, downtown businesses are bustling and on-street parking is difficult to find once again, especially during peak hours. It would behoove the City of Davis to re-examine downtown parking management and consider whether intervention is necessary.

Outside of Davis, cities where on-street parking demand oftentimes outstrips supply would especially benefit from examining how paid on-street parking could balance this scarce resource

⁸⁷ Brett Lee.

and address the externalities. I hope that these cities can apply the lessons outlined in this research report: the importance of capitalizing on momentum once paid parking is proposed, the need for elected officials to demonstrate political courage, the value of having multiple champions both inside and outside of government, the beneficial role of public education, and the impact of strong policy implementation. However, even if a city follows these lessons, there will still be policy detractors. One opponent I interviewed is illustrative of this: he objected to parking meters as a coercive mechanism to control his behavior, views which no educational campaign would sway.

In the end, the stars must align for such an oftentimes politically controversial policy to pass. The benefits (increased parking turnover, decreased cruising, less air pollution) are diffuse, while the costs are specific to downtown parkers, including employees and the public. For example, business owners may believe the policy will reduce their customer base, thereby creating a perceived, direct cost. Those same business owners cannot easily calculate the value of the increased parking turnover, decreased cruising, and reduced air pollution to their business. Bridging the gap between benefits and costs is a key challenge which must be addressed. One way to do so, as explored in this report, is to ensure parking revenues are reinvested in downtown beautification and infrastructure, thereby improving the experience of being downtown, as well as providing parking validation.

If implemented correctly, paid parking can improve the vitality of downtown areas, making them more desirable places to visit, and by association making cities more desirable places to live. Passing paid on-street parking is not impossible, but it can present many challenges. I hope this report furthers parking management discourse and aids others wishing to implement paid on-street parking.

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