



February 10, 2015

Council File 14-1529

Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Los Angeles City Hall
200 North Spring Street, Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Members,

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council requests that the following Community Impact Statement be added to Council File 14-1529, regarding the City Council's effort to install on-street blue curbs to create disabled parking spaces.

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council ("DLANC") opposes installation of on-street blue curbs to create additional disabled parking spaces because according to current California law, a disabled person may park for unlimited periods in any metered parking space for free. In addition, the intended benefits of creating additional on-street blue-curb parking spaces will undoubtedly be negated by the current rampant and escalating misuse of disabled placards.

To be clear, DLANC supports the City's efforts to improve mobility and access to disabled persons, but believes that creating additional on-street blue curbs without first addressing the rampant and escalating misuse of disabled placards, obviates the benefits sought by the Motion.

According to the California Vehicle Code, Section 22511.5, "A disabled person or disabled veteran displaying special license plates issued under Section 5007 or a distinguishing placard issued under Section 22511.55 or 22511.59 is allowed to park for unlimited periods in any of the following zones . . . in any metered parking space without being required to pay parking meter fees." Unfortunately, the benefits guaranteed by Section 22511.5, that is free unlimited parking in metered spots, has attracted and led to widespread and systemic abuse of disabled placards.¹

¹ See Interview with UCLA Professor Donald Shoup, available at <http://la.streetsblog.org/2011/08/24/interview-with-donald-shoup-los-angeles-making-strides-with-expresspark/> ("The main problem we already have in L.A. is the widespread abuse of handicapped placards. A disabled placard in California is like a "free parking" pass for the entire state. One of our students just finished his Masters thesis on placard abuse in downtown. He surveyed one block on Flower Street where there are 14 metered parking spaces. Most of the spaces were filled most of the time with cars that had disabled placards. For five hours of the day, all fourteen spaces were occupied by cars with disabled placards."); see also <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/22/local/la-me-disabled-parking-20110522> ("Fraudulent use of disabled parking placards -- those blue or red badges that allow motorists to park for free or in specially reserved spaces -- has exploded in the last decade, according to state motor vehicle officials. With 1 in 10 California drivers now legally registered to carry the passes, transportation experts say abuse has become commonplace. At any given moment, on any given street, more than a third of the vehicles displaying the tags -- and parking without paying -- are doing so illegally, say officials with the California Department of Motor Vehicles.").

According to reports, there are roughly 2.5 million disabled placards currently in use, that number represents about 10 percent of all licensed drivers.² This number represents nearly triple the number that had a disabled placard in 1994 and while many are no doubt legitimate placards, parking experts say anecdotal evidence also suggests widespread fraud.³ In high density areas, such as in Downtown Los Angeles, the impact of disabled placard abuse is even more pronounced. For example, a recent study conducted by students at UCLA found that in Downtown Los Angeles, at various times, up to 44 percent of metered parking spaces were occupied by cars with handicapped placards – and those vehicles stayed in those spots, on average, 70 percent longer than the cars without placards.⁴ Disabled placard abuse not only makes parking far more difficult in Downtown Los Angeles, but also removes much-needed parking revenue from the City and may negatively impact nearby businesses due to limited parking.⁵

To address disabled placard abuse, DLANC recommends that the City consider adopting a two-tiered system that takes into account different levels of disability. In a two-tiered system, drivers with severe disabilities receive special placards that allow them to park for free at meters, while other drivers with less severe disabilities receive ordinary placards and must pay to park at meters. One state that has utilized a similar system is Michigan. Before reforming its disabled placard system, Michigan had issued 500,000 disabled placards that allowed all users to park free at meters. After Michigan enacted its two-tier reform, only 10,000 drivers applied for the special placards that allow free parking at meters. Illinois also adopted a similar two-tier system after the city of Chicago learned that free parking at meters for disabled placard users was costing the city \$22 million (about 25% of total meter revenue). To qualify for a placard that allows drivers to park for free at a meter, drivers must have their doctor attest that they cannot do one of the following: (1) feed parking meters “due to the lack of fine motor control of both hands;” (2) feed meters because they need to use a wheelchair; (3) reach above their heads “to a height of 42 inches above the ground;” or (4) walk more than 20 feet due to an orthopedic, neurological, cardiovascular or lung condition.”⁶ Adopting a similar two-tiered system in the City of Los Angeles could greatly assist in curbing disabled placard abuse and make significant gains in addressing the issues discussed herein. If such a system were to be adopted, subsequent creation of on-street blue curbs would certainly improve access for drivers with severe disabilities.

This Community Impact Statement is based on the action taken at the regularly scheduled Board of Directors meeting on February 10, 2015, when the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council adopted the following motion by a vote of ___ yes, ___ no, ___ abstaining and directed that a

² See <http://www.govtech.com/transportation/Using-Analytics-to-Spot-Fraudulent-Use-of-Disabled-Parking.html>; see also <http://abc7.com/archive/7072930/>; see also <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/22/local/la-me-disabled-parking-20110522> (“California, which has 24 million licensed drivers, will issue 2.1 million permanent placards this year, up from 1.2 million a decade ago. In Los Angeles County, about 621,000 of nearly 6 million licensed drivers have placards.”).

³ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/us/18placard.html>.

⁴ See <http://shoup.boi.ucla.edu/MeterPaymentExemptionForDisabledPlacardHolders.pdf>.

⁵ See <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/oct/22/opinion/la-oe-shoup-disabled-parking-abuse-20121022> (“In 2010, a UCLA survey of placard use on several blocks in downtown Los Angeles found that cars with disabled placards occupied most of the curb spaces most of the time. For five hours of the day, cars with placards occupied every space on one block. The meter rate was \$4 an hour, but the meters earned only 32 cents an hour because cars with placards consumed 80% of the meter time.”).

⁶ See http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2013/december_2013/new-illinois-state-law-limiting-disabled-placard-use-goes-into-e.html.

Community Impact Statement be filed reflecting its position.

Motion: “The Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council shall submit a Community Impact Statement for Council File 14-1529 stating that DLANC opposes installation of on-street blue curbs to create additional disabled parking spaces because according to current California law, a disabled person may park for unlimited periods in any metered parking space for free. In addition, the intended benefits of creating additional on-street blue-curb parking spaces will undoubtedly be negated by the current rampant and escalating misuse of disabled placards.”

Sincerely,

Patricia Berman
DLANC President

Sincerely,

Eric R. Garcia
DLANC Community Impact Committee Chair