

[The Los Angeles Times reports](#) that the City has decided to inject at least a little rationality into its parking policy: in April, the City will begin ExpressPark, which will focus on a 4.5 square-mile zone in the city's downtown, and will set parking rates based upon demand.

It will use sensors and other technology to measure demand at about 6,000 sidewalk meters and 7,500 spaces in public parking facilities such as the Convention Center.

Officials will adjust the cost of meters based on demand at various times throughout the day and on how long motorists stay in each space. Although the price of most meters will be set once a month, in some areas officials will adjust the rates more frequently based on demand.

One might well ask what has taken so long, although it's good to see the City's transportation department leveraging \$15 million of federal grants to do it. ExpressPark is clearly based upon my UCLA colleague [Don Shoup's](#) classic work, [The High Cost of Free Parking](#). The idea of pricing parking based upon demand involves pretty simple and straightforward economics: if parking price is set to demand, then that also reduces circling around city blocks looking for empty spaces, which increases efficiency. It also reduces congestion as people no longer double-park in desperation.

Unfortunately, two critical aspects of Shoup's work do not apply here:

- 1) As the title of Shoup's book suggests, his true aim is *free* parking: Shoup argues that urban area with parking problems and free parking should price it and use the proceeds to create a "Parking Benefit District," which will pay for local amenities like neighborhood beautification, parks, landscaping etc. In downtown Los Angeles, you already pay for parking, so no PBD is contemplated: downtown residents (and there are tens of thousands, contrary to stereotype) will see more available parking, but none of the other amenities. Shoup often uses the example of [Pasadena's Old Town](#) as an example of what can happen when a neighborhood moves to price parking, but previously, Old Town used free parking, so the windfall there cannot be replicated. (This begs the question of whether the parking pricing was the thing that actually revolutionized Old Town, but that's a different issue).
- 2) The real bite to Shoup's book comes when it gets applied to broader land use policies. Most municipal zoning codes have bloated parking requirements that have no basis in actual demand, he (correctly) argues. Developers are forced to construct unnecessary parking

spaces, increasing the cost of land and housing, making the density that is a prerequisite for transit more difficult to achieve, and increasing the dependence upon the automobile. If we let the market price parking for developers, we would have a more efficient and less costly urban form. Because ExpressPark only will occur in a small area of the city and will not be tied to land use decisions, its impact will be relatively minimal.

The bigger test for the state and the city will come over the next few weeks, as the state Senate considers [AB 710 \(Skinner\)](#), a bill sponsored by the California Infill Builders Association, which will limit municipal parking requirements for transit-oriented developments. AB 710 could really begin to make a bigger difference.

But this is a start. Los Angeles has really made a lot of beneficial and important changes to downtown, including an [adaptive reuse ordinance](#) that waived a lot of traditional parking requirements. It's good to see that someone in the Department of Transportation is keeping their eye on the ball. Now we need to see these principles outside of downtown.