Focus Group Discussion Summary

SFMTA held two focus group meetings on October 4th and 5th, 2016. Invitations to participate in the focus groups were sent to 70 neighborhood, community and business stakeholders who are actively engaged in their neighborhoods in a leadership capacity. Twenty people accepted the invitation and chose which date they would be able to participate. Of these, 15 attended; 7 on one date and 8 on the other. Each focus group lasted two hours. Below are summary statistics about the participants.

- 15 participants in all
- 12 have personal vehicles
- 10 have off-street parking
- 12 live in a permit area – A, F, BB, Y, K, P, Q, S, X
- 6 are current permit-holders

Focus group participants were asked a series of nine questions. A summary of their comments follows.

Question 1. Introductions

Tell us about your experience with the RPP program. Live in a permit area? Own a vehicle? Purchase a permit? Do any of your neighbors have too many vehicles?

Discussion:

- Intro comments/concerns:
    - Uniqueness of older neighborhood with limited off-street parking
    - No one-size-fits-all approach
    - Want to keep program mostly as it currently is
    - Don't buy permits because they don't see the utility
    - Permits important for those without access to off-street parking
    - Should address internal neighborhood parking issues (i.e., people have multiple cars)
    - Interested in forming a new permit area (NW Bernal)
    - Permit parking (via improved availability) can enhance neighborhood safety
    - Interested in joining a permit area (Area I)

Question 2a. Area-wide permit cap

One of the policy options we are considering is to set a cap on the total number of permits issued per area, say 120% of available permitted spaces. Another option is to limit the number of permits issued per driver to one. Yet another is to limit the number of permits issued per household to no more than two.   In terms of possible impacts, setting an area wide cap at 120% of available spaces would affect Areas A (North Beach/Russian Hill); C (Nob Hill/Chinatown); S (Duboce Triangle, Castro, Upper Noe); G (Lower Pacific Heights/Japantown); and Y (South Beach/Rincon).

Currently, households are allowed up to 4 permits and each permit costs the same. A household may petition SFMTA to have additional permits, up to 4 more, for a total of 8, but would pay 2X, 3X or 4X the base cost. There are no area-wide or per driver caps at this time.

How likely are you to support the area-wide cap?

Discussion:

- Concerned about hitting the (120%) area-wide cap
- How will SFMTA keep up with new development, new units?
- So the number of permits per house is not the issue?
- Goal is equitable sharing of a scare resource; area cap doesn't solve anything – if pursued, should give priority to people without off-street parking
- Area cap should take into account access to off-street parking
- Area cap should take into account how many cars are in the neighborhood
- Need finer-grained analysis to pursue – including localized permit saturation, recent changes in parking supply and colored curb, business and other permits
  - Remove unnecessary white zones and other colored curb
- Need to sub-divide larger areas to make an area-wide permit cap work
- People will just bring their cars into the neighborhood even with an area-wide permit cap
- Some permit over-sell are convenience permits that are not being regularly used
  - Those who pay for a permit but rarely use it are benefitting the system
- Support area-wide cap with grandfathering; charge market rate for new permits
- 1-day permits should not be affected by the cap
- OK with an area-wide cap, with a lowered limit per household
- Inability for some to purchase permits could impact home values
- City's increasing density makes area cap more troubling (higher population makes it less likely one will be able to purchase a permit) – how does this keep up with population density?
- Area-wide cap is important because otherwise the permit doesn't have value
- New tech workers will be upset that they can't get a permit
- S.F. attracting young people who want to drive; they will say lift the cap and SFMTA will do it
- Some have a real *need* to drive and have to be considered
  - Older people who have difficulty walking
  - People without garages
- So if sell house, new owner can't get a permit?
- Grandfathering 4 permits in one household where the next over gets none is unfair
  - Creates a two-tier system
- Cheaper to not own a car; if need to drive, don't live where you can't park
- Consider a variance process if need more permits

Question 2b. Cap of two permits per household

How likely are you to support a lowered cap of two per household?

Discussion:

- 2 per household won't work – too strict
- 2 per household hurts large families / groups of unrelated roommates
- Several people against this proposal
- 2 per household logical
- OK with 2 per household
- Need more off-street parking built

Question 2c. Cap of one permit per driver

How likely are you to support a cap of one permit per driver?

Discussion:

- Concerns about the number of permits given to large households
    - Units with 4+ drivers get more under this proposal
- 1 per driver is equitable – only fair way to do it
    - Allocate permits to people, not units
- 1 per driver better than 2 per household for driving teens
- 1 per driver easiest way but does not help without an area-wide cap as well
- Strong support for 1 per driver proposal

Question 3. Graduated permit pricing

Another option for managing demand for parking in residential areas is to establish graduated permit pricing for multiple permits issued to one residential unit. Each successive permit issued to a residential unit would cost more than the previous permit. The purpose of this is to encourage residents to obtain fewer permits, which would reduce parking demand from those residents. In terms of potential impacts, 73% of current permit accounts have only one permit per residential unit. 27% of permit accounts have two or more permits per residential unit. Graduated pricing may require lowering the price for the first permit in order to stay within the limits of cost recovery, which may slightly increase overall permit demand by incentivizing the purchases of single permits. This policy may disproportionately affect large households and families with children.

How likely are you to support the idea of graduated pricing?

Discussion:

- Permits charge people for something that was once free – 1st permit should be free
- Neighborhoods would think that SFMTA is after money (2x, 3x, etc.)
    - People won't get that it's cost recovery – messaging is key
- Reduce cost of 1st permit to attract more people into the program on currently ineligible blocks
- Make the 1st permit lower for public relations benefits, others graduated

- Making the 1st permit cheaper only helps for the 1st year, then people see it as the base rate
- Won't disincentive enough to make an impact but will make people mad
- Could do graduated pricing per driver instead
- Not equitable
- Regressive
- If you can afford it you can purchase all the permits you want; this is regressive tax
- Hard to graduate properly with cost recovery requirement
    - Would have to bring the base price so low that it would flood the market with first permit-holders
- More fair if graduated per person than graduated per household
- How large households or families would deal with this is a concern
- Could be used in combination with an area-wide cap
- System should be based on the *need* for parking, not ability to pay
- Low income families would be hurt the most
- Those with higher income would be subsidizing those with lower income; more fair is based on per driver; second permit should be priced at market rate
- Some people have very legitimate need and reason to use a vehicle

Question 4. Premium permit pricing for those with access to off-street parking

Another option to manage demand for on-street parking in residential areas would be to charge a premium for permits issued to customers with access to on-site, off-street parking. The purpose is to encourage customers with access to off-street parking to use it rather than park their cars on-street using a permit. Approximately 53% of permit-holder accounts have off-street parking. May encourage permit applicants to state that they do not have access to off-street parking even if they do, to obtain a cheaper permit rate. The resulting permit fee would still be far less than the cost of renting an off-street parking space in San Francisco for a single month, which is between $250 and $500 per month.

How likely are you to support the idea of charging a premium for those with access to off-street parking?

Discussion:

- As someone with a garage, it's a great idea; don't mind paying double if I actually got a benefit from purchasing a permit
- Higher pricing for those with off-street parking unfair
- Convenience permits important for guests (e.g., resident who usually parks off-street will park on-street to allow a guest to use their garage)
- SFMTA should be happy that people use their garage but still pay money to the City by purchasing permits for convenience
    - Permits should be less expensive for those who purchase them for convenience since they are using on-street parking less
- This option encourages people who have garages to use them

- But hard to tease out those who have a garage but don't use it (park on-street instead) from those who have permits for convenience (e.g., when guests visit)
- Could pair easier/cheaper access to 1-day permits with higher annual permit pricing for those with off-street parking to solve the "guest problem"
- Should get a certain number of free 1-day permits with annual permit
  - But then the annual price would be higher for everyone
  - Risk of fraudulent sale
- Strong support from several participants
  - One said they would support though they would pay more for their permit
- Street space is at a premium – if demand > supply, give preference to those without off-street parking (i.e., charge more)
- Important for those without off-street parking to be able to park [on-street] in the neighborhood, particularly if older or disabled
- If disabled, shouldn't have to pay a premium – running errands in the neighborhood (same permit area) is easier if you have a permit and don't have to worry about time limits
- Off-street parking check would be invasive
- Needs to be paired with an area-wide cap – permit needs to have value
- People without garage need permit the most; people with garages don't need a permit

Question 5. Omit permit eligibility for new housing in certain areas

As you know, San Francisco is the densest major city in the U.S. outside of New York City. It also has a robust transit system that provides many neighborhoods with easy access to transit with multiple transit lines. The City has a finite amount of curb space and is responsible for managing access to that curb space.

Some neighborhoods have Area Plans and regulations for new developments that limit the number of off-street car parking spaces allowed, and require developers to meet trip reduction measures, in order to encourage new residents not use a car for most trips. And, so far, this policy seems to be working. New residents do seem to not be bringing their cars or are selling them once they get here. This new residential development is significantly larger than what it replaced and usually includes retail on the street level. This increases neighborhood densities greatly, and makes provision of transit services more cost-effective. If these new residential buildings are located in existing permit areas, residents may obtain permits to park on neighborhood streets undermining, in many cases, planning efforts to encourage reduced car use. The SFMTA wants our policies to be in alignment with City goals and other city policies. This is one area where our permit parking program policies are not in alignment.

How likely are you to support exempting new buildings from eligibility in specific transit rich neighborhoods?

Discussion:

- Muni needs to step up to accommodate all new residents moving in
- Not building sufficient off-street parking is a scam benefitting developers – get to build more units (and generate more profits) while dumping the parking issue onto the public sector

- o Another: this option would prevent this – don't have off-street parking and can't purchase a permit to park on-street
      - o Rebuttal: residents will still bring cars and find somewhere to park on-street
- Makes sense – prevents the parking issue from being dumped onto public streets
- Best for new buildings to have parking on-site
- Seniors still drive; people *need* to drive
- Should somehow disincentive larger vehicles
- Preposterous – some people *need* to drive; Muni and other options don't always work, will increase circling for parking
    - o Another: but there is car share, Uber, etc. to help, as well
- Not everyone can take Muni – need to provide them with some parking option
- Too many Uber cars circling, waiting for passengers
- Buildings without off-street parking attract car-free/lite households, families without cars
    - o Another: don't only want people without cars living in the neighborhood
- Self-selection would be at play if this were implemented (i.e., people who don't own cars would move in) – great idea on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis
    - o Current policies support developers who don't build on-site parking; not right
- Duboce Triangle debated this extensively (3 years ago) – wanted lower parking provision off-street, but didn't realize how much new housing was going to be built; don't want to limit neighborhood livability for new residents, so didn't want to deny permit eligibility
- Need various options for housing (some with parking, some without parking)
- Access to parking = livability
- Supports as it aligns with other existing City policies
- Supports in transit-rich areas
    - o But make transit better!
- OK with excluding new buildings from eligibility in their area (NE Mission)
- Diversity of living options; need for new people to know what they are getting into

Question 6. Paid + Permit parking

The permit parking program was designed for residential neighborhoods. But over the last two decades, new multi-family housing has been constructed in industrial and commercial areas, especially in Eastern Neighborhoods such as SOMA, Potrero Hill, the Dogpatch, the Mission, South Beach and Rincon Hill. These neighborhoods now have several different uses—residential, commercial and industrial—mixed in together, sometimes even on the same block. Residential and commercial/industrial uses have very different transportation needs and present challenges in the administration of a residential parking permit program. These areas have grown in popularity and now attract more visitors and have more parking demand than they did in past decades. The existing permit program focuses on preferential parking for residents, but is better suited to prototypical San Francisco residential neighborhoods. It has been difficult logistically and politically to superimpose a program designed for residential areas on to a mixed use neighborhood.

One idea is to implement residential permit parking areas where visitors can pay to park if they find a space, something we call "paid + permit parking". Residents with a valid permit are exempt from payment, and the zone functions just like a traditional RPP area for them. Payment replaces time limits as the option for visitor parking in permit areas. A paid + permit overlay provides another tool for balancing various demands for parking, especially in neighborhoods with a greater mix of land uses. If paired with no time limits for those who pay, it could address the issue of employees or visitors who need to park in permit areas for longer than the typical time limits (usually one or two hours).

How likely are you to support paid + permit parking concept?

Discussion:

- Likes overlay idea – gives workers a place to park on occasion
- Great way to share in certain [mixed-use] areas
  - Concern is the overconsumption by those willing to pay for the whole day – this would then lead to less availability of parking for permit-holders
- Would you be able to pay to park at night?
- There was going to be an overlay in the University Terrace area – concerns: meters creating the impression that this is a commercial area, SFMTA making money in neighborhoods [SFMTA note of clarification: no overlay was proposed at that time; only RPP; and meters only in specific high-use areas]
- Makes sense in mixed-use areas, less so in residential areas
- Perception issue – paid parking looks bad to public, too commercial looking, even if nothing changes for permit-holders
- Communication + phasing in would be important
- Negative perception of paying for parking in neighborhoods
- Lack of a time limit is concerning; don't like it if no time limits
- Instead, give PDR businesses transferrable permits (at graduated rates) – pits the new model (overlay concept) against expanding access to permits for businesses
- Should issue "stakeholder"/visitor permits
- Give permits to schools (e.g., USF), if they have small enough cars to park on-street in the area
- Time limits are better at keeping people out of cars – time limits should be shorter
- Workers shouldn't be encouraged to commute by car (whichever solutions are chosen)
- The overlay concept would make parking more complex – already hard to understand rules
- Could try this in the University Terrace area
- Like the concept for areas that border commercial districts or mixed-use areas

Question 7. Subdivide large permit areas

The formation of permit areas depends entirely on petitions from residents. The resulting boundaries and sizes of each permit area vary greatly, ranging from over 1 square mile to less than 1/10th of a square mile. In the larger areas, residents are able to commute to work by car and park in the same permit area, reducing the effectiveness of the program and encouraging commuting by car.

One idea is to revise the borders of existing areas to make them more responsive to traffic generators and natural neighborhood borders. This would result in smaller areas that discourage intra-area car

commuting and would allow overall area caps to be more responsive to local neighborhood parking trends.

This option would likely impact about half of the existing permit areas, including (but not limited to): A, D, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, S, V, W, X, Y

How likely are you to support sub-dividing large permit areas?

Discussion:

- People definitely commute within permit areas to reach transit (i.e., intra-area commuting)
- Several participants like this idea ("makes perfect sense")
- SFMTA let Permit Area L cross Arguello and Geary
- Sub-division reduces peoples' park-shed (can't park in as many places), which would be a burden for seniors and people with disabilities who use permits to run neighborhood errands
    - Some have a *need* to do intra-area commuting
    - Need to enlarge buffer areas