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Exploring the Equity of Market-Priced Parking in Los Angeles



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Issue

As the United States aims to curb its transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions, policymakers and planners are implementing strategies to disincentivize the overuse of private vehicles. However, reducing single occupancy vehicle (SOV) use is more than an urgent climate issue. Pollutants from vehicle emissions have been linked with adverse health afflictions that often disproportionately affect communities of color and low-income communities (August et al., 2022). Despite the urgency of these issues and the significant potential benefits of reducing SOV use, convincing drivers to give up their cars in favor of more sustainable modes of transportation is challenging. Additionally, the potential regressive effects that policies aimed at reducing SOV use may have on low-income, historically disenfranchised communities should be examined. This research aims to better understand whether one proposed method of reducing SOV use — pricing parking — disproportionately affects people of color and female and gender minority drivers by:

- Identifying the benefits and limitations of market-priced parking.
- Understanding driving and parking behavior in Los Angeles by gender and race.
- Considering how adjusting price, proximity, and parking duration can make market-priced parking strategies more effective and equitable.

Methods

The researcher used a mixed-methods approach, including analyzing data from the Understanding America Study Survey 379 (UAS 379), field observations, an in-person survey (n=45), and case study review to understand differences in driving behavior, perceptions of parking and driving, and priced parking strategies. She focused her field observations and in-person surveys in Hollywood — an area that has implemented market-priced parking — to understand the impacts of this pricing strategy on a diverse community with high destination density and a high percentage of residents who do not drive. While this small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, this approach centers the impact of market-priced parking on equitable outcomes.

Findings

Parking Behavior

- Most Angelenos spend, on average, \$0 per month on parking and find private vehicle use relatively inexpensive.
- Approximately 44% of observed drivers did not pay for parking.
- There was no statistically significant difference between observed driver gender and race and the use of market-priced parking spaces.

Conclusions

These findings reveal several strategies and pathways for improving gender and racial equity in market-priced parking programs:

- **Develop a Plan for Consistent Community Outreach:** More than 67% of surveyed respondents in Hollywood were unaware that the price of parking varied by block, despite the program’s existence since 2018. As such, more community-based outreach and promotional efforts are needed to ensure community members and visitors know about available parking options.
- **Implement Discounts at Parking Meters:** Offering specific drivers, such as lower-income drivers or Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) participants, would reduce the financial burden of driving that falls disproportionately on lower-income drivers. In addition, enrollment for eligible drivers could be automatic during registration renewal or WIC sign-up to avoid creating a logistical barrier to entry.
- **Improve Street Design and Public Transportation Systems:** By improving the street design (e.g., adding pedestrian scale lighting), parking further away from critical destinations could be more appealing for drivers who want to pay a lower price for parking but are concerned about their safety, such as people of color, women, and gender minorities.
- **Establish Community Task Groups in LA Express Park Neighborhoods:** Community members’ lived experience and expertise must be incorporated into the planning process to develop more equitable parking policies. Community task groups could determine what equitable pricing strategies mean in the context of their community.
- **Remove Barriers to Establishing Parking Benefit Districts:** This project shows that parking meters are most abundant in lower-income areas with the lowest car ownership rates and a large percentage of people of color. These communities are not reaping the benefits from hosting metered spaces. To help redistribute the benefits and burdens of on-street parking spaces, the city should expedite the establishment of parking benefit districts. Furthermore, community members should lead the development of the goals and revenue allocation of these districts alongside city officials.

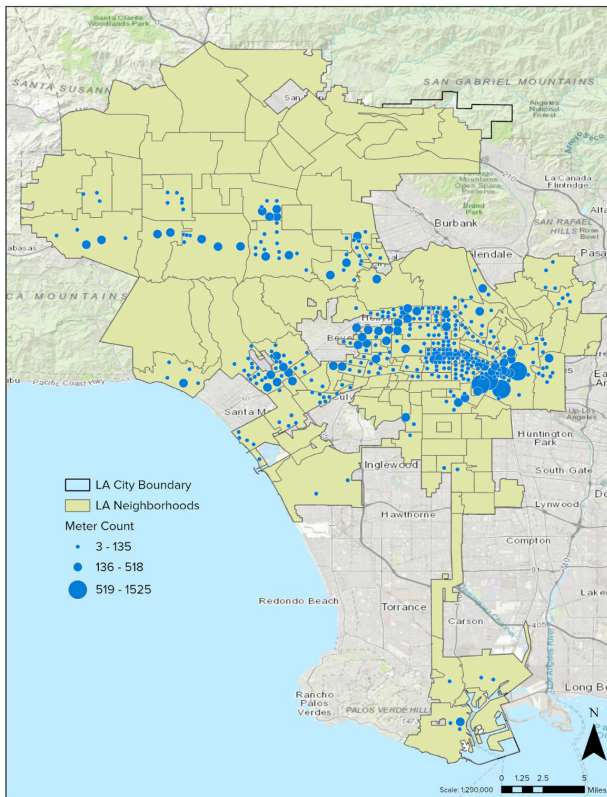


Figure 1. Parking Meters in the City of Los Angeles by Census Tract

Parking Experience/Preferences

- Women find it more difficult to find parking in their neighborhood than men, with approximately 23% of female UAS 379 respondents stating the process was “difficult” compared to 15% of male respondents.
- More UAS 379 survey respondents who identified as white indicated that it was “easy” to find parking in their neighborhood compared with respondents of color.
- The importance of parking-related factors such as proximity to destination changes based on the time of day for women and men.
- Proximity to destination became more important at night for 67% of women surveyed in Hollywood.
- Community members are open to the flexible use of parking-generated revenue, and other cities have set a precedent for using funds to redistribute the benefits and burdens of transportation.



Savignano, E. (2023). Change for the meter: Exploring the equity implications of market-priced parking (Master’s capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1q10k2tt>

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