

My business partner, Ken Snaggs, development engineer and land use planner extraordinaire, advised me that I may not have considered “*an unappreciated emolument for public servants*”: free parking in State-owned urban parking garages and parking lots. For example, most of the carpark spaces in the parking garage for twin-towers on the POS waterfront are reserved for Government officers. It is not uncommon for a visitor to receive a temporary space on the seventh floor or above.

The cost of city parking is high, and free parking is highly subsidized. This means that not only does fuel continue to be increasingly heavily subsidized, but also free Government car parking. The new rates at the Parkade in POS is TT\$550.00, VAT included, for monthly reserved parking. This could be considered a tax-free income for officers to whom it applies.

Our society is transport dependent, and people will not reduce their car use unless the alternative modes of transport are convenient, reliable and attractive. Even so, car-owners are wedded to their cars, so that perhaps only disincentives would cause a shift in mode. I continue to argue that only peak period auto reduction will effectively address out severe congestion situation.

According to California Environmental Protection Agency, Air Resources Board, “*California State law requires certain employers who provide subsidized parking for their employees to offer a cash allowance in lieu of a parking space. This law is called the parking cash-out program. It was enacted after studies showed cash allowances in lieu of parking encourage employees to find alternate means of commuting to work, such as public transit, carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling,*

or walking. Parking cash-out offers the opportunity to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion by reducing vehicle trips and emissions.”

Their Parking Cash-Out law states “*...each employer of 50 persons or more who provides a parking subsidy to employees, shall offer a parking cash-out program. ‘Parking cash-out program’ means an employer-funded program under which an employer offers to provide a cash allowance to an employee equivalent to the parking subsidy that the employer would otherwise pay to provide the employee with a parking space.*”

That law requires a cash allowance equal to the parking subsidy, that is, what is paid for the parking space minus any contribution by the employee. Commute-related subsidies (such as, public transit pass, ridesharing allowance, etc.) may be deducted from the cost of the parking in determining the amount of the cash allowance. The cash allowance is considered gross income subject to State and Federal income and payroll taxes. However, their ridesharing subsidies are exempt from state income taxes.

The question may be reasonably asked, what about the potential of spill-over on-street parking into nearby neighbourhoods, by employees who willingly cash-out but continue to use their cars? The California law provides “*that employers may develop guidelines to avoid neighbourhood parking problems. Employees must comply with these to be eligible for the cash allowance. Such guidelines might prohibit cash-out recipients from parking on specific streets or in specific neighbourhoods, or require the recipient to not drive alone to work (e.g., take the bus, carpool, walk, etc.).*”

Their research has shown that paid parking has about the same

impact on reducing solo driving as providing a cash allowance.

The University of Bradford car parking policy states that (1) Car parking permit fees shall cover operational costs and any planned improvements to the car parks. (2) High over-subscription of available spaces means that unless a permit holder has a reserved space, a parking permit only gives permission to hunt for a space. It does not guarantee that a space will be available. (3) The number of permits issued is limited and any student applicants living within a 3 km radius of the University are only eligible to apply for a permit under exceptional circumstances i.e. special holders or individuals with a permanent or temporary disability. (4) Provision of car parking is detrimental to the environment in that it encourages car travel as a means of commuting to work and study.

Annual permit charges also contain a 10% environmental carbon levy, and are as follows, in Pound Sterling: (a) Full-time Staff, Eligible senior staff entitled to a reserved parking space, £690; (b) Full-time Staff, General, More than 22 contractual hours, £190; (c) Full-time Staff, General, Less than 22 contractual hours, £95; (d) Students, 12 Month period, £95; (e) All Staff and Students, Motorcycles, 12 Month period, £33; All Staff and Students, Occasional, 20 visit entitlement up to a maximum of 50 per annum, £32.

A Civil Parking Notice of £60.00 will be imposed for parking offences.

Cash-out incentives, combined with effective transit development and suburban park-and-ride facilities, could significantly influence the levels of auto reduction in peak period commuting.

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