

Berkeley wins \$1M parking grant to fix '2-hour shuffle'

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Berkeley is looking to improve the “parking experience” in residential neighborhoods. Photo: Chris Makarsky

A Berkeley plan to improve residential parking woes won a \$1 million grant this week from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to help the city continue its [goBerkeley pilot program](#) for three more years. The goBerkeley effort was [one of six projects to be awarded a total of \\$6 million](#), as part of the MTC’s Climate Initiatives Program, out of 20 projects that applied for the money earlier this year. The

goBerkeley program previously focused on [bettering parking in commercial districts](#), and the city will now turn its attention to residential neighborhoods.

The commission voted Wednesday to approve the funding. The city hopes to receive the money in February and begin planning in March, said city spokesman Matthai Chakko. The three-year pilot is set to include one year of planning and outreach followed by two years of implementation and evaluation.

The prior goBerkeley pilot tweaked pricing for meters and garages downtown, in the Southside neighborhood and in The Elmwood district to make it easier for visitors to those areas to park. During outreach for that program, the city heard from many community members about the need to refine its approach to residential parking, too.

The commercial pilot areas covered about 2,500 spaces, but the city estimates that there are 20,000 on-street parking spots in Berkeley: “The majority of these parking spaces are in residential areas and are unregulated or part of the Residential Preferential Parking (RPP) permit system.”

In RPP areas, vehicles without permits are limited to 2-hour parking during certain hours and days.

According to the city, “This 2-hour time limit encourages the ‘2 hour shuffle’ in most of the City’s residential streets, which leads to congestion and cold-starts from drivers moving their vehicles from one parking space to another to avoid the time limit violation. If successful, these pilot solutions could be rolled out citywide to drastically reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gases (GHG) from driving. The pilot program could provide a ‘win-win’ for residents, businesses and the City by improving the parking experience, reducing congestion and GHG emissions.”

Potential goals of the pilot include achieving 80% occupancy of all blocks, both metered and residential; improving the “parking experience” for community members; and reducing both cold-starts and congestion, as described above.

The [80% occupancy standard](#) was popularized by Donald Shoup, who argued in his book “[The High Cost of Free Parking](#)” that basing pricing and fees on parking demand can help change driver behavior for the better.

How might the city achieve this? Staff plans to look into extending RPP restrictions to evenings and weekends in high-demand areas. The city could also streamline the visitor permit parking system by offering mobile and online purchases. And the city might curtail the RPP requirements where occupancy is lower than 80%, or [even eliminate or reduce the RPP requirement altogether](#).

The city also will investigate requiring motorists without permits to pay an hourly rate through some sort of mobile pay system.

“We want to make sure that residents get enough parking, and also to share the surplus parking with visitors,” Chakko said this week. “Right now, residents are the only ones paying. And people who are visiting are shuffling their cars every two hours. So we have one group that is paying the costs and another group that’s paying for the inconvenience. Those are issues that we’re trying to resolve.”

The program is also set to involve monitoring and evaluation to adjust rates to achieve the 80% occupancy standard by using an automated license plate recognition system to collect data.

Exactly where the city would roll out the new program has not been determined. That decision will be made after the city collects feedback from neighborhood groups, and plans to target areas where residents and businesses have asked for help. The city says current project areas — downtown, Southside and The Elmwood — are candidate project areas.

“Final strategies and project areas would be developed in consultation with the community and would be presented to the Council through a staff report and/or work session prior to implementation,” according to a [September staff report that outlined the grant application](#).

The city will need to kick in \$500,000 in matching funds to help run the program but, according to the staff report, the money is already part of the budget for ongoing goBerkeley operations.

Mayor Tom Bates, who represents Alameda County on the [21-member Metropolitan Transportation Commission](#), said he was pleased with the unanimous decision.

“The grant would help us fight climate change and support our local economy by reducing vehicle miles traveled and improving parking availability in commercial districts. The funding would let us build upon the successes achieved in the goBerkeley pilot to further develop efficiencies in managing parking demand while integrating them with the Residential Parking Program.”

The Climate Initiatives Program run by the MTC aims to reduce “transportation-related emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and is a critical strategy for implementing [Plan Bay Area](#),” according to the resolution approved Wednesday.