San Francisco is about to spend $25 million to answer a simple question: How much should a city charge for parking?

The price should be cheap enough that most of the metered spaces and city parking lots are always almost full.

But it shouldn't be so cheap that spaces are entirely full, leaving drivers frustrated and adding to congestion as cars circle endlessly looking for a place to park.

"It's the 'Goldilocks' principle of parking spaces," said Donald Shoup, a professor of urban planning at UCLA who wrote a book called "The High Cost of Free Parking."

Shoup's work was the inspiration for a high-tech project San Francisco is launching today. Its aim: to set parking prices just right.

The system will use electronic sensors to measure real-time demand for parking spaces, and adjust prices accordingly. When there are lots of empty spaces, it will be cheap to park. When spaces are hard to find, rates will be higher.
"It's basic supply and demand," Shoup said.

The range in prices will be huge: from 25 cents an hour to a maximum of $6 an hour, according to the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority.

Eventually, drivers will be able to find open parking spaces by going online, checking their mobile phones or reading for new electronic signs that will be posted throughout the city. (Warning to SF pedestrians: Watch out for drivers who are checking their phones to search for a parking place.)

Today's first phase begins with the installation of 190 new meters in the Hayes Valley area of San Francisco. Over the next two years, the city will be testing the system at 6,000 metered spaces across city and at 12,250 spaces in 15 of the city’s parking garages.

"It's good for commerce and getting the price right," Shoup said, pointing to the economic efficiency of the plan. "Let the market do something good for this service."

For More on Shoup: Check out his "Shoupista" following on Facebook.

For More on Shoup: Check out his "Shoupista" following on Facebook.
paul branson (pbransonii) wrote:
I gotta say, this is one of the smartest things I've heard. Cost is a little high. But I have always thought it is stupid to pay the same for a parking place at 7 a.m. on a Sunday morning as I do for a parking place at 7 p.m. on a Saturday night. Sounds kind of expensive, but it's a big job. Dictum #1: People will always fear and gripe about change even if it makes sense. Dictum #2: People will always blame stuff they fear on people they fear.
Wed Jul 28 2010 13:02:23 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (0)

Y D (whyveet) wrote:
ah yes, one of the reasons i don't like the principles of economics. The person who gets the spot is the one who "values" it the most, aka can afford it.
Recommend (3)

sdgsdgs dqyvsdsd (sdvsyvsd) wrote:
This comment has been reported as inappropriate by the NPR community.
Wed Jul 28 2010 12:43:30 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (0)

Gula Martaban (Murtabak) wrote:
This comment has been reported as inappropriate by the NPR community.
Recommend (3)

tom chang (xenophobia) wrote:
This is retarded, and another perfect example of why California is broke. They just spent $25M and who knows how much annually on upkeep to make sure the already severely limited spaces in SF are going to always be 'almost' full? Meaning they'll price the last spots out of range for people to actually use? How does making spots less available help people that want to park? I'm sure $25M and whatever it takes to maintain this garbage annually would go a long way in actually building garages to add spaces. Call me crazy but if you want people to more easily be able to park, you either create means for there to be less cars (ie mass transit) or create more parking. Limiting existing parking doesn't seem to solve anything....except maybe guarantee that the rich can always find a $6/hr parking spot.
Wed Jul 28 2010 12:17:24 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (9)

D G (Gilbear) wrote:
Last time I checked, it's always hard to find parking in SF. Way to go Gavin Newsom. Another complete waste of money.

@Steve Carr - Latte's are out man. We now pay a premium for hand drip coffee.
Wed Jul 28 2010 12:08:10 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (0)

Terence McBride (terry1919) wrote:
Now lets see if the EXTRA REVUNE GENERATED goes to FUND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION!!!!
Wed Jul 28 2010 12:07:30 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (1)
CB (C_J_B) wrote:
There is something dubious about adjusting prices to gouge customers when they will pay more - we decry this practice in the marketplace, so why tolerate it from City Hall? For "free-space" identifiers, try GPS, or make the free meters blink with green LEDs - keep the drivers' eyes on the road.
Many of us can see the need for a total restructuring of city planning since the advent of autos and cheap mass transit - there ideally should be a "no-drive" zone in the city with surface mass transit the dominant mode, and mass parking at least 5 miles out of the city; deliveries can be made through underground transit or by service transit lines on the ground.
Remake our cities for the twenty-first century, guys!
Wed Jul 28 2010 11:43:01 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (6)

Phillip Boyer (InYourFace) wrote:
To Mark Davis:
You sound like the typical whining American I hear about on a daily basis. What can I do about it? I'm only one person.
Go back to your sex, screen and sport and forgot about how politicians waste your dollars.
Your comments are that of an uninformed, spoiled little American brat.
Wed Jul 28 2010 10:45:34 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)
Recommend (9)