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**Inquiry into Federal Employee Parking Policy. LCD-78-339; B-192897. September 28, 1978. 12 pp.**

**Report to Sen. James Abourezk; by Richard W. Gutmann, Director, Logistics and Communications Div.**

**Issue Area: Are Agencies Maintaining Government Facilities Cost-Effectively? (713).**

**Contact: Logistics and Communications Div.**

**Budget Function: General Government: General Property and Records Management (804).**

**Organization Concerned: General Services Administration; Office of Management and Budget; Environmental Protection Agency.**

**Congressional Relevance: Sen. James Abourezk.**

**Authority: Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977 (42 U.S.C 7401). (P.L. 92-313; 40 U.S.C. 490). 55 Comp. Gen. 897. F.P.H.R. 101-20.117.**

Concern was expressed about the number of Federal employees driving to and from work and about Federal employee parking policy and its impact on the ability of cities to attain Federal clean air standards. Findings/Conclusions: About 28,000 employee parking spaces are provided at Federal facilities in the Washington, D.C. area, with an estimated monthly rental value of \$1.4 million. The General Services Administration (GSA) is authorized to charge agencies for space they occupy, including parking, at commercially equivalent rates. Parking charges assessed Federal agencies in the Washington area average about \$50 per month per space, but these charges are not passed on to the employees by the agencies. Federal regulations require that carpools be given priority in the assignment of parking spaces. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is responsible for developing a national parking policy for Federal employees, and the GSA is not in a position to establish rates until a Federal parking policy is developed by OMB. Opinion is divided on the effect the implementation of commercial rates would have on vehicle miles traveled by Federal employees. Washington, D.C. is probably the only urban area where Federal parking policy would have a significant impact on air-quality standards. (RRS)

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REPORT BY THE U.S.

# General Accounting Office

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## Inquiry Into Federal Employee Parking Policy

About 28,000 employee parking spaces are provided at Federal facilities in the Washington, D.C., area with an estimated monthly rental value of \$1.4 million. Federal regulations require that carpools be given priority in the assignment of parking spaces.

The Office of Management and Budget currently is studying the Federal parking issue but does not know when this will be completed.

Environmental Protection Agency officials believe that about 75 large urban areas with severe automobile pollutant problems will not be able to meet Federal air quality standards by 1982. Washington, D.C., is the only urban area where Federal employee parking policy would have a significant impact on Federal air quality standards.

This report was prepared at the request of Senator James Abourezk. Because of time constraints, information is based on agency records and there are no GAO conclusions or recommendations.



LCD-78-339  
SEPTEMBER 28, 1978



**UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548**

**LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS  
DIVISION**

**B-192897**

**The Honorable James Abourezk  
United States Senate**

**Dear Senator Abourezk:**

In your letter of April 27, 1978, you expressed concern about the number of Federal employees driving to and from work and asked us to look into several questions concerning Federal employee parking policy and its impact on the ability of cities to attain Federal clean air standards. During a subsequent meeting on May 22, 1978, to discuss your request, your office also asked about the extent of commitment on the part of Federal agencies toward developing a Federal parking policy. It was agreed that because of the time constraints our report would provide information based on agency records but no conclusions or recommendations.

We advised your office that most of the relevant studies and evaluations available focus on the situation in Washington, D.C. Information on the situation in other urban areas is limited. Furthermore, in the opinion of General Services Administration (GSA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials, Washington, D.C., where one-third to one-half of the work force are Federal employees, is the only urban area where Federal employee parking policy would have a significant impact on Federal air quality standards. Consequently, your office agreed that our response would concern itself primarily with the situation in Washington, D.C.

Your office also agreed that in our response to the questions regarding the Federal Government's cost of the parking subsidy program and cost recovery, cost would be based on the Standard Level User Charges GSA bills to Federal agencies for assigned space.

**Our comments on the questions raised follow:**

WHAT ARE THE COSTS TO THE  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF THE  
PARKING SUBSIDY PROGRAM?

Public Law 92-313, dated June 16, 1972 (40 U.S.C. 490), authorizes GSA to charge agencies for GSA-controlled Government-owned or leased space they occupy, including parking, at commercially equivalent rates for comparable space. GSA-controlled parking spaces are not assigned directly to Federal employees but to the agencies for both official and employee use. With the exception of the Washington, D.C., area and some of the large suburban Government facilities, most of the spaces under GSA control are used by the agencies for official purposes. This includes spaces for Government-owned vehicles, privately owned vehicles used for official business, service vehicles, and visitors' automobiles.

The parking charges assessed Federal agencies in the Washington area under Public Law 92-313 average about \$50 per month per space; however, these charges are not passed on by the agencies to the Federal employees. In some GSA-controlled garages and parking lots, Federal employees are charged a modest management fee by the firms that operate these parking facilities for GSA. Typical management fees approximate \$10 to \$15 per month per space. Management fees are charged on about one-third of the GSA-controlled employee parking spaces in the Washington area.

In November 1977, GSA made a survey of parking facilities of Federal agencies in the Washington metropolitan area. The GSA survey results produced the following statistics:

	<u>Total parking spaces</u>	<u>Official parking spaces</u>	<u>Employee parking spaces</u>
Downtown Washington, D.C.	10,834	1,259	9,575
Southwest Washington, D.C.	7,561	519	7,042
Nearby northern Virginia	<u>12,239</u>	<u>1,390</u>	<u>10,849</u>
Total	<u>30,634</u>	<u>3,168</u>	<u>27,466</u>

GSA estimated that about 850 additional employee parking spaces were not reported to GSA during the survey and were

therefore not included in the above statistics. Based on the parking charges GSA assesses Federal agencies, we estimate the rental value of the 28,316 employee parking spaces at about \$1,416,000 per month. The GSA statistics do not include parking spaces on Capitol Hill.

Parking on the Capitol Grounds is administered by Senate and House committees on their respective sides, and by the Supreme Court and Library of Congress separately. According to a 1977 report by the Architect of the Capitol, there are 9,112 parking spaces on Capitol Hill allocated as follows:

	<u>Parking spaces</u>
U.S. Senate	3,256
House of Representatives	<u>a/5,092</u>
Library of Congress	544
Supreme Court	<u>220</u>
 Total	 <u><u>9,112</u></u>

a/358 of these spaces are unassigned.

HOW SUCCESSFUL ARE EXISTING FEDERAL PROGRAMS  
SUCH AS CARPOOLING INCENTIVES IN REDUCING  
VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED?

GSA's guidelines for assignment of parking spaces to Federal employees at GSA-controlled facilities are based on the requirements of Federal Property Management Regulations section 101-20.117, as amended February 1978. These regulations establish a goal of assigning not more than 10 percent of the total spaces available to each agency for employee parking (excluding spaces assigned to the severely handicapped) to executive personnel and persons assigned unusual hours. The remaining spaces are to be assigned to carpools using the number of persons in the carpool to determine priority. Each agency is responsible for internal monitoring to determine that its various activities are in compliance with the carpooling requirements.

GSA believes that the preferential treatment given carpools in the assignment of parking permits is largely responsible for increased carpooling in recent years.

GSA's 1977 survey of parking facilities of Federal agencies in the Washington metropolitan area produced the following statistics:

	<u>Total employee parking spaces</u>	<u>Single- occupant parking spaces</u>	<u>Carpool parking spaces</u>	<u>Average carpool vehicle occupancy</u>
Downtown				
Washington, D.C.	9,575	3,129	6,446	4.21
Southwest				
Washington, D.C.	7,042	1,575	5,467	3.77
Nearby northern Virginia	<u>10,849</u>	<u>5,017</u>	<u>5,832</u>	3.06
Total	<u>27,466</u>	<u>9,721</u>	<u>17,745</u>	

The above statistics indicate that the number of single-occupant parking spaces far exceed the 10 percent goal prescribed by the Federal Property Management Regulations. A GSA official explained that the 10 percent single-occupant parking criteria is intended as a national agencywide goal but that in Washington, agencies are likely to exceed that percentage due to the large number of executives at agency headquarters. He conceded, however, that some agencies are very liberal in granting parking permits and do not adhere to GSA guidelines.

The statistics in GSA's survey report are based on information furnished to GSA by the various agencies. GSA did not verify the information but believes that it is reasonably accurate. However, District of Columbia Department of Transportation officials dispute these statistics. They believe that the number of single-occupant parking spaces is understated due to the existence of "phantom carpools," and that carpool vehicle occupancy is overstated. A GSA official conceded that there probably are some "phantom carpools" and overstatements of carpool vehicle occupancy but said that GSA has been working with the agencies to eliminate these situations and some progress has been made.

GSA believes that carpooling incentives are effective in reducing vehicle miles traveled, but that in some agencies GSA's parking guidelines need to be more strictly administered.

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board has considered a number of other transportation control measures to reduce vehicle miles traveled, including:

- Shuttle buses between Metrorail stations and Federal facilities.
- Express bus service.
- Vanpooling.
- Express lanes for buses, carpools, and vanpools.
- Fringe parking facilities served by public transportation.

However, these have had only limited implementation thus far and their potential for reducing vehicle miles traveled is still being studied.

The House of Representatives has been operating a carpooling program on Capitol Hill for a number of years. The Senate, the Library of Congress, and the Supreme Court have participated in the program to varying degrees. Nevertheless, according to a 1977 report by the Architect of the Capitol, the principal transportation problem on Capitol Hill is associated with employee parking. The report notes that there is an excess demand for parking when compared to other concentrations of employment in the Washington area. For example, a 1977 survey showed that approximately 11,400 of the 17,000 employees drive their cars to work and less than 700 of these share their car with a fellow employee.

The Architect of the Capitol says in his report:

"The manner in which parking permits are distributed and the willingness on the part of Congress to continually increase the supply of available parking are counter to the objective of reducing single occupant auto travel by the Capitol Hill employees."

The Architect of the Capitol's proposed program to reduce single-occupant autos has three components:

- An improved carpooling program.

--A vanpool program.

--Shuttle service between Metrorail stations and Capitol Hill locations.

The Architect of the Capitol's report says that policy changes coupled with an aggressive carpooling promotion and assistance program should easily achieve the 1.3 or more car occupancy goal previously set.

WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE TOWARD  
DEVELOPING A FEDERAL PARKING POLICY?

The regional organization for transportation and parking management planning in the Washington, D.C., area is the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and its independent policy organization, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board.

The Board first expressed its concern about Federal parking policy in a December 1975 resolution which noted that:

"The Federal policy and practice of providing subsidized parking for its employees is contrary to regional goals and objectives and to regional transportation planning designed to increase carpooling and use of public mass transit."

The resolution urged the Federal Government to proceed promptly to develop and implement a plan for parking charges equivalent to commercial rates at all Federal installations in the Washington metropolitan area.

The Board submitted the resolution to Federal agencies and congressional committees concerned with transportation, energy, and environmental protection policies. Responses on the resolution were received from the Department of Transportation, the Federal Energy Administration, EPA, and GSA. A common theme of many of these responses was a willingness for a more comprehensive exploration of the issue.

In March 1977, the Transportation Planning Board staff prepared a position paper recommending parking fees for Federal employee parking and presented it to U.S. Secretary



of Transportation Brock Adams. The former Board chairman, John R. Freeland, further endorsed that position in a May 25, 1977, letter to the Secretary. The Secretary expressed interest in the position paper and stated that he would respond following appropriate Department of Transportation study of the points made. We were told that the Secretary did not officially respond to the position paper because, toward the end of fiscal year 1977, the Transportation Planning Board established a Joint Intergovernmental Task Force on Regional Parking Policies to address the Federal parking issue and other parking management strategies. The Department of Transportation and other key Federal agencies appointed representatives to the Task Force. The Task Force met in September and November 1977, but has made little progress in terms of eliminating parking subsidies for Federal employees. The Task Force is currently dormant and no date has been set for another meeting.

On June 14, 1978, the Board's staff decided to continue its efforts to persuade the Federal Government to eliminate parking subsidies for Federal employees and continue to work with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority, and State and local agencies to promote fringe parking served by public transportation and parking at Metrorail stations.

The Board also plans to identify, evaluate, and recommend potential transportation control measures for implementation by 1982. A preliminary list includes the following measures:

- Motor vehicle inspection/maintenance program to reduce emissions.
- Improved public transit.
- Exclusive bus and carpool lanes.
- On-street parking controls.

At a November 14, 1977, meeting, local representatives to the Joint Intergovernmental Task Force on Regional Parking pointed out that there are still many single-occupant vehicles coming into the District and that measures to deal with this problem are needed in both the private and the public sphere. Federal representatives, however, contended that these single-occupant vehicles were primarily

driven by non-Federal employees and that therefore strategies should focus on the private sphere. Local representatives concluded that the Federal establishment seemed to be more concerned with establishing roadblocks to solutions than with tackling its part of the problem.

Similarly a September 1976 EPA report, "Parking Management Strategies for Reducing Automobile Emissions," pointed to a lack of cooperation on the part of the Federal establishment. It said:

"Almost 25 percent of the parking spaces in the D.C. Core are under the control of either the General Services Administration or the Congress and thus not subject to any controls exercised by the city government under its home rule charter. Historically, these two parts of the Federal establishment have been less than cooperative in regulating their parking policies to meet city goals, especially in reducing their subsidy of employee parking costs."

OMB CURRENTLY HAS IN PROGRESS AN  
EVALUATION OF POSSIBLE FEDERAL ACTIONS  
TO REDUCE VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED BY  
FEDERAL EMPLOYEES. IS THIS WORK  
PROCEEDING EXPEDITIOUSLY?

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is responsible for developing a national parking policy for Federal employees. The matter of charging Federal employees for parking is one of the primary subjects which such a policy would address. GSA is not in a position to establish parking rates until a Federal parking policy is developed by OMB.

In 1972, OMB prepared a draft of a parking policy which proposed the establishment of employee parking fees. It said:

"The Government shall recover costs \* \* \* where the parking facilities provided are for employees working in areas served by public transportation and at times when such service is available. \* \* \* Reimbursement shall also be required when the installation is not served by public transportation if free parking on

private or Government property is not available within reasonable walking distance to accommodate all Federal employee parking requirements."

The 1972 draft was opposed by Government agencies and was never promulgated. In 1977, OMB began to reevaluate the need for a Federal parking policy and the question of charging Federal employees for Government-furnished parking spaces. OMB is still working on the project but was unable to provide us with an estimated completion date.

WHAT EFFECT WOULD FULL COST RECOVERY POLICIES HAVE ON VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED BY FEDERAL EMPLOYEES? WHAT EFFECT WOULD IT HAVE ON FEDERAL AGENCY REVENUES, EMPLOYEE INCOMES, AND SPECIAL INDIVIDUAL NEEDS, SUCH AS THOSE OF THE HANDICAPPED?

Opinion is divided on what effect the implementation of commercial rates for Federal parking would have on vehicle miles traveled by Federal employees. GSA believes that parking fees will not result in a reduction of vehicle miles traveled; that employees will drive if they can find parking, even when it is not economically advantageous; and that emphasis on carpooling is the most effective solution to the problems of energy conservation, air pollution, and traffic congestion.

However, a mathematical model used by the Department of Transportation to investigate the relationship between parking cost and choice of transportation mode showed that automobile trip productions are sensitive to parking cost increases. Similarly, at a September 20, 1977, meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Task Force on Regional Parking, it was pointed out that arguments which maintain that increasing parking rates for Federal employees (in many cases as much as \$40 a month) would have no impact on automobile work trips and would not deflect some trips to public transportation, are not consistent with results predicted by a range of available urban transportation models.

At the September 20 meeting, the Joint Intergovernmental Task Force discussed the merits of implementing commercial rates for Federal Government employee parking facilities. Among the arguments opposing commercial rates for Federal parking were:

--Many employees in the private sphere have their parking fees subsidized by their employers. Commercial rates for Federal spaces would represent an inequity for Federal employees vis-a-vis private employees.

--Commercial parking rates for Federal parking would represent a pay cut for Federal employees. This would handicap the Federal Government in its recruitment of desired employees.

Arguments supporting commercial rates for Federal parking were:

--Enforcement of carpools would be less of a problem since drivers would have an incentive to split the cost of monthly parking with their riders.

--Tax dollars used to subsidize Federal employee parking would be better spent if invested in public transportation capital improvements or operating support.

The estimated amount of revenue that could be generated by charging commercial rates for Federal agency parking spaces in the Washington area is shown on page 3 in response to your question about the cost of the parking subsidy program. Unless otherwise authorized by law, parking fees collected by an executive agency, if rates therefore are approved, are to be credited to appropriations initially charged for such services, except that amounts collected in excess of actual costs must be remitted to the Treasury as miscellaneous receipts (55 Comp. Gen. 897).

The Transportation Planning Board in a February 1976 study for the Department of Transportation, "Parking Management Policies and Auto Control Zones," said that certain negative socio-economic impacts can be expected from the implementation of a parking fee program. Less convenient work trips for drivers switching to transit and higher commuting costs for drivers who continue to use their cars are mentioned, as are additional hardships imposed on drivers who must travel from work to school or personal business. Low income persons are likely to be most affected and therefore the provision of alternate public transportation services is important. An October 1976 study by R.H. Pratt Associates prepared in cooperation with the Department of Transportation, "Transportation Controls for Air Quality Improvement in the National Capital Region,"

suggests that parking fees would not apply to handicapped persons unable to use mass transit. To translate such a suggestion into policy, GSA will have to provide for such an exemption in any future regulations on parking fees.

WHAT EFFECT DO FEDERAL PARKING POLICIES  
HAVE ON THE ABILITY OF CITIES WITH LARGE  
CONCENTRATIONS OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, SUCH  
AS DENVER AND WASHINGTON, TO MEET FEDERAL  
CLEAN AIR STANDARDS?

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977 (42 U.S.C. 7401) require all States with areas not meeting Federal air quality standards to submit new control strategies to EPA by January 1979 showing how they plan to attain the standards by December 1982. For areas having severe problems with the automobile pollutants, carbon monoxide and photochemical oxidants (smog), attainment deadlines for these pollutants may be extended by EPA until December 1987. To be granted an extension until 1987, an area may have to institute inspection/maintenance programs to control pollution from in-use cars, or implement transportation control measures. Examples of the latter would be establishment of special carpool lanes and new mass transit systems, resulting in reduced traffic congestion.

Photochemical oxidants, which are particularly prevalent in urban areas, are EPA's greatest pollution problem. According to a February 24, 1978, EPA listing, there are 105 urban areas in the United States with populations greater than 200,000, and 103 of these areas failed to meet EPA's oxidant standards. The listing also shows that 62 of these areas failed to meet EPA's standard for carbon monoxide.

EPA officials believe that about 75 of the major urban areas with severe automobile pollutant problems will not be able to meet the 1982 deadline. Denver and Washington, D.C., are in this category.

As mentioned above, Washington, D.C., with its large Federal work force is probably the only urban area where Federal parking policy would have a significant impact on Federal air quality standards. Nevertheless, the EPA regional office in Denver has undertaken a program to improve transit ridership and vehicle occupancy among its own employees. The next step will be to implement a similar

program for other Federal agencies in the Denver area. The EPA Denver regional office's plans call for extensive support to the Federal agencies, including assistance in formulating effective carpool matching programs, identifying potential employer incentive programs, and other assistance as needed. A major goal of the Federal sector portion of the program is to set an example for the private sector.

EPA officials point out that a parking policy is only part of a program to reduce automobile travel, increase vehicle occupancy, and reduce emissions from individual automobiles. EPA officials believe that in areas with severe automobile pollutant problems, Federal air quality standards will not be attained without an effective inspection/maintenance program to reduce automobile emissions. The prospects for adoption of such a program in the near future are not good in most States, according to EPA.

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As your office requested, we did not take the additional time needed to obtain written agency comments on the matters discussed in this report. Copies of this report are being sent to the Secretary of Transportation; the Director, OMB; the Administrator, EPA; and the Administrator of General Services. Copies will also be available to other interested parties who request them.

Sincerely yours,



R. W. Gutmann  
Director