

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
*District Department of Transportation*



Public Hearing:  
The State of Accessible Parking in the District and B21-175

Testimony of  
Leif A. Dormsjo  
Director

Before the  
Committee on Transportation and the Environment  
Council of the District of Columbia

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Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good afternoon Chairperson Cheh, members and staff of the Committee. I am Leif Dormsjo, the Director of the District Department of Transportation or DDOT. I am pleased to testify before you today on “The State of Accessible Parking in the District” and Bill 21-175, the “Accessible Parking Amendment Act of 2015.” Meeting the accessibility needs of the residents and visitors in the District is of great importance to the Mayor and to me as the Director of the Department of Transportation. I want to thank you and Councilmember Evans for holding this hearing and for your leadership on this critical issue.

### **Background**

Fifteen years ago, City Council enacted the “Individuals with Disabilities Parking Reform Amendment Act of 2000,” which set limits on the amount of free parking available to cars with disability license plates or hanging placards. The Parking Amendment Act of 2006 authorized the establishment of payment and time limitations at reserved metered spaces and required DDOT to “address the accessibility of parking meters for persons with disabilities and identify any alternative means by which meter payment requirements can be met.”

To comply with the legislation and assess parking accessibility in the District, DDOT commissioned a study on the existing conditions of meters and sidewalks. The study identified several capital construction projects necessary to improve accessibility including the retrofit or replacement of approximately 200 sidewalks and 800 curb ramps. In the years following this study, DDOT completed the identified projects. As a result of these accessibility improvements and emerging new parking meter technologies, DDOT was prepared to design a metered parking program that could provide for payments and time limitations at reserved spaces as authorized in the Parking Amendment Act of 2006. These years of study, capital improvements, and technological advances culminated in the development of the Red Top Meter Parking Program.



In February of 2012, DDOT began the implementation of the Red Top Meter program. However, due to concerns about the outreach and communications around the plan, the City Council passed the “Citizens with Disabilities Parking Fairness Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2012,” which delayed the implementation of the program until DDOT coordinated with stakeholders representing the disability community to address concerns.

Since DDOT first embarked on the Red Top Meter Program, several other cities have successfully implemented disabled parking programs that have increased access and curbed fraudulent use of disabled placards and plates. Baltimore implemented the "Project Space" program last summer in the downtown area, and the Parking Authority is now looking to expand the program to other areas. Portland, Oregon, also successfully implemented a program that resulted in steep declines in placard use in the downtown area, and expanded access to parking for all users.

We now have the benefit of learning from these peer cities to understand how they have rolled out and communicated these programs.

### **The State of Accessible Parking in the District**

With regard to accessible parking in the District, it is DDOT’s goal to:

- Provide individuals with disabilities access to reserved, accessible parking meters;
- Provide all residents and visitors with improved access to services and to local businesses through increased turnover at metered spaces;
- Improve the availability of parking for all by eliminating the temptation to use disability placards to obtain “free,” day-long parking at metered spaces; and



manage—in partnership with the Department of Public Works—the limited available curb-side space equitably through enforcement of longstanding but previously unenforceable time limits that ensure turnover and access at metered spaces.

In the past several years, DDOT has enhanced engagement and communication with the disability community to ensure that the parking needs of persons with disabilities are addressed.

Under my leadership, DDOT has begun to evaluate and adjust the red top meter program with a focus on accessible, appropriately placed meters that meet US Access Board standards. DDOT also established the *Reserved Parking for People with Disabilities Working Group*, comprised of representatives from 19 organizations representing disability communities, business groups, federal and District government agencies, and representatives from the City Council.

### **Bill 21-175, the “Accessible Parking Amendment Act of 2015**

We think the framework offered by the bill is one that will allow us to move forward successfully in partnership with stakeholders and implement the program. Following this hearing, we will review the public testimony in order to offer suggested changes to bill as proposed.

At this point, our review focuses on a few broad areas:

- Definition of the initial implementation area: the Central Employment Area is largely used to define where the Federal government may locate office space, and may not offer a clear and communicable boundary. The District's defined Central Business District may offer an alternative area already defined in the DC Municipal Regulations.
- Flexibility to expand the program: the bill proposes a maximum of one Red Top Meter per block within the Central Employment Area only. We feel that the implementation



requirements should allow more flexibility to define areas of higher demand and a method for allowing additional areas to be included in the program, in collaboration with business and neighborhood groups, as well as disabled stakeholders.

- Blue top meter program: we are concerned about reference in the bill to the blue top meter program. The blue top meter program is not an actively supported program at DDOT. Blue top meters are aged assets that are coin-operated and not networked. DDOT's original plan was to phase out the blue top meters once all red top meters were installed. This program also offers no real benefit for persons with disabilities since the space is not reserved and all parkers may park at a blue top meter and take advantage of the extended time intended for person with disabilities.
- Fines: while we appreciate the intent of increasing the penalty for unauthorized parking in reserved metered spaces, we believe that the fines should be more in line with the surrounding jurisdictions which set the fine at \$500.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, DDOT will continue to strive to improve the state of accessible parking in the District. We look forward to working with the Council and the members of this Committee to continue to address accessible parking in the District.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

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