POLICY BRIEF

The Politics of Congestion-Priced Parking

An Evaluation of the SFpark program

Daniel G. Chatman and Michael Manville - 2014

Brief By: Nathan Holmes

UCLA Lewis Center
www.lewis.ucla.edu

UCLA ITS INSTITUTE OF TRANSPORTATION STUDIES
www.lewis.ucla.edu

RESEARCH TOPIC

In 2011 San Francisco initiated SFpark, one of the first tests of congestion-priced street parking in the country. SFpark's explicit goal was to reduce cruising for parking and as a consequence induced a host of other benefits, such as making walking and cycling safer and increasing the speed and reliability of the city's buses and trolleys. SFpark's slogan is "live more, circle less," and our research examined whether SFpark's implementation of congestion-priced parking achieved its stated goal of reducing cruising for parking.

RECOMMENDATION

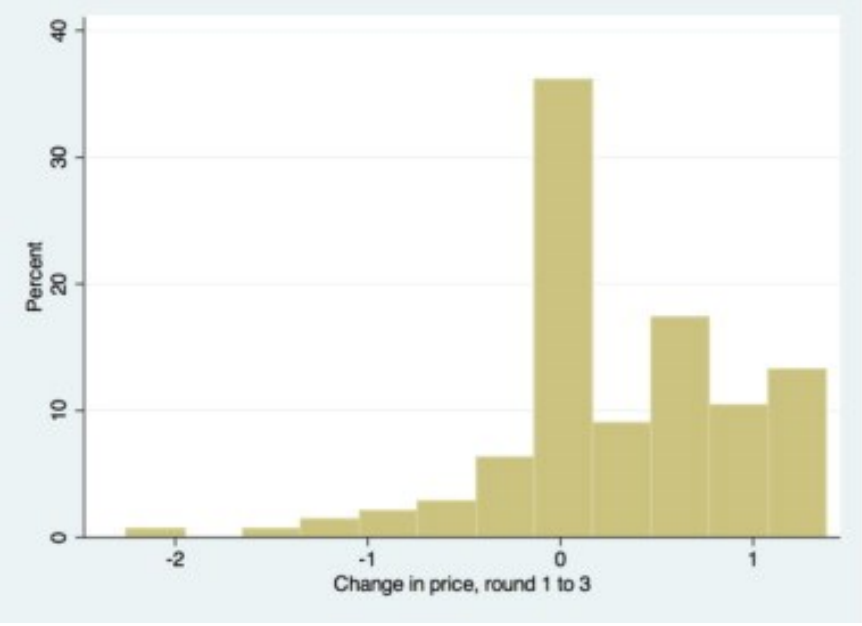
SFpark set its prices based on a block's average occupancy. We believe cities will have more success reducing cruising if they set prices to achieve a "minimum vacancy" rate. We also recommend (to the extent it is politically feasible) not placing ceilings on parking prices. If public agencies or elected officials follow the San Francisco example and are unwilling to let meter rates rise quickly, then they risk charging higher prices without substantially improving the availability of parking in high-demand areas .

STUDY

This study draws on thousands of hours of curb parking observations carried out at three different times in 2011 and 2012. We examined SFpark's effects on 50 blocks (both priced and control) and used multiple metrics: average occupancy, parking turnover and duration, vehicle occupancy, non-payment, and the share of time at least one space was available on each block.

MAIN FINDINGS

- **After a full year of SFpark, parking price increases were not associated with greater parking availability or with other metrics that would suggest reduced cruising.** On average, and in apparent contradiction to SFpark's goals, our sample blocks showed a trend toward more parking use and less parking availability as average prices increased.
- **We find little or no relationship between price increases and overall average increases in average minimum block vacancy.** Price increases in the study are associated with reductions in average block occupancy (the metric SFpark uses to make its price adjustments), but we do not find a significant relationship between higher prices and average shorter parking spells, higher turnover, or more carpooling.
- **SFpark's particular method of implementing price changes could explain the program's lack of influence on cruising.** Instead of large and sudden increases in price, SFpark made small price adjustments over time, with restrictions on both how fast and how high prices could rise. It is therefore possible that a number of external factors outweighed the impact of the price increase.
- **The results speak to the importance of the price-setting criterion.** Prices in SFpark are based on average timeband block-level occupancy rates, and while average occupancy is correlated with parking availability, the relationship is not perfect. A block whose average monthly occupancy is 85% might nevertheless go many hours with a vacancy rate of zero.



Chatman, Daniel and Michael Manville, 2014. "**Theory vs. Implementation in congestion-priced parking: An evaluation of SFpark, 2011-2012**," *Research in Transportation Economics,* 44. 52-60.