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The Honorable Laura Friedman
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento CA 95814

Support for [California Assembly Bill 1401](#); Prohibit minimum parking requirements for housing within one-half mile walking distance from public transit

Dear Ms. Friedman:

California has been waiting for AB 1401 for a long time. In 2005, the American Planning Association published *The High Cost of Free Parking*, an 800-page book in which I argued that minimum parking requirements increase housing costs, subsidize cars, worsen traffic congestion, pollute the air and water, damage the economy, degrade urban design, encourage sprawl, reduce walkability, exclude poor people, and accelerate global warming. To my knowledge, no city planner has argued that minimum parking requirements do *not* cause these harmful effects. Instead, a flood of recent research has shown that minimum parking requirements do produce all these harmful results. We are poisoning our cities with too much parking.

Minimum parking requirements are almost an established religion in city planning. One shouldn't criticize anyone else's religion, of course, but I'm a protestant when it comes to parking requirements. City planning needs a reformation, and AB 1401 can help.

City planners are placed in a difficult position when asked to set parking requirements in zoning ordinances. They don't know the demand for parking at every apartment building, art gallery, bowling alley, dance hall, fitness club, movie theater, pet store, tavern, zoo, or hundreds of other land uses. Planners also do not know how much the required parking spaces cost or how the parking requirements affect the cost of housing and everything else. Nevertheless, planners must set the parking requirements for every land use.

Planning for parking is an ad-hoc talent learned on the job and is more a political activity than a professional skill. Despite a lack of theory and data, planners have managed to set parking requirements for hundreds of land uses in thousands of cities—the Ten Thousand Commandments for off-street parking.

There are many good reasons to adopt AB 1401. Federal and state governments give cities billions of dollars every year to build and operate mass transit systems, but most cities require ample parking everywhere on the assumption that nearly everyone will drive everywhere for almost every trip. Minimum parking requirements work against all these transit investments.

For example, Los Angeles is building the Purple Line under Wilshire Boulevard, which already boasts the city's most frequent bus service. Nevertheless, along parts of Wilshire Boulevard the city requires at least 2.5 parking spaces for every dwelling unit, even for the smallest apartments.

Twenty public transit lines serve the UCLA campus near Wilshire Boulevard in Westwood, with 119 buses per hour arriving during the morning peak. Nevertheless, across the street from campus, Los Angeles requires 3.5 parking spaces for every apartment that contains more than four rooms. California has expensive housing for people and free parking for cars.

Without knowing how much the required parking spaces cost to build, city planners cannot know how much parking requirements increase the cost of housing. Small apartments cost much less to build than big ones, but their parking spaces cost the same. Many cities require the same number of spaces for all apartments regardless of their size, so the parking requirements disproportionately increase the cost of low-income housing.

Parking requirements would be redundant if they did not increase the parking supply, and the increased cost of the required parking is passed on to all shoppers. For example, parking requirements raise the price of food at grocery stores for all shoppers. People who are too poor to own a car pay more for their groceries so richer people can park free at the store.

Most California cities seem willing to pay any price and bear any burden to assure the survival of free parking. But do people really want free parking more than affordable housing, clean air, walkable neighborhoods, and a sustainable planet? A city where everyone happily pays for everyone else's free parking is a fool's paradise.

Cities usually require or restrict parking without considering the middle ground of neither a minimum nor a maximum. This behavior recalls a Soviet maxim: "What is not required must be prohibited." AB 1401, however, is something new. It does not require or restrict parking, and developers can provide all the parking they think demand justifies.

Many people believe Americans love their cars, but the affair was an arranged marriage. City planners were both matchmakers and leading members of the wedding party. Unfortunately, no one provided a good prenuptial agreement. City planners can now become marriage counselors or divorce lawyers because the relationship between people and cars no longer works well. AB 1401 will help solve the problem.

Like the automobile itself, parking is a good servant but a bad master. Cities will work and look much better when markets rather than politicians govern decisions about the number of parking spaces.

Assembly Bill 1401 is the easiest, simplest, and fastest way for California to provide affordable housing, walkable neighborhoods, and a just society. Good luck with it!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald Shoup". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.