

# LET'S MAKE ACCESSIBLE PARKING MORE ACCESSIBLE

A Practical Guide to Addressing Disabled Placard Abuse  
and Other Parking Issues for People with Disabilities





## ABOUT THE ACCESSIBLE PARKING COALITION

Established and led by the International Parking & Mobility Institute, the mission of the Accessible Parking Coalition (APC) is to eliminate disabled placard/plate abuse and improve access to parking for people with disabilities.





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The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

## THE PROBLEM

Although the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) made discrimination against people with disabilities in transportation and other areas illegal, ensuring available accessible parking remains an ongoing challenge for the parking and mobility industry. For more than 30 million Americans with mobility disabilities, the inability to park near destinations can be a frequent occurrence that profoundly affects their ability to lead independent lives. Across the U.S., accessible spaces are often occupied by able-bodied drivers using fraudulent, borrowed, or stolen placards so they can park for free and/or take fewer steps. Impediments such as street furniture, motorcycles, plowed snow, and shopping carts can hinder drivers using wheelchairs from exiting or entering their vehicles. Parking meters and pay stations that require a certain level of manual dexterity may be prohibitively difficult to use. The list goes on.

Statistics show that this issue will get worse as our population ages. [According to the Population Reference Bureau \(PRB\)](#), the percentage of people age 65 and older will rise from 15 to 24 in the next 40 years. Increasingly,

older Americans are choosing to live in their communities for as long as they can rather than move to controlled environments such as assisted living facilities. According to Brian Bard, program specialist, National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), more than a quarter of the 46 million people in this age category report a disability that makes walking or climbing difficult.

## IPMI AND THE ACCESSIBLE PARKING COALITION

The International Parking & Mobility Institute (IPMI) decided to take action to combat the problem, launching a multi-year, multi-platform initiative in late 2017. Its first step was to engage the people most affected by creating the Accessible Parking Coalition (APC), an alliance of civil rights and independent-living advocates, disabled veterans groups, other advocates for people with disabilities, transportation officials, government agencies, and parking management and technology experts. One of the goals of the APC is to foster additional partnerships with organizations that have a stake in assisting this effort.

### First Meeting of the Accessible Parking Coalition Founding Members at U.S. Access Board offices in Washington, D.C.

**Front row L-R:** Brian Bard, National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research; Lee Page, Paralyzed Veterans of America; David Capozzi, U.S. Access Board; Mat McCollough, U.S. Access Board; Bill Botten, U.S. Access Board Not pictured: Kelly Buckland, National Council on Independent Living; Glen White, Ph.D., Research and Training, Center on Independent Living, Univ. of Kansas.

**Back row L-R:** Cindy Campbell, International Parking & Mobility Institute (IPMI); Shawn McCormick, San Francisco MTA; Regina Morgan, NHTSA/DOT; Ron Lucey, Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities; Helena Berger, American Association of People with Disabilities; Helen Sullivan, IPMI; Jasey Cárdenas, United Spinal Association; Fran Robertson, Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities; Ken Husting, Los Angeles DOT; Brian Ursino, American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators; Shawn Conrad, CAE, IPMI.



The motto, “Nothing About Us Without Us,” associated with the disability rights movement since the 1990s, signifies that policy decisions should not be made and enacted without the full participation of groups they affect. The APC is providing this unified voice to help better inform jurisdictions, parking and mobility professionals, planners, developers, and others across the U.S. The organization serves as a collaborative resource center, organizing and sharing others’ experiences.

## THE 2018 NATIONAL SURVEY ON ACCESSIBLE PARKING AND PLACARD ABUSE

To gauge the full scope and effects of accessible parking issues, the APC conducted the first coordinated, national survey of nearly 4,000 persons with disabilities. The landmark 2018 National Survey on Accessible Parking and Placard Abuse has since helped guide the program, create media awareness and opportunities, and identify strategies for communication.

Survey results were significant: 85 percent of those surveyed said they experienced problems finding accessible parking in their communities. Seventy percent agreed that parking access affects their decision to ride or drive, and 62 percent said they would be more likely to drive or ride if parking was more available. Nearly all (96 percent) confirmed that parking availability is important to leading an independent life.

As IPMI CEO Shawn Conrad, CAE, noted, “The APC survey responses revealed that availability of accessible parking severely affects the lives of people with disabilities—influencing their decisions of whether to drive, ride, or stay home, and even where to live.”

*“Availability of accessible parking severely affects the lives of people with disabilities—influencing their decisions of whether to drive, ride, or stay home, and even where to live.”*

### Q: How often do you have problems finding accessible parking in your community?



Source: APC

APC’s survey numbers are confirmed by other polls, including a recent one conducted among BraunAbility wheelchair van users. Eighty-nine percent said they feel excluded from events or places they want to go in their everyday lives. Nearly two-thirds avoided going somewhere because they were unsure if it was accessible, and 52 percent turned back when they were unable to find accessible parking. “Specifically, having access to park, enter, exit, and navigate a building or event space is keeping many of those with mobility challenges and their caregivers from enjoying the freedoms they deserve,” observed the mobility equipment manufacturer.

This *APC Guide* explores the many parking issues faced by people with disabilities and presents a variety of proactive approaches parking and mobility professionals and other decision-makers can take to help ensure accessibility for all. It includes numerous examples of measures already in place in several cities and states, as well as action items to take to become positively involved in this industry-wide effort.

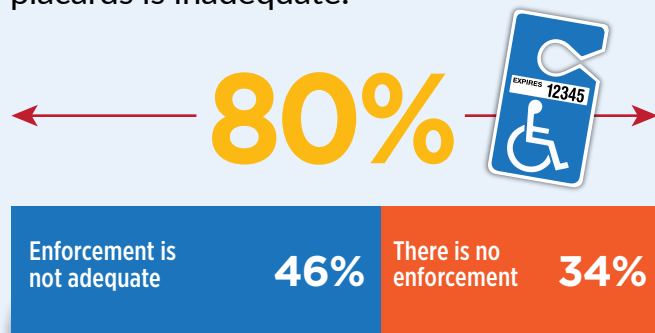
“Our industry is in a unique position to be a catalyst for change on this very important issue,” said Conrad. “If we work individually to eliminate parking obstacles for people with disabilities and collectively to foster public understanding of their parking and mobility challenges, we can make a big difference in improving people’s lives.”



## A CLOSER LOOK AT PLACARD ABUSE

One of the most challenging issues related to accessible parking is the fraudulent use of disability placards and license plates. As many jurisdictions are discovering, providing free or unlimited parking to vehicles with plates or placards for people with disabilities invites abuse by many able-bodied drivers who want to avoid parking restrictions and fees and take advantage of closer proximity to their destination.

Percentage of respondents who believe enforcement of wrongful use of disabled placards is inadequate:



Source: APC

In their article in *The Parking Professional's* (now *Parking and Mobility* magazine) January 2015 issue, UCLA professors, Donald Shoup and Fernando Torres-Gil, noted that drivers in Los Angeles and San Francisco can save up to \$40 a day by using disabled placards at meters. A downtown Los Angeles parking study revealed that 44 percent of vehicles at meters displayed disability placards and they remained in the same spaces seven times longer than other cars.

"States encourage this licensed fraud by making placard abuse easy, profitable, and rarely punished," they wrote. "Because enforcement is so difficult and the chance of getting a ticket is so low, even high fines do not prevent abuse." The meter exemption for placards twists the intention of the ADA by confusing accessibility with charity, and in the process has corrupted the placard system.

As far back as 2010, a *Washington Post* article described placards as "a prized commodity" that some families pass down as "heirlooms." "Thieves covet them," the article said. "Last year, a Temple Hills [Md.] man was arrested for stealing placards from cars—ignoring Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and stereos—so he could sell them for \$50 each."





A 2014 investigation by the Boston Inspector General's Internal Special Audit Unit (ISAU) uncovered blatant ongoing abuse of placards in the four Boston neighborhoods it surveilled. The ISAU found that 77 vehicles regularly displayed a placard belonging to someone other than the vehicle owner, including relatives, roommates, and acquaintances. Four placards belonged to deceased people; two had been reported lost or stolen and had been cancelled. One had been purchased for \$300.

A follow-up report in 2016 concluded that improper use of placards cost the city of Boston millions of dollars per year. If just 10 percent of meter users were misusing placards, it amounted to more than \$1.8 million in lost revenue.

An investigative TV news segment by CBS 2 in Los Angeles illustrates how able-bodied people are misusing disabled placards to obtain free parking.

Efforts by cities to address placard fraud often are often hindered by state legislative authority. There is significant inconsistency in how states regulate or authorize jurisdictions to implement solutions.

The ADA Standards require [a specific percentage](#) of spaces to be designed, constructed, and maintained for people with disabilities—yet in some jurisdictions, the number of parking placards issued far outnumbers the designated spaces. In Colorado, at one point, there were 570,000 valid parking placards for 5.6 million state residents. That represents more than 10 percent of the population. In the greater San Francisco Bay Area, placard issuance has risen steadily since 1997, and there are now more than 500,000 placard holders competing for 29,200 metered spaces, of which only 700 are designated blue zones for people with disabilities.

### Action Item:

*Remove the financial incentive for disabled placard/plate abuse by limiting free parking only to those with severe mobility disabilities—and reinvest revenue to improving accessibility services.*

## HOW PLACARDS CAN SLIP INTO THE WRONG HANDS—OR CARS

### ► Theft

The lure of free or unlimited parking has created a black market for stolen parking placards. Mark Wright, in [“Solutions to Disabled Placard Usage”](#) in the August 2015 issue of *The Parking Professional* (now *Parking & Mobility* magazine), reported that 20 to 25 percent of placards issued in Baltimore were stolen every month prior to reforms, which now require placard holders to pay for placards and adhere to time limits.

### ► Relatives with Multiple Placards

In California, where cars with placards can park for free at any meter for unlimited time, the DMV estimates that one in 10 placards was obtained fraudulently. In [“Scammers Caught Selling Disabled Parking Placards,”](#) San Francisco reporter David Goldstein went undercover and purchased a disability parking placard for \$200 from a relative of a legitimate placard holder. According to the seller, his aunt had obtained another one so he decided to sell the extra.



### ■ Placards Sent to the Deceased

Family members of deceased people often receive replacement disability placards or plates in the mail and use them. A 2018 [Best Practices Guide on Deterring and Detecting Fraud and Misuse of Disability Placards and Plates](#), published by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) and funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) noted that, until recently, the California DMV automatically reissued disability placard replacements every two years, unless notified that individual was deceased.

Peer Ghent, senior management analyst for LA Express Park, said that one of his company's parking meter technicians was still receiving his deceased mother's placards six years after her death, despite repeatedly asking the DMV to stop.

California now keeps track of placard cancellations and communicates with local parking enforcers to ensure they are seized. Texas requires the surrender of placards within 60 days of a person's death or relatives face a fine.

### ■ Placards Used by Able-Bodied Family Members or Friends

In one of the most common scenarios of placard misuse, able-bodied drivers use a relative's placard to secure a desirable spot close to a destination's entrance. This is especially prevalent in large cities, where parking can be more expensive and availability is limited.

Placards should never be used by spouses, relatives, or friends when they are not driving the person to whom the placard was issued. In Texas, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and several other states, it is a violation of state law to use the placard or plates for a disabled parking spot when the person with the disability is not in the vehicle. Violators are subject to fines of up to \$1,250 and/or up to 50 hours of community service.

### ■ Health Professionals

Fraud by licensed healthcare practitioners is one of the most difficult sources to detect and eliminate. Although state laws are slowly changing, placards have routinely been issued for everything from serious, permanent mobility impairments to temporary conditions such as sprained ankles. Besides physicians, certified nurse midwives, nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, chiropractors, and optometrists have been authorized to certify placard applications in many states.

Neurologist Richard Senelick, MD, addressed this concern in 2010 in his *Huffington Post* article, "[Who Gets to Use Handicapped Parking?](#)" "It is the physician or the optometrist who has the authority to sign the application forms that grant disabled placards or license plates," he wrote. "But how many doctors know the law, read the forms and assure that only those truly eligible get the privilege? How often have we signed a form for a patient without really evaluating whether it was a necessity or a 'convenience?' Every unnecessary form we sign decreases the number of available parking spots for those that are deserving."

California's "Operation Blue Zone," launched in February 2014, targeted eligibility fraud by doctors who, either



unwittingly or knowingly, signed off on disability placards for drivers who did not meet the requirements. Among the many practices investigated were suspected forged doctors' signatures, similar applicant and doctor handwriting, frequent applications being submitted by the same doctor, and suspicious, unsubstantiated medical diagnoses. By 2018, California had initiated 176 investigations resulting in 50 felony charges.

One [high-profile case of DMV fraud in 1999](#) involved 14 members of the UCLA football team who had fraudulently obtained disability placards to park on campus by submitting applications to the DMV citing bogus physical handicaps, such as Bell's Palsy (a facial nerve ailment), back surgery, a herniated disk, bad knees, and a broken ankle. The applications bore signatures from nonexistent physicians.

With nearly 3 million drivers using placards for various temporary and permanent disabilities, California now requires the DMV to perform quarterly audits of placard/plate applications. It screens for individuals who have been issued multiple active placards, who apply for an excessive number of replacement placards, and who are over age 100, as well as for providers who certify an abnormally large number of placard applications. Applicants must reapply every four years. The California DMVs also are required to routinely compare medical providers' signatures on file with those on placard applications.

Many other states, including Massachusetts and Illinois, have passed legislation to tighten restrictions on medical professionals who authorize placard use and limit eligibility categorizations. After [Boston's 2016 investigation revealed that its Registry of Motor Vehicles \(RMV\)'s](#) electronic database of healthcare provider information was incorrect for nearly half of the placards reviewed, the city expanded the RMV's ability to detect and correct placard abuse. The state of Washington requires a written prescription from a medical professional to accompany an application for a disabled license plate or placard.

Illinois took an innovative approach by partnering with the Illinois Medical Society and Rush University Medical Center

ADA Task Force. "We didn't want to make physicians the 'bad guys'—we wanted to make them part of the solution and invited them to the table," said Bill Bogdan, disability liaison for the Illinois Secretary of State Vehicle Services, Special Plates Division. "Physicians helped our division design a ["Guide for Medical Professionals"](#), which was sent with a letter to 68,000 medical professionals throughout the state." Other educational materials included posters stating that falsifying information on placard applications was a crime in Illinois, punishable by a fine up to \$2,500, and potential medical license suspension.

"It served as a kind of disclaimer for them, giving physicians a way to respond to patients who obviously didn't meet the disability qualifications," Bogdan said. He works to educate the medical community about fraud, offering seminars and workshops at hospitals.

As an added measure designed to encourage second thought, Illinois requires physicians to sign placard applications in two different places if the patient meets the eligibility for a meter-exempt placard and for all placards to be recertified by the physician every four years, he said.



**Action Item:**

*Connect with local and national medical professional groups to enlist their support.*

## **Fraudulent Issuance**

Placard/plate issuance fraud may not receive the attention or notoriety it should. As the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators' (AAMVA) [Best Practices in Detering and Detecting Fraud and Misuse Resource](#) noted, there are many points in the authorization and issuance process that are susceptible to fraud occurring—from healthcare provider authorization issuance, to DMV personnel who abuse the issuance process for personal gain.

AAMVA notes that renewal cycles for disability placards and plates vary greatly among jurisdictions, which must balance various competing factors, such as customer convenience, fraud prevention, and distribution efficiencies.

“Ideally, DMVs should limit the validity period of temporary placards to the time needed, after which the DMV should require reassessment of the temporary disability,” AAMVA recommends. “Temporary tags may be subject to abuse because DMV clients often view them as easy to renew.”

The Uniform System for Parking for Persons with Disabilities ([23 CFR Part 1235](#)) recommends that the period of time a temporary placard is valid should not exceed six months. For permanent placards, shorter renewal cycles can help mitigate the risks of fraud.

**Action Item:**

*Reach out to your local DMV(s) by contacting a person at the highest level possible to make sure they are aware of accessible parking challenges.*



## **Placards with Expiration Dates, Bar Codes, and Holograms**

Until recently, it was relatively easy for scammers to reproduce or create phony placards or alter their hole-punched expiration dates.

Many jurisdictions are taking measures to address placard and license plate tampering. In Texas, for example, placards feature a hologram that wraps around both sides, imprinted with a serial number and expiration date or a photo of the placard holder. Massachusetts, New Mexico, and South Carolina are among the states now using photos on placards. Other states place barcodes on placards to provide police with instant access to a database that can help them verify to whom the placard was issued.

Illinois elected not to use placard-holder photos on its placards after a female user pointed out to Bogdan that it could jeopardize her privacy.

“She told me she was a victim of domestic violence and her husband was serving time in prison but would soon be released,” he said. “She told me she would live in constant fear that he could find and identify her by her placard. That single, compelling story convinced me that using photos was not a good idea.” It is a point many states that are considering using photos on placards may want to consider.

Parking professionals agree: According to the [2018 Emerging Trends Survey](#) of IPMI members, developing a high tech/smart placard was listed as the best way to reduce abuse and facilitate enforcement.



### Action Item:

*Explore ways to make parking placards more tamper-proof and cheat-resistant and share your ideas with local officials.*

## WILL LIMITING FREE PARKING END PLACARD ABUSE?

In states that authorize local jurisdictions to act independently, several have elected to limit the meter exemption for placards. An increasingly popular proposal to curb misuse is the “two-tier solution,” discussed in 2015 by Donald Shoup and Fernando Torres-Gil, based on policies adopted in Michigan, Illinois, and Portland, Ore.

### ■ The Two-Tier Solution

This approach to placard abuse/misuse calls for placards based on different levels of disability: Drivers with disabilities that seriously limit mobility can continue to park free at meters while drivers with less limiting disabilities must still pay at meters. All drivers with either kind of placard can continue to park in all off-street spaces reserved for people with disabilities. The two-tier policy recognizes that people with disabilities have different needs that must be satisfied to assure parking accessibility.

“The two-tier reform will greatly reduce the financial incentives to cheat and will improve life for everyone except drivers who now abuse disabled placards,” said Shoup and Torres-Gil in a January 2015 article in [The Parking Professional](#) (now *Parking & Mobility* magazine), “[It] will reduce placard abuse and increase accessibility for drivers with impaired mobility, but it will also require meter payments from legitimate placard holders with less severe disabilities.”

Sometimes, drivers with an unobservable mobility impairment are challenged when they park in accessible

spaces by people who suspect placard abuse. The two-tier policy would address this problem by allowing free parking at meters for drivers who have fully met the requirements to certify a mobility impairment, thus removing suspicion that some placard holders who park free at meters are not seriously disabled.

Illinois’s version of the two-tier system is notable because it is based on the nature of the disability. Its blue parking placards are issued free of charge to persons with disabilities who are permanently disabled. The state does not extend free parking to meter users unless they have a valid Illinois driver’s license and are unable to physically approach or manually operate a parking meter, in which case they are issued a yellow and gray-striped placard. Exceptions are made for children with disabilities who meet the criteria but are unable to obtain a driver’s license. Effective since 2013, the system has proved successful, both in curbing abuse and facilitating enforcement of metered parking.

Only 6 percent of more than 500,000 Illinois disability placard holders qualify for meter exemption. Only one placard is issued per driver (without a special exception). Out-of-state placards and disability plates are no longer eligible to park free at meters. “A national database where law enforcement can verify the authorized holder of a placard/plate issued from other states would help,” said Bogdan.

“The most controversial provision is that only licensed Illinois drivers who meet the eligibility requirements may obtain meter-exempt placards—they cannot be issued to family members who may be driving,” he said. “We had witnessed a lot of abuse by people who drove their family members and other times used the placards for themselves.”

When states begin charging for nearly all metered parking, it can create a false impression that reform is mainly designed to increase meter revenue. To counter this, Shoup and Torres-Gil suggest states require cities to dedicate the new meter revenue to pay for services that can benefit people with disabilities, such as safer sidewalks, curb ramps, and audible devices at pedestrian crosswalks to assist people with visual impairments across intersections.



LA Express Park's Ghent stresses that accessibility should be the primary goal. "The two-tier system recognizes that people within the disability community have different needs that must be satisfied to assure parking accessibility," he said. "For example, a person in a wheelchair will need more time than many other persons who qualify for a placard."

*"The two-tier system recognizes that people within the disabled community have different needs that must be satisfied to assure parking accessibility,"*

In states such as California and Washington, jurisdictions trying to use a combination of price and time limits to manage on-street parking in areas of high demand may be hindered by current state exemptions. If 40 to 50 percent of people parking on a block are using disabled placards, as Bogdan said some cities have seen, adjusting the hourly paid parking rate on that block may not have the intended effect of reducing demand to improve reliable access for all, including those with mobility challenges.

## ▶ Veterans

Another issue that frequently arises is the variation of disabled veterans' (DV) license plates from state to state. In Virginia, for example, DV plates are issued to anyone meeting the requirements established by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, but they may not necessarily

display the International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA) required to park in accessible spaces under federal law.

Oregon's new Wounded Warrior parking placard is designed for veterans who qualify for a disabled parking permit and have a service-connected disability that is VA-rated at 50 percent or greater. In Portland, the placards grant an exemption from paying at the meter and extend the posted time limit for all spaces that are at least 30 minutes (excluding short-term spaces, such as 15- or 5-minute spaces.) They are enforced in the same way as disability placards.

## ADA METERS AND OTHER TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

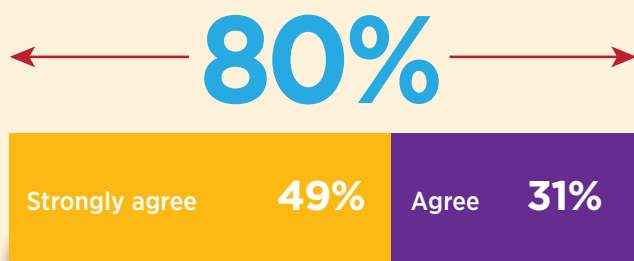
Technology can play a critical role in helping jurisdictions that want to implement the two-tier system or similar solutions by charging people with disabilities while giving them extra time.

The city of Raleigh, N.C., decided to amend its policy after local merchants complained that metered spaces were being monopolized all day by vehicles with placards. It began charging for all metered parking and replaced its traditional meters with new meters that have a designated "ADA" button, which allows persons with disabilities to extend the time limits. It also increased the time limit to four hours for people with disabilities. The program was backed by a strong marketing initiative that included a dedicated website, Morespace4all.com, and communications materials. It effectively lowered the occupancy time of the metered spaces from 96 to 77 percent.

Baltimore's problems related to placard theft and illegal use were resolved by its award-winning "Project Space" initiative, which enlisted citizens with disabilities as spokespersons. Meters were retrofitted to be accessible and all users were required to pay for parking.

Washington, D.C. is transitioning from "Red Top" meters to accessible parking meter spaces with ADA compliant signage and markings. The change will enable all users, regardless of disability, to be able to pay to park, eliminating the need for separate parking assets.

Percentage of survey respondents who agree accessible parking fraud is widespread:



Source: APC



As more jurisdictions adopt pay-by-plate solutions, they can employ technology that not only improves payment and access options for the disability community but also provides disabled permit information to enforcement. Information about a mobility impairment could be conveyed manually at the meter or pay station or by using options such as pay-by-phone. The technology would ensure that a parking enforcement officer sees both the paid and unpaid valid license plates and parking sessions when entering a block.

### Action Item:

Share ideas, success stories, and contribute resources at [accessibleparkingcoalition/share](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org/share).

## Enforcement

Eighty percent of respondents in the [2018 APC National Survey on Accessible Parking and Disabled Placard Abuse](#) agreed that enforcement of wrongful use of disabled parking placards/permits is either non-existent or inadequate.

Without question, enforcement of accessible parking violations can be extremely time-consuming, requiring

officers to stake out a parked vehicle for hours, waiting for a driver to return to it to check whether the placard was issued to that person. Police departments are busy dealing with more pressing issues and many cases of placard abuse go undetected.

Cities such as Los Angeles and Sacramento, Calif., routinely patrol shopping centers to conduct “compliance checks” to augment regular enforcement. An April 2017 [article in the Los Angeles Times](#) reported that in one day of checks, DMV investigators discovered 42 cases of fraudulent use out of 280 cases investigated. The violators turned out to be spouses, relatives, or friends of people with a disability.

“In the last three years, the [California DMV] has conducted 270 of these enforcement operations and handed out about 2,000 citations,” the article noted, adding that the number of citations issued has increased each year.

With a two-tier system, “enforcement is simple,” wrote Shoup and Torres-Gil in their *The Parking Professional* (now *Parking & Mobility* magazine) article. “Able-bodied drivers who use the special serious-disability placard that allows free parking at meters are obviously breaking the law as soon as they hop out of a car and stride away. Giving free parking only to



drivers who have serious physical disabilities can eliminate the scourge of placard abuse and thus ensure convenient parking for truly disabled drivers.”

Illinois found that enforcement was greatly simplified when it restricted free metered parking to only those who met the criteria, Bill Bogdan noted. “On a given block of 30 to 35 meters, we used to see a sea of blue,” he said, referring to blue placards. “Now it’s very easy for police officers to spot the five or so yellow placards on these blocks that allow for the meter exemption.”

The state requires that all parking placards be renewed every four years, which allows them to periodically change the design, color, and features such as holograms to discourage reproduction. Their expiration dates correspond to the birth month and year of the holder and feature a punch-hole system indicating the holder’s gender based on their driver’s license. Police can easily access a placard-holder database to determine to whom the placard belongs. Illinois further helps police enforcement by sending them a quick reference guide that explains state placard policies and what to look for. “It’s our accessible parking bible for police,” Bogdan said. “We also provide training to law enforcement on how to conduct a traffic stop, and tell them not to question a person’s disability, but rather if they are the authorized holder of the placard.”

One challenge that is more difficult to address is judicial training—getting local judges to stop dismissing tickets issued to abusers, which happens frequently. “It’s a very

controversial subject—it’s not easy telling judges how to enforce parking placard abuse,” Bogdan said “It will be our next area to consider.”

## ► Citizen Enforcement

Some states and cities are supplementing enforcement efforts with the help of watchful citizens. For example, the Onondaga County Sheriff’s Office in upstate New York launched the Sheriff’s Accessible Parking Enforcement (SHAPE) program, deputizing volunteers from the community, both with and without disabilities, as “accessible parking enforcement specialists.” After undergoing rigorous background checks and extensive training, the volunteers have the authority to write tickets for parking violations in disabled spaces and for blocking curb ramps and fire lanes.

ParkHouston also recruits volunteers as part of its Mayor’s Volunteer Initiatives Program (VIP) to help fight disabled parking abuse. Once volunteers complete a four-hour training session and background check, they are empowered to issue citations within city limits to those who abuse accessible parking spaces. In the past three years, the volunteer enforcers have written nearly 20,000 citations.

Although these programs may not work for all jurisdictions because of the potential risk for citizen volunteers, they serve as examples of creative approaches.

## ► Marketing and Public Awareness Campaigns

Many cities, including Los Angeles, are working to educate the public about how placard misuse denies access to people who really need accessible parking. The California DMV, for example, publishes the results of enforcement operations on its website and in field offices and releases them to local and statewide media.

At Texas A&M University, the university police and transportation department teamed up to mount an education and enforcement effort. They launched a campus-wide campaign and installed educational signs explaining that disabled plates and placards were only valid when used by the person with the disability or the driver is transporting the person with the disability.



Many states and cities have discovered the media can be an effective partner in spreading the word. For example, when Illinois switched to its two-tiered system that eliminated free metered parking for most users, local print and broadcast media were more than willing to talk about the issue and the need to curb abuse, Bogdan said.

### Action Item:

*Launch a public service awareness campaign to educate the community about the importance of accessible parking for people with disabilities.*

## Toughened Fines

Several states have high fines for fraudulently parking in an accessible space. In Illinois, violators may be charged \$2,500. In Texas, the fine for first time violators for unauthorized use of a disability placard is \$500, and \$1,000 for a second offense. Texas is one of the states that is also taking a closer look at frequent dismissal of accessible parking citations. New Jersey placard abusers who are convicted of making a false statement or providing misinformation can pay a fine of up to \$10,000 and serve 18 months in prison.

### Action Item:

*Reach out to your local and state officials to urge action on toughening fines on accessible violations.*

## MAKING THE CASE FOR REFORM

### Data Matters

Because parking is an important part of an increasingly complex mobility ecosystem, cities that want to more effectively understand and manage their parking operations need to consider occupancy as a critical element in any pricing or enforcement strategy, says Ben Winokur, chief of staff to the CEO at Passport, which provides mobile payment technology and other services for the parking industry. For example, San Francisco's SFPark sent enforcement officers to investigate occupied spaces sensor data showed were being used frequently and unpaid.

“As parking payment and parking enforcement data become increasingly digitized, cities can develop models of parking demand and occupancy that allow them to more efficiently



price their inventory and effectively deploy enforcement resources without the need to purchase expensive hardware,” Winokur noted. “They can then take steps to spread demand and reduce cruising by increasing available parking inventory.”

“When implementing any data-based policy for pricing, parking enforcement, or even curbside mobility, flex zones must consider the magnitude and location of free placard parking in order to be successful,” Winokur added. As cities face the prospect of evolving their parking and curbside management programs, they must find a way to capture this data programmatically.

### ► Additional Revenue

If jurisdictions incorporate a two-tier or other system that charges for placards, there will inevitably be pushback about who will benefit from the additional revenue. Because the primary goal is to increase accessibility, not revenue, cities can avoid conflict by reinvesting these funds in services related to accessibility and making that part of their messaging when announcing changes.

### ► Good Citizenship and Meeting Needs

The parking and mobility industry can benefit from viewing individual facilities through the lens of common sense. For example, if a facility serves a community or building with a large older population or that provides programs for people with disabilities, it should provide accessible parking spaces that exceed recommended ADA standards.

The common-sense approach also can work in the reverse, as Texas A&M University learned after it hired consultants Kimley-Horn to do a needs-based evaluation of accessible-space allocations on its 5,200-acre campus. [The study](#) divided the campus into 30 logical, regional zones, which were evaluated for proximity to accessible paths and building entrances. The study allowed parking planners to put accessible spaces near accessible paths and buildings and eliminate others in remote lots that didn’t serve accessible places.

“It gave us the ability to put the parking where people most need it and not in places where people weren’t needing it at all,” said Debbie Hoffmann, CAPP, director of Texas A&M’s Transportation Services. After considerable scrutiny, the results were approved by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation and have guided accessible-parking planning throughout the campus for several years.

In the end, it is important for parking facilities to provide access for all individuals. There are numerous benefits to being proactive in meeting ADA standards, including future cost-avoidance and risk management against future litigation.

#### Action Item:

*Comply with [2010 ADA Standards](#). It may sound obvious, but it’s important to be sure your on-street and off-street parking meet all accessibility requirements. Put yourself in the position of a wheelchair user and someone with impaired manual dexterity as you take inventory:*

- *Would you find it easy to park close to a building?*
- *Do you provide the space needed to load and unload a wheelchair safely and easily?*
- *Are there any streetscape issues (e.g., curbs, benches, planters, etc.) that could interfere with mobility?*
- *Do your snow and ice removal policies/equipment present any obstacles that interfere with accessible spaces and access aisle marking?*
- *Can someone in a wheelchair easily reach—and manipulate—your pay stations and meters using cash and credit cards without tight grasping, or twisting of the wrist?*

## BEYOND DISABLED PLACARD ABUSE—OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO ACCESSIBILITY

### ► Equipment Challenges (Including Manual Dexterity)

As Raleigh, Baltimore, and many other municipalities have learned, some meters and pay stations may not be accessible for a large segment of the community, who either lack the manual dexterity to operate them or cannot reach to pay



from a wheelchair. According to the U.S. Access Board, a founding member of the APC, the operating components of meters for customers should be no higher than 48 inches above the pedestrian access route.

Despite various regulations and recommendations, 39 percent of respondents in APC's National Survey on Accessible Parking and Placard Abuse reported difficulties paying for parking. For many people, an inability to grab a ticket stub or use a credit card slot makes parking in many garages an impossibility.

Portland, Ore., offers two payment options: its Parking Kitty app allows users who have smartphones to pay for metered parking remotely. People who are unable to operate the meters or use the app can use one of the city's scratch-off cards, which can be paid for in advance and displayed on the dashboard, eliminating the need to walk to and from a meter.

In Washington, D.C., payment can be made either by coin, credit card, or the District's pay-by-cell service, which has waived service charges for accessible parking meter spaces.

## ► Placement of Spots and Access Aisles

Access aisles exist for a good reason: they provide the space needed by ramp- or lift-equipped vehicles to lower the ramp/lift for wheelchair users so that they can safely enter and exit the vehicle. Ramps and lifts are typically on the right or passenger side, although some vans have them in the back. [The 2010 ADA Standards approved two van-accessible layouts](#): an 8-foot accessible parking space with an adjacent 8-foot access aisle, or an 11-foot accessible parking space with an adjacent 5-foot access aisle.

Standard accessible parking spaces also are eight-feet wide, but only require an adjacent 5-foot access aisle. They are designed to accommodate people with disabilities who use wheelchairs, walkers, and other assistive devices. Both van-accessible and standard access aisles are usually marked with yellow, white, or blue diagonal stripes, but local laws vary.

When access aisles are blocked, even partially, a person with a disability cannot exit or enter his or her vehicle and may have to wait hours until the violator returns. Even



abandoned shopping carts and plowed snow banks in access aisle marking can prevent drivers with disabilities from using accessible spaces. This can severely limit community participation and inclusion by people with disabilities who require access aisles and represents one of the greatest challenges to accessible parking.

This issue was underscored by the APC's National Survey on Accessible Parking and Placard Abuse. Eighty-two percent of respondents agreed that their van access was frequently impaired by cars parked too close, and 54 percent cited curbs as a major obstacle. Other hindrances cited included shopping carts, snow/ice, motorcycles, poles and signs, and uneven pavement.

Although the 2010 ADA Standards require that access aisles be marked to discourage parking in them, there may be creative ways to deter drivers from misusing access aisles more effectively.

For example, Hawaii, Maryland, and South Dakota require "No Parking in Access Aisle" signs. Illinois requires each accessible parking space to have its own access aisle making it punishable with a \$250 fine. However, designation of



access aisles—whether by paint, signs, etc.—is left up to the owners of individual parking facilities. State attorney general’s offices can prosecute any business that does not comply, said Bill Bogdan.

Educating drivers about access aisles remains a great challenge. The [University of Kansas’s Research & Training Center on Community Living](#) recently conducted two [studies](#) examining the issue. It found that many access aisle violators either “don’t think about it,” “don’t understand,” or simply “don’t care.” In fact, violators are sometimes people with disabilities who use the extra space to safely navigate the limited space adjacent to curbs or closely parked vehicles. The University of Kansas research concluded that even a combination of signs and pavement markings did not effectively deter access aisle parking violations—and that current state initiatives may not be enough to counter their frequency and severity. Clearly public education is needed.

**Action Item:**

*Take steps to reduce blocking of access aisle marking near accessible spots. Use signage or painted pavement to inform drivers not to block this area. Indicate there’s a fine or penalty, if there is one, or work with disability groups to advocate for a fine or penalty.*

## CITIZEN ACTIVISM

Among the best assets available to all communities tackling the issues of accessible parking are the residents with disabilities themselves, who can best illuminate the problems they encounter regularly. As the following examples illustrate, people with disabilities are often ready and willing to contribute their voices, efforts, and even their images to help heighten public awareness, and many become citizen activists to help bring about needed change:

### Colorado

Denver’s Chris Hinds has become one of the country’s leading activists for accessible parking and now serves as the spokesperson for the Accessible Parking Coalition. In the decade since the motor vehicle crash that paralyzed

him from the chest down, Hinds, a member of the Denver Commission for People with Disabilities, has fought for accessible transportation for all—providing research, testimony before state and federal legislative committees, and speeches at various seminars on transportation, access, and disability.

For years, Hinds and other advocates for people with disabilities pushed Denver city officials to improve enforcement and improve accessibility in the city’s public parking lots. An [independent 2016](#) audit revealed the city lacked information about where its accessible parking spaces were located. When the auditor spot-checked pay parking lots, many didn’t fully meet ADA standards, and five lacked the required number of accessible spaces. Although the lots could not have been constructed without initially demonstrating ADA compliance, the audit found that the spaces originally designated for accessible parking had missing signs, faded paint, improperly marked spaces, and spaces that had never been constructed.



Hinds' activism prompted Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper to sign the Chris Hinds Act in May 2018. It closes loopholes to prevent the fraudulent use of disability parking.

## Michigan

Patricia Cherpes, a resident of Ionia Township in Michigan, who uses a specially equipped van with an 8-foot, passenger-side, wheelchair ramp, became frustrated after being unable to access parking spots. She even posted a magnetic sign on the side of the van about the needed space, which violators continually ignored. To help educate drivers about the issue, Cherpes created flyers to put on cars parked in access aisle marking and appealed to local police. Her advocacy has led to increased enforcement and widespread media attention.

## Texas

Lora Taylor, whose 35-year-old daughter, Julie, has developmental disabilities and complex medical needs, uses an accessible van. They often could not find a van-accessible parking spot at a medical center they frequently visit, even though the center had the legally required number of accessible parking spaces. Van-accessible spaces with the necessary loading room were occupied by vehicles with accessible placards or plates. She often had to park on the garage's roof, subjecting her daughter to extreme heat that can trigger her seizures. After years of frustration, Taylor contacted her state senator, who initiated a statewide parking study in 2015.

"For many Texans with disabilities, accessible parking is the first step in being able to fully participate in the community," Taylor told the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Its 2016 report offered numerous recommendations for reform that were submitted to the 85th Texas Legislature.

## Rhode Island

Former boxing champion Gary "Tiger" Balletto, who relies on a wheelchair after being paralyzed in a 2013 accident, was given a media platform to fight ignorance

after he posted a photo to Facebook showing a Jeep parked in the painted lines adjacent to his accessible van. Balletto waited indoors, out of the elements, for mall security for more than an hour.

"I think a lot of people are not totally aware that's why the lines are there," Balletto told local NBC 10 News after the incident. "It's equivalent to a handicapped parking space. It's the same thing." His Facebook post quickly went viral and the resulting TV interviews have helped increase awareness.

## Kentucky

A Lexington citizen activist approached the city's Commission for People with Disabilities to call attention to the frequent difficulties he was experiencing with blocked access aisles. The commission works to promote the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities within the community and advises Lexington's mayor and the Urban County Council on issues that affect them. The commission considered a variety of options before launching its multi-faceted "Where Not to Park" campaign to educate drivers about the purpose of access aisle marking.

A citizen's efforts to focus awareness on the issue led to local legislation to require all new development to clearly designate access aisle marking with paint and no-parking signs (existing parking facilities were required to comply when they were resurfaced, restriped, or remodeled). The commission sent notifications about the new requirement to all parking facility owners, adding that funding was available to help them offset the cost of improvements. Drivers who parked in an access aisle were fined \$250—the same as for parking in an accessible space.

Public-education components of the Lexington campaign included signage, cards to place on violators' vehicles ("Please Do the Right Thing and Don't Park Here"), and a video created by the commission. The Lexington Parking Authority (LEXPARK), whose Executive Director Gary Means, CAPP, is an IPMI Board member, donated

\$20,000 toward the promotion and signage. Police stepped up enforcement efforts in shopping centers throughout the city. LEXPARK continues to monitor citation statistics and reports that progress is being made.

## ▶ BraunAbility's 'Save Our Spot' Campaign

**BraunAbility**, which manufactures mobility products such as vans for people with physical disabilities, launched a campaign to focus attention on the importance of leaving the access aisle next to accessible parking spots for wheelchair users. **"Save Our Spot"** features fact-filled flyers for its customers to distribute on violators' vehicles and an animated video about a student with a disability who can't take an important college exam because a driver has blocked her van's access space in his rush to get to a dental appointment.

### Action Item:

*Reach out to your state or regional Office of Disabilities, Veterans Affairs, and Councils on Aging and Civil Rights, all of which are likely to have an interest in working with you. These efforts also can garner positive media coverage, which aids public awareness.*



## EMPATHETIC SIGNAGE

Colorado has experimented with empathetic signage and campaigns that use a human element to increase awareness since 2015. Its Arvada campaign, created by the Colorado Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities (CACPWD), featured a photograph of Hinds with the words, "Think of Me—Park Legally" (a revision of the original slogan, "Think of Me—Keep it Free" to correct misperceptions of the word "free"). Police reported a 50 percent drop in ticket issuance after the signs were posted.

A subsequent audit of Denver's accessible parking spaces and policies revealed enforcement weaknesses, such as the use of volunteers to identify and ticket violators, and illuminated a national problem: that able-bodied drivers think there are more than enough accessible spaces, so occupying one for "just a minute" is acceptable.

Enlisting Hinds' help, Denver addressed this prevailing mindset with a multi-pronged approach. CACPWD's 2015 "Excuses vs Reasons" campaign highlighted justifications used by accessible-parking violators, showing that by doing so, they hurt someone who legitimately needs the space. Print ads featured other people and messages, including "'I'm just running in for a sec,' said no one with a disability ever."

### Action Item:

*Consider adding empathetic signage to deter abuse. Feature signs with photos of people with disabilities that say, "Think of Me—Park Legally," or "You Can Take This Spot If You're Willing To Take My Disability."*

## NOT ALL MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS ARE OBVIOUS

One caution for any citizen activist is to be aware that not all placard users have visible mobility issues. Placards can be issued for a range of other disabilities, including respiratory or cardiac ailments, vision issues, the loss or significant impairment of hands, arthritis, and neurological impairments. Shaming placard/plate users who don't appear disabled, but



## MEET CHRIS HINDS: What People with a Disability Want You to Know



**Chris Hinds** is a member of the Denver Commission for People with Disabilities and the impetus behind Colorado's Chris Hinds Act, aimed at preventing fraudulent use of disabled placards and plates. A wheelchair user for 11 years, Hinds contributes his firsthand experience as spokesperson for the Accessible Parking Coalition. Here are a few of his insights:

We need a system of laws that are enforceable, make it difficult to commit fraud, and still provide equal access. When people perceive lawlessness, they make their own laws. 74 percent of people acknowledge they've seen someone improperly using an accessible parking placard.

- ▶ Accessible parking enforcement calls for a two-pronged approach: the carrot and the stick. The carrot is education. Surveys show that there is a lack of understanding about accessible parking spaces. Assume people don't know why accessible parking spaces exist and educate them on why it's important to keep them free for those who really need them. However, once an education program has been in place and the public understands the need for accessible parking, some people still won't comply. Then it calls for the 'stick': enforcement and fines.
- ▶ Fine amounts should be set to deter behavior. Revenue generated from accessible parking fines is not as important as setting the amount at a level that keeps people from using spaces improperly. One way to tie the carrot and stick is to use fines (or a portion of fines) for increased accessible parking education and awareness.
- ▶ Able-bodied people only see accessible parking spaces when they're empty. What identifies them? The paint on the ground and the sign in front of the space. At 2 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon at the mall, lots of spaces are empty, and people can see the paint and signs. They get frustrated that they must walk past those spaces to get into the mall. At 7 p.m. on a Friday night at the restaurant, when people want to eat dinner with friends and family, all the accessible spaces are taken, and cars are blocking the view of the paint
- and signs. The only people who see them when they're taken are the people who actively need them.
- ▶ The public may have a skewed perception of medical professionals, who have a financial relationship with the patient in front of them. They must weigh the risk of losing that customer against their medical opinion that the patient doesn't truly need a placard/plate. The medical professional does not consider all the other people whose accessible space availability will be impacted as more and more people qualify for spaces. For example, one doctor's office had blank, signed accessible parking applications in the waiting room. A reporter investigating the issue obtained a valid placard for his dog as a result. DMV personnel are not in a position to question the validity of the medical professional's medical opinion—they just issue the placard.
- ▶ Accessible parking is good for business: an increased number of customers can visit and purchase items from a store. Those people may not have access without proper parking.
- ▶ Regarding two-tier accessible parking placards (like The Chris Hinds Act), current Colorado law gives anyone free parking with a valid disability plate or placard. We wanted to limit that. The No. 1 reason people fraudulently obtain placards is for free parking. Current law creates two placards: red for temporary disabilities; blue, for permanent disabilities. This bill creates a third placard, which requires the recipient to visit a medical professional and validate that he or she meets one of three medical criteria, all centered around whether your disability keeps you from paying at a parking meter.
- ▶ We didn't reinvent the wheel—it was modeled after laws in multiple states that date back to 1995 and are supported by extensive research, data, and studies. Proven benefits include reducing the fraudulent use of placards, providing better access for people with disabilities, limiting state control over local parking regulations, and helping small businesses that rely on street parking. The whole point of a parking meter is to incentivize people to only park there for as long as they need.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

### Responses from APC's 2018 Report on its National Survey on Accessible Parking and Disabled Placard Abuse.

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*"I have no grip or finger dexterity so pulling out tickets at parking garages or putting coins in meters is impossible. Systems where you flash a card, versus swiping a card, would help."*

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*"Physicians hand out too many placards to complaining patients who really do not need them."*

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*"As an individual with multiple sclerosis, my disability is often not visible to others.."*

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*"When I return to my van, if someone has parked in the striped area, I can't deploy my ramp and I'm forced to wait for them to return. I have carried an orange traffic cone to place in the striped area to discourage parking too close."*

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*"I wish other placard users knew not to take the van spaces if they don't need them."*

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*"I'm a quadriplegic. Parking makes my life harder than it already is."*

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*"It's horrible that parking for people with disabilities is not closely regulated and enforced."*

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*"Enforcement is non-existent. Fifty years of abuse of disabled parking is a social awareness issue."*

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*"Abuse starts with doctors freely giving placards."*

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*"What really amazes me is when I confront someone and they say, 'I'll just be here for a minute and no one needs the spot,' and I say 'I need it!'—and then they start yelling and cussing. Pretty sad."*

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*"I wish we could snap photos of violators and send them to a national enforcement line."*

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*"The more urban and populated a town, the more difficulties and potential abuses seem to increase."*

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*"There needs to be more sensible planning about where accessible spots are placed and whether there is a way to get from that spot to the destination."*

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*"I wish someone would do informational public service ads about the reason there are access areas next to accessible spots. Show the proper way to park to avoid blocking someone out of their vehicle."*

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*"Street-side accessible parking spaces always assume the disabled person is the passenger. Try having to upload a wheelchair from the driver's side, getting in and shutting the car door while traffic is going by!"*

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*"I am 36 years old and have debilitating rheumatoid arthritis. I have gotten dirty looks from people when I got out of my car. I was so upset when an old woman yelled at me and told me I was a disgrace for abusing the space. I cried."*

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*"Just because someone is old, doesn't mean they need a disabled placard. That's going to be a problem in the future with an aging population."*

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*"Very often, disabled parking spots are quite far from the curb cutouts, forcing me to navigate through a parking lot behind park cars that could suddenly back. Very scary when sitting because in my wheelchair, I'm the height of a child and cannot be seen easily."*

*"It all comes down to a lack of kindness and understanding."*

*"We travel a lot. In the states where we had to pay, more accessible spots seemed to be available."*

*"Violators are often very aggressive if confronted."*

*"People parking in the crosshatched areas is a huge problem."*

*"There is just too much unenforced parking fraud."*

*"I am a quad in a wheelchair. Parking is the biggest obstacle in my life!"*

*"Some doctors like to give out placards like bubble gum."*

*"Parking issues make me add 90 minutes to my morning commute."*

*"I hate the term handicapped parking and wish people would stop using it."*

who do have another type of mobility issue is not the intent of this effort, which is to ensure available parking to all who need it. As Donald Shoup points out, the two-tier policy should greatly reduce misguided shaming.

## SHOPPING ISSUES AND THE ROLE OF RETAILERS

One of the key questions asked in IPMI's [2018 Survey on Accessible Parking and Placard Abuse](#) was where drivers with disabilities most frequently encounter problems finding accessible parking. By far, the top four venues revolved around shopping. They included Main Street (65 percent), shopping centers (64 percent), shopping malls (62 percent), and grocery stores (61 percent). Far fewer respondents reported issues at hospitals, airports, offices, sports arenas, and educational facilities.

"If shopping centers do not have an active in-house enforcement program, they should contact their local law enforcement office for drive-through enforcement support," suggested LEXPARK's Gary Means.

**Q:** Where do you most often have problems finding accessible parking?

### Top Answers:

1. Main Street	(65%)
2. Shopping centers	(64%)
3. Shopping malls	(62%)
4. Grocery stores	(61%)
5. Hospitals/medical centers	(54%)
6. Sports arenas	(37%)
7. Office parks/corporations	(32%)
8. Airports	(26%)
9. Colleges/universities	(26%)
10. Schools	(26%)

Source: APC



## STREETSCAPE ISSUES

Without input from advocacy groups or people with mobility issues, even the most well-intended streetscaping features, such as bicycle racks and park benches, can actually serve as impediments.

In addition to bike racks and benches, streetscape issues affecting wheelchair users and others with impaired mobility include planters and trees surrounded by fences, parking meters that force users to cross a street to pay, and metered spaces on sloped streets. Bike lanes placed on the curb side of parking spaces also create a challenge.

Municipalities face significant challenges in built-out urban environments, where many blocks would need to be redesigned to ensure there are accessible opportunities even when the physical constraints of the right-of-way prevent them from meeting all specifications.

Cities are starting to focus data-gathering efforts on making sidewalks more accessible for people with disabilities noted Jason Plautz in a [May 23, 2019 article](#) on the *SmartCitiesDive* website. Sources like Google Street View are making it easier to supply detailed information, such as where to find usable curb ramps or stay away from broken concrete. He said apps such as the University of Washington's [Project Sidewalk](#) use Google Street View images of city sidewalks and machine learning to identify

obstacles like overgrown trees and broken pavement and assess the state of curb ramps. Project Sidewalk has cataloged Washington, D.C., with more than 205,000 labels on sidewalk images and is working on mapping Seattle and Newberg, Ore.

Jon Froehlich, assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Computer Science & Engineering, “hopes to use an artificial intelligence (AI) network to do image evaluation, speeding up the process and making it possible for Project Sidewalk to take advantage of rolling updates to Street View and Mapillary, keeping accessibility up-to-date,” Plautz said. The data could be used to create a super-detailed directions app to help wheelchair users avoid uneven sidewalks and perhaps even create an accessibility version of [walkscore.com](#), the website that ranks neighborhoods and buildings by how pedestrian-friendly they are.

### ■ Snow and Ice Removal

Besides placard abuse/misuse at shopping areas, one of the most cited problems is snow and ice removal that creates obstacles. In many cases, snow banks are pushed to accessible spaces and access aisles to clear the ground in regular parking spaces. This can occur in any public and private parking lots but is especially common in shopping venues.

### ■ Sector by Sector

As [APC's National Survey on Accessible Parking and Placard Abuse pointed out](#), the problem of finding accessible parking exists throughout the U.S. and in every sector of the industry. Although Main Street and retail centers were most often cited, hospitals, airports, offices, universities, and schools were not far behind. Many solutions apply across the board, but some parking sectors, such as universities, may experience unique difficulties and overlap with local municipalities and may need to work as partners to address the issue.

### ■ Valet Parking

Another issue facing drivers of vans and other specially equipped vehicles is valet parking. Generally, vehicles for persons with disabilities may not be easily used by others.





According to the [2010 ADA Standards](#), parking facilities with valet parking must provide accessible parking spaces to allow self-parking by people with disabilities, as well as an accessible passenger loading zone. When valet parking service is provided on a site without any parking spaces, accessible spaces are not required on-site, but policies and practices to accommodate people with disabilities must be in place. If a facility does not provide valet parking, or it is provided off-site by a different entity, an accessible passenger loading zone is not required at the garage.

## CONCLUSION

As this *APC Guide* points out, the many issues around providing accessible parking for all who need it will not disappear by themselves—everyone must do their part. The problem was not created overnight and will not be resolved by quick and easy fixes. However, taking action need not feel overwhelming. By enlisting the willing support of organizations and committees for people with disabilities and tackling the issues one by one, every citizen, community and

organization can provide a valuable contribution. That was the mission behind the APC being established and why we view this challenge as a long-term initiative, said IPMI's CEO Shawn Conrad, CAE, who hopes that the enthusiasm and passion of the people who have shared their experiences and ideas for this guide will become contagious.

"Parking and mobility are essential components to our daily lives and should be guaranteed for every segment of the population we serve," he said. "It's incumbent on our industry to fulfill our mission by making them available—and frictionless—for all. And keep in mind that these are all actions that everyone in the parking industry can feel good about. Let's work together to make a difference."



### Action Item:

Visit the [Accessible Parking Coalition](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org) website for more at [accessibleparkingcoalition.org](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org).



## ACCESSIBLE PARKING COALITION (APC) FOUNDING MEMBERS

American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)

International Parking & Mobility Institute (IPMI)

National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), part of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)

National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)

Research and Training, Center on Independent Living at the University of Kansas

Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

United Spinal Association

U.S. Access Board

## APC WEBSITE RESOURCES

The website is a collaborative effort. Please share your resources at [accessibleparkingcoalition.org/share](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org/share). Most of the documents cited in this publication and many others may be found on the APC website.

You can browse resources by role, resource type or format, contributing organization, geographic location, or keyword/phrase at [accessibleparkingcoalition.org/resources](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org/resources).

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Contact the U.S. Access Board at [ta@access-board.gov](mailto:ta@access-board.gov) or 800.872.2253. Find your [regional ADA Center](#) online, or by calling 800.949.4232.

## LEGAL AND POLICY RESOURCES

### Uniform System for Parking for Persons with Disabilities 23 CFR Part 1235

Guidelines to states for a uniform system including model definitions and rules regarding eligibility, application procedures, issuance of special license plates and placards, and reciprocal systems of parking privileges.

### 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design

Government entities, private businesses, and others must adhere to the ADA Standards for Accessible Design when re-striping existing or building new parking lots. The ADA standards mandate specific percentages of car and van-accessible parking spaces per parking facility and require signage and accessible aisles between spaces.

### Best Practices Guide on Deterring and Detecting Fraud and Misuse of Disability Placards and Plates

#### American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)

Assists jurisdictions in improving the issuance of disability placards and plates, the deterrence and detection of fraud in these areas, and the enforcement of disability parking violations.





## A DOZEN WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### Action Item 1:

Connect with local and national medical professional groups to enlist their support.

### Action Item 2:

Reach out to your local DMV(s) by contacting a person at the highest level possible to make sure they are aware of accessible parking challenges.

### Action Item 3:

Explore ways to make parking placards more tamper-proof and cheat-resistant and share your ideas with local officials.

### Action Item 4:

Share ideas, success stories, and contribute resources at [accessibleparkingcoalition/share](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org/share).

### Action Item 5:

Launch a public service awareness campaign to educate the community about the importance of accessible parking for people with disabilities.

### Action Item 6:

Reach out to your local and state officials to urge action on toughening fines on accessible parking violations.

### Action Item 7:

Comply with [2010 ADA Standards](#). It may sound obvious, but it's important to be sure your on-street and off-street parking meet all accessibility requirements. Put yourself in the position of a wheelchair user and someone with impaired manual dexterity as you take inventory:

- ▶ Would you find it easy to park close to a building?
- ▶ Do you provide the space needed to load and unload a wheelchair safely and easily?
- ▶ Are there any streetscape issues (e.g., curbs, benches, planters, etc.) that could interfere with mobility?
- ▶ Do your snow and ice removal policies/equipment present any obstacles that interfere with accessible spaces and access aisle marking?
- ▶ Can someone in a wheelchair easily reach—and manipulate—your pay stations and meters using cash and credit cards without tight grasping, or twisting of the wrist?



### Action Item 8:

Remove the financial incentive for disabled placard/plate abuse by limiting free parking only to those with severe mobility disabilities—and reinvest revenue to improving accessibility services.

### Action Item 9:

Take steps to reduce blocking of access aisle marking near accessible spots. Use signage or painted pavement to inform drivers not to block this area. Indicate there's a fine or penalty, if there is one, or work with disabilities groups to advocate for a fine or penalty.

### Action Item 10:

Reach out to your state or regional Office of Disabilities, Veterans Affairs, and Councils on Aging, and Civil Rights, all of which are likely to have an interest in working with you. These efforts also can garner positive media coverage, which aids public awareness.

### Action Item 11:

Consider adding empathetic signage to deter abuse. Feature signs with photos of people with disabilities that say, "Think of Me—Park Legally," or "You Can Take This Spot If You're Willing To Take My Disability."

### Action Item 12:

Visit the Accessible Parking Coalition website at [accessibleparkingcoalition.org](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org).

Download free copies of this document in the resource center at [accessibleparkingcoalition.org](https://accessibleparkingcoalition.org)

