



# Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### REGIONAL PLAN FORESEES MORE BUSINESS BENEFIT THAN HARM IN CUTTING MIDTOWN ON-STREET PARKING

Regional Plan Association today predicted that reducing illegal and legal on-street parking in Midtown Manhattan would improve business rather than hurting it.

"This is not an issue of clean air vs. jobs," John P. Keith, Regional Plan President stated. "There is more reason to believe that fewer cars parked along Midtown curbs would help business in the City than hurt."

The issue came up when a federal court ordered the City to eliminate 206 Midtown on-street metered parking spaces during business hours and "substantially eliminate" illegal parking in the Central Business District by early next year. These steps were part of a plan for meeting federal air quality standards that the City and State submitted to the federal government four years ago.

The Association gave these reasons for believing that cutting back on-street parking would help Midtown:

"The nearly three million people who come into the Manhattan Central Business District every day will move more freely, pleasantly and safely in cleaner air. By contrast, the number that would be inconvenienced even if eventually there were a total ban on automobile parking on Midtown streets would amount to no more than 10,000 persons, less than a third of a percent.

"Less parking makes more room for moving vehicles and more room for pedestrians. The dollars saved just in speeding truck movement probably would more than equal any economic value lost by the parking that was eliminated.

"About 17 of every 20 persons who come into the Manhattan Central Business District during peak hours come by public transportation. Only 14 percent come by car, truck or taxi between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m.; and only a small fraction of them parks on the street. In midday, only about 2,100 cars are parked on the street in Midtown's central square mile. There are 19,000 off-street parking places in the same square mile.

"Furthermore, when the City did its Midtown parking study in 1975, they found only 77½ percent of the off-street spaces occupied at 2 p.m., the peak parking hour. So we can assume that in the central square mile, the 2,100 cars parked on the street could have been parked off the street where there were twice that number of vacant parking spaces at the time.

"In a test area on Lexington Avenue, a lengthy study found almost always two-thirds of the on-street parking space was occupied by cars that stayed there a long time. There weren't a large number of persons parking briefly, running in and out of a store and then driving away. This was true of ordinary parkers at meters as well as diplomats and doctors privileged to park along specially marked curbs.

"The study was carried out over several years using actual observations in person and by continuous motion picture films. It was done by William H. Whyte, Jr., a former Editor of Fortune and author of The Exploding Metropolis and many other books.

"So, a few parkers appear to be holding up hundreds of times their number who are trying to move through the streets in cars, buses, and trucks and literally thousands of times as many people trying to walk on crowded sidewalks that could be enlarged into part of the parking lane.

"In April, Regional Plan urged the Governor and Mayor to sponsor a comprehensive Manhattan Central Business District transportation plan, not just for air quality but for the City's economy and attractiveness.

"One of the goals would be to maximize the number of people moving around Midtown but minimize the number of vehicles. People who do not need to drive in Midtown should be discouraged from it; but those who must, should be able to drive at a reasonable speed. On-street parking now prevents that.

"The plan should provide for improved public transportation financing, a shift of traffic as much as possible to the periphery of the Island--leaving more space for pedestrians in the center and closing off more entries to the Central Business District, for example the Central Park drives. Regional Plan's support for Westway is part of this conception," Dr. Keith continued.

Regional Plan has called for tighter Midtown parking restrictions for more than a decade to achieve these traffic movement and pedestrian amenity improvements, in addition to cleaner air.

"It may sound silly for a civic organization to have to call on the Mayor to enforce City laws and to carry out a plan the City itself devised. But the City Administration has never challenged the federal standards nor offered an alternative to the approved program for meeting them. Since the program emanated from the City and State, not from federal officials, it seems strange for the City Administration to complain that the federal government is forcing something harmful on the City," Dr. Keith added.

"We certainly agree with the Mayor that jobs are of prime importance to the City," Dr. Keith explained. "We believe, however, that

holding jobs can be consonant with cleaner air and a pleasanter City and that by following this court order that will be the case. In fact, the first reason corporations have been giving for moving headquarters out of Manhattan is quality of life--the difficulty they have in persuading middle managers' families to move to the City. In the face of that, Regional Plan does not think that environmental quality can be ignored in the effort to hold jobs."

Regional Plan Association has done several relevant studies and reports on transportation, on pedestrian movement and on the Manhattan Central Business District, including Urban Space for Pedestrians (The MIT Press, 1975), Urban Design Manhattan (Viking Press, 1969), Transportation and Economic Opportunity (for the New York City Transportation Administration, 1973), and "Transportation and the Manhattan Central Business District," Regional Plan News, February 1966. The Association is a half-century-old citizen research and planning organization concerned about the economy and the environment of the 31-county urban region surrounding the Port of New York.

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