CASE STUDY

SAN FRANCISCO, USA

San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) | URBAN REGULATION OF CURBSIDE SUPPLY AND DEMAND/TNC AND CITY PARTNERSHIPS
OVERVIEW

Regulatory authority and policy over curbside space in San Francisco is fragmented, so multiple city agencies currently interact directly or indirectly with curbside policy. To reduce transportation hazards and improve quality of life, the City currently regulates supply of curbside space directly through its Color Curb Program and curbside demand through the following suite of programs:

- Demand-responsive parking pricing program
- Regulation and curbside access for commuter shuttles and Private Transit Vehicles (PTVs)
- Curbside access for Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) in exchange for data
- Geofencing
- Living previews (or pop-ups) to test curbside management treatments

In addition to this, new partnerships between the City, private transit vehicles, commuter shuttles, and TNCs have formed to allow better utilization of curbside space and data access.

OBJECTIVES

Guiding Principles and Policies

The following city agencies are involved in curbside policy:

- **San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA):** Color Curb Program, transit, active transportation, and general management of the right of way
- **San Francisco Planning Department:** Environmental review for new projects, including determining impact on nearby on-street loading and parking
- **San Francisco Department of Public Works:** Accessible curb cuts

While policies such as Vision Zero, Transit First, and the Better Streets Plan affect curbside space, the City of San Francisco has yet to implement formal city-wide policies regarding the prioritization of curbside space based on uses, adjacent land uses, and other factors. The following are general principles that have guided the most recent projects undertaken by SFMTA to address curbside management in San Francisco:

- Improving Safety: Decrease unsafe actions associated with TNCs such as mid-block U-turns and unsafe passenger loading
- Support Transit Performance: Support reliability and speed of transit
- Ease Localized Congestion: Support goals to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through reductions in SOV trips

The City currently regulates supply of curbside space directly through its Color Curb Program. The Color Curb Program is the main tool that SFMTA has for regulating curb uses across the city. The curb is painted different colors to indicate the appropriate use by vehicles as specified by the California Vehicle Code; parking for persons with disabilities (blue), “no parking” (red), short-term parking (green), commercial loading (yellow), and passenger loading (white). Color curbs are implemented based on individual fee-based applications submitted by property or business owners. Once a curb is painted, its application generally must be renewed every 2 years at the owner’s request. Recently, the City has begun taking a more proactive approach towards managing these spaces as part of streetscape projects and other area planning efforts.
SFpark
San Francisco implemented SFpark, a demand-responsive parking pricing program, as a pilot in 2011 across some of the most congested areas of the city, including the Financial District. SFpark, which required the installation of new meters and parking occupancy sensors, uses pricing to open up parking spaces on each block and reduce circling and double-parking. Rates may vary by block, time of day, and day of week.

Commuter Shuttle Program
SFMTA implemented a voluntary pilot program to regulate commuter shuttles from 2014 to 2016. The Commuter Shuttle Pilot program allowed commuter shuttle operators to have access to certain Muni stops and shuttle-only zones for passenger loading in exchange for paying a fee, providing data, and complying with a set of permit conditions. The program aimed to reduce VMT, improve safety related to curbside loading activities, and improve relationships between the City and private shuttle operators.

Private Transit Vehicle (PTV) Permitting
As a response to the increase in private transit operators within San Francisco such as Chariot, SFMTA approved a permit program to formalize private transit operators. These operators use high-capacity vehicles that are open to the public as a jitney or form of microtransit. SFMTA regulated these services to reduce unsafe passenger loading, minimize travel on restricted streets, collect data, and address lack of vehicle accessibility.

Living Preview
SFMTA has used living previews (or pop-ups) for community outreach efforts in order to allow residents to observe, interact, and comment on the project in a manner that typically yields greater participation and better represents the proposed treatments. For the Safer Taylor project, a key project of the SF Vision Zero Plan, the City temporarily removed some parking and one travel lane to test a series of curbside management treatments that include the following: parklets, greenery, commercial and passenger loading spaces, and a separated bikeway.

Off-Street Loading Requirements
After 1957, the City began to require new commercial developments to include off-street loading docks. The Planning Code now includes a schedule for required off-street loading for a variety of land uses, including office, residential, and commercial. While many buildings in areas such as the Financial District now have off-street loading, they are often underutilized. This is due to inconvenience of entry into off-street parking structures and the older loading space designs that are often inadequate for newer, larger freight vehicles.

TNCs and Curb Space
The rise of TNCs and other emerging mobility services has led to an increase in the need for curb space to facilitate safe and reliable passenger pick-ups and drop-offs and decrease localized congestion. SFMTA is working with TNCs by creating dedicated passenger loading zones in high-demand destinations such as performing arts venues, stadiums, and commercial corridors. TNCs then geofence areas to identify pick-up and drop-off zones, blackout certain areas for drivers and riders, and reduce the impact on surrounding streets. TNCs use geofencing at the San Francisco International Airport and at the 4th and King Caltrain Station and used it for the Super Bowl in 2017.
Folsom Street Near-Term Project
The Folsom Street Near-Term Project provided quick and effective bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and curbside management improvements ahead of a much larger capital project for a mile on one of San Francisco’s High Injury Network streets. Part of the huge success of the near-term project was extensive door-to-door outreach and surveying to understand how each business uses Folsom Street for their loading needs. Input and results from this outreach directly influenced where and how many commercial, white, or short-term loading zones were implemented along the project corridor. While the Folsom Near-Term Project removed a third of the overall private vehicle parking spaces, the project doubled the number of commercial loading zones. During the project approvals process and after project implementation, staff heard little negative feedback from merchants and business owners along the project corridor.

Patricia’s Green
SFMTA temporarily closed one block of Octavia Street — a relatively low-volume local road surrounding a central park space called Patricia’s Green — to vehicular traffic in June 2018. The 17-day ‘open streets’ event supported several community-sponsored events and allowed for evaluation of impacts to traffic circulation, access, and loading for people and goods. To support continued access to the nearby commercial corridors of Hayes Valley, the SFMTA established temporary “active loading only” zones on streets surrounding Patricia’s Green to test the use of addition of loading space. Limited data shared by TNCs showed a high concentration of ride-hail activity around the Green, which informed the placement of the loading zones. These temporary loading zones were evaluated with ‘before and after’ video-based data collection to determine their availability, occupancy, and turnover rates, as well as whether TNC drivers obstructed the travel lane partially or fully. Intercept and merchant surveys were also used to gauge the publics’ perspectives.

RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

SFPark
An evaluation of the pilot found that areas with dynamic pricing for on-street parking experienced greater on-street parking availability, reductions in congestion, and VMT due to decreased cruising, and lower parking rates. In December 2017, the SFMTA Board voted to expand the program citywide.

Commuter Shuttle Program
An evaluation found that the Commuter Shuttle Program has reduced conflicts with transit, safety concerns, and shuttle impacts on neighborhoods. In 2016 this program was extended by one year and in 2017 the SFMTA Board voted to make the program permanent.

Private Transit Vehicle (PTV) Permitting
The SFMTA Board approved new PTV regulations in October 2017. In the months after that, the SFMTA worked with Chariot to move dozens of their stops from illegal locations to safe and legal loading zones. In April 2018, the SFMTA issued a PTV permit to Chariot after Chariot paid a fee and began transmitting real-time GPS data.