

# Vancouver addicted to parking revenue

## City relies heavily on income from meters, using it to pay for libraries, parks, and pools

We want to have more than one or two vacant parking spots per block. As soon as we have less ... we adjust the rates. It's not related to revenue or budget. It's related to (efficiency). JERRY DOBROVOLNY VANCOUVER'S GM OF ENGINEERING SERVICES

The City of Vancouver is addicted to cars.



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*LINDSAY/PNG FILES* The City of Vancouver increased its number of metered parking spaces to 10,100 last year.

It's an odd affliction for a municipality working hard to green itself, but take away its steady flow of automobiles and the parking revenue it generates and the city's bank account would take a significant hit.

Gordon Price, a former city councillor and the director of the city program at Simon Fraser University, explained the situation a little differently.

“Addicted to parking revenue? Yes. I think the answer is yes, mostly,” Price said in a recent interview. “But I think I would add that the city is as much addicted to parking revenue as the citizens are addicted to the services, or the city is addicted to service delivery.”

Parking brings in a lot of cash for the city. \$55.1 million in parking revenue is expected to be raised this year. That revenue will account for about four per cent of the city’s total income, according to its latest budget.

That doesn’t include revenue from EasyPark, an arm’s-length corporation founded in 1948 to manage and operate parkades owned by the city. The parking corporation manages 41 facilities with more than 10,830 parking spaces.

The city’s take from its metered parking spots has risen year over year for at least the past seven years, due in part to a substantial increase in the number of meters. From 2009 to 2015, parking revenue rose from \$31.3 million to \$49.5 million — an increase of 58 per cent.

There’s also revenue from parking fines. The city’s 104 parking enforcement officers will bring in a projected \$16.4 million in fines in 2016, accounting for another one per cent of the city’s overall revenue stream.

All that income helps pay for city programs and services — the libraries, parks, community services and amenities residents rely on — but it comes with an environmental price tag. Road transportation accounted for about 37 per cent of the city’s total emissions in 2014, according to the city’s Renewable City Strategy document, released in November 2015.

The environmental cost of movement is something the city would like to change. Vancouver plans to shift the majority of trips from autos to foot, bike or transit by 2020 — something that would require taking road space away from private vehicles, according to the Renewable City Strategy.

But before out-of-town commuters or car-dependent locals bemoan an impending threat to cars, consider that the city’s long-term transportation strategy stops well short of rash moves to curb vehicle use as a way to meet long-term air quality and emissions targets.

“Private automobiles will continue to play an important role in Vancouver for the foreseeable future,” reads the Transformation 2040 plan, which instead focuses on paving the way for low-emission or car-share vehicles and a gradual transition to fewer car trips over the next 25 years. It includes a handful of strategies for parking, but reducing paid parking spaces for private automobiles is not among them.

Vancouver’s interest in parking revenue is absolutely and definitely not slowing its greening goals, said Jerry Dobrovolsky, the city’s general manager of engineering services.

“We have a concrete goal by 2020 to get more than half the trips by walking, cycling and transit, and have less than half of the trips by driving,” Dobrovolny said in an interview. “We achieved that goal last year. We just surpassed 50 per cent.”

Dobrovolny said the city monitors the occupancy of its paid street parking spaces and sets its rates accordingly.

“We want to have more than one or two vacant parking spots per block. As soon as we have less ... we adjust the rates. It’s not related to revenue or budget. It’s related to (parking efficiency),” Dobrovolny said.

The system is also designed to serve businesses.

“It doesn’t serve a purpose to have metered street parking that supports local business if you can never get a space there. It only makes sense if you have turnover,” Dobrovolny said.

Vancouver increased its metered parking spaces to 10,100 last year, up from 8,500 in 2008. If the city continues to coax drivers from their cars, the income generated by those spaces could feasibly decrease.

If that happens, the city would be faced with some tricky options to make up for that lost revenue, according to SFU’s Price.

“It could reduce services — not popular — but in some cases you can do that,” Price said. “The second thing is, you can increase traditional, already existing taxes. But that is not popular either.” There is a third option. “Create a new tax,” Price said. “It strikes me that with automated vehicles and fleet management, that’s going to be relatively easy to do.”

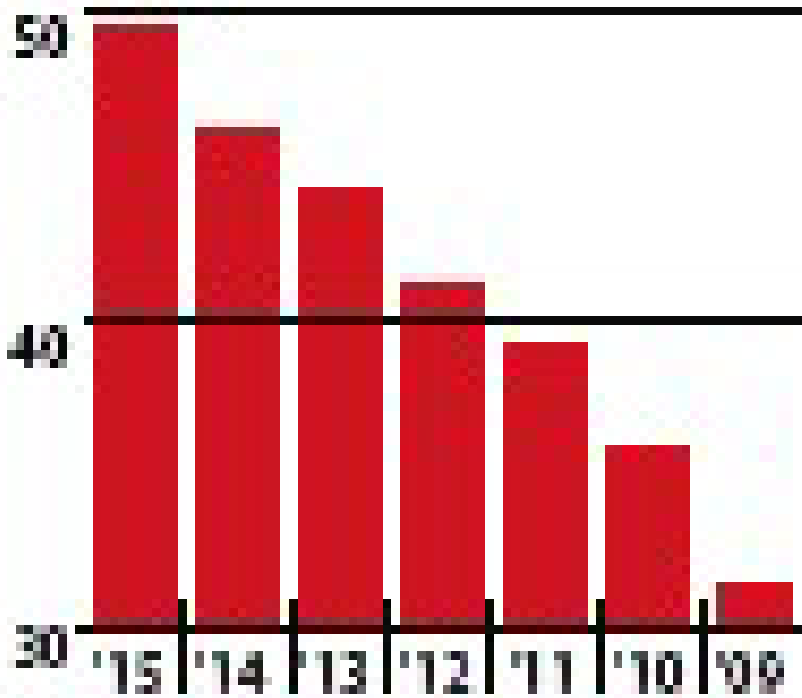
Under such a scheme, any autos using the streets — including shared fleet cars, future rideshare companies and driverless autos — would be charged to use city streets, instead of charging only drivers who need to park.

The city already makes cash from the 2,182 car-share vehicles driving on Vancouver streets. Each of the 141 onstreet parking spaces allotted to car-share companies generate annual fees of \$300 to \$1,320 depending on their location, said Tobin Postma, a city spokesman. Shared cars park at paid spots for 66 per cent of the metered rate, he said.

The bigger unknown is how driverless cars will factor into Vancouver’s future.

## Parking revenue on the rise

\$ millions



Source: City of Vancouver

It's something Coun. Geoff Meggs is keen to find out. Meggs prepared a motion slated for consideration at city council Tuesday that directs staff to report back on the implications autonomous and driverless cars could have on the city and its economy.