



POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Part I: Parking and Transportation





INTRODUCTION

Hoboken faces constant challenges related to parking and transportation management. It's an incredibly popular destination and people want to keep coming here; that is not going to change and it's not a terrible problem to have. In fact, in recent meetings that our professionals have attended with the New York City Department of Transportation, NYC officials have spent more time asking questions about Hoboken than issuing their own recommendations for us. **Hoboken is unique—and as it continues to evolve, so must its policies.** In order to serve residents first while fostering a great experience for commuters and visitors, we need to take a look at what's working and what's not.

This policy proposal is the first in a series I'm going to lay out over the coming months, all related to critical aspects of life in the Mile Square City. I often survey residents via email and over the years we have compiled a lot of responses. As a lifelong Hoboken resident, and as its longest-serving City Council member, I have seen plans and policies come and go across multiple generations and administrations. We cannot settle for the status quo if we want to revolutionize what Hoboken is, but we also can't diminish the ability of long-time residents to live in the place they've called home. **This document will discuss the placement of parking garages, expansion of the Hop and other public micro transportation options, bike lanes, commercial traffic, parklets, and both the expansion of on-street parking inventory and more efficient use of existing on-street space.** It is not definitively prescriptive—more so a map of the possible, and of what we can accomplish together.

I'm committed to being a public servant who listens. To paraphrase what I said above (and as I've said many times in person) my simple intention is to keep what works and change what doesn't, bolstered every step of the way by resident input. For example—and we'll talk about this in an upcoming public safety policy document—the City Council recently passed an e-bike licensing and regulation bill, also known as the "Tests and Vests" ordinance. That was done together with input from people all over Hoboken. **This document was created in consultation with key stakeholders, including current and former City engineering officials, professionals in the field, and passionate and knowledgeable residents, including Hoboken Parking Dude owner Andrew Impastato, and leaders from Bike Hoboken.** My commitment to my neighbors is that I will be out in the community listening to all of you, that your ideas and feedback are welcome, and that we will build the Hoboken we want as a team.



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THE PROBLEMS

The way I see it, traffic and transportation issues in Hoboken are primarily threefold.

First: the lack of parking. We can incentivize public transportation, ride-sharing, and biking as much as we want – and we should—but many Hoboken residents have cars, and that will probably never change. The parking situation we have right now is clearly not adequate, and it's one of the most frequent and intense complaints I get from residents in the Third Ward. I've gotten emails before saying that residents have had to reschedule doctor appointments because they couldn't find a space, or that they had to walk half a mile to their home. It's about time this gets addressed for real.

Second: traffic. So often, it feels like it's either one or the other in Hoboken: either everyone is double-parked and causing gridlock, or cars are flying through residential neighborhoods. Addressing traffic involves a number of solutions, from protected bike lanes (PBLs) to automating how we enforce anti-idling ordinances and improving loading zones.

And third: safety. From e-bike delivery drivers (some from out of town) zooming down our sidewalks and harassing residents, to speed bumps and rat infestations under parklets, the decisions we make have many implications for our people. Additionally, Hoboken may be on a streak with no traffic fatalities – no small feat – but we have plenty of injuries, and many of them can be avoided with the right planning.

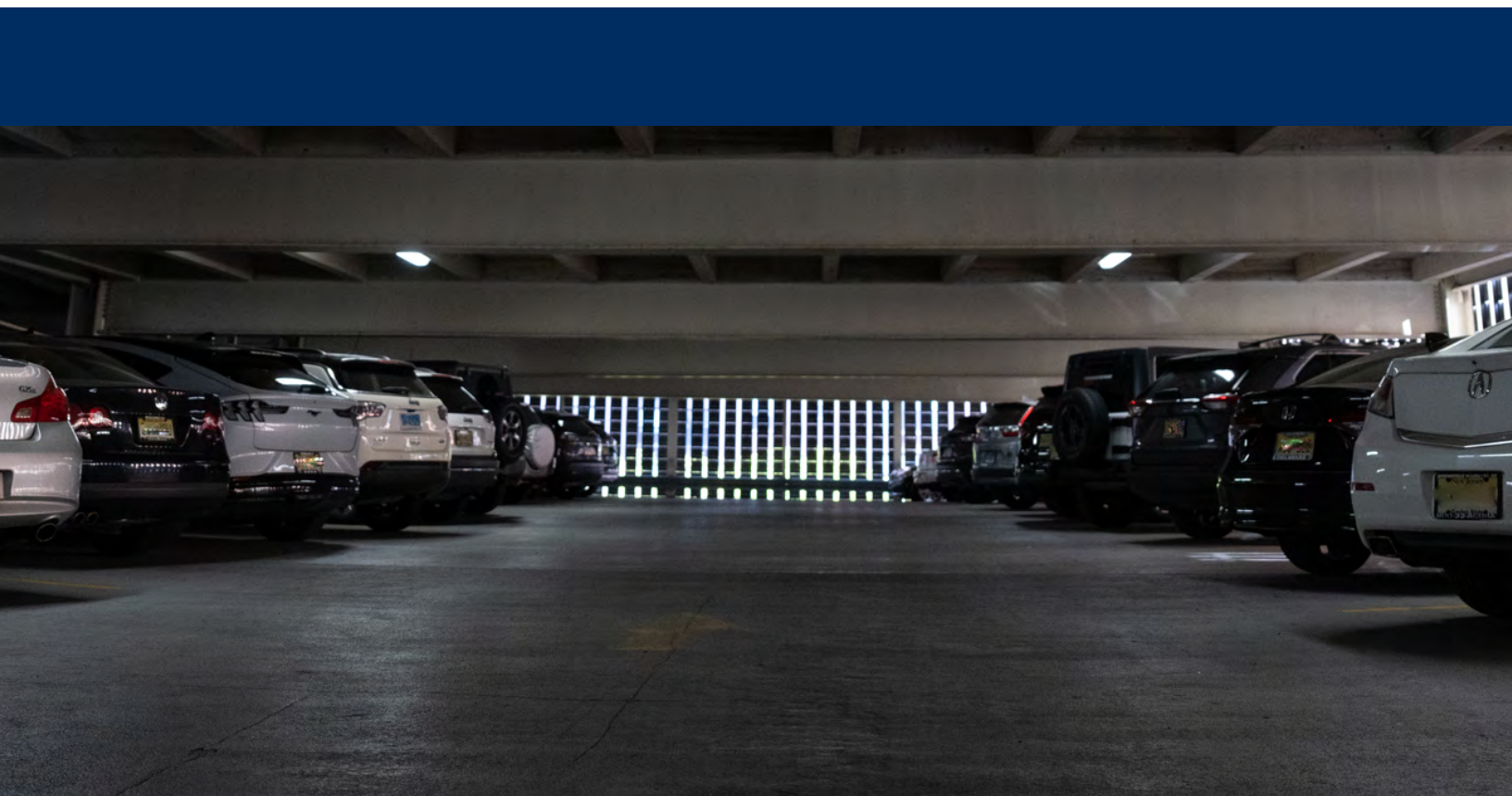
The following proposals aim to strike a balance in order for Hoboken to appeal to everyone. All credit where credit is due to elected leaders past and present—but our goal is to accommodate existing transportation needs for our residents, while also proposing common-sense alternatives that can make life safer, easier, and more enjoyable.

THE SOLUTIONS: PARKING GARAGES

Let's start with parking garages.

To this day, in both my resident surveys and similar community surveys, parking is by far our neighbors' number one issue. As one expert put it, "parking is the stoop of Hoboken. When you get here, often your first experience is parking; if people pull up to a house and the stoop is broken or inaccessible, they don't come back." We need to critically examine our parking inventory and optimize it for residents and visitors.

Our municipal garages are a decent start, but need improvement. Some are in outright disrepair and need to be fixed or replaced. Also, most of our garages—three out of five, specifically—are concentrated within two blocks of each other downtown. We must identify locations for new garages on the periphery of the City, offer similar short-term and long-term parking plan options for residents, and study the potential impact of alternative visitor pricing plans depending on location. Think of the mom and pop shops on the outskirts of town that would benefit and the residents who would be in closer proximity to their homes; it's a win-win.





THE SOLUTIONS: REINVENTING THE HOP

To accommodate garages in different parts of the City, we need to make them convenient. The Hop, a public micro transportation system that currently exists and operates for Hoboken residents, offers a convenient alternative, reducing residents' reliance on personal cars and mitigating congestion. Currently the Hop has three routes for all residents, plus a dedicated route for seniors.

Imagine a world where the Hop is reinvented and expanded with themed lines: Hop On Demand, Medical Hop, The Hop After Dark for weekend nightlife, a Parks Hop, and more.

To expand the Hop, we should consider enlisting owners of existing Hoboken taxi medallions; they are currently losing market share to apps like Uber and Lyft, but there is still a separate and specific need for the services they provide. Expanding the Hop does not require much more spending, as the infrastructure is already in place. **Transitioning to smaller electric Hop shuttles and expanding services would reduce both traffic and the City's carbon footprint, incentivize economic development outside of Hoboken's downtown, and—as an added bonus—build community among riders.** Public-private partnerships and relationships with entities like the Hoboken Business Alliance will minimize the effect of such beneficial programs on taxpayers.

THE SOLUTIONS: ENCOURAGING THE USE OF BICYCLES

Bike lanes should also be expanded and protected. Developing these lanes, north and south, east and west, is a vision I've had for a long time, and we should aim to have three in each direction that span the whole City. This is both an environmentally conscious and modern necessity in service of our first priority, which is safety regardless of the mode of transportation.

Willow Avenue between 9th and 14th Streets, for example, is a road wide enough to install protected bike lanes that go in both directions. Since Willow is technically County Road 675, this is a great opportunity to leverage our relationships and work with partners at all levels of government to tackle a complex project. 9th Avenue in New York City is a great example of a longer protected bike lane that helps people go where they need to go, no matter what vehicle they're in.

Additionally, as bike lanes expand, we should also aim to place bike racks on more street corners. Since state law forbids parking within 25 feet of a crosswalk, these areas are ripe for the expansion of bike racks.



THE SOLUTIONS: IMPROVING SAFETY AND STREET PARKING

For residents who would rather drive, **that's fine**; there are still a great deal of improvements that can be made.

We need to better delineate street parking spaces so that people don't park across multiple spaces. We need to simplify zone types and issue clearer, simpler signage to avoid confusion. And now that federal guidance has changed, we should consider a new traffic study, revised speed limits, additional speed bumps, and more mid-street crosswalks. Taking these steps ensures traffic and parking that are more respectful and efficient, and don't sacrifice safety.



THE SOLUTIONS: RETHINKING PARKLETS

Furthermore, let's face it: we just need more parking spaces overall. To that end, **we should examine the current parklet inventory and see what changes can be made.** During the pandemic, the City normalized a massive parklet infrastructure that helped restaurants provide safe dining for their patrons. Now that the pandemic is behind us, parklets remain convenient and can be economically advantageous, but we have to rethink how and where they are issued and deployed.

Permits are currently issued on an annual basis; that basis should be seasonal in order to allow restaurateurs to gauge the seasonality of their clientele and act accordingly. Construction uniformity should be ensured, as the lack of removable decking and regular cleaning contribute to rat infestations (which we will address in detail in forthcoming proposals). Sidewalk dining should be considered as a more frequent alternative. Residents should continue to be allowed to provide objections to permit issuance and the City Council should continue to hold hearings whenever these objections come up.





THE SOLUTIONS: ADDRESSING TRUCKS

Finally, it's time to do something about the trucks slowing things down on our streets. Tractor trailers stuck on the west side, delivery trucks double-parked and holding people up...it's got to stop. We should be rethinking what truck routes look like, and dedicating more time and effort to enforcing idling and double-parking laws in order to smooth out the flow of vehicular traffic throughout every ward. Simultaneously, loading zones can be improved using 1) automated technology to enforce against anyone who idles in them for too long, and 2) timed signage that allows daytime loading zones to become overnight parking, like those already in place on Washington Street.

Implementing this plan strategically will have a double benefit: less traffic and less idling emissions. Plus, if we create these truck routes and place properly sized trucks where they need to be, instead of allowing trucks of all sizes to run all over town, we could unlock tens of millions of dollars in federal grant funding that would improve quality of life at no cost to our taxpayers.

CONCLUSION

These are all proposals that would dynamically contribute to the flow of people throughout Hoboken, provide adequate parking capacity for the level of demand, and encourage alternative modes of transportation. Not every solution will match every part of the city—and it will require a strategic approach with the big picture in mind in order to make these things work together. Of course, this coin has two equally important sides: the City Council will have to adopt ordinances, and the next administration will be charged with implementing and enforcing them with clarity and consistency. I'm confident that we can build a coalition to make these changes happen. As long as the residents of Hoboken are with us, we can accomplish anything.

As always, please direct any and all comments to my direct email address, michael@drmichaelrussonj.com. I'll respond to you as soon as I can. We're in this together.

Thanks for reading!
Dr. Michael Russo, DPT



★
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