

*Mayor Sullivan*

*from David Wilson*

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TO: MEMBERS OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL  
by courtesy of Councilor Francis H. Duehay

RE: MEETING THE COSTS OF SNOW CLEARANCE.

We are all grateful for the excellent job the City snowplow crews have done for us in keeping the streets clear during the unprecedented series of January storms. We drivers do not begrudge the additional cost to the city that has resulted from the unusual amount of snow.

I believe that it is important that the costs of snow clearance be met from assessments on road users. Even though most property-tax payers are also drivers, it would be quite inappropriate for the additional costs of snow clearance to be put on the property tax. It would produce incentives that would be against the public interest. We should not be subsidizing driving and penalizing home ownership.

Here are some suggestions on how the required sum could be raised.

1. Parking charges throughout the city should be brought into line with free-market charges. It is irrational to provide parking to a lucky few at far lower cost than most have to pay in commercial lots. It is even more irrational to have various high-demand roads in the city - for instance, Brattle Street from Mason Street to near Sparks Street - with totally free parking. In other words, these areas have neither parking meters nor residency requirements. They are used largely by well-heeled people who drive in from Wellesley and other western suburbs, go to work on the T, and return in the evening, expecting their cars to be kept safe by our police and the roads to be cleared by our crews. This type of free but very limited parking encourages others to come to Cambridge and to clog the roads hunting for similar free places. These people are then likely to park illegally. Often the commercial lots, where they would have to pay around ten dollars, become full, compounding the problem. To correct these anomalies, all streets that are not limited to residents should have parking meters. The rates charged should, according to the best economists (my hero is Prof. William Vickrey of Columbia) produce one place free in five or ten, on average, throughout the day and night. To do this will require substantial increases in present charges. Drivers would mostly

be very happy to pay if they can thereby be guaranteed parking places. Others will use the MBTA, and the buses will be able to move faster without all the double parking that presently seems to be tolerated because there are no nearby parking places. The T will become more attractive, and will require less subsidy. Everything goes in the right direction when economic distortions are corrected.

2. It is also irrational to have parking meters that must be used until 6 pm, when suddenly parking is free, although the demand, especially near Harvard and the other major squares, is still high. Parking charges should apply at least until midnight.

3. Businesses, especially some gas stations, that have been in the practice of shoving their snow on to the streets after the city plows have cleared the snow, should be fined. I'd prefer the death penalty, but a fine of \$1000 seems to me a good alternative. Residents who have been clearing out their driveways and dumping the snow on the sidewalks, blocking the way for pedestrians, should also be given a short, sharp financial shock. There is an increasing tendency for drivers to park their cars on the sidewalk to avoid opening their garage doors or cleaning out their driveways. They need similar treatment. It must be unbelievably horrible to be blind or infirm and to try to negotiate icy sidewalks that resemble either the foothills of the Himalayas or a used-car lot.

If the response to these suggestions is that they cannot be implemented because the law doesn't allow parking meters to operate beyond 6 pm, or doesn't allow public parking charges to be raised to free-market levels, or puts other impediments in the way, then the law must be changed. Some wag pronounced that "The law is an ass". I would hate this to be proven correct. The essence of many of our urban problems is simply this: drivers do not pay more than a very small proportion of the costs they incur. Driving is, therefore, highly subsidized. The result is just the same as would happen if the government subsidized ice cream. The demand would outstrip supply, and we would all get fat. Some local government must have the courage to face the automobile-subsidy issue. Not long ago, little kids were sent down British coal mines to haul mine cars on their hands and knees in workings that were too low for ponies. Apparently, everyone at the time thought that the system was time-honored and acceptable. Our treatment of the automobile is less horrible but equally irrational.

*David Wilson (who would be very happy to have bicyclists pay their fair share)*

Copies: Senator Michael Barrett, who could perhaps introduce rational legislation on parking where necessary;  
Cambridge Chronicle;  
The Tab.

*Cal. N.Y.T. W.H.B.*  
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Comm. from David Gordon Wilson, stating his belief that the costs of snow clearance should be met from assessments on road users & transmitting suggestions as to how the required sum could be raised.

In City Council,

February 2, 1987

C. D. Duckham

moved to place on  
the Calendar for 2/9/87

2/9/87

Placed on file

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