

Statement of Mr. Thomas M. Downs  
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on S.930, A Bill to Prohibit  
Free Federal Employee Parking

Senate Governmental Affairs Committee

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Mr. Chairman, I am Thomas M. Downs, Associate Administrator for Planning, Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation. I am pleased to appear here today to present the views of the Administration on S.930, The Federal Employee Parking Act.

While we strongly support the concept and intent of this bill, and commend the Committee for addressing this sensitive issue, we believe that the bill, as currently written, is too inflexible in its blanket approach to the parking question. It fails to take into account the complexities of transportation and also overlooks the opportunity to use parking policy as an incentive to encourage employee carpooling and vanpooling. These shortcomings, if not remedied, could raise a great deal of opposition which could undermine the basic intent of the policy, which is to encourage more energy-efficient commuting among Federal employees.

Before I discuss these shortcomings and perhaps offer some possible solutions, I would like to make some observations about parking policy and ridesharing in general, and also

inform you of a recent Federal executive activity in this area.

The energy constraints on our Nation are already requiring changes in driving patterns. The daily home-to-work trip by car is the most routine and predictable type of driving and accounts for over 40 percent of all household automobile mileage. Because this commuting trip is so predictable, it follows that this trip should be easily adaptable to carpool or vanpool arrangements, and to transit usage. Yet, over 75 percent of all automobiles used for commuting have only one occupant--the driver. Free or low-cost parking biases an employee's decision on whether to drive alone, carpool or use transit for the commuting trip. Through the Department's ridesharing efforts over the past few years, we have identified the price and location of parking as critical incentives which, if appropriately applied, can significantly influence commuters' choice of travel mode. Through the Federal-aid highway program we have urged State and local governments and private employers to encourage employee ridesharing through such policies as eliminating free parking.

We have often felt uncomfortable promoting such policies when the Federal government--as the Nation's largest employer--did not practice what it preached. In the past, by offering free or low cost parking in urban locations, the Government has contributed to traffic congestion, energy

consumption and air pollution. In addition, an issue of equity arose because at many downtown locations only a few Federal employees have free or low-cost parking and many other Federal employees already pay to park in commercial garages or pay mass transit fares. Our discomfort was partially relieved on April 5, 1979, when President Carter, in his Energy Address to the Nation, stated that the Government will eliminate free or subsidized parking for its employees and called upon all employers to follow suit. In accordance with that announced policy, the Office of Management and Budget has prepared a circular that will require establishing a parking fee, based on the fair monthly value of equivalent commercial space, at all Federal parking facilities under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch. We in the Executive Branch would hope that similar action will be taken to adopt similar policies to cover the Legislative and Judicial branches. It is our understanding that the final OMB Circular will be issued shortly. We believe it offers a sound and equitable policy of charging for parking at Federal installations and offices, primarily in densely populated urban locations.

The OMB Parking Policy Circular recognizes the need for management flexibility. For example, nonwork locations such as visitor and patron parking spaces at cemeteries, commissaries, chapels and similar service facilities would be exempted, and patient and patient's visitors may be exempted from parking charges at Federal hospitals.

Certain employees such as those on weekend duty or shift work (so-called "swing" or "midnight" shifts) would also be exempted at the agency head's discretion. This flexibility would be most applicable at locations where there are not enough employees scheduled for a particular shift to make carpooling feasible.

Unlike the proposed legislation, the OMB Circular deliberately uses the parking policy to support and encourage carpooling and vanpooling. For example, agencies are directed to institute more effective carpooling practices and incentives. This policy aspect is particularly important at those large suburban and rural installations that have large parking facilities, but because of low "commercial" value, the actual collection of assessed parking fees would cost more than the revenue earned and amount to a nuisance charge. Under the OMB policy, charges would not be collected at locations where the value of parking is less than \$10 per month. In addition, employee parking assignments at large, outside parking facilities shall be made on a priority basis, with the priority based on the shortest walking distance to building entrances: (1) official vehicles used during the day, (2) handicapped employees, (3) vanpools, (4) carpools with four or more occupants, (5) other carpools, and (6) space permitting, single occupant cars. All agencies

will be encouraged to establish parking areas that give priority space assignments to vanpooling and carpooling vehicles. Under the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act, most revenues collected from parking fees will be used by agencies to pay the "rent" on parking spaces they now pay to GSA. These moneys are used to operate the Federal buildings. I would defer to the GSA for a discussion of how that process now works and how it would work in the future.

We believe, it is essential that we recognize that pricing policy, and the management of that policy, is the most effective mechanism to ensure that employees will ride together. Again, the OMB Circular addresses this issue by requiring departments and agencies to appoint an employee transportation coordinator to provide carpool or vanpool matching service and public transit information for employees, and to implement an effective mechanism to discourage abuse of parking space assignments made to handicapped employees, and those in vanpools and carpools.

We believe the OMB Circular goes a long way in promoting transportation energy conservation among Federal employees. The specific provisions discussed above, if incorporated into the proposed legislation, would help remedy its technical shortcomings. Given the imminent issuance of the OMB Circular, the Committee may wish to consider adopting the

policies and procedures of that Circular in order to establish a uniform system of equitable treatment for all Federal employees, in all Branches. We believe that employee commuting and parking policies must be strong components in our energy conservation efforts and we would be happy to provide whatever technical assistance you may require.

If the Committee has any questions, I would be pleased to address myself to them.