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goBerkeley program aims to increase parking availability in Berkeley

BY LYDIA TUAN | STAFF

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goBerkeley, a pilot program aiming to change parking practices and increase parking-space turnover in Berkeley, was officially launched at City Hall on Thursday.

AC Transit provided 1,000 free one-year EasyPasses on Thursday for employees of small businesses in the Elmwood, Telegraph and Downtown areas to encourage them to take advantage of free public transit in order to increase the number of available on-street parking spaces for visitors and reduce Berkeley's carbon footprint.

Until 2015, goBerkeley will test out a combination of carsharing, free transit passes and its new supply-and-demand pricing system for parking in efforts to alleviate traffic congestion and limited parking in business districts. The city received funding from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Climate Initiatives Program, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the Federal Highway Administration to test its plans.

"We want to free up the spots to visitors in these commercial districts to bring in higher sales revenue," said Councilmember Jesse Arreguin.

Part of the problem is that employees of businesses in select areas occupy a great number of on-street parking spots, leaving limited visitor parking, Arreguin said.

The program will partner with the city of Berkeley, MTC, UC Berkeley, AC Transit and public transit nonprofit organization TransForm, among others.

Ann Cheng, a program director at TransForm, says its goal is to get outside employers and employees to take advantage of Berkeley's public transit options. With the dynamic pricing policy, parking rates will vary by time of day and location so that people can quickly find parking spaces in busier districts.

"The businesses are very supportive," Cheng said. "I think it's a really good sign when businesses understand the importance of helping visitors find parking."

According to Cheng, TransForm's goal is to increase street parking availability by 16 percent.

City CarShare, a Bay Area nonprofit car-sharing service, was also invited by the city to partner with goBerkeley and help provide more eco-friendly methods of transportation.

“The city of Berkeley is such a forward-thinking city in that it looks at the problem of car congestion and for other ways to get around while looking at sustainability,” said Anita Daley, marketing director of City CarShare.

Some community members have expressed concern surrounding specific aspects of the goBerkeley program. One controversial proposal involves extending metered parking time. Arreguin said that extending meter time would have a negative impact on businesses.

“Oakland did that a few years and there was a huge backlash from businesses and residents, and I think we will see that from the Berkeley community,” Arreguin said.

Contact Lydia Tuan at ltuan@dailyca.org.

<http://www.dailyca.org/2013/07/02/goberkeley-pilot-parking-program-launched/>