

The national Dutch newspaper Trouw opened on May 31, 2014 with an article on the impact of parking policy on shopping behaviour. The CROW-KpVV-report "Vervoer naar retail" (Transport for retail) contains all the facts on this topic based on the results of research and experience. The most important facts are:

Impacts of Parking policy

When judging free or cheap parking, it is important to consider the aim of the measure. Most municipalities aim for a thriving retail sector. From all research and practical experience available to us, it turns out to be an expensive measure that contributes hardly to the number of shop visits or shops revenues. Moreover other measures are cheaper and contribute (much) more. These measures are investing in a high quality of the public realm, a good mix with other entertaining functions like bars, cafes and restaurants, museums, and special events at or close by the shopping area.

Looking at the impact of transport related variables, the most important factor is that it is well organised. Easy accessibility and ease to find a parking spot is influential in the choice of the shopping area for 15 percent of the visitors. Parking tariffs play only a role for 6 percent of the visitor.

Costs

The costs of free or cheap parking are quite high, moreover. For instance, Alphen aan den Rijn, a town with 100.000 inhabitants is a good example. The first two hours parking is free in the shopping areas. The cost of this measure for the municipality is €3 million per year. In Dokkum, Friesland (13.000 inhabitants) with free parking in the morning between 8.00-11.00. Cost per year €300.000.

Paid parking is not exactly a cash cow for municipalities, as most people consider it to be. As much as there is no such thing as a free lunch, there is no such thing as free parking. A parking place in a parking garage has a yearly cost of €3.500- €5.000. With the usual occupancy rates of parking garages it is easy to calculate that a parking tariff below €3, = an hour can never cover these costs. Project developers have a minimum of €4,40/hour to cover costs. So cities mentioning that there is a positive cash flow from the parking exploitation to general municipal resourced leave out certain cost items, like the costs for building the garage.

Because of the fact that so much of the costs for parking are taken from general tax resources, also people who do not own a car, or do their shopping by bicycle, on foot or with public transport, also contribute involuntarily to the free parking by the car driver.

In the Netherlands on average 10 percent of the costs of parking is paid by users. This is considerably less than the West-European average, which is 23 percent. Some people think these costs are already covered by the road tax. This is not true. Road Tax is a state level tax, whereas the costs for parking are provided for by the municipalities.

The buzz word: Experience

Reasons, why a lot of shop owners think free parking contributes to shop revenues, are:

- a. They overestimate the share of "car" in their revenues by several dozens of percent.
- b. They hear a people complain about accessibility problems or how hard it was to find a parking spot or how expensive it was. But they never hear cyclists or pedestrians about their trip to the shopping area, because they experienced no trouble and have nothing to complain about.
- c. There has been a great change in shopping behaviour. Experience is the buzz word. "Normal" purchases are done online or at the nearby shops. There is no more shopping for a day, but we want experience a city. Shopping is just a part of that. Shops who have experience as their main selling point, grow against the declining trend.

Abolishing paid parking has no effect whatsoever. Recently an experiment in Ede (100.000 inhabitants) with free parking has been stopped, because there was no increase in the number of people visiting the shopping area.

Good examples of investing in quality of the city and experience are:

- Maastricht, where notwithstanding a raise of the parking rate of 84 percent in 2012 compared to the level in 2005, there was a growth of the number of people visiting the shopping area of Maastricht with 22%, by upgrading the city center. Almost all other Dutch cities experienced a decline in the visiting numbers.
- The Hague. The The Hague City Traffic Plan, resulted in a decreased car accessibility, but also a huge gain in quality and atmosphere of the city center. Nowadays, the city center of The Hague is one of the few areas where in the midst of the economic crisis there are huge investments in retail. Reason is the large increase in attractiveness.

Résumé

- a. Municipalities have measure to their disposition to promote the retail sector that are much more effective than free of cheap parking.
- b. There is no such thing as free parking. But the cost of free parking is very high for the municipality (i.c. the taks payer)
- c. Experience is the buzz word for the success of shopping areas.

Producten

CROW-KpVV publishes on a regular base about retail, mobility and parking:

- [Rapport Vervoer naar retail](#)
- [Kennispagina 'Vervoer naar retail'](#)
- [KpVV-bericht nr. 112: Mythes rond auto en parkeren doorgeprikt](#)

Apart from that there are a lot of other interesting CROW-publication, such as [publicatie 333: Lopen loont](#)