



MOVING BEYOND
THE AUTOMOBILE

Film Guide for Educators

Engaging in Policy

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Key Concepts

Policy is Crucial to Making Streets

In addition to design, government policies shape our streets. When a local, state, or national government creates and enforces policies and laws that make a certain mode of transportation easier, faster, and less expensive, these policies encourage people to make certain personal choices. Historically, we have had government policies that support individual car ownership and uses. The films in this section explore government policies that discourage the use of privately-owned vehicles.

Congestion Pricing

Congestion Pricing is the practice of charging drivers more to use a roadway, bridge or tunnel, to discourage the use of cars during periods of peak congestion. The goal of congestion pricing is to reduce traffic and encouraging commuters to walk, bike or take mass transit. Profits earned from charging motorists would fund maintenance and improvements to the regional mass transit system.

Parking Pricing Policy

Studies have proven that free parking is a major problem for city streets. Parking pricing reform will lead to a better pedestrian environment, cleaner streets and air, and safer downtown shopping districts. Here's how it works: metered parking decreases the use of long-term parking, convinces some drivers to use garages, and causes others to take public transit. As a result, people drive less, so they are not looking for parking, circling blocks with polluting vehicles and causing car crashes in neighborhoods with a lot of pedestrians.



Citizen Engagement: Getting Involved in Policy Making

If we want our government to make changes to improve our neighborhoods, we need to get involved.

PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES: Putting it in Context

Discussion: Do active citizens make better cities?

Discuss why residents do or don't get involved with our local, regional and national policy-making, and how we might get more involved. Questions to include:

- Is voting important to shaping government policy? Is voting in elections enough?
- Do you think people pay attention to policies that elected and appointed officials make?
- Do you think we have any power to influence decisions made by officials? Why or why not?
- Are there ways people can get involved in making their government policies better?
- What about transportation planning? Can we get involved in issues that we have looked into through the film series?

Did New Yorkers Want Congestion Pricing?

- Look at the Quinnipiac University poll from August, 2007, regarding congestion pricing. <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1302.xml?ReleaseID=1098>.
- Briefly go over the definition of congestion pricing as a class, and explain to the students that congestion pricing failed to pass in New York City several years ago.

- 9 in 10 people said traffic was a serious problem in New York, but almost 6 in 10 did not support congestion pricing. Why might that be the case?
- What borough supported congestion pricing? Which ones opposed it? If we look at a map of New York City, why do you think it was most popular in Manhattan?
- How might complicated public opinion have affected attempts to pass congestion pricing in New York?
- A majority of New Yorkers supported the idea if politicians would use the proceeds to prevent transit-fare increases. Do you think a mistrust of politicians may be a reason why people were against congestion pricing? How could their concerns be addressed?

Film Synopses and Discussion Questions

These two films highlight policy initiatives that local governments take to address issues related to traffic congestion in city centers. These policies deal less with traffic engineering and urban design, and more with economic and legal changes that discourage car use and incentivize transit ridership.

Congestion Pricing

Synopsis: Explores the system of charging drivers in periods of peak traffic to reduce congestion and invest revenue in mass transit.

- What are some reasons why city officials feel the need to implement congestion pricing?

- What does the local government do with money earned from congestion pricing?
- Where has congestion pricing been successfully implemented?
- Where has it failed?
- What might be some reasons for controversy over congestion pricing?
- Do you think your community would support congestion pricing in your city (or the nearest city)? Why or why not?

Parking Pricing

Synopsis: Investigates the ways that improving pricing schemes to reflect more accurate costs of driving can help provide revenue that can be invested in projects that make more equitable use of street space. Case Study: San Francisco.

- How might cars circling for parking spots cause problems for a neighborhood?
- How does raising the price on a parking spot differ from taking away a spot? Do you think one is better than the other?
- Should our local government make money off of parking spots? Is it fair to charge drivers?
- Should parking be priced to increase parking spot availability and turnover?
- What should be done with the money made from charging for parking?

Concluding Questions

- Do you think that taxing people for driving cars is the best way to encourage sustainable transportation and improve air quality? If yes, explain why. If no, provide an alternative plan.
- What would you want to tell policy makers to do differently when it comes to street design and policies related to the built environment?

POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES:

Making the Connection

Activity: Case study of congestion pricing in London

- Learn about Congestion Pricing from three sources and then discuss them as a group.
- The first source is a New York TIMES article, entitled “Costly to Drive, Painful to Pay”: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/automobiles/16LONDON.html>.
- Next watch an interview with a London driver on Streetfilms.org, “London Driver on Congestion Pricing” <http://www.streetfilms.org/london-driver-on-congestion-pricing/>.
- Last, go to Transport For London’s page with information about the charging zone, including maps and times, discounts for nearby residents, and auto pay <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/congestioncharging/default.aspx>
- How do these three sources on congestion pricing in London compare to one another? How do they differ?

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- How does Transport for London's online information show how congestions pricing is actually implemented?
- Do you agree with the London driver that congestion pricing is fair? Do you think it is something that should be brought to major cities in the United States?

Letter Writing

Activity: Compose a letter to an elected official

Worksheet: Outline Your Letter

Have a discussion with the students about why letter writing is important. Ask the class:

- Why is it important to share what we've learned?
- How can we write clear, strong letters to share our ideas with officials and our community, and make a difference?

Distribute the "Outline Your Letter" handout for the students to look over. Discuss all the parts they need to fill out. First, based on all the films they have seen, they need to determine a topic that most interests them, a purpose for writing the letter, and a recipient for the letter. Help them if they don't know how to determine the recipient - the most appropriate person to write to - they can wait to fill out that last line and ask you about their options. When students finalize their ideas for the letters. Have the students double-check that their outline is logical, factual, and corresponds with what they are requesting.

They should then fill out envelopes to the appropriate officials (see lesson six for a list of addresses). Your students can look up their national, state, and local

elected officials at Congress.org by typing in their zip code at the following address:

www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials/

You can have the students present their letters to the rest of the class. They can choose an excerpt to read and the reason they chose to write their letters. Questions for them to cover when preparing to present:

- What aspect of urban planning or the built environment were you most concerned with improving?
- What does your letter request from officials?
- How, if officials implemented your request, would it lead to positive change (for example: save the city money, prevent crashes, improve air quality, lower carbon emissions, etc)? In addition to sending letters, you can make arrangements to have your students present their ideas to a larger audience. Some suggestions are as follows:
- Consider getting on the agenda of a local community council or community board. They might be an excellent audience.
- Find a like-minded advocacy organization to work with. These ideas that you have might be very helpful to their organization as examples of grassroots input.
- Create an exhibit of this work for your school, local library, museum or another public institution. You can include photos of your initial walk, survey results, all the way through to the letters that you will complete.

PSAs

Activity: Design and present and PSA

Worksheet: PSA Planning

Explain to the class that they will be making PSAs about air quality. Have a discussion drawing from the following questions to prompt the conversation:

- What is a Public Service Announcement (PSA)? Can you think of some examples of campaigns you have seen before? Were they effective? Why or why not?
- Why is it important to educate the public?
- How can we be advocates in our communities for better policy and better planning practices?
- Are there certain issues that you feel are most important for the public to know about?
- Who is your audience (which “public” are you trying to reach)?

Depending on your preference, students can work alone, with partners, or in groups. Hand out the planning sheet and ask students to fill it out one step at a time in order to come up with an idea for their PSA. Make sure they follow this flow:

1. **Brainstorm:** Think through all that they learned from this unit that they want to share with others.
2. **Focus:** Based on what we have learned from the films and corresponding activities, decide on only one key point they would most want to make to a certain public or the government.
3. **Why:** Explain to their audience why their suggested change is worth making. Challenge students to be persuasive and come up with a number of reasons.

4. **Medium:** Decide which format to use for their PSAs. We have provided some examples - poster, PowerPoint, song, rap, dance, film, skit, speech, radio segment, website, etc - but they don't need to limit themselves to those options.

Next, students should make their PSAs. You can help them by bringing in some extra reading materials or facts, or they could do some Internet research on their chosen topic. They can present these PSAs to their classmates, the rest of the school, or leaders in their community.

Further Resources

- SeeClickFix (www.seeclickfix.com) is a website that allows anyone to report and track non-emergency issues anywhere in the world via the internet. This empowers citizens, community groups, media organizations and governments to take care of and improve their neighborhoods.
- “Students Take Action to Save Their MetroCards.” www.streetfilms.org/students-take-action-to-save-their-metrocards/. Shares the experience of three high school students from New York City who traveled to Washington DC to meet with their Senator and other government staff regarding potential cuts to their city's student MetroCard program.
- “The High Cost of Free Parking.” <http://www.streetfilms.org/illustrating-parking-reform-with-dr-shoup/>



Outline Your Letter

Use this outline to plan your letter to an elected official.

Topic

(What subject will you write about? Buses, bike share, bike lanes, plazas, greenways, public art, subways, etc?)

Purpose

(What improvements you will ask for?)

Letter Recipient

(Who will you write to? If you don't know the appropriate official to contact, you can ask your teacher for help.)

Now write notes for yourself about what information you will include in your introduction, 3-4 body paragraphs, and conclusion:

Introduction

Body Paragraph 1

Body Paragraph 2

Body Paragraph 3

Conclusion

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Planning Sheet

BRAINSTORM

What did you learn about from doing this project that you would want to share with others?

FOCUS

What one key thing would you encourage your community or local government to do differently to improve the built environment?

WHY?

Why is this change an important one?

MEDIUM

In what medium will you create your PSA (poster, PowerPoint, song, rap, dance, film, skit, speech, radio segment, website, etc)?