

STREETS FOR PEOPLE, NOT ILLEGAL PARKING

Examining the ubiquity of illegal parking
and placard abuse in Downtown Brooklyn



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The safety, quality of life, and general walkability of Downtown Brooklyn are threatened by rampant illegal parking across the neighborhood. Pedestrians, cyclists, and businesses are negatively impacted by drivers who illegally park their vehicles wherever they want and have no regard for the rules thanks to a complete lack of enforcement and accountability. Illegal parking is more than just a nuisance: illegally parked cars force pedestrians, strollers, wheelchairs and cyclists into traffic, limit visibility, undermine safety, and prevent emergency vehicle access.

Over a four-week period from May 26 to June 20, 2025, Council Member Lincoln Restler's office surveyed 60 blocks of Downtown Brooklyn to determine the frequency and extent of illegal parking. On an average weekday, there are 457 illegally parked vehicles in Downtown Brooklyn. 186 of these vehicles (41%) have official parking placards, but are still parked illegally, such as on sidewalks or in no standing zones. An additional 74 (16%) have fake placards, including City agency gear or vests on the dashboard. 185 (41%) of illegally parked cars are without a real or fake placard. Only 3% of observed illegally parked cars had been issued a ticket, so 97% of illegal vehicles faced no fine or accountability. Notably, whether cars are in no standing/stopping zones, illegally abusing placards to park on sidewalks, or using fake placards—the majority of offenders are government workers or contractors.

There is significant variation in the amount of illegal parking across the blocks surveyed in Downtown Brooklyn. Some blocks only had 1 or 2 illegally parked cars, while other blocks had over 60 illegally parked cars every day of the study. Illegal parking was most prevalent around the following two locations:

- Kings County courthouses on Adams St (Brooklyn Bridge Blvd.): On an average day, there are 63 vehicles parked illegally on Adams St.—over 60% of those have an official placard. This is despite the fact that approximately 180 on-street parking spots in Downtown Brooklyn and a large 36 vehicle parking lot, taking up precious parkland in Columbus Park, are reserved for the exclusive use of court employees.
- Tillary between Prince and Navy Streets adjacent to NYPD 84th Precinct (301 Gold St), FDNY Engine 207 and Ladder 110 (172 Tillary St) and NYPD Transit Special Victims Unit (300 Gold St): there are an average of 36 cars parked illegally daily on this block. In total, there are 112 cars parked illegally every day on the five blocks surrounding these buildings.

Tackling the prevalence of illegal parking in Downtown Brooklyn requires a multi-pronged approach. The City must take the following steps to improve safety.

Action Plan:

- 1.Pass legislation (Intro 411-2024) to revoke 60,000 city-issued parking placards from government employees and hold agencies accountable for employee parking violations.
- 2.Implement consistent, aggressive enforcement operations that hold drivers of every illegally parked car accountable with daily ticketing, booting, and towing – no matter where they work. If the NYPD fails to enforce against their own employees and other government workers and contractors, then traffic enforcement must be moved to the Department of Transportation.
- 3.Pass legislation to allow citizen enforcement of illegally parked cars (Intro 80-2024) as an effective deterrent.
- 4.Implement street safety designs that protect pedestrians and prevent illegal parking on sidewalks and in bike lanes – such as jersey barriers, bollards and hardened infrastructure.
- 5.Review and reduce designated government agency parking spots in Downtown Brooklyn by eliminating all spots that are not essential for agency operations or employee safety.

METHODOLOGY

Neighborhood:

Downtown Brooklyn has the second highest concentration of government workers in New York City—including courthouses, city and state agency offices and a broad range of government facilities. Sixty blocks were identified to survey across the central areas of Downtown Brooklyn, based on parking regulations, locations of government buildings, and complaints about illegal parking.

The selected blocks were divided into geographic sections (see Image 1) and each section was surveyed twice per week—once in the morning and once in the afternoon—for four consecutive weeks. The days surveyed varied in order to limit abnormalities. Each illegally parked vehicle was geotagged with the date, time, and category of violation. No vehicle identifying information was recorded.

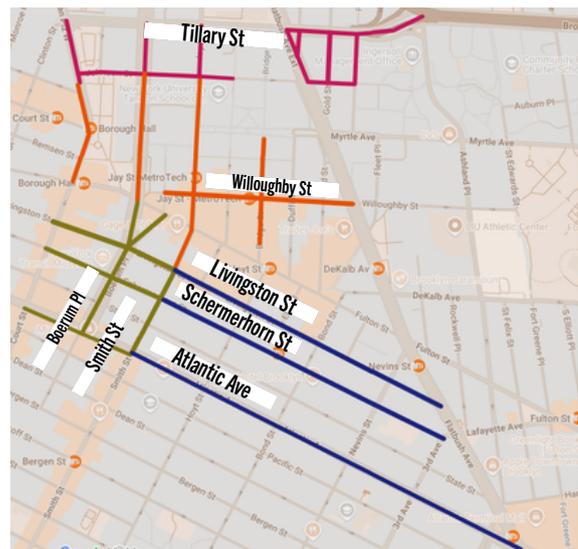


Image 1: Surveyed blocks

- Zone 1
- Zone 2
- Zone 3
- Zone 4

Violation Categories:

Illegally parked cars were counted in four categories: (1) with an official placard but parked illegally; (2) with a fake placard or vest; (3) without a placard; and (4) ticketed. Official placards are issued and authorized by government agencies. There are over 160,000 placards. Fake placards can range from unauthorized placards to NYPD gear or MTA vests placed on the dashboard. It is likely that official placards were overcounted in this study due to the difficulty in properly ascertaining the authenticity of real placards.

Any vehicle, with or without a valid placard, was marked as illegally parked if it was located in a crosswalk, in front of a hydrant, on the sidewalk, blocking a driveway, in a bus stop, or in a no standing zone. As cars with official placards are authorized to park in “No Parking” and “Commercial Vehicle Only” areas, they were not counted as illegally parked if in these areas. Any vehicle parked in a bike lane, bus lane, or general vehicular travel lane was marked as illegally parked. Additionally, a vehicle without a valid placard was marked as illegally parked if it was located in a no parking zone, in an authorized vehicles zone, or in a loading zone. Vehicles were only counted as illegally parked if no one was in the car. City vehicles, such as NYPD cars or MTA cars, were recorded as cars with valid placard as we presumed the vehicle was on official business.

RESULTS

Over the four weeks surveyed, there were a total of 3,654 illegally parked cars.

- 1489 (40%) were misusing real placards and parking illegally
- 588 (16%) had fake placards, government paraphernalia, or vests in the dashboard
- 1482 (41%) had neither a real or fake placard
- 95 (3%) cars were ticketed

The following table (Table 1) shows the average number of illegally parked cars across the 60 surveyed blocks on a given day. Illegal parking in the afternoon was on average 5% greater than in the morning. Additionally, data over the 4-week study showed a similar number of illegally parked cars each week. This suggests that illegal parking is consistent, and not attributable to particular incidents or events.

Table 1:

	Official placard	Fake placard	No Placard	Ticketed	Total Illegal Parked Cars
Average Day	186 (41%)	74 (16%)	185 (40%)	12 (3%)	457
Average Morning	194 (44%)	69 (16%)	175 (39%)	6 (1%)	444
Average Afternoon	178 (38%)	78 (16%)	196 (42%)	18 (4%)	470

Locations of Illegal Parking:

While illegal parking was widespread across the survey blocks, the results showed higher concentrations of illegal parking in certain areas. The average daily number of illegally parked cars observed on each block over the 4-week survey ranged from 1 to over 60, (see heat map in Image 2). The individual blocks with the most illegal parking were as follows:

Table 2:

Block	Average Daily Number of Illegally Parked Cars
Brooklyn Bridge Blvd. (Adams Street) between Fulton and Johnson St	63
Tillary St. between Prince and Navy St	36
Gold St. between Johnson and Tillary St	29
Jay St. between Willoughby and Johnson St	26
Schermerhorn St. between Hoyt and Bond St	20

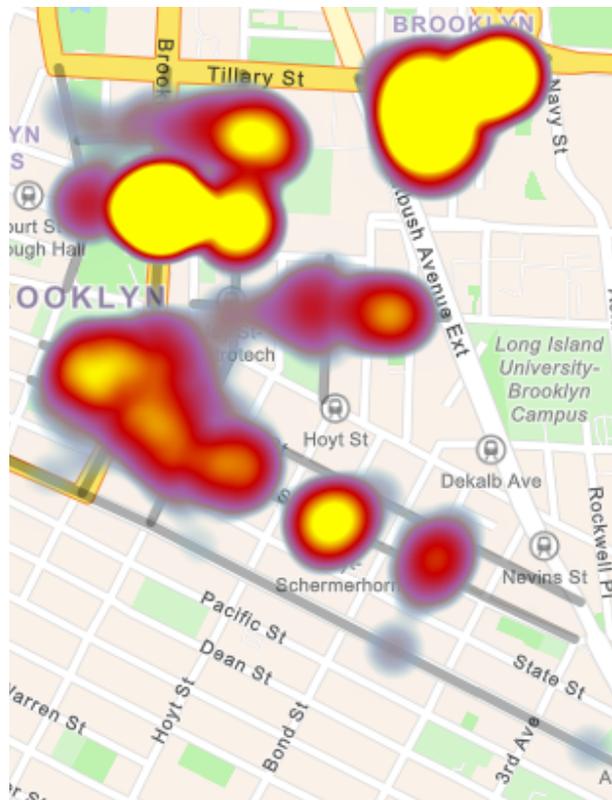


Image 2: Heat map of illegal parking

As expected, these blocks correspond to the locations of government buildings. The blocks outside the Kings County Supreme Courthouse (360 Adams Street) and surrounding courthouses, and the blocks surrounding the 84th Precinct, FDNY Fire House, and the NYPD Transit Special Victims unit at Gold & Tillary had the highest concentrations of illegal parking.

Placard Abuse:

While analysis across the full survey period found that overall cars without a placard (1,482) parked illegally approximately the same amount as cars with a real placard (1,489), there was significant variation across blocks in the percentage of illegal parking with placards. For example, on Tillary between Prince and Navy St, just 24% of illegally parked cars had a valid placard, while on the next block up (Tillary between Gold and Prince), 79% of illegally parked cars had a valid placard. Table 3 shows which blocks were surveyed as having the highest percentage of illegally parked cars in each category. This variation is correlated to the location of government offices and the lack of enforcement practices and protocols against government workers and contractors.

For instance, outside the Kings County Supreme Court, there is a high concentration of cars—nearly 60%—parked illegally with a placard. Similarly, Schermerhorn St between Hoyt and Bond had the highest rate of fake placards (28%, compared to 16% on average), which is likely due to the practice of MTA workers, NYPD Transit District 30, and nearby construction crews leaving vests in their windshields.

Table 3:

	No Placard	Placard	Fake Placard	TOTAL
Tillary St. between Prince and Navy Sts	76%	18%	1%	289
Schermerhorn St. between Hoyt and Bond Sts	57%	16%	28%	161
Gold St. between Johnson and Tillary Sts	39%	55%	5%	233
Brooklyn Bridge Blvd. between Fulton and Johnson Sts	24%	60%	14%	500
Jay St. between Willoughby and Johnson St	23%	61%	12%	208
Tillary St. between Gold and Prince St	21%	72%	3%	141

The images below show heat maps depicting the concentrations of illegal parking with no placard and with official placards.

Image 3: Illegally Parked Vehicles with No Placard

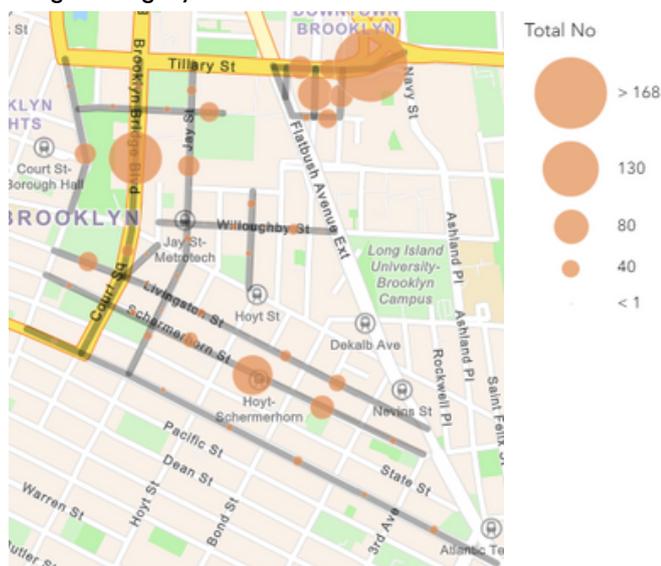
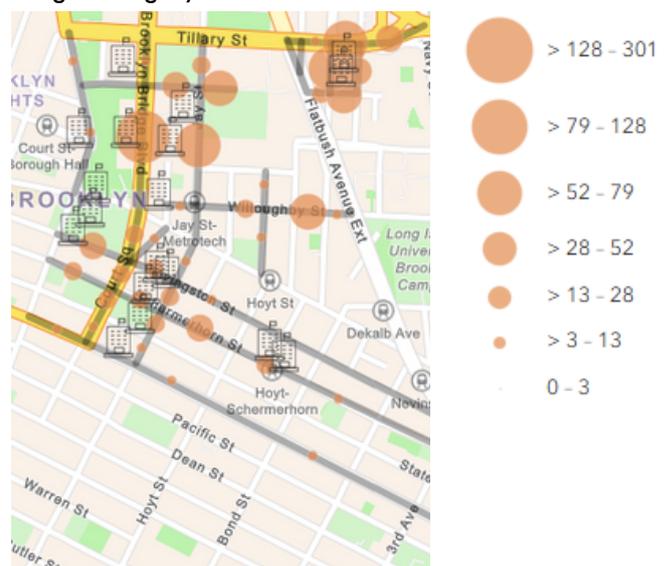


Image 4: Illegally Parked Vehicles with a Real Placard



Ticketed Vehicles:

Only 95 ticked vehicles were observed over the 4-week survey period – which is an average of less than twelve tickets per day. Given this was a point-in-time study, it is possible that tickets may not have been captured if they were issued after observations. However, the low number of tickets observed indicates there is too little parking enforcement in Downtown Brooklyn.

Types of Illegal Parking:

While all illegal parking can create potential safety issues, parking on sidewalks, in crosswalks, and in bus and bike lanes especially endangers pedestrians and cyclists. Additionally, parking in front of hydrants can result in fatal delays if FDNY is not able to access hydrants quickly when needed. This study was focused on capturing illegal parking and did not fully document the type of illegal parking in every instance. Data did reveal that parking on sidewalks was highly prevalent, with an average of over 45 cars per day. Slightly over half of these cars had placards. This issue was especially prevalent on Tillary St. between Prince and Navy St., Gold St. between Johnson and Tillary St., and Adams St., and between Fulton and Johnson St. Observers also counted almost 70 cars parked illegally in front of fire hydrants. Illegal parking was also frequent in cross walks, bike lanes, and bus lanes.

CONCLUSION & ACTION STEPS

Drivers who choose to illegally park create dangerous conditions for pedestrians, cyclists, and other drivers. While many see illegal parking as harmless, there are significant consequences, particularly when illegal parking is widespread. Blocked sidewalks and crosswalks force pedestrians into traffic, significantly increasing their risk of injury or even death. Placard abuse leads to an erosion of public trust and lack of confidence in the integrity of city employees. Parking in front of hydrants is reckless. And lack of enforcement of fake placards leads to lost revenue from parking meters and increased emissions from drivers who cannot find available parking. For all these reasons and more, it is critical that the City act urgently to enforce illegal parking and abolish placards.

1. Pass legislation ([Intro 411-2024](#)) to revoke 60,000 city-issued parking placards from government employees and hold agencies accountable for employee parking violations.

Thousands of government parking placard holders abuse their privileges everyday in neighborhoods across the city—particularly in Downtown Brooklyn—and never face consequences. In many instances, these placards are going to non-emergency agencies such as the Department of Finance or the Office of Court Administration and are given to workers who park their personal cars illegally when they could be using mass transit. The lack of any enforcement when an official placard is misused has also spawned the proliferation of fraudulent placards. According to 311 data, there were almost 24,000 complaints about illegal placard parking in the past year, and NYPD took no action on 82% of the complaints.

In Community Board 2 alone, there were over 1,300 complaints and no action taken on 77% of the reports. While this is an improvement from previous 311 response rates, NYPD is still failing to act on the vast majority of placard abuse issues. Placard holders unfairly access unlimited free parking unconnected to their employment duties—depriving communities of parking spots and creating a public safety risk. Abolition of all placards that were not collectively bargained is the appropriate next step.

2. Implement consistent, aggressive NYPD enforcement operations that hold every illegally parked car and driver accountable with daily ticketing, booting and towing.

If the NYPD fails to enforce against their own employees and other government workers and contractors, then traffic enforcement must be moved to the Department of Transportation. A [2023 study by Marcel Moran](#) found that there was widespread, unenforced parking on sidewalks around 91% of NYPD Precincts. The Department of Investigation concluded that there was “uneven and inadequate” enforcement of placard abuse. There should be a dedicated special enforcement division dedicated to independently and aggressively enforcing placard abuse.

3. Pass legislation to allow citizen enforcement of illegally parked cars (Intro 80-2024).

While aggressive city enforcement is needed, greater automated and citizen enforcement of illegal parking is essential to better prevent it from happening. There is no excuse for parking in front of a hydrant or on a sidewalk, and these violations can be easily captured by neighbors working to keep their community safe. It is a Sisyphean task for traffic enforcement staff to enforce every illegally parked vehicle, but neighbors invested in our collective safety can lend a hand and make a difference. The State should also pass legislation ([A5440 - Raga](#)) to allow the City to pilot automated camera enforcement of illegal parking.

4. Implement street safety designs that protect pedestrians and prevent illegal parking on sidewalks and in bike lanes.

Parking on sidewalks, blocking crosswalks, and obstructing sight lines poses a serious risk to pedestrians, strollers, wheelchairs, cyclists and other drivers. DOT should implement safety redesigns that prevent illegal parking and encourage drivers to follow the rules. Bollards or other barriers should be installed to prevent vehicles from parking on sidewalks and obstructing pedestrian passage. Additionally, protected bike lanes should be designed to prevent non-emergency vehicle access. Surveyors in the study also observed that illegal parking was more frequent on streets without clear lane markings and parking lines. DOT should ensure all streets are properly marked to encourage proper parking and allow for easier enforcement of illegal parking.

5. Review and reduce designated government agency parking spots in Downtown Brooklyn and eliminate all spots that are not essential for agency operations or employee safety.

Downtown Brooklyn is one of the most transit rich areas in New York City with over a dozen subway lines and even more bus routes. Despite this reality, there are hundreds of on-street parking spots reserved for government employees as well as a parking lot for 36 judges that takes up much needed parkland in Columbus Park.

These spots are reserved for city workers instead of commercial and neighborhood loading zones or parking for neighbors and private sector workers who need to drive to or from Downtown Brooklyn. While some parking is needed for city employees whose jobs necessitate driving throughout the day (such as building inspectors or child welfare specialists), the majority of employees should not be incentivized to drive and should rather be encouraged to take public transit.

Reducing illegal parking will help ensure that Downtown Brooklyn is safer and more accessible for all.