TORONTO

REPORT FOR ACTION

Proposed Parking Signage Pilot

Date: November 20, 2025
To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee
From: Acting General Manager, Transportation Services
Wards: All

SUMMARY

At its meeting on June 25 and 26, 2025, City Council requested the General Manager of Transportation Services to develop a pilot for improved parking signage. Transportation Services proposes launching a comprehensive Parking Signage Pilot to address longstanding challenges with clarity, visibility, and consistency in Toronto's parking regulations. Current signage often meets provincial standards but can create confusion when multiple signs are clustered, leading to interpretation delays and high violation rates. In 2024 alone over 1.8 million parking violations notices were issued for curbside infractions. The proposed pilot will introduce four new signage options that include:

- enhanced regulatory signs with larger fonts, simplified language, and consolidated restrictions;
- informational calendar-style signs for areas with complex time-based rules;
- illuminated digital signs for snow routes, activated during major storm conditions to prevent disruptions to TTC and snow removal operations; and
- enforcement consequence tabs displaying fine amounts or tow-away indicators to reinforce compliance.

The plan is to launch the signage pilot in the Spring 2026 with an evaluation period of up to eighteen (18) months at select locations. The pilot will be evaluated through public feedback, QR code surveys, operational data, and enforcement metrics in collaboration with the Toronto Parking Authority, Toronto Police Service, and the TTC. Findings will inform future citywide improvements to enhance user comprehension, reduce infractions, and support accessibility standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Acting General Manager, Transportation Services, recommends that:

1. City Council approve a parking signage pilot project of up to eighteen (18) months to evaluate the four (4) signage options, generally as described in the report (November 17, 2025) from the Acting General Manager, Transportation Services and City Council request the Acting General Manager, Transportation Services to report back to City Council on the outcome of the pilot project and recommended next steps.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The cost of installations to implement the proposed parking signage pilot options at select locations (i.e., 3 to 4 locations per pilot option) is approximately $150,000. Funding will be included in the 2026 Operating Budget submission for Transportation Services for consideration.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council, at its meeting of June 25 and 26, 2025 requested "City Council direct the General Manager, Transportation Services, in consultation with the President, Toronto Parking Authority, relevant Business Improvement Areas and other local stakeholders, to develop a pilot project on improved parking signage and report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee by the fourth quarter of 2025 with design options and recommendations to implement the pilot project." Agenda Item History - 2025.IE22.2

COMMENTS

Parking signs are essential for managing traffic flow and ensuring safety in public and private spaces. They provide clear instructions about where vehicles can park, for how long, and under what conditions. These signs help prevent congestion, support accessibility, and reduce the risk of fines or towing by informing drivers of local regulations. When signage is well-designed and its intent is effectively communicated, drivers are more likely to understand and adhere to the rules, thereby reducing instances of infractions such as illegal parking or overstaying time limits. In 2024, the Parking Enforcement Unit issued over 1.8 million parking violation notices (PVN), and as of October 2025 more than 1.5 million PVNs have been issued.

Pilot Objective

The purpose of this pilot is to enhance on-street parking signage to help drivers make informed decisions about where and how long they can park. Clear, simple, and unambiguous language will be used to communicate rules and restrictions, enabling quick understanding.

Key improvements include:

- **Sign Size and Font:** Larger signs and fonts for better legibility and visibility.
- **Placement and Arrangement:** Organizing signs to reflect the hierarchy of restrictions, from most to least restrictive, and positioning them on the side of the pole corresponding to the applicable direction, when possible.
- **Consistency:** Standardized terminology, colours, and icons to improve familiarity and support quick decision-making.

These changes aim to improve user comprehension and compliance while considering Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards to ensure accessibility for all users.

Current Issues

In Ontario parking signs are regulated by the Ministry of Transportation and the specifications for signs are laid out in Ontario Traffic Manual Book 5, Regulatory Signs. This includes standard sizing, spacing, font, symbols and colours. Individually, the signs are easy to interpret; however, when a cluster of signs is present at the same location, confusion and misinterpretation of parking regulations can occur. The visual clutter of signs can slow down interpretation as drivers have to scan multiple signs to determine which ones apply to the present time.

Parking signage is often installed based on available physical space rather than in accordance with the intended restriction hierarchy or the side of the pole/post to which the regulation applies. In several instances, although signs meet standard design specifications, the font size and overall dimensions are insufficient for clear visibility and quick interpretation by drivers, particularly in high-traffic or low-visibility conditions.

Examination of the top ten locations in the City for parking infractions in 2024 revealed that these sites typically feature straightforward and easily interpretable restrictions. This suggests that some drivers may be knowingly accepting the risk of receiving a ticket. Alternatively, the high infraction rates may reflect a lack of accessible legal parking options in the vicinity, prompting non-compliant behavior.

It has been observed, during the winter months, that drivers may not be aware when temporary restrictions such as snow routes are in effect due to the static and consistent nature of the current signage. This has operational implications for both TTC services and snow removal efforts, and can adversely affect overall traffic flow, as evidenced during the February 2025 major winter storm event. While Transportation Services have enhanced snow route signage for the 2025/26 winter season these new static signs also do not indicate when the snow route temporary no parking restrictions are in effect.

Jurisdictional Scan

Several jurisdictions have undertaken a range of parking signage pilot projects, including regulatory signage trials, informational and calendar-based signage initiatives, digital signage pilots, and the integration of mobile applications and digital data. These pilots aimed to address a common set of user-focused questions: 'Can I park here?' and

'How long can I park for?'; highlighting the need for signage that clearly communicates parking rules and durations to support compliance and reduce confusion.

Cities have used regulatory sign pilots to improve clarity, consistency and visibility using colour-coding such as red for ‘No’ regulations (e.g., no stopping, no standing, no parking), green for parking (both paid and free) and blue for accessible (e.g., parking and loading). In Winnipeg, they tested full colour signs with white text, and the feedback indicated while colour-coding was appreciated, the white text on colour was difficult to read. New York revamped the style of their parking signs, including features like ordering restrictions from most to least restrictive, using red/green colour on a white background and including time limits clearly in the corner of the sign.

Informational and calendar-style signage pilots began in 2014, following a grassroots initiative by designer Nikki Sylianteng. Her calendar-based signage concept has since been trialed in over a dozen cities, including Brisbane, Los Angeles, New Haven (CT), Boston, Flagstaff, and Winnipeg. These signs present parking regulations in a 24-hour, day-of-week format, allowing drivers to quickly determine applicable restrictions immediately.

While the design improves comprehension in areas with complex or layered regulations, several limitations have been noted. The signs can be difficult to read from a moving vehicle and may require drivers to stop to interpret them. Their effectiveness also depends on the regularity of restriction patterns; irregular schedules can make the signage overly complex. Additionally, because these signs are not considered regulatory signs they must be used as supplemental to the existing signage.

The informational signage pilots have had mixed results. Some cities citing up to 60 percent improvement in comprehension, yet only a few cities are continuing to deploy the informational signs beyond the pilot phase. Jurisdictions that have continued to use informational signs tend to deploy them in areas with multiple signs that are complex to understand and where traditional signage has proven insufficient.

Recently, cities have been deploying more digital signage. In 2015, Toronto piloted LED Blank-out signs that highlight 'no left turns' at time-of-day turning restrictions at intersections. The pilot showed a 39 to 53% reduction in prohibited left turns during restricted times and the City went on to expand to additional locations in the downtown core. In Sydney, Australia, a digital version of regulatory signage has been implemented along select bus routes. These signs prominently display the current restriction in a large, easily readable format, while also including smaller text that outlines all applicable regulations. This approach has been applied in areas with bus lane parking restrictions to enhance clarity and improve compliance.

Perth, Australia has deployed a similar style sign for special event clearway routes, where the time/date applicable can be easily changed. Laval and Montreal are piloting light up ‘No Parking’ signs on certain routes to translate real time displays of current restrictions. While these digital solutions enhance clarity and adaptability, they may come with higher implementation and maintenance costs compared to traditional static signage.

With the advancement of artificial intelligence, mobile applications are increasingly capable of interpreting parking signage and restrictions. Apps such as Parky.AI, currently optimized for use in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are demonstrating promising results. AI-Enhanced parking interpretation tools are achieving approximately 83% accuracy when interpreting single signs and 74% accuracy for multiple signs. As AI technology continues to evolve, these accuracy rates are expected to improve, potentially positioning such tools as a future standard for parking sign interpretation.

Other applications, like Park Usher, utilize digital bylaw maps interpreted at the sub-block level to provide location-specific guidance based on time and day. In the United Kingdom, AppyParking+ offers an integrated solution that combines navigation, parking availability, and payment processing within a single platform. These innovations reflect a growing trend toward leveraging AI and digital mapping to simplify parking decisions, improve parking experience and increase compliance.

While technological solutions can support drivers in identifying and selecting appropriate parking locations, the responsibility ultimately remains with the driver to interpret and comply with posted signage to ensure legal parking. Transportation Services will continue to monitor the performance and potential of digital signage technologies as part of its ongoing evaluation of parking management tools.

Proposed Pilot Options

The Parking Signage Pilot options are focused on addressing the current issues noted with parking signs in Toronto. The pilot has four (4) types of signage improvements or styles, each addressing different concerns. All the pilot types aim to communicate parking regulations in simple, unambiguous language that users can quickly understand. In pilot locations, the signs will be, where possible, arranged to indicate hierarchy of restrictions from most restrictive to least. Signage will be appropriately sized with clear and legible fonts. All pilot signs will make use of consistent terminology, infographics and colours to improve user familiarity and interpretation and consider Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards. Lastly, the aim of the pilot is to enhance clarity, placement, visibility and consistency of parking signage leading to improved user understanding and higher compliance rates.

1. Digital Sign Pilot

During the winter storm event in February 2025 several streetcar routes were disrupted by vehicles parking along designated snow routes, despite clear signage indicating ‘No Parking Snow Route’. Snow route clearways are enforced when the Mayor or General Manager of Transportation Services declare a ’major snow storm condition’ in Toronto. Once declared, parking on these routes is strictly prohibited to facilitate snow removal operations. While the signage for snow routes is posted permanently, drivers must stay informed by checking the City of Toronto website or listening to the local news to know if the no parking snow route restriction is active.

To address this issue, Transportation Services recommends piloting illuminated digital signage that is activated in the event of a ’major snow storm condition’. These signs will

provide a clear visual indication that ‘no parking’ is in effect and cars will be towed. The pilot will focus on select TTC streetcar routes that experienced significant parking-related disruptions during the last storm of 2025, allowing for a comparison between dynamic and traditional signage. Below are examples of existing signage and proposed digital sign.

Old Toronto Sign

New Toronto Sign (2025)

Proposed Additional Sign on Streetcar routes

2. Regulatory Sign Pilot

Traditional regulatory signage such as ‘no parking’, ‘no standing’, ‘no stopping' are seen across all streets in Ontario. The icons used are standardized to provide drivers with repeated consistent messaging and aid in interpretation. The regulatory sign pilot, builds on the familiar elements, introducing enhancements aimed at improving clarity and reducing confusion.

Key features of the pilot signage include:

- **Coloured borders** to visually distinguish between permitted and prohibited actions.
- **Larger sign dimensions and font sizes** to improve visibility and reduce interpretation time.
- **Clear, unmistakable language**, including spelling out days of the week and replacing “12:00am” with “midnight” for better comprehension.

To reduce visual clutter, multiple restrictions would be consolidated into a single sign rather than using traditional clusters. Where feasible, signs will be installed on the side of the pole that corresponds with the restriction.

This pilot will be implemented in areas currently affected by sign clutter and overlapping regulations, allowing for evaluation of effectiveness compared to existing signage. Below is an example of existing signage and proposed replacement signage.

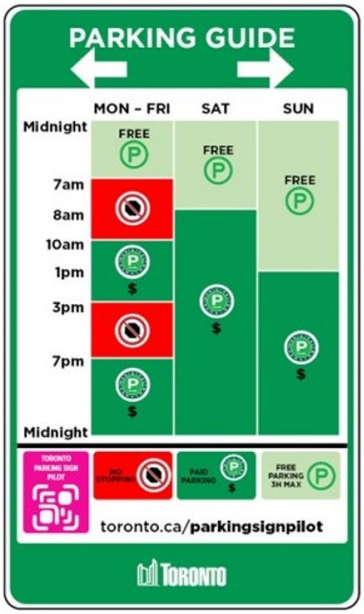
Existing Signage

Proposed Signage

3. Informational Sign Pilot

The informational sign pilot uses a weekly calendar-style layout to visually communicate parking permissions and restrictions. These signs incorporate colour-coded regulations in time/day blocks to clearly indicate when regulations apply. By time blocking ‘no parking/stopping/standing’ restrictions, as well as paid and free parking periods the sign offers users clearer information. Free parking blocks also highlight the City of Toronto unsigned 3-hour street parking limit.

The pilot signs are supplementary and will not replace the existing regulatory signage. Informational signs are best suited for areas where there are multiple but regular restrictions (such as rush hour prohibitions) and in areas where people may not be as familiar with when and where you can park, such as tourist or retail areas. Below is an image of the traditional signage on the left and a calendar-style sign with the same regulations.



4. Tow-Away or Fine Amount Pilot

Transportation Services is also proposing to launch a pilot to test the effectiveness of adding visual indicators of enforcement consequence, such as fine amounts or tow-away directly to existing regulatory signage. The goal is to improve compliance by clearly communicating the potential penalties for parking violations. A tab displaying either a fine amount or a tow-away icon will be affixed to current signs to reinforce the message.

The pilot will focus on locations with high rates of infractions or critical clearways where adherence to regulations is essential. Compliance will be monitored to assess the impact of these additions. This initiative is not intended for citywide implementation but will target specific areas with known enforcement challenges.

Examples, existing signs

Existing Accessible Sign Toronto

Existing No stopping Cycle Routes Toronto

Examples, proposed signs

Fine amount Added

Tow Away Added

Pilot Timing and Locations

The pilot is expected to begin in the Spring of 2026 and to run for up to eighteen (18) months. Transportation Services will report back to City Council at the completion of the pilot with its findings and recommendations. The digital signage pilot would run until at least one ‘major snow storm condition’ has been called so performance could be measured and may be reported on separately as it is weather dependant.

The exact locations are still to be determined, as each pilot type has specific requirements on the type of regulations in place. These requirements are detailed in the pilot descriptions. Each pilot type will be evaluated at 3 to 4 locations, which may be clustered or spread across the city.

Measuring Success

Details about the parking signage pilot will be available on the City of Toronto’s website, including descriptions of each pilot type, a map of pilot locations, and a link to a public survey. All feedback and data will be used to inform the next steps.

To measure success, the following evaluation methods will be used:

- **Public Feedback:** QR codes with a request for input will be placed at all pilot locations. Scanning the code will direct users to a survey specific to that location.

Feedback will be collected for all signage types to gauge user comprehension and satisfaction. Feedback will also be available through our website.

- **Compliance Metrics:** working with Toronto Police Service to analyze parking violation rates pre- and post-pilot and with the Toronto Parking Authority to analyze revenue data.
- **Operational Feedback:** Including sign installation, costs, maintenance, performance of digital signs (lighting, power).
- **Service Improvements:** monitoring TTC routes during significant snow events and working with TTC for operator feedback on parking compliance.
- **Future Applications:** The digital pilot may have opportunities to deploy digital signs in other situations. The lessons learned through piloting this technology may inform alternative applications based on performance.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Transportation Services will finalize pilot locations in collaboration with Economic Development & Culture, select Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), the Toronto Parking Authority (TPA), Councillors, and Toronto Police Service (TPS). In partnership with the TPA and TPS, Transportation Services will also develop an evaluation framework to measure pilot outcomes. In addition, to support public engagement, a dedicated website and survey will be launched in the Spring of 2026.

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SIGNATURE

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