

Read the following text extract taken from the Los Angeles Times. Then discuss the topic, keeping in mind the questions below.

Los Angeles Times | **latimes.com.**



TOP OF THE TIMES

Take valuables with you

You'll need them to afford the skyrocketing parking rates around L.A.

February 1, 2007

Cheap, convenient parking — as Southern Californians have long known and expected it — is getting harder to find in Los Angeles.

Two hours in an office building garage can set you back \$28, more than twice what it cost in the early 1990s. Club hopping in Hollywood? It could cost \$60 before you even tip the valet. Commuters who paid as little as \$80 a month in downtown Los Angeles in the early 1990s are being hit up for as much as \$300 for unreserved spaces. Prefer a prime slot with your name on it? Be prepared to write a check for more than \$500 a month.

Basic economics — rising demand and declining supply — explain the parking price surge.

With economic growth, new buildings and more residents, many lots and garages are filling up. Housing developers have also converted lots into residential buildings. With downtown land prices now surpassing \$300 a square foot, it doesn't make economic sense to buy land just to use it for parking. So, acres of asphalt are giving way to housing, stores and other attractions that people want to visit — by car, of course.

Prices are rising on standard surface lots, but also in the garages of fancy high-rise office towers and in parts of Hollywood, especially during peak weekend hours for the district's popular nightspots. With 55 clubs in the area, parking lots are frequently overbooked, and parking costs \$5 during the day, but \$25, \$40 or even \$50 after dark.

Business owners now worry that high parking costs will drive away their customers. "We have seen a dip in business at many clubs because people can't get in here," the owner of one club said.

Cultural institutions are also facing problems. Twelve major historic theaters survive in Los Angeles' Broadway theater district that was once the West Coast equivalent of New York's Great White Way, but most have no parking. So, few visitors come.

"Now is a good time to be a parking operator"

Higher prices translate into fatter profits for parking lot owners. Each stall on the average downtown lot grosses about \$10,000 a year. So a lot with 100 parking spots would bring in \$1 million with very little operating costs.

Still, even with the increases, downtown Los Angeles parking prices are low compared with other downtowns. In cities like San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York and Seattle it can cost as much as \$40 or \$50 to park.

Public transportation advocates look more positively at the situation. They say that rising costs will push motorists into mass transit. "People don't like to pay for parking. If transit can replace that need, people will choose it." Thousands of Los Angeles County commuters already ditch their cars at Metro Rail stations every weekday so they can hop a train to work. Although general parking is free, some stops are so crowded that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority offers reserved parking for a price.

TASKS:

1. What does the text's title express?

2. What are the average prices for a parking spot in your area?

- Is this higher, lower or about the same as in Los Angeles?
- Are the prices justified? Why?
- According to the text, are the prices in Los Angeles above or below average?

3. Who benefits from increasing prices for parking lots?

- Who are supporters of the high prices, and why?
- Consider whether the lots are owned privately or by the community.
- Are there other reasons for the rise in prices, apart from economic interests?

4. Which problems do critics see in connection with the rising prices?

- Who is against the rising prices, and what reasons do they give?

5. What is your own opinion on the topic?

- If you were a resident/ commuter/ local merchant...