

Government of the District of Columbia

Department of Transportation



Commercial Loading Zone Policy

The right to establish and maintain a commercial loading zone is conferred to the Director of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) through the DDOT Establishment Act of 2002, and is exercised through the Planning & Sustainability Division of the agency. Specifically, Title 18, Section 24-02 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations authorizes the Director “to establish loading zones for use of commercial vehicles in any area which is zoned as a commercial or industrial district, or in front of property used as a commercial property under a nonconforming use, or at the usual shipping entrance of a large hotel or apartment building.” Accordingly, DDOT seeks to ensure that the establishment and management of commercial loading zones city-wide is conducted according to principles that (1) Encourage off-street freight deliveries; (2) Adopt loading zone management strategies to mitigate congestion and improve air quality; (3) Promote loading zone management strategies to support freight efficiencies; and (4) Achieve a balanced approach to the allocation of curbside space.

In accordance with these principles, DDOT establishes policies to be used for determining where each loading zone will be placed; the hours and days when each loading zone will be in service for the loading and unloading of commercial vehicles; and the physical space that will be allocated to each loading zone. These policies ensure that the strategies employed to establish and manage loading zones support the priorities of the District. The policies for establishing and managing curbside loading zones are set forth in the following paragraphs:

1. Encourage off-street freight deliveries

DDOT encourages the off-street loading and unloading of freight in four ways. Firstly, the District ensures that planned urban developments include physical accommodations for off-street freight loading activity. Secondly, the District seeks to maximize the usage of existing off-street infrastructure - such as alleyways and loading docks - as an alternative to on-street commercial loading zones. Thirdly, the District encourages building owners and managers to lease excess off-street loading capacity to adjacent businesses. Fourthly, the District encourages the introduction of innovative practices to reduce the frequency of curbside deliveries.

2. Mitigate congestion and improve air quality

Pursuant to, and in accordance with, the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the 1990 Amendments, DDOT takes affirmative steps to mitigate traffic congestion and consequently improve air quality within the District. DDOT aims to improve the flow of traffic at commercial loading zones to help improve air quality in the District. Some types of traffic activity around commercial loading zones that lead to congestion and air pollution are the double parking of commercial vehicles, the occupancy of commercial loading zones by non-commercial vehicles (leading to double parking), the occupancy of commercial loading zones by trucks that are not in the process of loading or unloading, the extended waiting and idling of trucks that are consequently unable to access the zone, and blocking of traffic lanes by trucks that are improperly positioned in commercial loading zones.

DDOT mitigates congestion and improves air quality by adopting strategies that reduce the occurrence of double-parking by freight vehicles; that reduce freight truck idling times; that reduce the time that freight trucks must wait to get access to commercial loading zones; that encourage off-peak delivery of freight; that promote efficient use of curbside loading space through adaptive pricing mechanisms; that encourage use of non-combination, straight trucks under forty (40) feet in total length; and that widely distribute routing information to commercial loading zones. In addition to these strategies, DDOT seeks out funding sources for transportation pilot programs and research projects that promote the mitigation of congestion and the improvement of air quality.

3. Promote commercial loading zone management strategies to support freight efficiencies

DDOT promotes commercial loading zone management strategies to support operational efficiency on the part of freight carriers. The agency encourages freight shippers to use shared loading facilities (such as third-party freight consolidators); and encourages businesses to use curbside space in a way that considers the loading needs of adjacent businesses and their patrons. The agency also shares information with freight partners to encourage operational efficiency in the loading and unloading of freight.

4. Achieve a balanced approach to the allocation of curbside space

DDOT serves the transportation needs of an entire city. Accordingly, the agency must ensure that it takes a balanced approach to the allocation of curbside space, and that the establishment and elimination of commercial loading zones is conducted in a way that considers the interests and priorities of all constituents. To achieve this balance, DDOT seeks to ensure the District has adequate curbside loading capacity, to reduce loading and unloading times by encouraging more efficient use of commercial loading zone space, to allocate curbside space in a manner consistent with immediately adjacent land use, to integrate commercial loading zones into the prioritization of competing uses of curbside space, and to encourage alternative modes of transportation to reduce curbside conflicts.