Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne CBD Off-street Casual Parking Prices

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Introduction

This report analyses the prices for off-street Central Business District (CBD) parking for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne CBD areas and compares the cost of parking to analyses performed in 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2014/15.

Off-street car parking price data was gathered by the RACQ in July 2015 from websites of parking operators with publicly available car parks and pricing within the CBDs of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

Parking price data covered weekdays and weekends and was collated by city, parking station and duration of stay. A consistent definition of the CBD as the core of high density/high rise CBD area has been identified for each city, with the CBD parking boundaries remaining static throughout all surveys.

The majority of CBD parking stations in the capital cities of Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney are operated by Wilson and Secure Parking.

The number of parking spaces available at each parking station was not recorded as it was often not available. The reported average parking rates are therefore not weighted by the number of specific car parks at each parking station. Where new car parks were found to be operating within the defined CBD boundary, these were included in the latest analysis.

The reported prices are those that a motorist must pay when they pull in to the car park and leave their car there for a period of time, often called the casual user rate. Some motorists, however, choose to pre-book a car park on-line as substantial discounts are often available. Other motorists take advantage of early bird rates (e.g., entry before 9am) and for many regular CBD parkers, businesses pay long term leases to ensure spaces are available.

Disclaimer: This report is based on information obtained from website of car park operators. While attempts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this report, the Royal Automobile Club of Queensland makes no statements, representations, or guarantees about the accuracy or completeness of it.
Results

**Weekday Parking**

The cost of parking in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne is higher than other Australian capital cities.

In the Brisbane Central Business District (CBD), motorists are paying a weekday average casual rate of approximately $28 for one hour of off-street city parking, $45 for two hours, $68 for four hours and $71 for eight hours.

Since 2001, average weekday casual car parking rates in Brisbane’s CBD have more than quadrupled\(^1\). RACQ believes that the increased revenue being pocketed by Brisbane parking operators is a function of constrained competition in the market as well as Brisbane City Council policies designed to limit CBD office parking.

The high cost of casual user parking in Brisbane cannot be justified on the grounds that it deters motorists from driving during peak hour into the CBD as many casual users seek to visit outside of peak hour congestion. Additionally, much of the traffic entering the CBD is ‘through’ traffic and is therefore not parking.

Employment has increased in the CBD over the last decade while car park numbers have been constrained, resulting in a higher proportion of car parks owned or leased by CBD businesses. These car parks contribute to congestion as presumably many are used for work commutes of senior managers. This has reduced the proportion of car parks available for casual short term use and thus increased prices.

RACQ believes it is time for a rethink on how to improve mobility in the inner city without excessive parking rates that restrict the diversity of activities in, and access to, the CBD.

The parking rates for one, two, four and eight hour stays in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne are presented in Figure 1 (over). The rates for shorter stays are important as they show the cost to motorists who are visiting the CBDs for a range of trip purposes such as shopping or recreation.

The full day rate is the price relevant to commuters who have to pay for their own parking where they are unable to access early bird rates available at some parking operators. Many commuters, especially senior executives of businesses and government departments in the CBD, will have their parking paid by the business as a fringe benefit.

It is RACQ’s view that the high casual user parking fees have contributed little to efforts to reduce congestion.

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\(^1\) The Price of Parking in Brisbane CBD and Comparison with Prices In Other Australian Capital Cities, RACQ/TTM 12 April 2011
Figure 1 reveals that Brisbane just edged out Sydney for the highest average weekday parking rate for one hour parking, with an average cost of $27.63 across CBD car parks. The one hour parking rate for Sydney is $27.60 with Melbourne substantially cheaper at $19.47. In addition, Brisbane recorded the highest average weekday parking rate for 30 minute parking at $15.03, versus Sydney and Melbourne at $13.56 and $10.71 respectively.

Sydney CBD has the most expensive two hour parking on a weekday, where the price almost doubles from the one hour rate to an average of $53.45, compared with $45.26 in Brisbane and $38.70 in Melbourne.

Sydney also has the most expensive four hour parking on a weekday, recording an average cost of $74.31, with Brisbane the second most expensive at $68.68 and Melbourne again trailing with $63.74. The order was the same for eight hour parking, with Sydney being the most expensive at $75.78, Brisbane at $71.18 and Melbourne at $65.81.

While off-street parking was the main focus of this report, an analysis of on-street parking rates (weekdays, up to 3hr meters, in the main CBD core area) reveals that Brisbane is the cheapest at $4.40/hr, Melbourne is next best at $5.50/hr and Sydney the most expensive at $7.00/hr.

The average weekday eight hour (maximum) rate for car parks in the Sydney CBD was $75.78. Therefore over two-thirds (70%) of the average maximum daily cost is accrued in the first two hours (see Figure 2 over).

In the Brisbane CBD, the average weekday maximum charge for car parking was $71.18. Therefore 64% of the average maximum daily cost is accrued in the first two hours.

In the Melbourne CBD, the average weekday maximum charge for car parking was $65.81. Therefore 59% of the average maximum daily cost is accrued in the first two hours.
The Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne change in weekday parking rates since the original RACQ and TTM report in 2010 is shown in Figure 3 (over).
Figure 3 – 2015/16 Average Weekday Parking Rates for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne compared with 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2014/15.
Since 2014/15 in the Brisbane CBD study area, average weekday car parking rates have remained relatively stable but increased slightly for stays longer than 2 hours.

In Brisbane CBD on weekdays:
- The most expensive maximum rate (per day) is $89, with this price recorded at three parking stations (two parking stations in 2014/15)
- 30 minute and 1 hour casual parking rates are more expensive than Sydney and Melbourne
- The average 1 and 2 hour casual parking rates have remained steady since 2014/15
- The average 4 hour casual parking rate has increased by $2.13 (3.2%) since 2014/15 to $68.68 in 2015/16
- The average 8 hour casual parking rate has increased by $2.79 (4.1%) since 2014/15 to $71.18 in 2015/16
- Weekday earlybird rates without discounts averaged $24.37 in Brisbane ($30.56 Sydney, $18.59 Melbourne).

**Figure 4 Average Cost of Parking (Weekday) in Brisbane CBD 2015/16**

Since 2010/11 many of Brisbane’s parking rate increases have been above inflation, suggesting that parking operators are in a comfortable oligopoly position and are able to extract maximum prices from motorists. In the last twelve months price increases have been moderate, with no significant change to the 1 and 2 hour casual parking rates and increases of 3.2% and 4.1% to the 4 and 8 hour rates respectively. The cause of this could be a reduction in demand for CBD car parking, possibly in response to the previous years’ price increases and the resulting legacy of high base-price car-parking.

The availability of large discounts, however, suggests competition is increasing to fill car parks during low use periods. This provides the opportunity for those who pre-plan their CBD parking requirements to save a substantial amount compared with the published fees.
Weekday casual parking rates can vary depending on operator and location of the parking station. The two cheapest car parks are the King George Square and Wickham Terrace car parks operated by Brisbane City Council, which have identical casual parking rates and can be seen in Figure 5 below.

The most expensive car park casual rates, for each time segment, is shown by the purple line below.

**Figure 5 Cheapest Parking Station versus Brisbane Average and Maximum, Weekdays.**
**Weekend Parking**

The average weekend parking rates for the largest capital city CBDs are shown in Figure 5 below. Average weekend casual parking rates are significantly cheaper than weekday parking costs in the Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney CBD areas studied.

The average weekend parking rate for Brisbane CBD has decreased from $12.40 in 2014/15 to $12.14 in 2015/16. Brisbane weekend parking rates are similar to the average Melbourne CBD rate at $12.64, but much cheaper than the Sydney CBD average rate of $22.16.

**Figure 5 – Average weekend parking rates for Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne CBDs**

![Bar graph showing average weekend parking rates for Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne](chart)

**Note:**
These numbers do not include a small proportion of parking stations where weekend rates are the same as weekday rates. The ‘General Maximum Cost’ and ‘General Minimum Cost’ were the highest rates nominated by the parking operators for all day parking. No discounts have been applied.
Night Parking

The average weekday night parking rate for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne CBDs are shown in Figure 6 below. The average weekday night parking rate is modest in Brisbane and Melbourne while Sydney is almost double the cost.

Average weekday evening/night rates in Brisbane reduced from $11.83 in 2014/15 to $11.52 in 2015/16. Sydney and Melbourne average weekday evening/night rates increased slightly to $22.40 and $12.47 respectively.

On average it is significantly cheaper for casual users to park after 5pm rather than during the daytime on a weekday in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne CBD areas.

Figure 6 – Average night parking rate (Weekday) for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne

Note:
The Average Night Parking Rate was based on the highest rate nominated by the parking operators for weekday evening / night parking, generally between 5pm – 5am. No discounts have been applied.
Parking Discounts (Online and Promotional)

If discounts are not applied, the current casual parking rate structure favours long term (>4 hours) and early-bird parking, and discourages short term visits to the CBD for shopping, recreation, attending events or going to movies and restaurants.

Weekday casual parking rates are still high. However since the 2011/12 survey there has been an influx of online discounts for pre-booking parking spots as well as other promotional offers and deals that can provide significant savings for parkers.

The Brisbane City Council (BCC) website also details current parking offers in Brisbane City [http://www.visitbrisbane.com.au/parking](http://www.visitbrisbane.com.au/parking) including those at the BCC owned parking stations at King George Square and Wickham Terrace.

**Offer 1**: Park up to 15 minutes for FREE
King George Square and Wickham Terrace Car Parks
Enter any time and park up to 15 minutes for free

**Offer 2**: Special Weekend Parking
King George Square and Wickham Terrace Car Parks
$5 per day
Saturday: Entry from 7am and exit before midnight
Sunday: Entry from 7am and exit before 11pm

**Offer 3**: Special Evening Parking
King George Square and Wickham Terrace Car Parks
$5 only, Monday to Friday
Park from 4.30pm and exit before 6am

**Offer 4**: Special Early Bird Offer in the City
King George Square Car Park only
$20 only, park before 7am and exit between 1-6pm

*All offers are subject to availability

Some of the offers that have been available at other off-street car parks in the CBD are shown below:

**Secure Parking:**
‘Secure-a-spot’ – savings by pre-booking a parking spot – savings of up to 60% (depending on day, time and length of stay)

**Wilson Parking:**

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2 Discounts shown relate to information obtained from parking operator websites, July 2015
Conclusions

Brisbane parking costs are currently the second highest in Australia after Sydney. Brisbane has the highest charges for 30 minutes and one hour parking, and second highest for two, four hour and all day parking.

The more than quadrupling\(^3\) of Brisbane CBD weekday casual parking rates since 2001 indicates that steep rises have occurred. The increase in parking rates for Brisbane since 2001 suggests a level of oligopolistic pricing.

Brisbane City Council (BCC) has constrained the provision of car parking space in the CBD for many years, primarily through the planning approval process. CBD office towers are limited to provide just one parking space for every 200 m\(^2\) of Gross Floor Area. This policy was designed to minimise the amount of CBD commuting by car during peak hours.

A high proportion of existing car parks are leased by building tenants and provided to senior managers and clients so they retain the flexibility of car access. Many of these managers would access their leased parking spot during the morning peak hour.

BCC wants to promote the CBD as a centre of entertainment, culture and retail activity, catering for shoppers, diners, movie goers and other leisure activities. Many of these activities are accessed through the day or at night, so they do not add to congestion at peak hours.

The parking constraints appear to have dedicated more of the parking supply to business leases and limited the availability of casual and short term parking options. This has driven up the price of short term parking without any meaningful reduction in peak hour congestion.

The large difference between on-street parking meter rates and off-street short term rates also results in circulating traffic searching for an on-street space to save money. This can add substantially to the level of traffic within the CBD.

BCC’s parking policies appear to have increased parking costs to motorists without reducing congestion. More recently, BCC established a Brisbane Parking Taskforce to seek solutions and has begun making improvements.

The night and weekend discounts and the 15 minute free parking at BCC’s CBD parking stations and non-CBD on-street parking meters has allowed more motorists to complete quick inner city tasks outside of peak hours without incurring a high fee. On-street parking rates are also cheaper in the Brisbane CBD area ($4.40/hr) than in Melbourne ($5.50/hr) and Sydney ($7.00/hr) for up to 3 hour parking meters. Those who are able to pre-book online can also find substantial discounts at many other parking garages.

RACQ commends these efforts to date and supports further implementation of policies that improve the availability and reduce the costs of car parking in the inner city and at train stations.

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\(^3\) The Price of Parking in Brisbane CBD and Comparison with Prices In Other Australian Capital Cities, RACQ/TTM 12 April 2011

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