Dear Sir or Madam:

The "A Year of Parking Tickets" interactive graphic (Nov. 26, 2008, at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/11/26/nyregion/20081128_PARKING.html) provides an excellent high-level view of the parking ticket data for the city of New York. However, it could do better to allow users to refine their views of the ticket data and could provide fine details in a more easily accessible manner.

One aspect of this graphic that may impede users’ ability to zoom and filter the ticket data is the fixed mapping from colors to ticket density. While the constant-valued, three-range color scheme may be appropriate when surveying the whole city, it does not provide sufficient visual contrast when zooming into low-density regions. For example, the street colors in Astoria scheme point out the large number of tickets issued just outside of Metro stops, but do not differentiate other streets in the area despite the apparently high variance in their ticket densities. Moreover, the color scheme does not seem to reflect the actual area of any street (and thus does not apparently take the number of parking spaces on a street into account); this may cause colors to be assigned in an unbalanced manner that may further skew the visual contrast between neighboring streets. A color scheme that (optionally) adapts to the range of values in the visible area might make patterns inherent in this data more obvious.

Additionally, the visualization’s interface, despite zooming to near-street level, does not provide instrumentation to "drill down" into the data at different levels of resolution. Ticket counts are currently shown only on a per-block basis, but could also be grouped by borough, neighborhood, or even full street. The lack of a persistent representation of ticket counts (even at the closest zoom levels) also makes it difficult to query the fine details in this data set, as individually "mousing over" each block is a tedious and perhaps futile task. Some other geometric representation proportionate to the density of regions at each zoom level (as are used in your "Immigration Explorer" from March 10, 2009) might give a clearer view into the distribution of tickets across specific regions of the city.

Finally, the information presented by this graphic might be more useful to users if it could be divided along other dimensions like time of year, day of week, hour of day, etc. The visualization shows clearly that tickets are more frequent in certain areas of the city, but does not facilitate the exploration of why this so: are tickets mainly issued on weekdays vs. weekends, are they given due to parking meter violations or for poor car placement, are more tickets issued to first-time violators or are repeat offenders more common, etc. While some of this data may not be readily available, this graphic would be of even greater use if it attempted
to illustrate the relationships between parking tickets and other aspects of New York lifestyle and transportation—it is certainly well suited to novice users in its current forms, but may leave more experienced users unsatisfied.

Sincerely,

Mark Daly