

CAMPAIGN FOR NEW YORK'S FUTURE

Congestion Pricing Responses

“We think congestion pricing has the promise to get New Yorkers the subway and bus service they deserve and the traffic relief they want.”

—Gene Russianoff,
NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

Mayor Bloomberg has proposed that New York City adopt a three-year pilot project for “congestion pricing.” Drivers would pay an \$8 daily charge to come into Manhattan’s Central Business District during weekday rush hours. Drivers would be credited for the bridge and tunnel tolls they pay for entering Manhattan. The mayor says these charges will reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and public health and help pay for badly-need transit improvements. His critics disagree. This fact sheet is prepared by the Campaign for New York’s Future – a coalition of scores of civic, business, environmental, labor, community, and public health organizations – to respond to these criticisms.

Isn’t it a better approach to fight congestion to better enforce the traffic laws?

Critics say what’s needed is to enforce laws on “blocking the box” or those regulating construction sites. Each of these measures would help in local situations and the City should do all that is possible to enforce them. In fact, they are part of the Mayor’s 2030 PlaNYC; he has already put money in the city budget for more traffic enforcement agents and has asked for state legislation to make easy to fine motorists for blocking the box. But traffic congestion is widespread and only actions that lower overall traffic volumes will have a significant effect on traffic. And better traffic enforcement does nothing to raise funds for transit.

Should we charge trucks higher tolls at the existing tolled bridges and tunnels to enter Manhattan’s core during the day?

Four of the seven East River crossings are now free. So, if a higher toll is put in place at the three tolled facilities during the day, trucks will shift to the free crossings. Traffic would worsen on Brooklyn streets approaching the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges and to the Queens approaches to the Queensboro Bridge to enter Manhattan. Unfortunately, higher truck tolls alone will also fall far short of raising the funds needed for more than \$30 billion of transit improvements over the next 25 years. And trucks comprise only 8% of vehicles on East River bridges and only 7% of vehicles at MTA and Port Authority tunnels and bridges into the heart of Manhattan.

In contrast, the Mayor’s PlaNYC combines a variable truck toll with incentives for trucks to travel in the off peak. Because drivers are credited for the tolls they pay going into Manhattan, there would be no free alternative to avoid high peak tolls. Finally, PlaNYC would raise substantial funds for maintaining and improving subways, buses and commuter rail.

Shouldn’t we reduce commutes to 30 minutes from all over the city before implementing congestion pricing?

Rather, the focus should be on transit improvements in those neighborhoods with disproportionately high auto use. Many of these areas are at the outer edges of the City and residents understand that their commutes will be longer than 30 minutes.

“Congestion pricing means less traffic and less traffic means healthier neighborhoods, a more sustainable City and a stronger transportation network.”

*– Paul Stealy White,
Transportation Alternatives*

Wouldn't congestion pricing impact seniors traveling to doctors and hospital in Manhattan?

First, congestion pricing – and the reduced traffic it brings – will help lower response time for ambulance services. Traffic levels will mean ambulances will be less likely to get stuck in congestion. Second, the frequency of any travels by auto to hospitals or doctors into Manhattan is very low. Very few would be affected by the \$8 charge and not very often.

Isn't congestion pricing unfair to low and middle-income drivers who have no choice but to pay the charge?

64% of people who commute to the heart of Manhattan by car live near a subway, commuter rail or PATH. The City has pledged to provide a range of transit options to 22 neighborhoods with inadequate transit services before congestion pricing starts. This would include more express buses and Bus Rapid Transit with the aim of providing shorter commutes by bus and subway in this area.

Right now, more than 95% of New York City employees do not drive daily into the heart of Manhattan. These commuters already unfairly pay taxes to keep up the free bridges. Congestion pricing would be fairer to lower-income New Yorkers than is now the case: the people who already commute by mass transit to Manhattan earn less on average than people who drive, and to the residents of poor neighborhoods who suffer extraordinarily high asthma rates, due in part to congestion.

Since London has doubled their charge, so won't New York City?

The price of the charge, the exemptions, the change in price over time, the zone boundaries are all part of the political negotiation as to what form congestion pricing will take. This is a scare tactic, not an argument.

For more information, contact the Campaign for New York's Future at www.campaignforNewYork.org