

[CLOSE WINDOW](#)**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****PR- 179-07****June 8, 2007****MAYOR BLOOMBERG TESTIFIES ON PLANYC BEFORE THE STATE ASSEMBLY**

***The following is the text of Mayor Bloomberg's testimony as prepared. Please check against delivery.***

"Thank you, Speaker Silver. Chairmen Farrell, Brodsky, Brennan, Sweeney, Tonko, and Gantt: Good morning, and thank you all for bringing your committees to our city. Today, commuters in, and around, our city turned on their televisions and radios to get the news.

"They heard that in addition to the heavy traffic and back-ups and delays common on any workday, there is, today, an air stagnation advisory in effect today in the following area: Suffolk, Nassau, Richmond, Kings, Queens, New York, Bronx, Westchester, Rockland, Orange, and Putnam counties.

"High levels of ozone, a pollutant produced by, among other sources, auto exhaust, make today especially dangerous for people with asthma and other respiratory conditions. That was a reminder that when idling cars and trucks stack up on our roads and at our tunnels and bridges, they produce more than just ulcers and hair-trigger tempers. They pump deadly pollution into the air that we and our children breathe. The greenhouse gases they emit ratchet up the global warming that threatens our environment and endangers our future. And the hours lost in traffic delays drain jobs and opportunity out of our economy.

"Our plan to relieve New York City's traffic congestion, a plan that would have profound benefits for our entire region-is the subject of today's hearing-and I commend each of you for the serious attention you are giving it. It's a plan that has continued to gain broad support from civic groups, organized labor, and business organizations, from newspaper editorial boards and columnists, from every major transit advocacy and environmental organization, and from a growing cohort of elected officials across our city.

"It has been, to name just a few, endorsed by the Association for a Better New York, the Citizens Budget Commission, the General Contractors Association, the Drum Major Institute, the New York Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, West Harlem Action for Environmental Justice the New York City Central Labor Council, the Building and Construction Trades Council, Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union, the League of Conservation Voters, the Straphangers Campaign, and more than 80 other groups across our city.

"Why? Because they recognize that the threats to our city, and our planet, are 'inconvenient truths' that we can no longer avoid facing, and that we can no longer wait for Washington to confront. No, the challenge before us is not if we will do something to address the most pressing issues of our time, but what we will do.

"So at the outset, let me urge you to frame your thinking about our congestion pricing plan in this larger context: Today, New York City is home to a record 8.2 million people-and growing. In fact, by 2030, we expect the city to have more than nine million residents.

"To accommodate that growth, to keep our economy strong and our environment healthy, we need to act now to maintain and expand our vital infrastructure, to upgrade our water and air quality and also to improve the quality of our lives. A good illustration is the comprehensive, sustainable solid waste management treatment plan for New York City that our City Council approved last year.

"It is the only practical way that we can end nearly six million miles a year in trips by Sanitation trucks and diesel-burning long-haul trailers, and replace them with an economically and environmentally sounder system for transporting our city's residential and commercial waste and recyclables by barge and rail.

"To put that plan in effect, we need the Legislature's approval of an amendment to the Hudson River Park Act that would permit us to establish a recycling marine transfer station on Gansevoort Peninsula. This is a citywide; not a neighborhood issue. And because it would take polluting trucks off streets in Northern Manhattan and the Bronx, it is perfectly in keeping with the spirit and the intent of that Act, and I urge every Assembly member here today to support this amendment.

"The key to achieving a sustainable future for New York City and its suburbs lies in our PlaNYC agenda. It was developed over the past year and a half with extensive input from community leaders and everyday New Yorkers across the city. It sets out ten ambitious but achievable goals on fronts ranging from affordable housing to brownfield clean-up to energy efficiency... and from protecting our water supply to enhancing our parks and open spaces. Today, I appreciate the opportunity to focus on one part of that extensive plan.

"Transportation: It is a crucial component of PlaNYC-because transportation presents the greatest barriers to our ability to accommodate growth and build a greater, greener city. The time to act and prepare for the future is now; and that's what I have committed the final 937 days of my Administration to doing.

"What we propose to do is to give economic incentives to use mass transit (the only answer to congestion), while at the same time expanding and improving the mass transit options for those wanting to enter the busiest part of our business district. Here is how it would work.

"We are asking for your authority to establish a three-year pilot program, charging cars entering Manhattan south of 86th Street \$8 per day, and trucks \$21 per day. These fees would be collected only on weekdays during the hours from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m., when traffic is at its worst. But we would reduce the charge by any tolls the commuters pay on bridges and tunnels, so the trip is not so onerous as to dissuade those who would come to do business or shopping.

"For example, if you drive in and out of Manhattan by way of the Midtown Tunnel, you now pay \$8 for a round trip. Congestion pricing will add nothing to this cost. There would be no fee at all for using either the FDR Drive or the West Side Highway, so you can go to the other boroughs without extra charge. Taxi cabs would also be exempt. And those who travel only within the congestion pricing zone would pay half-price, with of course, no charge to move your car a few blocks to comply with alternate-side-of-the-street parking rules.

"Members of the Assembly, I must admit that when we began the PlaNYC process, I was skeptical about congestion pricing. But I was willing to keep an open mind on the subject. Because when you do, I believe one finds that no other solution accomplishes the five essential goals to safeguard our future: Reducing congestion; enhancing mass transit; improving public health; strengthening our economy; and combating climate change.

"Let me say something about each, starting with congestion: Of the 25 metropolitan-area counties in the United States with the longest commuting times, we now have the dubious distinction of having 13 of them in and around New York City. Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 are Queens, Staten Island, the Bronx, and Brooklyn.

"Congestion pricing is the first, essential step in helping us begin to change that. The experience of London and Singapore, both of which have instituted congestion pricing, is very encouraging. The most recent data for London shows traffic down by 12 per cent. Let's assume a very conservative

impact of congestion pricing that would reduce auto traffic south of 86th Street by only six per cent.

"That may not sound like a lot, but it would make an average work day feel like one of those mid-summer days when the traffic really flows on our streets because so many people are away on vacation.

"Second, congestion pricing would be crucial to funding much-needed, regional mass transit improvements. To accomplish that, we propose to combine the money raised from congestion pricing with funds from two other sources: a City contribution, from our own tax revenues, of at least \$200 million a year; and a matching State tax levy contribution of at least \$200 million.

"These three funding streams would, together, create a Sustainable Mobility and Regional Transportation, or 'SMART,' fund. By bonding these monies, the SMART fund would permit us to raise the approximately \$30 billion needed to complete the Lower Manhattan Rail Link, the full-length Second Avenue Subway, East Side Access to Grand Central Station, the Nassau County Hub, and more than a dozen other regional transportation projects.

"Everyone recognizes that these projects are essential to New York's future. They have been on wish lists for years, and some of them are already underway-but that doesn't mean we have the money to finish them. And they will remain incomplete or on the drawing boards until an adequate and predictable source of funds is committed to realizing them. With congestion pricing, we can move all these projects off the wish list, put shovels in the ground, and guarantee their completion.

"Third, congestion pricing will meaningfully improve our public health. That's because auto traffic accounts for about 25% of our air pollution. Fifty-two per cent of the nitrogen oxide in our air that is produced locally comes from autos; that's also true of about one-third of the volatile organic compounds in our atmosphere.

"Together, these form ground-level ozone and smog-culprits in serious respiratory diseases, including asthma, especially on warm humid days like today, when these pollutants don't dissipate. In the South Bronx, Harlem, and communities in Brooklyn, children are hospitalized for asthma at a rate nearly four times the national average. And as the American Lung Association reported only last month, the quality of air in our city is actually getting worse.

"Anyone looking for a connection between auto traffic and asthma should look to Atlanta's experience during the 1996 Olympics. During the games, auto traffic to the city's downtown areas was prohibited-and asthma hospitalizations decreased 20%. Congestion pricing will help us improve our health by cleaning our air, not simply in Manhattan but across the city.

"Today, residential streets in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens are clogged by drivers who are going out of their way to avoid tolls. Cars and trucks on their way into Manhattan also make up nearly half the traffic on major thoroughfares like Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn and Queens Boulevard in Long Island City. Congestion pricing will cut into that traffic during peak hours-good news for everyone who travels, works, shops, and breathes in those communities and the same in Nassau and Suffolk with the easterly blowing prevailing winds.

"Fourth, our proposal will begin to cut the economic costs of congestion. Today, those costs, measured in wasted fuel, lost business revenue, increased business operating costs, and decreased productivity, come to some \$13 billion annually. Reducing traffic congestion will result in widely shared savings, and improved business revenues. For example, as Crain's New York Business and others have pointed out, contractors and commercial drivers now lose hours each day sitting in traffic. By easing gridlock, congestion pricing will increase their productivity and profits.

"Fifth and finally as to climate change: Cars, trucks, and other vehicles now produce 20% of the greenhouse gases that we generate. If we allow the number of vehicles on the road to increase, this impact-so perilous for the world we will leave our children-will only worsen.

"New York City is already moving aggressively to combat climate change by, for example, requiring virtually our entire fleet of 13,000 cabs to go hybrid by the year 2012. Moving people on to transit and off the road is also crucial to fighting global warming-and congestion pricing moves us toward

that goal.

"Before closing, I also want to stress two steps we've taken in the design of our congestion pricing plan to make it fair to drivers in every part of our region and our city.

"First, congestion pricing will equalize, not add to, the costs of driving for many commuters. And it will stop people from 'toll shopping,' which causes congestion in many neighborhoods.

"Second, congestion pricing will make alternatives to driving more immediately attractive to commuters who are now stuck in traffic. Only about five per cent of New York City commuters who live outside Manhattan rely on autos to get into Manhattan. Nevertheless, we recognize that there are communities where the lack of comfortable and reliable mass transit alternatives makes driving-even with the headaches it produces-seem like the best alternative.

"So as part of our plan, we've already identified at least 22 city neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of drivers going to Manhattan. We're now prepared to work with the MTA to come up with ways to improve bus, subway, and ferry service in all those communities-not by 2030, but in the next year or two.

"We have good reason to believe that the Federal government will bear the costs of these transit improvements, as well as the start-up costs of implementing congestion pricing. We have already submitted a preliminary application for at least \$400 million in such funds, and we are very hopeful of receiving them. Just yesterday, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters was here to announce that New York City is on her department's 'short list' of cities for Federal Urban Partnership funds.

"Now we are eager to work with the MTA, and with State leaders, to refine the proposals in this application into a serious, effective, and achievable set of solutions-such as giving buses priority on our streets, improving transfer connections between buses and subways, and more ferries using our waterways.

"A State consensus around congestion pricing is needed to secure this Federal funding, and to move congestion pricing forward this year. So we seek State legislation authorizing us to implement congestion pricing, with all revenues dedicated to the SMART Fund.

"In addition, we are requesting legislation to allow us to establish residential parking districts in the city. Many of you have expressed an understandable concern that congestion pricing could cause parking problems in the neighborhoods directly at the boundaries of the congestion zone. Residential parking programs are one of a number of possible solutions to such problems.

"Jeanette Sadik-Khan, our City's new Transportation Commissioner, is examining all such options, and will work with communities to craft workable solutions. We are seeking your approval of other transportation measures this term as well.

"These include granting the City the option to issue non-moving violations for 'block the box' intersection infractions and authority to use on-bus cameras to enforce certain bus-only rapid transit lanes by capturing the license plate numbers of cars parked in bus lanes.

"These last two measures would help us keep our current volume of traffic moving more smoothly-and they are therefore very important to us. But by themselves, they would neither reduce the volume of traffic nor fund essential transportation improvements. Only congestion pricing addresses both those vital issues head-on. That is why it is at the heart of our transportation agenda for New York City.

"As to those who say the implementation of congestion pricing is a civil liberties issue, I would only remind them that we have license plates on cars, E-Z pass, cell phones that continuously report our location (whether they're being used or not), and thousands of security cameras watching virtually every step we take outside of businesses and apartment buildings.

"Members of the Assembly, this is a unique opportunity for our city. Term limits prevent me from running again-and I am not running for any other office, either. So I have nothing to lose by working

for the city's long-term needs. That's why I am energetically devoting my Administration to this effort to put our city on a sound footing for the years ahead.

"So I commend you again for holding hearings on this all-important question. I urge you to approve the transportation elements of PlaNYC-this year. And I will now be glad to take your questions."

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