



Thinking Politics on Congestion Pricing

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Congestion pricing is often thought of as the single best way to reduce the use of automobiles and create better incentives for mass transit and other means of transport. However last night at a transportation forum hosted by [Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer](#) and [City Councilmember Dan Garodnick](#) it seemed that the debate over congestion pricing was fairly done in Manhattan. BP Stringer called it an "applause line" in Manhattan. But he added that it was something that was very much feared and opposed in the outer boroughs, particularly by powerful interests in Brooklyn and Queens.

And so the stalemate over congestion pricing continues and even if Bloomberg were to vigorously fight for it, he might find his efforts go down in flames much like his West Side Stadium effort. This leaves the balance of the debate to the outerboroughs. What's their plan to reduce traffic congestion? or more to the point, What would they need as a sweetener to make congestion pricing worthwhile?

And that's exactly where the debate will start to shift over the next few months. A consensus in Manhattan, even with strong Mayoral support can not carry the day politically. Manhattan only represents 1.5 million residents versus the outerboroughs of 6.5 million. Then that eventually the state legislature might have to approve the plan, which would include representatives from Long Island, Westchester and other surrounding suburbs that would most likely oppose this strongly as another commuter tax.

Here's an outline of a possible compromise that could attempt to balance the various interest

1. Money Collected through Congestion Pricing Dedicated to Outerborough Mass Transit Service Improvements During Off Peak Hours. In particular increasing train, bus, ferry service and extending BRT rapidly. This is a good sweetener if it can be guaranteed by the MTA to dedicate money to this effort. Manhattanites just want the incentive system changed, they would be willing to let the money go to ther outer boroughs, especially if it helped encourage carpooling, mass transit and other non-auto forms of transportation.
2. Only Congestion Price the Central Business District's (CBD) streets, not the Bridges & Highways. For traffic flowing through the CBD, from Brooklyn to New Jersey, it makes sense to encourage them to use the highways in place instead of the streets. You don't want people to feel trapped by a congestion charge, but you need to channel them through
3. Reduce Verrazano and George Washington Tolls leaving the city during rush hour, especially for trucks. Currently there is a perverse incentive to drive over the East River Bridges and then out through one of the trans-hudson tunnels instead of taking expressways to bridges that are underutilized outside the CBD.
4. City Development, Investment and Rezoning of Alternative Downtown areas of the outerborough that could become new centers of commerce, jobs, transportation. This would create more balance to the city's economic life and shorten commutes for workers who could live closer to work instead of always commuting into Manhattan.

I'm very open to other ideas, but I think the time for blind opposition is over. The outerborough leaders on the fence or outright opposed to congestion pricing will have to put forth their own transportation and congestion relief ideas.

Or the city will sink under the weight of it's own traffic congestion and lose it's place as a center of global commerce. The rebuilding of the World Trade Center alone is expected to generate over 300k truck trips into lower Manhattan.

[Streetsblog also posted about congestion pricing today as well:](#)

Traffic congestion slows you down when you're trying to get somewhere. It slows down the delivery of essentially goods throughout the city and slows the movement of people - - the city's most valuable economic input -- by clogging the roads that could be moving them along much more quickly with free flowing buses, cabs and bicycles. Traffic congestion gets in the way of emergency vehicles, no doubt contributing to the finding that heart attacks are more likely to be fatal in New York City than anywhere else in the nation. The fact that congestion pricing would lead to less air and noise pollution while improving the public realm is just a happy coincidence. But it is one that should make every New Yorker support congestion pricing, whether you're in favor of making New York into an efficient platform for commerce or you are concerned about a rise in sea levels or you simply want to live in a more pleasant, breathable city.

We look forward to hearing proactive solution ideas by future mayoral candidates from the outerboroughs like [Marty Markowitz \(Brooklyn Borough President\)](#), Anthony Weiner (US Congress, Queens) and [Adolfo Carrión, Jr \(Bronx Borough President\)](#).

They may want to read [this statement from Former Bronx Borough President Ferando Ferrer:](#)

Ferrer does support congestion pricing. In a questionnaire for the New York League of Conservation voters, he wrote; "I do favor a congestion pricing policy, but one that is part of a larger framework; a framework which incorporates an expanded freight rail

There should be a larger framework and that needs to be articulated by the outerboroughs now. What will it take? What are major transportation issues and how can congestion pricing be part of the solution rather than a simple throw-away line in a campaign. It may be that Congestion Pricing is the only way to fund their desire for increased mass service for the majority of residents.



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