



Mayor Bloomberg's Sustainability Plan: Good, Bad and Ugly

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I've now had time to sift through more of Mayor Bloomberg's sustainability plan. I highly recommend [the speech](#) reading through the [whole report](#) if you get a chance or you can focus on a few of the different sections on [Land](#), [Water](#), [Transportation](#), [Energy](#) and [Air](#). I could probably spend a post or two on each of these in the future.

The Good

Everything in the plan itself is pretty much all good stuff for creating a more environmentally friendly and sustainable city. Most of these are administrative no-brainers, it's just a matter of changing the way procurement is done by the city and how incentives are arranged for individuals and businesses to do the right thing. There is too much to digest completely here, but the important part is that this Mayor has committed to sustainability as a major part of his agenda for the rest of his administration:

I make this promise to you: I will not spend my last 984 days in office pretending that all is fine and leaving these challenges to the next mayor, who may well pass them off to his or her successor. And we – the residents of a city that is a beacon to the world – will not abdicate our responsibility to that world. That's not leadership. Leadership is about recognizing challenges and seizing opportunities. And we are going to seize this opportunity – to lead the way forward and create the first environmentally sustainable 21st century city.

What's the bad and ugly? The Bad is all the stuff that somehow got left out of the plan. And the Ugly is the risk that major pieces of this may get bogged down in getting approval at different levels of government before the next Mayor takes over.

The Bad - Errors of Omission

There are a significant number of ideas that have been floated around in recent years that could dramatically improve the quality of life and environmental sustainability of the city, particularly on the transportation front:

1. [Cross Harbor Freight Rail Tunnel](#): A tunnel between Brooklyn/Queens and New Jersey's freight rail network that would eliminate hundreds of thousands of tractor trailer trips through the city. Congestion pricing, if it happens, may give trucks greater incentives to go around the city, but no matter what route they take, it will not reduce the amount of carbon going up into the atmosphere.

2. [Car Free Central and Prospect Parks](#): Transportation Alternatives has been leading an effort to make Central and Prospect Parks Car Free. Last Summer the mayor agreed to extend the car

free hours, but stopped short of making them 100% car free during commuting hours. This would seem to be an easy proposal that is very popular that could have been included to encourage more biking and improve quality of life for park users.

3. Pedestrian Only Streets: Currently all streets are primarily focused on moving as many cars through them as possible. While the mayor has inserted a general initiative to build public spaces in all communities, he did not propose pedestrianizing various streets around the city, like this proposal for [Car-Free Bedford](#) to promote pleasant public spaces and shopping areas around the city.

4. Onstreet Light Rail: Bloomberg is still very much a proponent of Bus Rapid Transit and he already has plans to create 5 of those routes by 2009 and expand it from there. I was hoping to see some experimental ideas for light rail such as [Vision 42](#).

Perhaps the new Commissioner of Transportation will be able push these ideas to the forefront.

I was also hoping to see something more innovative about using water cooling systems to help improve energy efficiency of cooling systems. This is a fairly simple way to use the high specific heat of the Rivers and Harbor to help cool buildings in the warm months.

The Ugly

Getting approval for much of the agenda from the State Legislature and the City Council may be problematic and the next Mayor may not prioritize the environment over other issues or worse may have a political base that is more heavily dependent on regular auto commuters in NYC.

Yesterday, in a classic pandering move to the taxi industry, the City Council overrode Mayor Bloomberg's veto of very harsh and unnecessary regulations for pedicabs. This shows that not only are these folks not committed to new environmentally friendly modes of transportation, they will actively oppose it when it is politically expedient.

The state legislature controls much of the ability to allow the city to charge additional tolls for congestion pricing or install the cameras needed for enforcement. Since 50% of the burden for the new tolls would fall on drivers from outside the city and with very little incentive to favor them, it is unclear how to build a bicameral majority on some of the more controvertial parts at the state level.

In looking at the field of potential Mayoral candidates, there are few who seem to be willing to go out on a limb and support congestion pricing upfront and at least a few who actively oppose it, like [Congressman Anthony Weiner](#). Others, like Christine Quinn, Marty Markowitz and other outer borough leaders will probably continue to pander to motorists with initiatives like free Sunday parking and continuing to make as much room for cars over alternative transportation like biking and walking. Scott Stringer and Dan Doctoroff on the other hand would be probably be the best hopes of carrying on Bloomberg's legacy on Congestion Pricing.

My hope is that Bloomberg teams up with Spitzer and makes deals with Quinn and the two State legislative leaders (Bruno and Silver) because they find that the environmental, health and other benefits outweigh the nominal costs to certain small groups of constituents. Bloomberg is a shrewd negotiator and I expect that he knows already that he has the necessary political capital to make this happen. This will not be easy and compromises will probably have to be made somewhere to achieve a consensus. There will be key moments in the months to come to apply public pressure to make sure these plans success and the Mayor has built a very good and diverse coalition of business and community leaders, but it will be an uphill struggle to get something this big done.

Despite the Bad and the Ugly, it's great to see a man of enormous persuasive powers, at the height of his respect and popularity with two and a half years to implement his vision take such

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bold steps forward on these issues. And while he hasn't directly said it, this is a very good start on building a sustainable post Peak Oil city.



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