



Back to the Future

Posted by [Glenn](#) on September 18, 2005 - 11:10pm in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Demand/Consumption](#)

As I continue to think about ways to make NYC more sustainable and less dependent on cars/oil, my thoughts constantly turn to the first half of the 20th Century, before the post WWII cheap gas, when NYC was covered in streetcars. I just read an excellent post over at [Starts and Fits](#) about the decline in traffic over the 4 Free East River bridges (Brooklyn, Manhattan, Williamsburg & Queensboro). Each of these bridges reached their peak daily usage (number of people making a trip in a day) before WWII when they carried streetcars into Manhattan instead of mostly cars. For instance, in 1907 426,000 people crossed the Brooklyn Bridge, while in 1989 only 178,000 trips were made. NYC's whole population was only 3.5 million in 1907.

New York as well as all US cities really need to reconsider their relationship with the automobile. But we can't just be anti-car, since for many people in Brooklyn and Queens there are few viable alternatives to getting around.

More...

The best first step in creating a greener NYC and weaning the local area of their dependence on cars is to implement some type of congestion pricing for the East River bridges or creating some type of Central Business District (CBD) zone that would require an entrance fee, in particular one that would vary in price depending on the time of day.

In NYC, the most logical zone would be Manhattan south of 60th Street, since this would cover all 4 free East River bridges as well as people coming from the north of Manhattan where there are free bridges from the Bronx.

The most comprehensive and compelling [analysis](#) I could find was put together by Jeffery Zupan of the Regional Plan Association. He reviews 4 different options for congestion pricing and the impact it would have on the number of cars, trucks and other vehicles entering Manhattan as well as the increased mass transit ridership.

However, this is politically unpopular for politicians in the outer boroughs. We need to convince them that this is the right thing to do for the whole city. I think dedicating those revenues to (A) Regular Maintenance of the Bridges (B) Alternative Fuel Stations - biomass/ethanol, electric, hydrogen, etc (C) Upgrading bike lanes, etc. For the electric train cars we need to talk to the MTA.

From a peak oil perspective, this type of policy would help transition our economy so that when gas prices start to run away, we already have changed commuting habits in such a way that the impact will be less chaotic.



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