

# GREENING THE STREETS

## The Battle to Win Congestion Pricing

**O**F THE 127 ENVIRONMENTAL initiatives that comprise Mayor Bloomberg's landmark PlaNYC 2030 Sustainability plan, congestion pricing has simultaneously generated more support and more opposition than the other 126 initiatives combined. Indeed, no other part of the Mayor's plan will so quickly reduce pollution, generate billions to fund new transit projects, and boost health and quality of life. And no other part of the Mayor's plan so boldly challenges entrenched interests that have never paid for the pollution they generate and the valuable public space they consume.

In its aim to reduce driving and increase bicycling, walking and mass transit, the Mayor's proposal calls for a pilot three-year congestion pricing system that would charge drivers an \$8 fee to enter Manhattan south of 86th St. from 6 am to 6 pm on weekdays. (Under the plan, drivers already paying bridge or tunnel tolls would pay no more than \$8 total, for they would simply pay the difference between their existing toll and the \$8 congestion charge.)

The initiative gained the enthusiastic support of Transportation Alternatives and scores of other groups that have long advocated for road pricing. Many more groups became instant supporters once they understood that the benefits of the plan extend far beyond traffic relief, as the charge will also generate \$400 million per year to fund necessary transit expansions. But where many see a boon, others see a burden. Because it will drastically change the transportation status quo and induce many motorists to switch to transit, bicycling and walking, pricing has raised the ire of parking garage owners who fear diminished profits, and raised concerns among a vocal minority of drivers who are

averse to paying the charge or switching to transit.

That the campaign to win congestion pricing made it so far so fast came as a surprise to nearly everyone. Veteran policy watchers doubted that the Mayor, much less a bevy of city and local elected officials, would support

the acclaimed T.A.-produced documentary film "Contested Streets: Breaking NYC Gridlock" paved the way for pricing by educating New Yorkers that they need not put up with traffic's ills any longer. The film showed thousands of New Yorkers, for the first time, the merits of London's congestion pricing



T.A. volunteers have been canvassing transit users about the benefits of congestion pricing.

WILL SHERMAN



Hundreds rally at the State Assembly's first hearing on PlaNYC.

DANI SIMONS



Astorians respond to congestion pricing at a community forum hosted by T.A. and the Citizens Committee this June.

CLARK JONES

pricing at all. This progress was not a chance occurrence. As the campaign has moved from City Hall to Albany, T.A. has led the fight to make congestion pricing and all of its attendant benefits a reality.

### Moving Pricing from Pariah to Promise

Through a combination of research, education, coalition building and effective communications, T.A. has positioned congestion pricing - heretofore seen as political suicide - as an attractive policy option.

First screened to influential business leaders and elected officials in November 2005,

system and featured prominent business and civic leaders explaining why and how a similar approach could work for New York.

The campaign surged forward with the February 2006 release of "Necessity or Choice: Why People Drive in Manhattan," a detailed T.A. study that exploded long-held myths keeping congestion pricing from being seriously considered. That study and those that followed showed that 80 percent of drivers have competitive transit alternatives, that workers and shoppers were already much more transit dependent than anyone thought, and that if pricing were implemented, only 5 percent of commuters would be subject to the charge. Further T.A. research found only a fraction of that 5 percent would pay an additional \$8, as most already pay a bridge

## In Focus

### T.A. in the News: Stories that Paved the Way for Congestion Pricing

#### The New York Times

##### Business Groups Hear Plea: Do Something to Cut Traffic

"Ideas for reducing car traffic - including the politically volatile notion of charging drivers for entering the busiest Manhattan streets - gained momentum yesterday during a meeting of leaders of the city's business improvement districts... organized by the Times Square Alliance and by **Transportation Alternatives**."

November 18, 2005



New York Public Radio

##### Reducing City Traffic: Boon or Bane to Business?

"In this fall's election, traffic wasn't a top issue for voters. But now, two organizations - a business group and a **non-profit promoting biking and walking** - are studying reducing congestion, in part by charging drivers who bring cars into Midtown."

November 18, 2005

#### DAILY NEWS

##### N.Y.C. is Too Good to Car Drivers

"The rationale has always been that drivers keep our economy afloat. But a new **Transportation Alternatives** study shows only 6% of shopping trips in Manhattan are made by car. Moreover, 90% of the people who drive to their Manhattan jobs could get there quickly and efficiently by public transit."

February 26, 2006

#### The New York Times

##### Op-Ed: Smart Streets

"**Transportation Alternatives** is one of several organizations pointing out what should be obvious - that the city is choking in traffic."

March 26, 2006

or tunnel toll that under the plan would be deducted from their daily charge.

The constant drumbeat enabled T.A. to build a diverse coalition of citywide business and community groups who understood that traffic was a solvable problem, and more importantly were now motivated to press the Mayor into action. In November 2006, T.A. unveiled a coalition of 125 business improvement districts, community organizations, environmental and health groups - the Citywide Coalition for Traffic Relief. Every member of the Coalition endorsed a five-point charter that included congestion pricing.

On the eve of Mayor Bloomberg's April 2007 congestion pricing pitch, the landscape had shifted dramatically from only a few years ago. T.A. had assembled a robust network of congestion pricing advocates from all five boroughs, courted and won over the editorial boards of major newspapers and elevated New York's traffic problem to a top-tier issue.

### Breaking the Political Gridlock

Within hours of the Mayor's April 22 announcement, Transportation Alternatives joined the newly-formed Campaign for New York's Future, a collective of labor, health, environment and small business interests rallying behind PlaNYC. Over the subsequent eight weeks, in both the public and political arenas, the pro-pricing Campaign has scored victory after victory, due in no small part to the relentless outreach and educational efforts of T.A.

Political endorsements have come in waves. After T.A. worked hard to convince Bronx Borough President and mayoral candidate Adolfo Carrión to support the plan, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and Comptroller William Thompson - also key candidates for mayor not content with being outdone - immediately followed suit. Though Congressman and mayoral hopeful Anthony Weiner still opposed the plan, his originally vociferous opposition has been significantly muted thanks to T.A.'s effort to counter his fallacious argument that pricing was bad for New York City's middle- and low-income residents. (Among the 5% of other borough workers who commute by car, drivers earn significantly more than the subway and bus riders who would clearly benefit from the pricing system.)

As the regular legislative session drew to a close in Albany, a June 19 Quinnipiac poll placed support for congestion pricing at

52% statewide and 56% in NYC, provided the revenues generated were used to suppress transit fares and bridge and tunnel tolls.

The fate of congestion pricing now rests squarely with the State Legislature, which must pass enabling legislation before the City can move forward. Though two of the three men who essentially run state government - Governor Eliot Spitzer and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno - support the plan, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver's endorsement appears linked to the resolution of several other key issues like campaign finance reform and legislative pay raises, none of which had moved forward by time of publication.

Even as the legislature's regular session drew to a close on June 21 without Speaker Silver supporting congestion pricing, the campaign to pass congestion pricing aimed for July, when special session legislative approval could still capitalize on \$500 million in federal assistance for both the pricing system and related transit improvements.

### Green the Streets! T.A.'s Push to Win Congestion Pricing

To put congestion pricing over the top and ensure that both houses of the State Legislature support it, T.A. is launching the "Green the Streets" campaign. Green the Streets is an all-out effort to educate elected officials and their constituents in key districts of the city, the region and the state. If we do not push through congestion pricing this summer during a special legislative session, we will focus on the fall. In any case, the fight to win congestion pricing and ensure its rapid and successful implementation will require an unprecedented organizing effort.

In the five boroughs, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties, and in key communities upstate, we will be orchestrating local advertising blitzes, launching letter writing campaigns, deploying teams of organizers and providing the technical and strategic resources that sympathetic community groups and block associations need to win the hearts and minds of their neighbors and elected officials. We will be educating community members and community leaders about how the Mayor's plan helps New York City's middle class and small businesses while meeting the environmental challenges that face us all. □

**TakeAction.**  
Visit [Greenthestreets.org](http://Greenthestreets.org) to plug into the latest campaign news.

# A Congestion Pricing Primer

## Ten Things Every New Yorker Should Know

In keeping with our goal to educate all New Yorkers about the benefits of congestion pricing, T.A. has assembled this Congestion Pricing Primer. Post it in your office, pass it to a friend and help us break the gridlock on NYC streets.



GRAHAM BECK

### Congestion pricing will help low and middle income New Yorkers

2.5 million people ride the bus every day in New York City and pricing will clearly benefit them with quicker commutes and better service. Statistics show that the lower a person's income, the more likely they are to take public transportation to and from work. Of the 5.2 percent of commuters who will pay a congestion pricing fee, a far lower percentage of low-income and middle class New Yorkers will pay the fee compared to wealthy New Yorkers. The Drum Major Institute for Public Policy, New York City's leading middle class think tank, issued a report on June 7, 2007 entitled "Congestion Pricing: Good Policy For New York's Middle Class." The report noted that congestion pricing revenues will go to improve mass transit systems throughout the region, which will disproportionately benefit low and middle income New Yorkers.

### Neighborhoods bordering the zone will not be inundated with parking hunters

There is very little on-street parking available in places like Brooklyn Heights and Long Island City even now. In order to "park and ride" in these neighborhoods, commuters would have to drive to the congestion zone's border only to circle around looking for parking for 30 minutes to an hour or more – a decision that would dramatically increase the time of their commutes. Drivers are much more likely to take mass transit from the beginning of their commutes. In order to discourage any drivers who are nevertheless willing to try to drive in closer to Manhattan before getting on public transportation, residential parking permits will be extended to those who live in neighborhoods near the zone's boundaries, further deterring those who might try to park there.

### Other borough residents are charged fairly

The \$4 discounted congestion charge applied to those who drive within the zone is offered out of fairness to Manhattan drivers, believe it or not. Consider this: other borough residents will pay a congestion pricing fee only when they drive into Manhattan on weekdays between the hours of 6 am and 6 pm. Manhattan residents who live in the congestion zone will pay a congestion pricing fee every single time they drive between 6 am and 6 pm on a weekday. In addition, if a Manhattan resident drives out of the zone into Queens, that driver will pay the full \$8 fee.



## In Focus

### Manhattanites are charged fairly

The City will not be able to effectively reduce Manhattan's heavy traffic unless it can reduce all unnecessary automobile trips within the zone, including the unnecessary trips of those who live there. On balance, the benefits of lower traffic, pollution and noise in these Manhattan communities will far outweigh the burden of paying \$4 when a car trip is absolutely necessary.

### Pricing will benefit small businesses

Congestion, not congestion pricing, presents the biggest economic problem for small businesses. Congestion costs businesses in wasted fuel, lost productivity and longer delivery times; the savings on all these fronts will more than make up for the once-daily \$8 fee for driving a car into the zone or the \$21 fee for a large truck. Because of traffic in the congestion zone today, a delivery truck may only be able to make eight deliveries as opposed to ten, or a carting company may be forced to pay its driver for a four-hour trip that could have taken two hours in less traffic. According to the Partnership for New York City, the city's leading businesses association, City businesses lose \$13 billion each year to traffic, and small businesses bear that burden as much as large ones.

### Our under-funded transit system will get billions in much-needed new funding

Unlike lottery money, which is dumped into the general fund, congestion pricing revenues will be managed by a designated fund called the SMART Authority. The SMART Authority will be allowed to spend money from congestion pricing fees only on mass transit improvements. Governor Spitzer and the State Legislature are currently in negotiations as to who will be represented within the authority, but all parties agree that congestion pricing revenues will be put in a lockbox that can only be opened to pay for better and more public transportation options.

### Traffic and travel times will be significantly reduced

When it comes to reducing congestion, a small reduction in the number of vehicles goes a long way. For example, the drop in the number of vehicle trips into the congestion zone from congestion pricing is estimated to be 11%. This 11% drop in traffic will translate into 38% less time lost to congestion by vehicles traveling into the zone. Small changes in driving behavior amount to major reductions in congestion – that is one of the reasons congestion pricing has been so successful in other cities.

### Driving is much more a choice than a necessity

Unless one is transporting something too large or too heavy to practically to take on mass transit, virtually no New Yorker is forced to drive all the way into the congestion zone and to pay a congestion pricing fee. Those few New Yorkers who are not within walking distance of a subway line or a bus that goes either to a subway line or into the congestion zone may drive to mass transit, for which there is no fee; they need not drive into the zone. Of those who live in an area where driving or bicycling to a mass transit option is required, 69% of Staten Island residents, 75% of Brooklyn residents, 71% of Queens residents, and 71% of Bronx residents still use some form of public transportation to commute into the congestion zone. For the remaining 25-30% of these outer-borough residents who do not live near a subway, they can either do what three-fourths of their neighbors do – walk, bike or drive to mass transit and take that to work – or they can continue to drive into the zone and pay the congestion pricing fee. That is not unfair. That is a choice.

### The enforcement of congestion pricing will not impinge on civil liberties

New York, like London, will destroy the pictures its cameras take as soon as they are used to apply a congestion pricing fee. These pictures will not be retained for the long-term tracking of a person's movements and the like. Is it possible that a camera used for transportation monitoring purposes might pick up someone in the act of committing a major crime and be used as a law enforcement tool, as the cameras in London that enabled that city to identify and capture the terrorists who bombed their subway and bus system were? Yes. On the other hand, barring some significant event that warrants the NYPD looking at the pictures for evidence of a major crime that has transpired, is someone going to be looking through all the pictures as a matter of course to see if they pick up any images that are of interest to the government or police? No. Big brother will not be watching.

### Pricing will not overload the transit system

Because transit riders far outnumber drivers, if 10% of drivers switch to transit, that will yield only a 2% increase in transit ridership. This "shift" will be offset by congestion pricing revenues that will be used exclusively to provide New York City and its suburbs with better and more mass transit options. In addition, a roughly \$200 million infusion into bus service and other short-term improvements will be put in place prior to the congestion charge. The long-term result of congestion pricing will be an improved public transportation experience for all New Yorkers.

**Primed to win congestion pricing?  
Visit [GreentheStreets.org](http://GreentheStreets.org)**

