

EMMANUEL FUENTEBELLA



# PLANY-B?

Though congestion pricing didn't clear Albany, the debate moved traffic relief ahead. Page 12

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**Reclaim: THE MAGAZINE OF TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES**

**MISSION STATEMENT:** Our mission is to reclaim New York City's streets from the automobile, and to advocate for bicycling, walking and public transit as the best transportation alternatives.

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**COVER PHOTO:** Peter H. Jensen (front)

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MAYOR BLOOMBERG AND THE New York City Council wanted it. By a ratio of 2 to 1, rank and file New Yorkers wanted it. Governor Paterson wanted it, too: congestion pricing, the keystone of PlaNYC, is good public policy, he said. In the end, however, the State Legislature was in the driver's seat and they did not even stop to vote on it, preferring to inflict a quick hit-and-run.

What gives? In short, suburban-minded state legislators are from Mars, and transit-minded urbanites are from Venus.

Though there were a few notable exceptions, those who live in denser, more transit-accessible neighborhoods (read: 90% of New York City) tended to support congestion pricing, whereas those in the more car-dependent suburbs and exurbs, to whom transportation equals driving, opposed it. Never mind that 96% of New Yorkers were not going to pay the charge, or that Upstaters would only pay it on those rare occasions when they drive into the city. Through the opposition's testimony and press quotes, it was clear that congestion pricing was perceived as an unfair insult to their automobile lifestyle and an unwelcome curb of their right to tax our safety, quality of life and lungs.

Until New York City gains the authority to rightly charge motorists for the precious public space that they so profligately consume, there are other options that applied together would accomplish congestion pricings' dual benefits of switching driving trips and generating money for transit. Fortunately, these options—thanks to T.A. research, public education and advocacy—are ripe for the City to adopt. And most of them do not require state approval.

T.A. studies have convinced environmentalists and business groups alike that increasing the price of both on- and off-street parking would generate hundreds of millions of dollars per year for transit and livable streets, while reducing the "cruising" for parking spaces that constitutes 45% of traffic on some streets. By increasing on-street rates in Manhattan south of 60th street to \$4 per hour and more gently at other metered spots around the city, the City could reap a \$200 million windfall for bus, bike and pedestrian improvements.

Current efforts to reapportion streets for

bus riders, bicyclists and pedestrians must be greatly expanded. Plans for weak curbside painted bus lanes can and should be made stronger with median bus lanes protected from mixed traffic. More pedestrian space and crossing time is easily within the City's grasp; parking spaces are easily converted to wider sidewalks and pocket parks, and changing traffic signals to grant more crossing time is virtually cost-free. In addition, the city DOT should upgrade current and planned bike lanes to physically protect them from cars and trucks.

Paris has shown what a citywide public bicycle program can do. In less than a year, the *Vélib'* has transformed the streets—not just by boosting bicycling by 200%, but by fundamentally changing the character of street users themselves. Parisians, formerly as publicly taciturn as New Yorkers, are now chatting away in the streets. And drivers are constantly on the watch for cyclists that are now so often at every turn. Bike share would work beautifully in New York if bike share stations were erected at subway stations, or for a modest start, in a more localized area where biking is already popular, like on the NYU campus.

It is a pity that we lost this round. T.A.'s staff, volunteers and allies logged tens of thousands of hours working hard and smart over the past year to win congestion pricing. But though we lost the final (non) vote, we gained much in the journey to get there (see page 12). And whether the issue is energy, environment, health, or transportation, all trends are aiming towards bicycle-, pedestrian- and transit- oriented streets. Even Albany cannot resist common sense forever. Congestion pricing's day will come. Until then, the Mayor and the City Council should focus on changing what they can control.

Sincerely,

Paul Steely White  
 Executive Director  
 Transportation Alternatives