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Editorial

Congestion Pricing Unfair To Queens Drivers

Once again Mayor Michael Bloomberg is proposing "congestion pricing" to be imposed on motorists who drive into some sections of Manhattan. Bloomberg's proposal would impose an \$8 fee on motorists entering an area either below 86th St. or 96th St. from as early as 6 a.m. to as late as 6 p.m., with the \$8 charge including any bridge or tunnel tolls.

We have several times inveighed in this space against this concept, and now we do so again.

A few months ago the results of a survey of New York City drivers were broadcast over at least one all-news radio station. The great majority of drivers entering Manhattan, according to the survey, were from Queens, with Long Island also racking up large numbers. No explanation for the results was provided. We suggest one that is blatantly obvious to anyone who looks at one of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's excellent maps of the region's transportation system: Queens is vastly underserved by public transportation.

We have spoken about this issue with many of our neighbors in the borough. Most have expressed great willingness to forego the problems attendant on driving into Manhattan, where many of them work or have other business. They agree that parking is an expensive nuisance and sitting in a traffic jam does nothing for their cars, their tempers or the environment that drivers, mass transit riders and pedestrians alike, all share. They would be happy to take mass transit- if only it were available.

In some parts of this borough, it is necessary to take two busses to get to a subway line. Even with bus-to-subway transfers covered by the same \$2 fare, having to pay another fare leaves a commuter shelling out \$4 to travel one-way from, say, a home in Bayside to a job in Manhattan. Express bus fares are \$5 a trip. Busses are often subject to the vagaries of weather and traffic as well. Some subway lines, especially in inclement weather, seem to shut down at will with no explanation. Faced with this kind of expense and inconvenience, it is small wonder that many Queens residents opt for their own cars.

Some of us chose to live in the neighborhoods we do because public transportation, in spite of the problems sometimes attendant upon it, seemed far preferable to the expense and inconvenience of owning a car, and still think so. We understand and sympathize, however, with those residents of the borough who out of necessity must use their cars to get to destinations in Manhattan, whatever the reason. To force them to pay a fee to drive into Manhattan adds an expensive insult to an already injurious situation.

Borough President Helen Marshall points out that there are alternatives to congestion pricing, most of them having to do with upgrades and alterations to the existing mass transit system- reopening Queens stations closed by the Long Island Rail Road, improving surface transportation and providing ferry service from the Rockaways, for which Marshall has been asking since she became borough president.

Marshall- and we- agree with the Queens Chamber of Commerce that congestion pricing would cost Queens residents and businesses, which account for 40 percent of all New Yorkers who drive into Manhattan, an additional \$300 to \$350 million annually. "Let's face it; congestion pricing would place an unfair tax on the victims of poor public transportation," Marshall declared.

Mayor Bloomberg will reach the end of his last term in 2010. We salute his wish to leave his campsite better than he found it with mechanisms in place to ensure that his legacy of a cleaner, safer, more environmentally sound New York City will continue long after he leaves office. However, he seems to have forgotten that anyone who has to drive to a job in New York City does not regard the practice as recreational activity. We salute his wanting to leave a legacy that will better the lives of all New Yorkers, but we cannot support or endorse a plan that would put an unfair burden on most of the residents of one particular borough. There are other ways to alleviate auto congestion in Midtown. The mayor and his staff should work on finding them- starting now.