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DAILY NEWS

Profits from Mayor Bloomberg's congestion plan may go elsewhere

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DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU

Monday, January 14th 2008, 4:00 AM

Drivers may soon be forced to pay up to \$8 to drive into Manhattan - but there's no way to ensure the money would go for mass transit as promised, the head of the City Council's Finance Committee said Sunday.

"There is no guarantee that any of that money would be specifically earmarked," said David Weprin, who represents a part of eastern Queens with poor subway access. "We shouldn't be taxing the middle class if it's not going to make a difference."

A city-state commission is considering plans to charge Manhattan drivers \$8, generating an estimated \$420 million. It's also mulling \$4 tolls on all the free Manhattan bridges to raise \$859 million.

Mayor Bloomberg and the MTA say the money should be used for bus and subway improvements that would get more drivers out of their cars and onto mass transit.

But Weprin and former Councilman Walter McCaffrey fear government could instead use that money to offset other transit funding, or even to pay for projects upstate.

Most New Yorkers say they are opposed to congestion pricing or Manhattan bridge tolls, a Quinnipiac University poll found last week. But 60% say they would support it if the revenue was dedicated to mass transit.

Still, Weprin said the city should ease congestion by enforcing double-parking rules and other traffic laws - not new fees for drivers.

"Crack down on taxicabs that routinely pick up and drop off passengers in the middle of the street," Weprin said. "There's a lot that can be done to improve congestion without imposing a regressive tax."