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Council has votes to block congestion pricing: Avella

By: Stephen Stirling

City Councilman Tony Avella (D-Bayside) said Friday he believes there are enough votes in the City Council to deny congestion pricing - for now.

Avella, Councilman David Weprin (D-Hollis), Queens Chamber of Commerce President Albert Pennisi and Queens Civic Congress President Corey Bearak held a press conference at the foot of the Queensborough Bridge early Friday morning and denounced Mayor Michael Bloomberg's efforts to pass a congestion pricing plan, which would charge drivers \$8 to enter Manhattan below 60th Street during business hours.

Bloomberg's plan has until April 7 to be passed by the city and state legislature, otherwise the city will become ineligible for more than \$350 million in federal funding Bloomberg said would be earmarked for short-term transit improvements.

Bloomberg has been lobbying hard for congestion pricing, meeting with many of the 51-seat City Council's members on the topic over the last month in a final push to curry favor for the plan. Avella called Bloomberg's efforts "undemocratic" but said he believes the City Council, which could vote on legislation introduced by Gov. David Paterson last week as early as Monday, would vote the plan down if it came before them.

"There are enough votes today but the mayor is lobbying hard to change that," Avella said. "It's the taxpayers' dollars that are going to change these votes."

Weprin was more optimistic.

"I believe we do have the votes. Hopefully our colleagues will stand strong," he said. "But even if it does get past the Council, it won't be by a large margin, and it won't get past the state Assembly."

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