

## Battle lines forming on congestion pricing

CUOMO: ‘ONLY ALTERNATIVE’ FOR THE MTA; QUEENS LEADERS: ‘A MIDDLE CLASS TAX’

by Michael Gannon, Editor | Posted: Thursday, December 20, 2018 10:30 am

*Assemblyman David Weprin, at the microphone, was joined by Corey Bearak of Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, left, Councilman Barry Grodenchik, Queens Civic Congress President Kevin Forrestal and Bob Friedrich, president of the Glen Oaks Village co-op. Photo courtesy NYS Assembly.*



Gov. Cuomo on Monday included passage of a congestion pricing traffic plan for Manhattan in a speech outlining his priorities for the first 100 days of 2019.

But civic leaders and elected officials from eastern and northeastern Queens were a day ahead of him, promising resistance to Cuomo’s plans to use the measure to fund the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Speaking Sunday afternoon in Long Island City at the eastern end of the Ed Koch / Queensboro Bridge, Assemblyman David Weprin (D-Fresh Meadows) and Councilmen Barry Grodenchik (D-Oakland Gardens) and Daneek Miller (D-St. Albans) were joined by the Queens Civic Congress, the Trucking Association of New York, [KeepNYCFree.com](http://KeepNYCFree.com) and Queens residents to oppose what they said is nothing more than a tax on outerborough residents and businesses; and a move likely to slam already hard-hit taxi medallion owners and drivers.

Most plans that have been proposed call for tolls on what are now free East River crossings and a charge for all vehicles entering Downtown or Midtown.

**“A congestion tax would be disastrous for Queens, Brooklyn and Long Island residents,”** Weprin said in a statement issued by his office. “It could cost a commuter hundreds in additional expenses each month. It would raise the cost of doing business with the cost of congestion taxing being passed onto businesses. It would raise the cost of consumer goods, with business passing along extra costs to consumers. It would limit the competitive ability of these local small businesses; and it would impose a monetary barrier to Manhattan for outer borough residents, who often travel to the city to visit a doctor, watch a show or enjoy a night out in Manhattan.”

Grodenschik and Miller said the traffic and monetary gains also would be negligible given the potential impacts.

“Many in the outer boroughs already lack accessible and efficient transportation options and these New Yorkers will be hit hardest by this financial burden,” Grodenschik said “... According to multiple studies, the effect of congestion pricing would be negligible, with findings indicating a speed increase of just 1 to 2 miles per hour.”

Miller also questioned Albany’s commitment to “dedicated” MTA funding.

“Most observers now agree that a congestion pricing scheme would not generate enough money to compensate for the MTA’s projected \$1 billion revenue shortfall, and no dedicated funding stream will ever be safe from the State’s abusive practice of diversion without a lockbox to secure any new streams of revenue,” said Miller. “My Southeast Queens community shouldn’t be forced to pay a regressive and burdensome tax when it doesn’t have a multitude of accessible transit options like those in Manhattan ... **Transportation is the great equalizer between communities, but there is no equity to be gained from congestion pricing.**”

**Corey Bearak of Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free said the idea is “really a regressive congestion tax, represents an ideological-driven attempt at social engineering by elites who prefer to limit access by New York City’s middle class and working families to Midtown and Downtown Manhattan.”**

Cuomo on Monday included congestion pricing in the section of his speech calling for a total reorganization of the MTA.

“This year we have to take the bull by the horns with the MTA,” Cuomo said in a text obtained from his website. “We have to pass a dedicated funding stream so the MTA has the funding it needs; congestion pricing is the only alternative.”

Weprin and those speaking at his press conference on Sunday offered a number of alternatives.

Weprin last month told the Chronicle that he backs a 1 percent commuter tax. Other speakers proposed increasing the gas tax, a nonresident income tax and funding from the anticipated legalization of recreational marijuana.

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