



## Preserving the Integrity of Mayor Bloomberg's Congestion Pricing Plan

*(Excerpt from "News from the Transportation Front No. 19", 8/10/07)*

The second hurdle facing Mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing proposal is of a more substantive nature. It involves convincing the 17-member politically appointed commission that congestion pricing ought to be a key element of its overall congestion mitigation plan; and persuading three independent politically elected bodies — the City Council, the State Senate and the State Assembly— to adopt the implementation plan substantially as proposed by the Commission.

At each stage of the process, opponents of congestion pricing will have an opportunity to challenge the Mayor's proposal, question his assumptions, offer amendments to his plan and propose other traffic mitigation alternatives. Challenges may be expected to many aspects of the Mayor's proposal. Among them are the proposed northern boundary of the charge zone (86th Street), the schedule of fees, the number and nature of exempted categories of drivers, the nature and timing of transit service improvements, ways of handling traffic and parking at the periphery of the zone, methods of collecting fees from drivers that do not have E-ZPass, the ability of trans-Hudson transit links to handle the extra commuters diverted from their cars, and the possibility of substituting a more stringent parking regime or targeted tolling component for a citywide congestion fee. The Commission may also want to raise the larger question of the impact of congestion pricing on residents of other boroughs and of suburban jurisdictions. Finally, there exists the possibility of a lawsuit challenging the plan on the grounds it lacks an environmental impact statement (EIS), an eventuality that could seriously delay implementation.

"I am afraid the final outcome may bear little resemblance to what Mayor Bloomberg had in mind," one local elected official who considers himself supportive of the Mayor's plan told us. What he meant was that a number of things could still derail or seriously modify the congestion pricing plan. Chief among them is the possibility of tolling East River Bridges, an idea which is gaining traction because of its potential to reduce traffic in Manhattan by the required amount at a fraction of the cost, disruption and inconvenience involved in implementing the Mayor's proposal. Adding further uncertainty is the fact that 2009 is a mayoral election year. Congestion pricing could well become a volatile electoral issue.

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C. Kenneth Orski  
Editor/Publisher  
Innovation Briefs (now in its 18th year of publication)  
10200 Riverwood Drive  
Potomac, MD 20854  
tel: 301.299.1996  
fax: 301.299.4425  
[www.innobriefs.com](http://www.innobriefs.com)