

Queens Community Board 6 Opposes Congestion Pricing

QUEENS COMMUNITY BOARD 6'S RESOLUTION ON CONGESTION PRICING AND ANTI TRAFFIC CONGESTION STRATEGIES

At its October 10, 2007 meeting, Queens Community Board 6 considered the question of traffic congestion in New York City and, in particular, the Mayor's Congestion Pricing proposal. This topic is currently being reviewed by a commission established by New York State. As a result of this discussion, the Board unanimously adopted the following resolution that strongly opposes the Mayor's proposal but, instead, recommends the adoption of alternative strategies to combat this problem.

As a preliminary point, it is essential to emphasize that the mission of the State created NYC Traffic Congestion Commission is NOT to provide a fait accompli for the Mayor's Congestion Pricing plan but to comprehensively explore the ways – including congestion pricing - through which the traffic problems afflicting NYC can be effectively mitigated. Thus, the Commission should initially explore the impact and effect of all alternative remedies to Congestion Pricing before even considering what clearly is the most radical and disruptive of all the possible remedies. In addition, the Commission should also critically assess the costs and logistics that implementation of this initiative will require as well as the assumptions made by Congestion Pricing's advocates – especially the assertion that only 5-10% of all automotive commuters into Manhattan are NYC residents. Such an approach will be clearly consistent with the Commission's mandate as framed by its principal architect, NYS Assembly Speaker Silver.

CONGESTION PRICING PROPOSAL

As noted above, while CB 6 clearly recognizes the problem of traffic congestion affecting New York City's business districts, we do not believe that the Mayor's Congestion Pricing proposal provides the preferred answer. For the following reasons, we strongly oppose this initiative and recommend that the Commission supports this position.

1. The Congestion Pricing Proposal is far less of a plan than a series of untested assertions and conclusions supported by little more than a request to "trust us". In particular, no serious assessment of the proposal's basic premises and potential for success, the costs and practicality of its implementation, and the revenues it will raise have been made. We do not even possess a truly critical analysis of Congestion Pricing's experience in cities, like London, where it has already been implemented and where, despite the rosy assertions to the contrary, the picture appears to be distinctly mixed. Thus, without more, we cannot accept this offer to buy a pig in a poke.

2. Despite assurances to the contrary, we have absolutely no guarantees that the revenues generated by Congested Pricing will be deposited into a dedicated fund and only used for public transportation enhancements.
3. The infrastructure needed to support implementation of this extremely complex proposal is simply not in place.

Thus, for at least these reasons, Congestion Pricing does not merit our support and should accordingly be rejected at this time.

ALTERNATIVE ANTI CONGESTION STRATEGIES

Identifying alternatives to Congestion Pricing, we strongly advocate implementation of the following strategies. While this analysis is not limited to items directly affecting CB 6 we provide special emphasis to those situations that directly affect our community.

- **Local Regular Bus Service** – All regular bus lines serving central and eastern Queens – especially those that provide access to existing train routes - should definitely receive a significant increase in and modernization of service. As far as CB 6 is concerned, this primarily affects the Q 11, 23, 38 and 54 routes. Implementation of this proposal will make a bus-to-subway commute into Manhattan far more attractive than is currently the case. Enhanced service for the Q 60 line, which provides direct access to Manhattan, should also be pursued at this time.
- **Express Bus Service** – The exponential increase in this service – especially to those areas not directly situated on train routes – must be pursued vigorously as a prime component of this plan. This may, in fact ultimately provide the most effective alternative to Congestion Pricing. While this is primarily an East Queens issue, there are areas of CB 6 – the community situated along to the Grand Central Parkway, the Metropolitan Ave. and Crescent housing areas – where increased express bus service can – and should - make a real difference. In addition, the substantial increase in express bus service along Queens Blvd. should also receive the Commission's strong support.
- **The LIRR** – The substantial increase in Intra-City LIRR service should also be a prime beneficiary of the Commission's work. While the enhancement of LIRR service in CB's 4, 7, 11, 12 and 13 will probably be the principal components of an improvement package, we also urge enhancements to the Forest Hills station – both physical upgrades to the station and increases in service (perhaps 15-30 minute headways during rush hours). (One pipe dream: Since the MTA has floated the possibility of reviving the long defunct Corona station on the Port Washington line, we now wish to bring the re-opening of our long lost Rego Park station to the table. While admittedly far-fetched, it is precisely the sort of "crazy idea" that may actually be doable in the context of this debate.) Finally, although

CB 6 will probably not be principal beneficiary of the LIRR improvements, we still strongly advocate for them, since implementation of this entire initiative will provide an important alternative to Congestion Pricing in precisely those communities where the current need to commute into Manhattan by car is greatest.

- **Subway Improvements** – Certainly the significant enhancement of our existing subway service will provide an effective means of combating congestion and must be vigorously pursued by the Commission. This should involve the continued upgrade of the rolling stock and modernization of existing stations (e.g., Continental Ave.); the scheduling – where possible – of additional train runs during business hours; the possible expansion of station sizes on the most congested routes to permit the use of longer trains; and the prudent (to ensure safety to both staff and riders) pursuit of innovative advances in technology that will enable shorter headways to be maintained between train runs.

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For these reasons, Queens Community Board 6 strongly opposes the Congestion Pricing Proposal and instead urges consideration of the above noted alternatives.