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Point of view: Strike two for revised congestion plan

By Jeffrey Dinowitz

The Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission, whose job it was to evaluate Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan, has succeeded in only making a bad plan worse. Not only are the revisions the commission suggested merely cosmetic, the main faults of the initial plan have yet to be addressed, and it seems this new version has raised more questions than it has answered.

Due to the toll offsets recommended by the commission, whereby the cost of tolls would be subtracted from the \$8 fee, the revised plan will essentially create a "reverse commuter tax" on commuters from the outer boroughs who would pay the \$8 while drivers from New Jersey and other suburbs will be spared.

The commission seems to have its priorities backwards. Who could support a plan that creates a regressive tax on middle-class and working people from the Bronx and the outer boroughs while giving an exemption to drivers from New Jersey who are more likely to be able to afford such a tax?

Also among my chief concerns is the fact that there have been no assurances that the money generated from the plan will actually be spent on improving mass transit.

Considering the drastic cost overruns involved in the construction of the Croton water filtration plant in Van Cortlandt Park, the city has proven that they are certainly no experts in estimating the costs of major projects. There is no guarantee that the revenues generated by the plan will be as much as the city is claiming, and there is also no guarantee that the expenses involved in setting up and running this project won't be even more costly than they expect.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that in the initial MTA proposal, there was not a single improvement recommended for mass transit in the western half of the Bronx.

To make matters worse, it is shocking that the city has not done an environmental study for a project of this magnitude. There is no way of knowing, for example, if this plan will actually result in cleaner air for Manhattan or, even worse, perhaps more pollution for the residents of the Bronx. There is the very real possibility that commuters will begin using the outer boroughs as a parking lot to avoid paying the congestion pricing fee.

Among some of the commission's other faults in their revised plan is the fact that the West Side Highway and FDR Drive will now be included in the congestion pricing zone so that someone driving from Bronx to Brooklyn would have to pay the fee, and that surcharges will be added to passengers in

taxi cabs.

I urge the City Council to vote this plan down. Until the city can come up with a plan that is fair to all its residents, especially its citizens in the outer boroughs, the council needs to send the commission back to the drawing board.

Jeffrey Dinowitz represents the 81st Assembly District.