

2024-03-01 Testimony by Michael Gross\*

Those who live and work and keep private automobiles within the congestion zone—many of them less than wealthy, including tenants in rental buildings, shareholders in cooperative apartment buildings, owners of condominiums and private homes, and the doormen, mechanics, porters and more who work for them—will be unfairly impacted.

Manhattan has suffered greatly in the last few years.

Post-COVID, many residents have still not returned to the city, rents are rising, cooperative apartment values are depressed, and the addition of congestion pricing to the cost of living in Manhattan in a stagflationary environment will only add more negative pressure, both to real estate values and to the image of our borough.

Nearly every block below 60th Street has one or more vacant storefronts.

The increased costs of congestion pricing will continue to negatively impact commercial real estate, too, which will lead to decreased amenities for the people of this area and lower tax revenues.

Meantime, the cost of living here—already great—will inevitably rise. Additionally, small businesses will likely be hurt. London's congestion pricing plan—often cited as the model for New York City's proposed program—gives a 90% deduction to people living within the zone, and does not charge taxis or minicabs.

As the New York rules are currently written, there are no exemptions, caps or discounts for residents earning over \$60,000 a year, so even if they don't have (or get rid of) their private vehicles, taxis and for-hire cars will cost more.

For many elderly and handicapped residents, public transportation is not a viable option.

Living in the congestion zone will mean financial hardship for those who do not own cars, as well.

Any time a repair person, a contractor, or a delivery truck enters Manhattan, they will be charged a fee that will almost certainly be passed on to residents of the zone.

If you take taxis or for-hire vehicles you will be charged extra every time you cross into the zone. If your doctor is above 60th Street, a visit will cost more.

If you want to go to lunch or dinner or a movie or store above 60th Street, it will cost more.

Inevitably, people will be forced to move, real estate values may fall, and lower Manhattan will be made a less, not more, attractive place to live.

This tax creates an unfair and discriminatory burden on taxpayers who live below 60th Street.

We did not ask for or vote to be charged for our basic right of access to our homes.

\*author and journalist who lives next to the FDR Drive in East Midtown, garages a small, fuel-efficient car generally used at night and on weekends and a frequent mass-transit user.