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**Gazette**

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## **Queens Pans Mayor's 'Congestion' Plan**

John Toscano

Borough President Helen Marshall, focusing on the Queens residents and businesses which account for 40 percent of all New Yorkers who drive into Manhattan every day stated: "Let's face it, congestion pricing would place an unfair tax on these victims of poor public transportation."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's environment friendly plan to discourage drivers from coming into Manhattan and reduce pollution ran into a wall of opposition from Queens, mainly because it would victimize the borough's commuters who suffer from poor public transportation.

State legislators from the borough, who would have the final say in whether the billiondollar plan would ever get off the ground, expressed confidence that it would never get approved.

But the mayor vowed to make an all-out effort to get the proposed three-year pilot program passed.

"It's up to the [state] legislature, but I'd fight like heck to make it," he declared.

The program would require car owners to pay \$8 and truck drivers \$21 to enter Manhattan below 86th St. any time between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Part of a \$32 billion plan called "A Greener, Greater New York", the congestion pricing component would discourage 94,000 cars from entering the target zone each day thus driving down harmful emissions.

Opposition to the far-reaching plan came quickly.

Assemblymember Catherine Nolan (D- Ridgewood) declared: "I don't see how anyone from Brooklyn or Queens could support it."

State Senator John Sabini (D- Jackson Heights) said bluntly"

"It's going nowhere...I see it withering on the vine." Sabini is the ranking member on the Transportation Committee.

Borough President Helen Marshall, focusing on the Queens residents and businesses which account for 40 percent of all New Yorkers who drive into Manhattan every day stated: "Let's face it, congestion pricing would place an unfair tax on these victims of poor public transportation.

"Our mass transit system is already overloaded. I believe that there are alternatives to congestion pricing- reopen Long Island Rail Road stations, improve surface transportation and provide ferry service from the Rockaways."

Marshall added: "Studies have shown that the highest concentration of auto commuters come primarily from Southeast Queens where subways and efficient mass transit alternatives do not exist."

Despite the mayor's pronouncements that there would be meaningful mass transit improvements, along with the congestion pricing plan, Councilmember James Gennaro declared: "It is premature at best to even consider congestion pricing unless and until dramatic improvements are made to mass transit in the outer boroughs."

Gennaro, chair of the council Environmental Protection Committee made clear he supported the overall, 127-point PlaNYC proposal in which he played a role in producing. "This plan provides a superb blueprint for making New York city cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable over the next 25 years."

But to fight traffic congestion, he said, the city needs "a comprehensive, citywide traffic reduction strategy, one that not only relieves congestion in Manhattan, but throughout the city" and is based on "viable, equitable and high quality transit options for the residents of the outerboroughs".

Another opponent, former Councilmember Walter McCaffrey, spokesman for the Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free Coalition, stated, "Anyone who thinks it's going to be \$8 is either delusional or they are trying to deliberately hoodwink the public."

At a press conference at its Jackson Heights offices, Queens Chamber of Commerce President Raymond Irrera stated:

"Congestion pricing is a regressive tax that harms small businesses and middle class residents who need to travel into Manhattan to work or conduct business. The plan, as proposed, would entail forcing people with little or no access to public transportation onto a mass transit system that is already at capacity and would add significant costs to the price of doing business in New York City."

Also speaking in opposition to the mayor's plan were Councilmembers David Weprin, Tony Avella and Hiram Monserrate.