

Committee to Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free

245 8TH AVENUE, #157, NEW YORK, NY 10011 ■ EMAIL: KEEPNYCFREE@GMAIL.COM

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, June 7, 2007

Contact: Richard Lipsky (914) 572-2865
Corey Bearak: (718) 343-6779
c: (516) 343-6207

NYC SENIOR CITIZENS REJECT CONGESTION PRICING ECONOMIC & TRANSPORTATION HARDSHIPS; GATHER WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS & CIVIC LEADERS CALLING ON NYS GOVERNMENT TO KEEP NYC CONGESTION TAX FREE

Senior Citizens, Elected Officials, and Community Leaders convened today (Thursday, June 7, 2007) outside NYU Medical Center, 550 First Avenue and 31st Street in Manhattan, to call on legislators to “Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free” on the eve of State Assembly hearing scheduled for Friday, June 8, 2007. State Senator Carl Kruger, City Councilman David Weprin, chair of the Council's Finance Committee, Queens Civic Congress Transportation Chairman James Trent and others shared their concerns with the economic and physical impacts on seniors of the City Hall proposal to charge New Yorkers \$8 (\$21 for truckers) to drive into Manhattan below 86th Street.

Councilman Weprin stated, “The administration seems not to recognize that a large majority of people must drive into Manhattan and lack a mass transit option. This includes many seniors, people with health issues, the disabled, pregnant women, and others who must drive in for various reasons NOT related to work. In my district, many live blocks away from bus routes. We need to recognize that many senior citizens rely on their cars to get around.”

State Senator Kruger stated, “The Mayor's Congestion Tax scheme means seniors and others seeking medical care will be taxed further for coming to their doctors or to city hospitals for treatment.

James Trent, chair of the Transportation Committee of the Queens Civic Congress, stated, “Queens Civic Congress, a coalition of some 100 civic, community, condo, co-op, homeowner and tenants groups which represents every corner of the borough, long has opposed this regressive tax in our existing platform. We have many established communities in Queens with large concentrations of seniors who depend on their cars to get to midday appointments in Manhattan, or even to enjoy a show.”

- over, please -

For Immediate Release

Senator Kruger added, “Thankfully, State law requires this congestion pricing undergo a full Environmental Impact Statement and no legislative action can take place absent the completion of this protective process. New Yorkers need to know just how traffic will be diverted and spillover into other areas, particularly in those communities with higher incidences of asthma.”

“Congestion pricing will not reduce traffic, especially where we need to make a difference,” Weprin added. “Long Island City, East Harlem and the South Bronx, not to mention Jamaica, endure high rates of asthma. It does nothing to address the background pollutants found in greater concentrations along heavily trafficked corridors in these communities, home to our most vulnerable New Yorkers and greatest numbers of those who suffer asthma, including younger children at risk.”

“It took London four years to implement its plan and work out the kinks,” noted the Senator. “PlaNYC needs a more thorough review particularly when we are talking about a major initiative that no doubt harms our seniors and offers absolutely no relief to our most vulnerable residents who face the worst environment impacts each day.”

“Like many problems, traffic congestion can be dealt with by innovative ideas such as an innovative restoration of the commuter tax,” the Council's Finance chair explained. “There is nothing innovative about a congestion pricing scheme because it is just another unfair tax proposed at a time when the city residents should be reaping the benefits of a \$5 billion surplus.”

“We do not need a congestion tax to address traffic congestion on our streets,” said Mr. Trent who does not own a car. “We need better enforcement of the conditions that slow our buses and traffic in general. The means ending the overuse and inappropriate use of city, state, federal and international “permits” in no parking and restricted parking zones. It also means keeping rush hour lanes and bus stops open, as well as attacking double parking.”

Mr. Kruger said, “Congestion taxing hurts small distributors who have no choice but to deliver to their customers. And no one thinks that the \$21 tax on trucks will stop them from delivering into the city. We know this is really a revenue measure but any revenue measure that takes \$2 of every \$5 off the top before funding anything just makes no sense.”

“Commuters, small businesses and working class families, as well as other outer-borough neighborhoods which have very limited access to public transportation must rely on their cars to get into Manhattan,” Weprin concluded. “They would greatly suffer from a congestion tax. People who cannot afford the excessive fee will be bumped off the streets and crowded onto ill-equipped buses and subways to free up the streets for the privileged few who can afford to pay the tax.”

“New York is one city and this city hall scheme would create a divide,” opined Mr. Trent. “No one proposes to impose a tax on those who clog Queens roads on their way from Manhattan to reach the City's two major airports, which just happen to be in Queens.”