



Editorials

Thursday, August 23, 2007

Millions of questions!

Mayor Michael Bloomberg pushed, shoved, ranted, raved, cajoled, sputtered and threatened that if Albany did not pass his congestion-pricing plan before the summer legislative break, the city would lose out on some \$350 million that would help to fund the plan's \$250 million startup costs.

Then, when his plan to charge cars \$8 and trucks \$21 to enter into Manhattan between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays, met with strong opposition from local business and community leaders as well as many Albany lawmakers, he remonstrated some more and legislators met for one more day and created a commission to study the mayor's plan.

Governor Eliot Spitzer recently appointed a 17-member commission. Once the legislature submits recommendations for their plan by January 31, 2008, they would have to approve Bloomberg's plan or an alternative to it - roughly by the end of March - or we will not get the grant that the U.S. Department of Transportation has conditionally awarded to the city according to DOT Secretary Mary Peters.

The DOT grant of \$354.5 million has been earmarked as follows:

\$213.6 million for bus depots, signals that sense when buses approach, park-and-rides and pedestrian improvements.

\$112.7 million for rapid-transit buses, which zip past traffic in special lanes.

\$15.8 million for ferry improvements.

Finally, a measly \$10.4 million to cover startup costs for congestion pricing.

We have millions of questions!

Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff testified at an Assembly hearing on Friday, June 8 that it would cost \$225 million to install the congestion pricing system proposed by his boss.

So where is the other \$214.6 million going to come from? Moreover, who is going to pay for the 367 new buses the MTA has to commit to buying under the terms of the DOT grant?

Secretary Peters was clear that the mayor's plan did not have to be the one adopted. We remind the mayor that he must improve mass transit in Queens prior to implementing congestion pricing. This must include more than just adding new express bus routes from Bayside and College Point.

Assemblymember Rory Lancman is correct when he points out that, "This conditional award fails to live up to the mayor's promises. Not only does it seem to leave New York City taxpayers footing the bill to implement the mayor's congestion price tax, but at least insofar as the mayor intends to spend the money, it leaves the outer borough commuters who would jump at the chance to use mass transit no better off at all."

These questions must be answered before congestion pricing goes forward.

