

Group proposes alternatives to NYC's congestion pricing plan

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NEW YORK (AP) _ A transit group opposed to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan has proposed increasing metered parking, expanding taxi stands and raising parking ticket fines to ease traffic in Manhattan's central business district.

Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, a coalition of civic, business and labor organizations, said in a report Friday that the mayor's proposal unfairly taxes all vehicles without considering the root causes of city traffic.

Bloomberg ridiculed the coalition's proposal on his weekly radio show Friday, saying that it only addressed part of the overall issue. The advantage of his congestion pricing scheme, he argues, is that it not only reduces traffic but pours all the extra revenue from the fees into mass transit improvements.

"So people that come up with a solution say there'll be fewer cars coming in _ yeah that's great, but that's half the problem," he said. "Where's the money come from for the other side?"

But the group said its plan would actually generate more money for mass transit than the mayor's proposal.

The group has sent its report to a commission appointed to study traffic reduction, including Bloomberg's plan to charge motorists \$8 to drive cars _ and \$21 for trucks _ into heavily trafficked parts of Manhattan.

Ten of its 17 members, appointed by Gov. Eliot Spitzer, Bloomberg and legislative leaders, already support the mayor's plan. A recommendation is due on Jan. 31.

"Real and better alternatives exist to reduce traffic congestion more effectively and comprehensively without any need to implement a drastic plan which will disrupt the lives of many residents, senior citizens, working people and small businesses in our city," said Walter McCaffrey, a spokesman for the coalition.

The group said its plan would cut congestion by 7 percent to 11 percent, while the mayor's plan has targeted a 6.3 percent decrease.

The group proposed increasing the number of metered spaces on streets where parking is now free. It also proposes doubling on-street parking fees in many areas and more in the busiest districts.

It also proposes cutting the number of parking permits given to city employees; increasing fines for parking violations that cause congestion, like double-parking or blocking street intersections; adjusting traffic signals to help cars move more efficiently; and setting up traffic information services that would deliver updates directly to electronic devices.

On the Net: www.keepnycfree.com