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DOWN ON CONGESTION

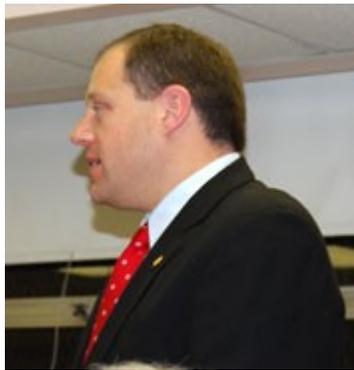
Speaker Derides Mayor's Tax On Drivers

story and photos by Ralph Mancini

The debate over congestion pricing took center stage at the Tuesday Oct. 9 Community Board 9 meeting, as a representative from a coalition opposed to the plan detailed why residents of the outer boroughs would end up with the short end of the stick if the fee were to be adopted.

Down on congestion pricing

Board members at the Richmond Hill Library witnessed attorney Corey Bearak's presentation, which revealed his thoughts on why Mayor Michael Bloomberg's initiative would fall short of its objectives.



Assemblyman Rory Lancman introduces himself to members of Board 9 (as seen in left photo) and details plans of bringing a Workers' Rights Van into the communities of Queens in order to advise people of their rights in the workplace. As seen in right photo, the newly installed president of the Queens Civic Congress, Corey Bearak, tells people why he's opposed to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Congestion Tax plan.

Earlier this year, Bloomberg endorsed charging an \$8 fee to drivers entering Manhattan during business hours below 86th Street, while trucks would be required to pay \$21.

Under this proposal, the mayor reportedly seeks to better address traffic issues and provide new sources of revenue to support mass transit.

Much of the focus, according to Bearak, has been to attain a 6.3 percent reduction in vehicle miles per travel.

The mayor's goal, however, doesn't reportedly take into account the vast number

of “cruising” taxi cab drivers throughout the city that result in 13.1 percent of vehicles traveled in areas of Manhattan below 86th Street.

“They want to set the 6.3 percent standard and taxis aren’t addressed in the mayor’s plan at all, to give you a sense of how ridiculous that is,” said Bearak.

The attorney, who also serves as the president of the Queens Civic Congress, encouraged those in attendance to log on to www.keepnycfree.com and learn how the mayor is “missing the mark” on congestion pricing.

The website also offers myriad “creative and workable” alternatives to the city’s ongoing traffic travails.

Bearak further debated Bloomberg’s contention that net revenues from congestion pricing would be used solely to fund improvements in mass transit and other transportation infrastructure by claiming that the money produced won’t be enough to avert a significant fare increase.

In 2008, for instance, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority will be facing a “shortfall” of \$799 million, while congestion pricing won’t be able to generate any dollars due to the fact that it will take at least 18 months to put the new system in place.

In 2009, congestion pricing is estimated to yield \$200 million in net revenues, which won’t be nearly enough to offset an MTA operating deficit of \$1.45 billion.

Furthermore, the coalition’s website maintains that the mayor’s plan is clear that the lion’s share of the money required to cover shortfalls in capital spending would have to be derived from other state and city sources.

Bearak also weighed in on the reported health benefits of the proposal and how it would help decrease asthma rates in the city by making note of the fact that the disease is much more rampant in poorer areas than it is in Midtown Manhattan.

Board member Robert Mangieri acknowledged that the transportation system is already burdened and the city would be hard pressed to find room for additional commuters.

Fellow board member Joan DeCamp, on the other hand, brought up the prospects of having even more Long Island and New Jersey residents come into Brooklyn and Queens and deprive locals of their parking spaces.

Board Chairperson Andrea Crawford echoed those sentiments and informed that she is sending a letter on behalf of Community Board 9 to Borough President Helen Marshall citing the many congestion pricing concerns of local community members.

“We are areas that cannot absorb anything else. We don’t have [municipal parking garages] and we don’t want to tear them down,” said Crawford. “People are going to come in here parking on streets that can’t absorb any more cars [and] loading subway stations that can’t absorb any more people.”