

Where's the cash?

MTA's got a plan for congestion pricing, but no way to pay for it

by Michael Rundle / metro new york

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LOWER MANHATTAN. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority might want congestion pricing, but it doesn't have the money to pay for more bus and subway service.

The MTA presented options to handle the increased ridership resulting from the traffic fee at Thursday's meeting of the Congestion Mitigation Commission, which will determine the viability of congestion pricing.

It restated plans for 300 new buses for express service in the outer boroughs, two new bus depots, new cars for the C line and ramped-up peak-time and midday service on several subway routes, including the E and F in Queens and the 1 in Manhattan. The tab for all of this would be \$787 million in cash, or an estimated \$56 million a year in debt service.

"Somebody is going to have to get the funding," said William Wheeler, the MTA's planning director, adding that more research was necessary for a final plan. "We're not done, this is not static, we have a long way to go," Wheeler said. Some members of the commission weren't comforted.

"Do you have a model that will show the air-quality impact of moving that many buses into these new facilities?" asked Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, D-Westchester, who has championed more state funding to the MTA but is against Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan. He argued the city needed to undertake more detailed surveys before any transit changes could be approved.

Several commission members complained that low-income communities would assume the burden of increased traffic and bus depots.

“We want improvement, but we don’t want you to do it in Queens on our back,” said state Assemblywoman Vivian Cook, D-Jamaica, who claimed MTA scouting missions have taken place in her district.

Gene Russianoff of the Straphangers Campaign, a member of the 17-person commission, said the MTA had not done enough to convince the public its proposals are sound.

“What the MTA has presented so far has not calmed a lot of the fears that are out there,” said Russianoff, a backer of congestion pricing. “Everywhere I go in the community people are saying, ‘You’re going to make transit intolerable,’ and I don’t think that’s true.”