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Bronx

Bloomberg's congestion plan draws fire from residents

BY BILL EGBERT

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Bronx residents and elected officials put in their two cents last week at a local hearing on Mayor Bloomberg's controversial congestion pricing proposal.

At the Halloween night confab convened by the city Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission, opponents called the plan a trick that would tax the working poor and boosters spoke of transit treats for the borough if the pricing plan is approved.

Establishing a congestion pricing pilot program would entitle the city to millions in federal grants on top of the revenues generated by charging \$8 for cars and \$21 for trucks entering south of 86th St. between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays.

The money would bankroll a splurge on public transit services for the borough, according to boosters of the proposal.

Short-term plans include creating three express bus routes from the northeast Bronx to lower Manhattan, served by 21 new express buses, a new Bus Rapid Transit Route along Pelham Parkway and Fordham Road, and increased midday service on the No. 1 IRT Broadway subway line.

Over the longer term, the MTA's East Side Access project would free up track for new Metro-North train stops at Co-op City and Hunts Point after 2013.

Some opponents suggested that already planned improvements, like a new Metro-North station for the new Yankee Stadium and nearby parking garages, would turn the borough into a giant, de facto park-and-ride hub, transferring Manhattan's traffic congestion to the Bronx.

"Don't turn my district into a commuter parking lot," Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (D-Riverdale) urged the commission.

But Assemblywoman Naomi Rivera (D-Morris Park) supported the plan, citing the 96.5% of her constituents who would not be affected by the congestion fees but would benefit from the transit improvements they would fund.

Officials representing upscale Riverdale, where many residents use their cars, all objected, arguing the neighborhood is already underserved by public transit, with few improvements offered.

City Councilman Oliver Koppell (D-Riverdale) suggested adding water taxi service linking the west Bronx to midtown and lower Manhattan and increasing rush-hour skip-stop service on the IRT No. 1 line.

A coalition of groups opposed to congestion pricing, calling itself Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, blasted the plan as a regressive, overly rigid scheme. The coalition argued that even greater reductions in congestion could be achieved through alternatives including "value pricing" for curbside parking in midtown, increasing fines and enforcement against double-parking, increasing the number of taxi stands for yellow cabs and cracking down on livery cabs in Manhattan.

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