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# DAILY NEWS

## Opinions

Sunday, November 25, 2007

### **Cabbie says: Nix congestion pricing plan and enforce current traffic laws**

By Chip Stern

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*Cabbie Chip Stern heads out for work on Wednesday. Hagen for News*

I drive a yellow cab on the night shift, and let me assure you that Mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing proposal is a cynical game of three-card monte that unfairly targets working people who can least afford it.

Just this week, Marc Shaw, chairman of the mayor's own commission, said "serious and fairly large changes" to the plan are likely. Let's hope "serious" is synonymous with "sensible" and "evenhanded."

Because, Mr. Mayor, if you really want to reduce congestion, you should start by enforcing existing traffic and parking laws and dealing with major headaches that, by my lights, are the real reason congestion is intolerable.

First, No Standing laws are being abused left and right. Go ahead, drive down 50th or 52nd Sts. heading east between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. any weekday. What do you see? Rows of black cars and limos parked and double-parked all along the street, reducing traffic to a single lane. When cars try to make a turn onto the avenues, there is no room for other cars to pass as pedestrian density prevents vehicles from quickly going left or right. Where are the tow trucks?

Want to get to LaGuardia at rush hour? Go up to 124th St. and Third Ave. to avoid the FDR Drive traffic, and you will see 124th St. backed up for several blocks because the street between Second and Third Aves. is virtually impassable due to lack of enforcement of No Standing laws. And what ho, there's a police car parked on the street! Someone shoot me.

Second, traffic cops are missing in action. Police should be positioned at key intersections, along with traffic agents with cameras, taking down the license plates of cars and all those buses that routinely clog the intersections. Ticketing everyone on the spot for blocking the box only creates more congestion. Better to document their malfeasance and trace them through their license plates, then mail them their tickets.

Third, street fairs have run amok. Why are these cheesy flea markets permitted to cause traffic carnage practically every weekend on key midtown avenues? Who is making the money, and how exactly does the city benefit from having to reroute major thoroughfares multiple times a month?

Fourth, current parking rules make no sense. There are far too many critical streets in the most heavily trafficked parts of the city where cars have no business parking during peak hours. And when commercial vehicles are forced to double-park to make deliveries, well, everyone suffers.

Fifth, deal with the rickshaws. How do pedal vehicles flooding midtown, disobeying every traffic law known to man, help with congestion? Oh, they're low-emission vehicles. That's a good one - until you see all the idling vehicles sitting behind these often unilluminated tourist attractions. And get bicyclists to obey traffic laws, too. Often, they don't.

Sixth, it's time to get the Department of Transportation to do its job better. I have spent the better part of two years trying to get the DOT to install lights along key stretches of highway all throughout the city, such as between 125th St. and 158th St. on the West Side Highway, where there has not been a single working highway light on the uptown or downtown side for the better part of two years. It is jet black and very dangerous. I even worked with WABC-TV reporter Jeff Rossen on a news feature on the subject. It aired on Nov. 17, 2006. Here it is one year later, and not a single one of these dangerously nonilluminated stretches of highway has been fixed.

The idea that DOT vendors who, quite literally, cannot seem to figure out how to change a light bulb could implement a complicated congestion plan based on monitoring license plates is ludicrous in the extreme, and rife with potential for abuse, corruption and major billing mistakes.

The answer to traffic in Manhattan is enforcing the laws we have and monitoring and regulating traffic patterns more effectively. Instead we get an elaborate and ill-conceived congestion pricing scheme cooked up by an administration ill-equipped to get a handle on our current problems.

Mayor Bloomberg, he of the SUV limo trips to the subway stops, doesn't have to deal with the reality of what life is like in the slow lanes. It is not surprising he would arrive at this "solution."

*Stern is a writer who has been driving New York City taxicabs on and off since 1979.*