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DAILY NEWS



Traffic congestion plan could hit 3rd rail

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Mayor Bloomberg's backing of an MTA fare hike could help cripple his plan for a congestion toll on cars driving into Manhattan, critics said.

"I certainly think there is a limit to what we can ask of New Yorkers in order to get to work," said state Sen. John Sabini, ranking Democrat on the Senate Transportation Committee.

"I don't think it helps, let me put it that way," the Queens pol said.

Lawmakers say they are going to find it hard to back an already unpopular measure that would hurt their constituents who drive, right after soaking constituents who take the train.

"For those who were on the borderline either way, certainly if you represent suburban commuters, I think it's more difficult to be supportive of congestion pricing," said influential state Sen. Dean Skelos.

"You're going to potentially cost your constituents money whether they are going by train or by car," said the Long Island Republican, one of four members of a panel that holds sway over the MTA's capital plan and an opponent of the plan to charge motorists to enter Manhattan below 86th St.

The public has been widely skeptical of congestion pricing, though support rises if the plan is tied to holding down or cutting MTA fares.

"In London, when they did congestion pricing in 2003, they lowered bus fares," said Gene Russianoff, a staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign. "This is the opposite."

Assemblyman Ruben Diaz (D-Bronx) said piling congestion pricing on top of a fare hike would be a "double whammy on New Yorkers" that had little hope of flying, politically.

A Bloomberg official said the mayor could have worked to kill the fare hike in exchange for getting congestion pricing approved in Albany, but chose not to play politics.

With Joe Mahoney