

This New York Times editorial opposing East River Bridge tolls highlights the unfairness in making Brooklyn and Queens residents bear the burden of the Congestion Tax: **"the vast majority who crowd the business district are not regular users of East River bridges."**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/opinion/nyregionopinions/Clrivertoll.html?ref=nyregionopinions>

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The City

## East River Bridges and Tolls

For much of the last century, the idea of charging tolls on four bridges over the East River has been political hemlock. Various mayors, including Michael Bloomberg in 2002, toyed with the idea as a way to reduce traffic congestion and produce revenues, only to meet with heavy resistance.

So it is a little surprising that the commission exploring ways to control traffic congestion is considering the idea of imposing tolls on the East River bridges for the first time since 1911. The commission's chairman, Marc Shaw, a former deputy mayor, actually sees these tolls as a possible alternative to Mr. Bloomberg's bold but complicated plan for congestion pricing.

Brooklyn and Queens commuters are only a small part of the congestion problem. A study from the Independent Budget Office last week showed that commuters who drive into Manhattan's main business district come mainly from outside of the city. Fewer than 19 percent of drivers were from Queens, and only about 11 percent started their drives in Brooklyn. That means the vast majority who crowd the business district are not regular users of East River bridges.

Mr. Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan, while not perfect, tries to spread the burden in a way that reflects those facts. He would charge most drivers \$8 during peak weekday hours in Manhattan's business district, south of 86th Street. Taxi drivers would be exempted, and so, in effect, would be drivers from New Jersey, who would be able to deduct the fee for crossing the Hudson River, which is being raised to \$8. As it tweaks the mayor's plan, the panel might reconsider these exceptions. It would also be wise to give serious thought to collecting something close to market value for on-street parking, which remains the only real deal for space in New York, and to crack down on free parking placards, thousands of which are abused by city workers in nearly every agency. The money thus raised could help fund the mass transit improvements necessary to coax commuters out of their cars.

Mr. Shaw's argument that tolls might be preferable to congestion pricing is not without merit. Thanks to new technologies, tolls would be easy to administer without causing the kinds of traffic backups that helped kill similar proposals in the past. Tolls would be charged at all hours, generating perhaps \$500 million annually, and would save the expense of a network of traffic cameras that would be required in the mayor's plan.

But the toll scheme could also put the broader plan to reduce gridlock in jeopardy. Though the panel is right to weigh options, East River tolls should not be in the final package.