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## Low-cost alternatives could fix congestion pricing

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Congestion pricing, if implemented in March 2008 as the mayor has stated, would hit northeast Queens hardest since improvements in transit and parking will not be in place. The 17-member commission will issue its report in January. The state legislature will have the final say.

Mayor Bloomberg should be commended for seeking relief in Midtown Manhattan from congestion and pollution and requiring a plan for relief. It may be one plan or a series of lesser incremental plans to produce a significant reduction in traffic and pollution in mid-Manhattan without significant impacts on the citizens and traffic in the other boroughs. However, any plan that is proposed must provide sufficient transit and follow all regulations for the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement.

There are many plans that will reduce traffic and pollution in mid-Manhattan's Central Business District, congestion pricing being one of them. However, there are many lesser incremental plans that would reduce traffic and pollution, such as strict enforcement of double-parking violations and cruising taxi cabs, No Standing and No Parking regulations, turning regulations and the many other existing traffic-control measures that are now law. Violators of any of these regulations should receive points on their license as well as stiff fines.

Another plan to be considered is the Mexico City plan, requiring a daily color-code conspicuously placed on every vehicle entering the CBD. If your code is blue, you can not enter on Monday, red on Tuesday and so on. Every New York State-registered vehicle would receive a color code. All New Jersey and Connecticut cars that need to be in the CBD must apply for a color code. All commercial vehicles, nationwide, which must be in or drive through the CBD must apply for a color code. All passenger vehicles from other states, since they have minor effect, would be exempt to show New York City's hospitality.

There are 14 entry points southbound at 86th Street, four bridges, two MTA tunnels and two Port Authority tunnels. At each entry point, color-control cameras (modified EZ-Pass) would be installed. Violators would be subject to fines: \$300 for the first offense and \$500 thereafter

(handicapped excluded). All major highway approach advisory signs would announce the color of the day. Residents below 86th St. would be subject to the same color restrictions if they drive their car in the CBD. Exemptions would have to be developed.

The implementation of this plan is substantially less costly and provides more effective traffic reduction than congestion pricing but only raises fees from fines. The construction cost of congestion pricing can be greatly reduced using EZ-Pass-style camera controls only at the 22 CBD entry points. Residents living within the CBD would be exempt (rightfully) from the fee since they cause minimal congestion. The savings from not installing thousands of cameras in the CBD more than offsets the residents' exemption.

Another issue that must be addressed is the increase in transit use. The MTA expects 80,000 additional transit users, a 5 percent increase. The Economic Development Corporation in 2007 said that subway usage now is 4 percent higher than it was in 2006. Will the required transit improvements accommodate this increase in ridership? And when?

The incremental plans should be seriously initiated immediately. If reduction in traffic and pollution does not meet the set goals, then employ other well-thought-out plans. Transit improvements must be well in place to accommodate any other plans.

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