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01/17/2008

Majority Of NY'ers Reject Congestion Pricing: Poll

by Lee Landor , Assistant Editor

Most New Yorkers say they oppose congestion pricing unless the money it collects goes to mass transit improvements, a Quinnipiac University Poll revealed last week.

The poll, which surveyed 1,162 New York City registered voters, showed that people opposed Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing proposal 58 to 37 percent, but that they would support it 60 to 37 percent if the revenue collected is used to improve and upgrade mass transit.

Bloomberg's traffic congestion reduction plan, introduced in April, is projected to raise \$420 million.

An alternative plan of implementing tolls on all of the currently free East River bridges into Manhattan, which would raise \$859 million, was strongly opposed by 69 percent of voters compared to only 25 percent in favor.

When asked which of the two plans voters preferred, 43 percent chose congestion pricing, 35 percent preferred the tolls and 22 percent were undecided.

The New York City Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission, which put forth the suggestion for East River bridge tolls, also proposed raising parking meter rates as an alternative. It was met with disapproval from New Yorkers, who opposed the proposal 60 to 35 percent.

Councilman David Weprin (D-Hollis), chair of the Council's Finance Committee, called on the commission to remove the East River bridges tolling plan from the list of alternatives.

"Charging a toll on any of the four bridges is equivalent to charging residents to cross the street," Weprin said.

Some 91 percent of New Yorkers agreed that traffic congestion is a serious problem, "but they reject all the ideas that are being talked about to ease it," said Maurice Carroll, director of the

Quinnipiac University Polling Institute.

According to U.S. Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-Brooklyn and Queens), the reason for New Yorkers' rejection of the plans is that "congestion pricing is simply a bad idea that will create a giant expensive bureaucracy, hand too much authority to state agencies and give many suburbanites a free ride at the expense of New York City residents."

Weiner devised his own plan, which includes increasing truck tolls during peak hours, incentivizing nighttime truck deliveries and implementing truck law training for truckers and NYPD officers.

These and other alternatives seem to be more favorable amongst residents of the outer boroughs, who the poll found to be more opposed to congestion pricing than those living in Manhattan.

In Queens, voters opposed congestion pricing 58 to 36 percent, while in Manhattan, 52 percent of voters favored the plan and 42 percent opposed it.

New York City voters said congestion pricing would unfairly tax people who live outside of Manhattan 54 to 42 percent. Manhattan voters disagreed with that claim 57 to 38 percent.

The commission is scheduled to agree on a plan by Jan. 31, and then receive approval from the City Council and from Albany.