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## New Visions Dem Club hears pro, con cases

By Howard Koplowitz

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Representatives from two opposing sides in the congestion pricing debate argued their cases before the New Visions Democratic Club in Jackson Heights last week.

Dan Hendrick, the communications director for the New York League of Conservation Voters, said congestion pricing is needed because "the city is going to grow.

But Corey Bearak, a policy adviser for the interest group Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, contended that congestion pricing was a "tax" that had more to do with paying for mass transit improvements than relieving Manhattan traffic. He said there are better ways to come up with funding for buses and subways.

"It's very clear it's all about revenue for mass transit," said Bearak, who is also the president of the Queens Civic Congress, a role he insists he keeps separate from his consulting work for the anti-congestion pricing interest group.

Hendrick said congestion costs the city between \$12 billion and \$15 billion a year from fuel costs and loss of productivity.

"The subways are so crowded now. There's just no way it's going to work," Hendrick said.

Of the 40 percent of Queens residents who work in Manhattan, 18 percent drive into the city, he said.

Funds from congestion pricing would go toward improving mass transit, an idea that Hendrick advocated.

"There's been a systemic under-funding of our transit system for some time," he said.

With congestion pricing, Hendrick said, "you hit two birds with one stone. You reduce traffic and

it's a fine way to fund your transit system."

One attendee at the forum said he was concerned that cars would park on borough streets and enter Manhattan through mass transit to avoid congestion pricing.

"I just don't see how (congestion pricing) is going to benefit Queens at all," the man said.

Bearak touched on that point, arguing that outerborough residents would be disproportionately affected by tolls on the East River bridges.

"The bulk of these people from Brooklyn and Queens are paying the bulk of the tolls," he said, noting that the Port Authority crossings would have an \$8 charge while the Midtown Tunnel, which is more often used by Long Island commuters, would have a \$4 charge. "It's ridiculous and absurd."

Bearak said congestion could be "significantly" reduced just by banning taxis from cruising on Manhattan streets and mandating them to pick up passengers at taxi stands.

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