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Congestion Pricing Opposed At Town Hall BY RICHARD GENTILVISO



Assemblymember Michael Gianaris listens to a question from the audience as UCCA President Rose Marie Poveromo looks on.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's proposed plan to charge cars \$8 and trucks \$21 to drive into Manhattan below 86th Street on weekdays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. is raising concern in Queens.

"It's going to be a negative impact for those of us who live in Queens," Tony Barsamian, publisher and editor of the *Queens Gazette*, said.

Barsamian asked local legislators about congestion pricing, beginning a three-hour town hall meeting sponsored by Assemblymember Michael Gianaris, the United Community Civic Association (UCCA) and the *Gazette* at the Museum of the Moving Image on January 10.

"I oppose it," said Gianaris. "A big concern is people will park in Astoria and Long Island City and hop on a train [to Manhattan]. I would hate to displace the [traffic congestion] problems of Midtown Manhattan to us."

State Senator George Onorato agreed. "We would be the parking lot for all the Long Island commuters," he said, noting two area municipal lots, at Hoyt Avenue and Queens Plaza, have already closed. "Where are they going to park?"

"I have not seen a plan yet that I can support," Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr. said.

The Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission that is due to make a recommendation to the state legislature, the City Council and Bloomberg by the end of the month, said earlier on January 10 that it is also considering \$8 round-trip tolls on East River and



State Senator George Onorato explains a finer point in answer to a question from the audience at the Museum of the Moving Image as UCCA President Rose Marie Poveromo listens.

Harlem River bridges as well as a plan to restrict access into parts of Manhattan based on license plate numbers.

"It's a lousy idea," said a Queensview resident. A Quinnipiac University poll conducted from January 3 to 7 of 1,162 registered city voters found 58 percent of New Yorkers oppose congestion pricing, with 37 percent in favor and the rest undecided. New Yorkers also oppose bridge tolls by an even greater margin of 69 percent against and 25 percent in favor.



City Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr. responds to an audience member's question while UCCA President Rose Marie Poveromo listens intently.

"It's really a way to tax people who don't live in Manhattan," said Gianaris. "It's not only who's paying but who's not paying—the wealthiest of the wealthy. I am not going to support a plan to make Manhattan a rich person's paradise."

Gianaris, Onorato, and Vallone Jr., later joined by District Attorney Richard Brown, were part of a panel of about 25 federal, state and local officials. "They are here to address your concerns," UCCA President Rose Marie Poveromo told the audience of some 200 people gathered at the Museum of the Moving Image.

NYPD Inspectors Brian McCarthy (114th Precinct) and John Lavelle (115th Precinct), Queens DOT Commissioner Maura McCarthy, LaGuardia Airport General Manager Warren Kroepfel and Queens Department of City Planning Deputy Director Deborah Carney were just a few of the officials on hand to answer questions.

Community Education Council Member Jeffrey Guyton said there is a shortage of crossing guards in both the 114th Precinct (seven crossing guards) and the 115th precinct (one crossing guard). "It's a continuing effort [to acquire guards]," McCarthy said.

McCarthy also fielded questions about pedestrian safety, particularly at 31st Street and Steinway Street, where a resident reported cars going through red lights, drivers talking on cellphones and reckless bicyclists riding on sidewalks. "We had over 20 arrests for driving bicycles on sidewalks [in 2007]," McCarthy said.

Vallone Jr., responding to a resident complaining about a lack of police responsiveness to quality of life crimes, said lack of NYPD manpower is at fault. "We are down from 41,000 [police officers in 1993] to 35,500 [current police officers]," he said. "We don't have enough police officers. I'm amazed they continue to do the great job they do."

Commissioner McCarthy fielded questions about DOT policies for red lights and speed bumps at schools, and congestion pricing. Asked about handicap access to Manhattan under congestion pricing, she said, "We believe congestion pricing is going to increase express buses."

"There are people who do not have easy access to mass transit," Gianaris said. "It's a long way to go before this (congestion pricing) becomes a reality. I am going to fight this."