

Congestion Tax – Chock Full of False Promises

Statement to NYC Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission

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Speaking in my home borough, I distinguish my statement today from my testimony at Hunter College with a more Queens community-based focused.

In this manner, let me identify some things that never receive any attention and perhaps, to Queens residents, matter much more than anything previously promised. Just look at what the congestion tax scheme never promised to pay for and deliver:

I need to subway through Manhattan to get to another part of my home borough – The Rockaways.

I need to subway from eastern Queens through Manhattan to get to Coney Island or anywhere in Brooklyn where my brother and his family make their home.

In order to reach where I once worked near Yankee Stadium, it still requires a subway ride through Manhattan to get to the Bronx.

If my wife plays Mahjong at our friend Ellen's home in Little Neck, she cannot rely on the Q79 bus because it does not operate after 7:00 p.m.

If my friend Helene needs to go to a doctor in Lake Success or Manhasset, as many who resident in eastern Queens often do, MTA's Access-a-Ride does not cross the city line between Queens and Nassau – the issue is cost to the MTA.

My daughter needed three buses to go from our home in Bellerose to Bayside High School – about 1 1/4 hours; a ten minute or less car ride. Think about her classmates who had to take multiple buses from Howard Beach.

When my daughter is not away at college, four adults share two cars; many families have one car for each adult because that is the need in much of Queens.

Nothing about the congestion tax or any of its toll/ tax variants adds any money to address these needs.

The focus is entirely on those who commute. The focus ought to be on making residents less car dependent. An Assemblyman friend of mine speaks elegantly of this approach as the “carrot”. The number of residents projected to be diverted from cars make no real dent in congestion to justify any new funding. Your revenue estimates make obvious that you desire no long-term reductions in motor vehicle use.

This is why we in Queens joined our Borough President Helen Marshall and proposed many needed transit projects.

Perhaps Queens ought just to secede and charge anyone who enters the borough to use our airports; that just may move a lot of Commissioner Wilde's members to look at Queens locations for moderate density office and commercial spaces. No longer would our police precincts get raided to cover parades in Manhattan. We'd be free to make sound decisions about our schools. City agency responses, no doubt, would improve.

Someone in Brooklyn might make similar points without the airports but the borough where wife was born and lived for many years and where my brother's family lives and works has its good points as well and might just pursue the same approach.

The point remains that the congestion tax scheme and its toll/tax variants – besides being unfair, inequitable, inefficient and non-sensible – just offers nothing for Queens (and most city) residents but perhaps crumbs which may not even address ANY needs – not unusual – for residents from my borough.

Yet we are the ones asked to pay; these schemes ask residents of the boroughs outside of Manhattan to disproportionately bare the brunt of these tax schemes. How are these tax schemes not *new*? Are they not inconsistent with the Governor's budget that offers no *NEW* taxes? Is there a new definition of *new*?

I hold leadership positions in a boroughwide organization and also in the largest of its kind in the metropolitan area regional organization. My comments reflect my views; some may be consistent with the views of the organizations and many reflect nearly a generation of policy, budget and legislative work in public service. These perspectives lead me to championing the the non-intrusive, low-cost (almost no cost) traffic mitigation measures proposed by Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free with some half billion dollars or more in incidental revenues and the revenue measures proposed by its Queens Civic Congress coalition partner. I care enough to share; do you care enough to heed?