



Queens pols weigh in on congestion pricing

BY PETE DAVIS

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While members of the city council and state legislature wait anxiously for the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission's final report, some local elected officials are already criticizing the commission's work.

"The commission's report seems to be singularly designed to screw outer-borough New Yorkers and Queens in particular," said Assemblymember Rory Lancman in response to the commission's interim report.

Lancman, who has been a sharp critic of congestion pricing and announced his own alternative plans to reduce congestion last year, believes that commission has lost its target on its mission of finding ways to reduce the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in Manhattan's central business district.

"The Commission turned its mandate from reducing congestion with the least amount of impact on New Yorkers into raising as much revenue from New Yorkers as possible," Lancman said. "It went from a Congestion [Traffic] Mitigation Commission to a revenue generation commission."

City Councilmember David Weprin, who chairs the council's finance committee and has spoken out against the idea of congestion pricing back in 2006 before it was on the city's radar, agreed.

"All of a sudden it's about getting the money," Weprin said. "I still don't think any of these [plans] will reduce congestion."

However, City Councilmember John Liu, who chairs the council's transportation committee, said he thought the commission was doing a good job.

"It's clear that the commission is working hard," Liu said. "They have pondered all of the possibilities, and they are not leaving anything off the table."

Meanwhile one issue that Lancman and Liu both said was critical was the increase in mass transit services before any congestion pricing proposal is implemented. Currently, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has said that new express bus routes, increased

frequency on local routes, more subway cars and ferry service are part of its plan, which would cost \$767 million in capital improvements and more than \$100 million annually to operate under Bloomberg's original plan, according to an MTA report.

Lancman said the planned improvements, which include four new express bus routes in Queens, increased service on the E subway line and a bus rapid transit lane in south Queens is not enough.

"That is a drop in the bucket," Lancman said. "The whole premise is that we're going to charge people money to drive into Manhattan so that they will choose a less expensive alternative."

In addition, Lancman criticized the commission's handling of the final public hearings, which were all scheduled for tonight, January 24 at seven different locations.

"This is something that will have an enormous impact on New Yorkers, and I think the commissioners have an obligation to spend a few more nights of listening to what the people have to say in each community," Lancman said. "I assume that the public will be extremely disappointed the commission didn't take advantage of the opportunity to listen to have an open honest comprehensive discussion about how to reduce congestion," Lancman said.