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Mayor's Traffic Plan Draws Criticism of Weiner

BY BENJAMIN SARLIN - Special to the Sun

Laying out a possible strategy for his 2009 mayoral run, Rep. Anthony Weiner said yesterday that Mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan would cost the city millions in federal transportation aid.

"We can't be in this mind-set that every problem can be solved on the city level," Mr. Weiner, who represents parts of Brooklyn and Queens, said at a forum at Kingsborough Community College. "Which is why I always make the argument: The best person to be mayor is someone that understands different levels of government and understands how to make those work."

Mr. Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan, which won a \$354 million grant from the Bush administration, is intended to raise revenue for mass transit and reduce traffic, but Mr. Weiner warned that the federal government would slash federal aid to the city if the plan succeeds.

"This is where it matters that you have a certain amount of political acumen. What the mayor does not understand, what his supporters in the environmental community don't understand — we are playing exactly into the Republican argument that if you want mass transit, you should tax yourself," he said. "I am going to be hearing from my colleagues in Washington, 'Well, you need \$200 million less. You're already collecting the \$200 million.'"

Mr. Weiner suggested that the federal government instead take a greater role in funding transportation improvements and proposed raising revenue through a national gas tax.

A spokesman for the mayor, John Gallagher, defended the congestion pricing plan. "The congressman seems to be forgetting that this \$354 million from Washington is on the table because we won a federal grant, when he says that he can't stop Congress from taking away the money on the other end," he said via e-mail. "It's the city's job to try and win federal grant competitions and it's his to get us congressional appropriations. Our success in the former doesn't mean he shouldn't try on the latter."