

# NY POST OPPOSES THE CONGESTION TAX SCHEME

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## **NEW YORK POST**

### **Editorial: A TOLL TOO FAR**

*April 7, 2008* -- Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver convenes his members today to determine whether Mayor Bloomberg's congestion-pricing plan - or at least what's left of it - will ever arrive on the Assembly floor.

Silver has certainly killed more than his share of worthy bills in precisely the same way: behind closed doors, at the whims of his allies - rarely even having to take a public stand.

But it'd be an almost fitting end for congestion pricing - a once-promising idea that, sad to say, seems not to have survived the political sausage-grinder in anything resembling a fair or workable form.

Make no mistake: The mayor's plan, which would charge drivers an \$8 fee to enter Manhattan below 60th Street on weekdays, was worth a serious look.

After all, who *wouldn't* be in favor of less congestion and less pollution in such a car-choked city?

Far more important, though, was the mayor's promise that the fee would provide a reliable revenue stream for much-needed mass-transit improvements.

For all these reasons, we held out hope that the serious remaining questions as to how, practically, the fee would be levied would be resolved in a reasonable, equitable manner.

'Twas not to be.

Indeed, the proposal that emerged from a contentious City Council vote last week would create what's plainly an unworkably complex and often inequitable system. Among other things:

- \* Outer-borough drivers would now be socked simply for passing *through* the congestion zone on the FDR Drive or West Side Highway. That wasn't the original plan, but the powers-that-be decided that distinguishing drivers who are actually causing Manhattan gridlock wasn't worth the hassle.

- \* Drivers without E-ZPass would be assessed an added \$1 surcharge to cover billing costs. Any

fee not paid within four days would rise to \$65.

\* And then there's Jersey. The council was rightly none too pleased that Garden State commuters would be exempt from the fee, on the grounds that they already pay \$8 tolls to cross the Hudson. But its solution - demanding that the Port Authority pay \$1 billion in tribute for city mass transit, under threat of added fees for Jersey drivers - was remarkably Byzantine.

New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine is vowing to litigate. And his would no doubt be only the first of many suits.

\* Meanwhile, the mayor has yet to explain precisely how congestion-pricing fees would be fully safeguarded for mass-transit improvements over the long term - given Albany's time-honored tradition of shell-game financing.

And just think: If this is the mess the plan is in *now*, imagine what befuddling bells, whistles and special exemptions it would take to get it through Silver's horse-trading caucus.

The plain fact is that congestion pricing would amount to a serious new tax on city residents and businesses. Such a tax isn't *always* ill advised, but it *requires* public confidence that it will both be levied fairly and serve a compelling public purpose.

Without that certainty, the best intentions only serve to undermine confidence in government.

Sadly, congestion pricing as it now stands doesn't cut it.

Mike's lofty vision may or may not have been an idea whose time has come.

But *this* plan deserves to die.