

[This was submitted to the New York Times (but not run)
To the editor:

It makes no sense to try to resurrect the Congestion Tax (“Editorial: “The Riders Pay,” September 8, 2008) when the transit system needs broad-based stable revenues less dependent on the economy, outside events and the impact of the tax scheme itself. Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, a broad-based coalition including civic and community-based grass roots groups and groups advocating for small business, urges readers to look at its www.keepnycfree.com website to learn of the many traffic mitigation measures that also would raise many millions – some estimates indicate more than \$500 million in incidental revenue – that New York City can tap to fund its share of transit aid. The Times already notes the city (and state) failure to cough up its fair share. Once the city (and state) pony up what they owe and need to allocate annually, the legislature then needs to enact targeted progressive revenue [measures](#) outlined by our coalition partner, the [Queens Civic Congress](#). The decline in driving into Manhattan fueled by gas-gouging (and higher MTA and Port Authority tolls), already noted by The Times, makes clear that the regressive, unfair, inequitable and inefficient congestion tax, offers a most unstable source of funding.

-Corey Bearak, Policy Advisor, Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/08/opinion/08mon4.html?_r=1&ref=opinion&oref=slogin

The New York Times

September 8, 2008
Editorial

The Riders Pay

New York City’s mass-transit system is deteriorating and desperately underfunded. The politicians know this, but they are still providing far too little in the way of financing. The result is that the system’s users, many of them already suffering from tough economic times, could be stuck with the bill.

Neither the city nor the state is paying its fair share, despite what they claim. With the Metropolitan Transportation Authority facing a budget gap of nearly \$1 billion next year, direct subsidies from both governments last year totaled about \$600 million, not much more than what they were a decade ago, according to the nonpartisan Independent Budget Office. Adjusted for inflation, subsidies have actually declined, saddling riders with an ever-increasing burden.

The main problem is that New York's state legislators have failed to put a dependable source of financing — like congestion pricing — in place. Transit has been forced to rely on fluctuating taxes from real estate and other sources and, increasingly, rising fares.

A one-two punch of back-to-back fare hikes and reduced service seems likely if New York's elected leaders don't approve significant new subsidies or a solid revenue-generating plan.

The M.T.A. has said it needs the city and state together to contribute an additional \$300 million next year. State lawmakers say they are awaiting the recommendations of a commission led by Richard Ravitch, expected after the November elections. Mayor Michael Bloomberg insists that the city has already done its part, contributing \$1.2 billion last year.

But Mr. Bloomberg gets to his \$1.2 billion figure by including not only the city's direct subsidies, which are what really matters, but also an assortment of other kinds of payments that do not directly benefit the M.T.A. They include \$344 million in interest payments on money the city borrowed for previous transit aid.

A safe, clean and reliable mass-transit system is not only environmentally sound; it is also essential to New York's economy. We know the city and state have their own huge, looming budget gaps. But both need to dig deeper to keep mass transit moving.