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Keep those bridges free

Dear Editor:

On Dec. 4, the commission on MTA financing chaired by former MTA Chairman Richard Ravitch released its proposals. It included an inefficient and inequitable toll tax that makes little sense and merits rejection.

The imposition of tolls on the currently free East River and Harlem Rivers bridge crossings — including our Queensborough Bridge — essentially recycles the congestion tax. Both the congestion tax and this new re-packaged son of the congestion tax scheme would take \$2 for administration for every \$3 for transit. The Assembly correctly shunned the parent scheme earlier this year.

Instead of the Ravitch plan that also disappointingly lets Albany and City Hall off the hook, we urge Queens Chronicle readers and our public officials to look at our coalition plan (<http://keepnycfree.com>) that makes both the state and the city step up to the plate.

We identify specific revenues that empower the city and the state to fund this core responsibility. This includes a modest \$0.04 state gasoline levy (\$255 million), a vehicle registration fee increase (\$250 million), increased fines for illegal parking (\$75 million), higher parking meter rates (\$50 million) and more realistic city fees for the use of street space by construction contractors and utilities (\$500 million).

Other initiatives raise significant funds to support mass transit, including a non-resident income tax that apportions its proceeds between city and suburban transit projects (\$1.8 billion) and a modest real property tax surcharge on real estate development that benefits from mass transit (\$741 million).

For more information, please visit our website, keepnycfree.com.

Corey Bearak
Policy Advisor
Keep NYC Free
Glen Oaks

No East River tolls!

(This letter was sent to Council members Melinda Katz, Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi and state Sen. Tony Ann Stavisky.)

Dear Representatives:

As one of your constituents, I strongly urge you to vote against any bill that would authorize placing tolls on the East River crossing bridges for several reasons.

It seems to me that the mayor is using the recurrent budget problems of the MTA as an opportunity to confiscate the funds that he failed to acquire with his ill-conceived congestion pricing proposal. All of the reasons for being opposed to congestion pricing are still valid for opposing tolls on the East River bridges.

The traffic jams on the 59th Street Bridge and in downtown Brooklyn, where the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridge entrances are within blocks of each other, are absolutely unimaginable. Additionally, the amount of pollution from idling cars would be horrific. Why is it that when private industry seeks to build almost anything, lengthy environmental impact studies must be done? Yet when the government chooses to build toll booths, no such studies are required or even contemplated.

Last night I saw Ravitch on the news claiming that the tolls and the tax on employers was a stimulus. He is far too intelligent a person to actually believe his own words. On the other hand, he has so little respect for the intelligence of the public that he expects us to believe this nonsense. If taking money from the people were a stimulus, President-elect Obama would be talking about increasing taxes rather than sending stimulus checks to the people.

Why should automobile users, who do not place stress on public transportation, be required to pay the bill for services they do not use? If everyone who drove into the city decided to take the train or the Long Island Railroad the MTA would be unable to handle the increased ridership. Essentially, drivers are being asked to deprive their families of more than \$2,000 per year by paying tolls so that subway and bus riders can save 50 cents per day.

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