

## Crazy Eyes

*So who's been foolin' who* sings the protagonist in a certain [song](#) and it certainly applies to the efforts to convince the public and our electeds to embrace congestion pricing. Throughout the debate on congestion pricing, Keep NYC Free [questioned](#) the City's eagerness to employ the failed toll-tax scheme to address traffic in Manhattan, particularly its Central Business District (CBD). Years later, NYCDOT issues its Sustainable Streets [report](#) (covered in the [Times](#); see below) that includes a lot of useful data that reinforces the Keep NYC Free [position](#) that the toll-tax scheme served no useful purpose in addressing congestion. The DOT [report](#) by Bruce Schaller reported data that indicated declines in auto traffic and managing parking charges positively impact congestion.

Here's a sample of the findings:

- ▶ weekday auto travel into the CBD peaked in 1999;
- ▶ prior to the recession, the overall volume of auto traffic had been static, while transit ridership grew;
- ▶ Citywide traffic volumes were generally flat from 2003 to 2007, in contrast to the 11% increase in traffic in the 1990s.
- ▶ traffic speeds in Manhattan have improved;
- ▶ higher charges for street parking have a positive impact on congestion as the DOT Greenwich Village pilot evidences.
- ▶ Even areas outside the Manhattan Central Business District (CBD) that showed sustained growth in traffic as recently as 2002, such as on the Westchester/Bronx and Staten Island/New Jersey borders, have shown little or no growth in traffic since 2002.

The micro data on traffic congestion extracted from the taxi GPS data and used in the Schaller report could also be enormously valuable for designing (and monitoring the effectiveness of) site- and time-specific responses to congestion within the CBD. It could be the equivalent of CompStat for traffic – radically improving DOT's capacity - if they have the will - to manage congestion.

**The report really reinforces the argument that cordon pricing remains simply too crude a tool to serve any useful purpose in managing congestion, and that far better tools remain available – as [documented](#) by Keep NYC Free.**

So the only argument left is whether it's a good way to raise money for transit....and we know the [answer](#) to that one. The [song](#) concludes – as the Schaller/DOT report makes plain, *Crazy eyes, I've been a foolin' you*. No longer does anyone have an excuse to be fooled.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/24/nyregion/24traffic.html?scp=4&sq=traffic&st=cse>



## [N.Y. / Region](#)

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# Gridlock May Not Be Constant, but Slow Going Is Here to Stay

By [MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM](#)

If you are thinking of driving in Manhattan on a Wednesday, perhaps to take in a Broadway matinee, think again: it is the most congested day of the week.

Pretty much all of November is a slog, too. And when the [United Nations](#) is in session in September? Forget it.

Rainfall, parades and motorcades — they all have their effect on traffic. And when calamity and Wednesdays collide, watch out: July 29, a Wednesday, was among the 25 worst traffic days last year.

It happened to include a torrential downpour — not to mention a visit from [Janet Napolitano](#), the secretary of homeland security, who crisscrossed Manhattan on a tour of the city, entourage in tow.

Traffic in Manhattan has a rhythm all its own, and, according to a new study by the city, it is not quite the constant gridlock that it seems.

Using data from the [GPS devices in all New York City cabs](#), officials tracked the routes of tens of millions of taxi trips over the past two years. The result: a database of speeds and travel routes that can be broken down by minute, month and neighborhood.

“It’s like an M.R.I.,” said Bruce Schaller, a deputy transportation commissioner who supervised the city’s study.

For traffic planners, the data provides an entirely new resource for targeting their tweaks to the streetscape. Officials are already using the information to help improve traffic patterns along 34th Street.

But the trip data also offers a glimpse of the desires and frustrations of New Yorkers moving around their metropolis: where they want to go and the obstacles in their way.

To create a day-by-day look at the city's traffic, officials crunched GPS information from nearly every yellow taxi trip taken in Manhattan's business district — from 60th Street to the Battery — between November 2008 and October 2009.

In that 12-month period, weekday traffic in the district moved at an average of 9.5 miles per hour — about the speed of a farmyard chicken at full gallop.

Thursday, Nov. 13 was the slowest weekday of the year studied, with an average speed of 7.5 m.p.h. — about the speed of the typical jogger in Central Park. Excluding holidays, the fastest weekday: Monday, Sept. 28, at a speed of 11.7 m.p.h.

The four fastest days to drive in Manhattan, in order of average speed: New Year's Day, Christmas, [Memorial Day](#) and July 4. ([Thanksgiving](#) Day? Hindered, presumably, by the Macy's parade.)

On weekdays, speeds predictably peak between 5 and 6 in the morning (at a jaunty 16 m.p.h.), then decline sharply in the morning rush.

Not so predictably, speeds then stay low all day, even midday when commuters are at work. Traffic barely improves until the evening rush wanes about 7 p.m., hovering around 9 m.p.h. for much of the day.

Officials blame the midday congestion on a high level of commercial deliveries, which can clog side streets and stop up intersections. The data has helped officials as they consider raising daytime street parking rates to ease traffic tangles in Midtown.

Traffic in most major cities, Mr. Schaller said, returns to normal between the morning and evening rush. But Manhattan's business district is far bigger and more dense than most. "Walk around downtown San Francisco at 11 o'clock in the morning and there's not much going on," Mr. Schaller said. "You go to SoHo, and it's really busy."

A sweeping thunderstorm rolled through the city on Aug. 19, also among the slowest 25 traffic days in the study period, knocking down trees and generating some of the worst storm damage in decades. On June 18, another congested summer weekday, more than an inch of rain fell.

In previous eras, city planners had to rely on arbitrary test runs and data from the city's tunnels and bridges to measure traffic. Now, the taxi GPS machines put a vast amount of previously unavailable information at planners' fingertips. "We've known what goes on along the edge of Manhattan, but we've never known what's inside the beast," said [Janette Sadik-Khan](#), the transportation commissioner.

According to the data, cars are starting to move faster, partially because of New Yorkers' greater reliance on mass transit and a drop in traffic caused by the recession. From the fall of 2007 to last autumn, cars moved about 13 percent faster on weekdays. In the same period, the number of cars driving into Midtown from north of 60th Street fell to its lowest level in nearly 20 years, a trend that officials attributed to increased mass transit ridership.

On a typical Tuesday night, about 13,000 cabs travel south from the Upper East Side to a destination between 14th Street and Canal Street; on Saturdays, about three times as many cabs (38,000 on average) make the trip.

Small changes in speeds also seem to have an outsize psychological impact on impatient New Yorkers. On weekdays, when few people expect a trip to go quickly, speeds in east Midtown average about 6.3 m.p.h. in the daytime. On Saturdays, the average speed is about 8.5 m.p.h. — not an enormous difference, even though drivers report feeling more comfortable on weekends.

Despite the line at the Macy's returns counter, January clocked in as the least-congested month of the year. November, hindered by the frenzy of Thanksgiving and holiday shopping, was the most congested.

And, as any political observer will tell you, diplomats really bring things to a standstill. United Nations General Assembly week, in late September, accounted for four straight weekdays when Manhattan traffic turned to sludge.