



QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS, INC.

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To Queens City and State Delegations

December 1, 2013

I write on behalf of the Queens Civic Congress, a borough-wide organization representing over 100 Queens civic and cooperative associations, to bring to your attention an article in The New York Times ("Group to Promote Revised Plan for Tolls on East River Bridges"-Page A18, Nov. 26, 2013). This article reports on a proposal to impose tolls on the East River bridge crossings, ostensibly to provide funding for MTA operations and maintenance while reducing some fees currently imposed on other MTA crossings. The article suggests that the proposal would somehow mollify the failed congestion pricing schemes of the past.

On behalf of the Queens Civic Congress member organizations spanning our borough, we must register our ardent opposition to placing tolls on the east river bridges or any proposal which would impose tolls on the few remaining free crossings to Manhattan for the following reasons:

Firstly, the imposition of tolls would inarguably create both a physical and psychological barrier between the outer boroughs and Manhattan. This would further diminish the century-old concept of a unified city composed of equal boroughs, a concept already torn by numerous disparate services and treatments in certain boroughs. The city's boroughs were intended to nourish each other and form a preeminent city, but the additional expense to residents and businesses and the psychological barrier of tolls will harm that objective.

Secondly, such tolls would undoubtedly create an undesirable restraint which would hamper interborough industry and commerce where outer borough residents access Manhattan goods and services. There are numerous businesses that make daily or more frequent trips between the boroughs and tolls would place an unnecessary expense burden on them. In addition, many residents from Brooklyn, Queens or the Bronx, would on weekends take one of the bridges to a show, museum, gallery, shop or restaurant. That trip would seem much less inviting if they have to pay a toll.

Thirdly, the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn have spent years promoting tourism and commerce in their boroughs and new tolls would tend to discourage individuals and businesses from Manhattan and New Jersey from making the trip across the East River.

Finally, and just as important, while tolls on these bridges would enhance revenues, they would also impose one more painful expense and significant tax. This additional cost is on an essential transportation mode that, for many, is so necessary for their livelihood, well-being and quality of life. Many working class and middle income residents struggle under reduced circumstances to meet expenses, but cannot use mass transit because of their erratic shift, late overtime or need to carry heavy or expensive tools. The toll-free bridges offer these people the only alternative to unemployment.

We are disappointed to note that a Queens legislator was quoted in the article as being "receptive to this re-imagined version (of congestion pricing)." While the possibility of reduced fees on the other bridges and tunnels might seem attractive, we however, see any support for this, or other such proposals by our legislators as fundamentally contrary to the interests of our constituents.

On behalf of the civic and community organizations of Queens, we strongly urge you to oppose, and speak out against this proposal.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Hellenbrecht, President
Queens Civic Congress