

QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS INC.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact:
Richard Hellenbrecht:
Tel 646 732 5784:

QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS OPPOSES THE IMPOSITION OF TOLLS ON EAST RIVER BRIDGES.

Statement made at

Press Briefing held by NYS Assemblyman David Weprin on Sunday March 1, 2015 at noon

in front of 25-01 Bridge Plaza North, Ed Koch Bridge

By Harbachan Singh, President, Queens Civic Congress

1. My name is Harbachan Singh and I am the President of the Queens Civic Congress, a borough-wide organization representing over 100 Queens Civic and Cooperative associations, and wish to bring to your attention an article in the New York Times (Feb.17, 2015). This article reports on MOVE NY's Congestion Pricing initiative 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.
2. 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 in Manhattan for the following reasons:
3. 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.

4. 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. 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.
5. THIRDLY, the borough of Queens and Brooklyn have spent years promoting tourism and commerce in their borough (and Queens has been accepted as the No.1 tourist borough) and new tolls would tend to discourage individuals and businesses from Manhattan and New Jersey from making the trip across the East River.
6. 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 expensive tools. The toll-free bridges offer these people the only alternative to unemployment.

We do not share the contention of an official who is quoted as saying “ We finally have a plan that my constituents can get behind.” We are also concerned that the additional work of tracking license plates and manual billing for non EZ Pass customers, especially for multiple trips in a day, will impose expenses not accounted for. 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 oppose and speak out against this proposal.

Harbachan Singh
President,
Queens Civic Congress