

Congestion pricing is coming to NYC — though London shows it's a disaster

By City Council Minority Leader Joe Borelli

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Congestion pricing, the great white whale that transportation activists have been chasing for decades, is coming to New York City.

But before Gov. Kathy Hochul and the Legislature smack us with this new tax, they may want to check whether it actually works.

Will it deliver on its promise to greatly reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and address transit-revenue gaps?

If you ask Londoners, certainly not.

England's ancient capital, founded at the spot of one of Rome's notable traffic solutions, has become the global model for congestion pricing since implementing it two decades ago. But unlike its namesake bridge, the city's traffic scheme has not lived up to the hype, and now London is not only the most congested city in the United Kingdom, it is the [most congested city in the world](#).

In 2021, London drivers lost an average of 148 hours to congestion, costing \$1,211 per driver, as it topped the most recent Global Traffic Scorecard compiled by INRIX, a leading transportation-analytics firm. (If you're wondering, New York City is only the fifth-most congested city, just below Moscow.)

This study isn't an outlier. Pre-COVID London was ranked among the worst traffic cities by the [TomTom Traffic Index](#), "out-trafficking" crowded cities like Shenzhen and Kuala Lumpur. An earlier 2019 [Inrix traffic analysis](#) further confirms London has more congestion than New York. Imagine that — the Empire State, the Big Apple taking their cue from a city whose solution is worse than our problem. Bollocks!

The logjam in central London just outside the congestion zone has created so much traffic spillover that several borough officials recently embarked on a new car-reduction plan called Low Traffic Neighborhoods merely by erecting barriers to prevent outside motorists from using their streets.

Surprising no one, this has only led to even more congestion in adjacent neighborhoods without these measures. It turns out that people still need to get from point A to point B, despite their council, city and national government's best efforts.

LTNs have been so unpopular, [two-thirds](#) of South London residents polled demanded the streets be returned to normal. In nearby Ealing, the local council [scrapped](#) seven LTNs after only one year.

With congestion already a problem outside Manhattan business districts, are we now condemning our own adjacent neighborhoods to even worse conditions?

Despite London's ballyhooed congestion charge, it's planning a massive restructuring. The CO2 from all the idling cars clogging the capital have spurred Mayor Sadiq Khan to propose scrapping the current £15 (\$20) fee system altogether in favor of an entirely new scheme in which all London drivers would incur an initial surcharge and pay an existing "Ultra Low Emission Zone" fee, [plus pay-per-mile](#) charges as needed.

Nothing screams "Success!" or "Replicate me!" like London's leadership proposing a start-from-scratch overhaul because the system failed to meet its goals.

Essentially, London may soon be charging motorists as if they were taxi passengers — except they will be driving themselves in their own cars, along streets their tax money already pays for. We could chuckle about the absurdity of all this if only Democrats like President Joe Biden were not already pushing our own mileage-tax proposals here in the States.

The real reason London leaders are planning a vastly expanded tax structure on all vehicles may be far more cynical than saving the planet: The city desperately needs more revenue. Despite all the fees and fines it has collected since congestion pricing went into effect, the city's public transit and roadway agency, Transport for London (TfL), is going broke.

As it stands, despite receiving a massive COVID bailout from the national government, TfL needs [another \\$1.3 billion](#) annually to operate in the black. Even before the pandemic, TfL's budget shortfalls and cost overruns were more consistent than its bus schedule.

All this should sound eerily familiar to outer-borough New Yorkers who at present pay for the privilege of driving to posh Manhattan while their own streets remain choked in transit deserts.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority already runs its own version of congestion pricing, called MTA Bridges and Tunnels. Under this scheme, the state chooses which bridges and tunnels motorists must pay to cross to subsidize the public transportation of others. Just like London, a series of anti-car progressive lefties have pushed increases of these fees to satisfy MTA budget needs. In the past 30 years, those tolls have increased [more than 375%](#). Even Bidenflation can't keep up.

We don't need to know how a new driving tax will affect our lives — we are already living it.

London's congestion-pricing failure should serve as a cautionary tale. But our "leadership" in Albany is not going to read it let alone heed its warnings.

Instead, after New York City's congestion plan creates more traffic, fails to reduce emissions and produces far less revenue than expected, Hochul & Co. are likely to arrive at the same conclusion as their London counterparts: charge more money, impose higher fees and expand the catchment area.

In the end, all roads lead to revenue.

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