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TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

June 2023

The Traffic and Transportation Committee of Community Board #2, Manhattan held its monthly meeting on Thursday, June 1, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. via Video Conference.

Board Members Present: Shirley Secunda (Chair), Amy Brenna, Janet Liff, Daniel Miller (Vice Chair), Lois Rakoff, Antony Wong.

Board Members Absent with notification:

Board Members Absent:

Public Members Present: Joseph Flahaven, George Haikalis.

Public Members Absent with notification:

Public Members Absent:

Other Board Members Present: Susan Kent (CB2 Chair), Jeannine Kiely, Carter Booth, David Gruber, Valerie De La Rosa, Katy Bordonaro, Brian Pape, Stella Fitzgerald, Ryder Kessler, Donna Raftery, Mark Diller (CB2 District Manager).

Guests: Meera Dheer (Presenter, Congressman Goldman's office), Charles Komanoff (Presenter), Nicole Barth (Council Member Bottcher), Roy Ruiz (Assembly Member Glick), Tevin Williams (Congressman Goldman), Kate Scherer (NYC DOT), Jake McNally (Hudson Sq. BID), Pete Davies, Katherine Jason, Darlene Lutz (1st Pct Comm Council), Jeffrey Rowland, Linda Jacobson, Judy Pesin, Jonathan Weizmann, Michael Markowitz, Lora Tenenbaum, Charles Weissman, Norbert Masal, Amber Ott, Karen Bernsohn, Stephen Miller, Joe Ogara, Susan Parker, Cathy Spears, Ronnie Wolf, Judith Monaco-Callet, Marna Lawrence, Jon Giacobbe, Frank Stewart, Susan Ginsberg, Laura Hoffman, Anne Mitcheltree, Sean Lewin (Hudson Sq. BID), Staci Barber, Len Murach, Maureen Remacle, Kathleen Faust, Dennis Lee, Lucien Crowley.

MEETING REPORT:

Congestion Pricing Update and Q&A Session

On May 5, 2023, the Federal Highway Administration approved release of the Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for New York City's Central Business District Tolling Program (more familiarly known as Congestion Pricing) along with a Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), both available for public review (but not public comment) on May 12, 2023 for 30 days. A final FONSI, expected to be issued after June 12, 2023, would lead to the development of final recommendations for tolling rates, credits, discounts and exemptions by the Traffic Mobility Review Board (TMRB), specially set up for this purpose, and a public hearing conducted by the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA).

Recognizing the need for an update on the status of the Congestion Pricing program, Community Board #2 Manhattan's (CB2) Traffic and Transportation Committee organized a question and answer session at its June 1, 2023 meeting with short overviews on the need for and benefits of congestion pricing and the process used to develop and assess the program given by two congestion pricing experts, Charles Komanoff, who developed the "Balanced Transportation Analyzer" that helped New York State frame the legislation authorizing congestion pricing, and Meera Dheer, who handles transportation and infrastructure issues in Congressman Daniel S. Goldman's office. 33 people attended from the community in addition to the CB2 Traffic and Transportation Committee and other CB2 members, some public officials' representatives and NYC DOT's liaison to CB2.

The questions that were submitted revealed many varied concerns, as follows.

A. Charging Congestion Zone Residents

1. The most frequent concern was about tolling of residents in the congestion zone who need their cars to get around and would have difficulty affording the extra charge.
2. It was pointed out that residents in the zone will be financially burdened for going in and out of their neighborhoods. Their need for a discount or full exemption was emphasized.
3. There was concern about the added tolling costs for those doing a reverse commute, especially for seniors, with the only alternative option to driving being a long, involved mass transit trip, e.g. one route would involve taking 2 subways and 2 buses.
4. Concern was expressed about charging those who have to drive to places in the absence of transit options (and therefore have no choice).

B. Boundaries

1. There were questions about why 60th St, is the northern boundary.
2. Many claimed there's excessive traffic north of 60th and in other areas.
3. There was a suggestion to confine congestion pricing to midtown where it was claimed congestion is more intense, e.g. 34th to 59th Sts. btw. Madison and 8th Aves.
4. There was concern that tolling residents in the Central Business District (CBD) zone alone and not those above 60th St. (at least to 96th St., e.g. it was observed that the Upper East Side and Upper West Side have heavy traffic congestion), and not sharing the burden is inequitable. It was suggested that sharing the toll charge among those below

96th St. would be more equitable and also, being more spread out, less costly per person/vehicle tolled.

C. Impact of Congestion Pricing in Community Board 2 Manhattan (CB2)

1. It was asked if any measurements had been conducted on the impact of congestion pricing on:
 - CB2 residents.
 - On CB2 businesses and small businesses in the congestion zone in general.
 - On the cost of living (It was recognized that shops, businesses, car services, etc. are expected to pass along their increased costs as would deliveries).
 - Retention of small businesses in the Zone.
 - Property Values and development.
2. It was also asked whether measurements have been done of how many commuters vs. how many residents drive in and out of the congestion zone each day, with the questioner's rough guess being 1 million vs. 1,000, i.e. 100:1 ratio, noting that comparative impact studies need to be done.

D. Mitigation of Existing Impacts by Congestion Pricing

1. People were interested in learning what mitigations were planned to offset expected impacts.
2. It also was asked if measurements have been quantified in any way of negative impacts that can be reversed by Congestion Pricing in calculating the cost of car trips entering the CBD, e.g., the cost of air conditioning because of the need for closed windows, the cost of replacing equipment damaged by fumes, the cost of the impact of vibrations on historic buildings and other ancillary negative impacts (i.e., impacts that might be reduced through Congestion Pricing).

E. Special Discounts

1. There were questions about whether there would be specific discounts/carve-outs for:
 - Seniors.
 - CB2 residents.
 - HOVs.
 - Policemen, firemen, sanitation workers, teachers, essential workers, elected officials, i.e., those who need to enter the CBD to do their jobs.
2. It was also asked if the fee will vary for type and size of vehicles.

F. Exemptions for Those with Physical Challenges

1. There were concerns about the need for exemptions for people with physical disabilities, e.g. using wheelchairs, when making trips for medical appointments. It was answered that in the original law (New York State's MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) Reform and Traffic Mobility Act, April 2019) there was discussion and specific stipulation for exemptions for qualifying vehicles transporting people with disabilities and that it is something very much on MTA's radar, and they're working on carving out exemptions.

2. A related concern was if people with medical issues who aren't able to use public transportation and have to get places in a private car or taxi because they have no choice, will have an exemption.

G. Tax Credit for Residents in the Congestion Zone earning under \$60,000 a year

1. There was concern that a tax credit will be meaningless to many of those earning under \$60,000, since they often don't pay taxes for which they could get a rebate against.
2. It was noted that if people do qualify for a rebate, they still would have to lay out their own scarce assets while waiting to be reimbursed.
3. The general opinion was that \$60,000 is too low a threshold, because there are more people in the Zone who make more than that but still have problems with affordability.
4. People asked whether the tax credit is per person, per family, and how will that be accountable.

H. Differences in Time of Day/Week Charges

1. There were questions about whether there would be differences in weekday and weekend charges.
2. It was asked if there are Peak and Off-Peak periods (like PANYNJ tolls) and different charges at different hours.
3. Concerns were expressed about night-time deliveries increasing in response to reduced night-time fees and the need for this to be addressed.

I. Physical Infrastructure

1. It was asked what physical infrastructure will be installed within CB2 - on or around or above the streets - to capture identification of vehicles passing through (entering) the community/congestion pricing zone and what would be the specific components and location of those various installations.
2. There was concern about visual and other environmental impacts in response to some renderings that show massive steel installations above the entire width of the street

J. Pass-Alongs

1. It was recognized and concerning that shops, businesses, car services, etc. are expected to pass along their increased costs.
2. Residents were worried about impacts on the estimated 85% of households in CB2 that are car-free who occasionally use Uber or Lyft or taxis to transport heavy packages and other items and would have to pay congestion pricing costs passed on to them, as well as about Pass-Alongs in general to those who use for hire vehicles.
3. Concerns were expressed that the cost of deliveries will increase and be passed on to recipients.
4. It was asked if those who don't own a car and have medical conditions or disabilities that prevent them from taking public transportation or Access-A-Ride and require them to use For Hire vehicles and/or taxis would have to pay these services' added congestion pricing costs.

K. Congestion Piling Up Outside the CBD

1. It was asked if there is any plan to increase parking facilities outside the CBD to encourage people to use public transit.
2. Related to this, it was also asked if any consideration has been given to increasing the parking facilities at Pier 40 (part of CB2), which is outside the congestion zone, in order to keep cars outside the zone.
3. There was also a concern for how to stop people from parking and crowding the border where the toll is located.

L. Miscellaneous Other Questions and Concerns

1. People were concerned whether vehicles using and remaining on 9A or the FDR Drive (which are exempt from the congestion zone) except for crossing the few blocks to access the Holland or Lincoln Tunnels would be charged.
2. Sentiments were expressed about the need to cap the number of Ubers and Lyfts.
3. Some wondered if this influx of money would help keep fares more level.
4. Some preference was voiced for dedicating some congestion pricing funds to improving bus service.
5. There was a question of how long it will take for improvements to result, the response being that pedestrian improvements would happen right away, and that it would take 5 to 10 years to complete transit improvements (subway), half overnight; the other half up to 10 years).
6. Those present wondered what kind of impact as a community we can still have.

Ms. Dheer left the meeting before it was over, but invited attendees to reach out and submit their questions and suggestions to Congressman Goldman's office which will be working with different stakeholders at the state and local levels to make sure their constituents are heard. Mr. Komanoff stayed throughout the meeting to provide comments and field questions.

The questions that have been assembled here don't necessarily reflect the opinion of CB2, however, they are being submitted to Congressman Goldman's office and the members of the TMRB as well as to the MTA, the TBTA, and the NYS and NYC Departments of Transportation to apprise them of CB2 constituents' range of concerns for evaluating, formulating and running the Congestion Pricing program.

This report along with its cover letter that are being sent to Congressman Goldman, the TMRB and city and state agencies will appear on CB2's website, with a link to the transcript of CB2's Traffic and Transportation Committee's 11/01/2023 meeting.

Some Useful Information

Final EA Executive Summary - CBD Tolling Program/Congestion Pricing:

<https://new.mta.info/document/110756>

MTA description of Central Business District Tolling Program:

<https://new.mta.info/project/CBDTP>

MTA press release re Central Business District Tolling Program:

<https://new.mta.info/press-release/icymi-governor-hochul-announces-central-business-district-tolling-program-final>

Congressman Daniel Goldman:

https://goldman.house.gov/address_authentication?form=/contact

London's congestion pricing program info:

<https://www.curbed.com/2023/05/congestion-pricings-pitfalls-promise-londonlessons.html>

CB2 Manhattan website:

<https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb2/>

Tolls will be paid either by E-Z pass or through bills mailed to the vehicle owner who will pay using Tolls By Mail.

Congestion Pricing "Alphabet Soup"

EA - Environmental Assessment

FONSI - Finding of No Significant Impact

TMRB - Traffic Mobility Review Board

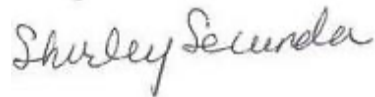
TBTA - Triborough Bridge & Tunnel Authority

FHWA - Federal Highway Administration

CBD - Central Business District

MTA - Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Respectfully submitted,



Shirley Secunda, Chair

Traffic and Transportation Committee

Community Board #2, Manhattan