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## Too Many Questions; So Few Answers

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OPINION CON: Whether the city congestion tax plan stays the same, changes or evolves into full-fledged tolls on the East and Harlem Rivers, it means most city residents pay \$8 while non-New Yorkers get a free ride. And, nine months later, New Yorkers still look for answers when it comes to the city's congestion tax scheme:



? Where are the ironclad legal guarantees of a net increase in mass transit funding? Why are there no “lockbox” assurances for funding dedicated to mass transit improvements? Will this tax be just like the Lottery - for every Lottery dollar in, government cuts out a dollar it used to allocate? Why does the Commission not discuss that it cannot prevent the old “dollar in, dollar out” scheme either?

? Why does the city plan rely on privatization to construct and operate the congestion tax infrastructure, ignore prevailing wages and waive “Buy America” provisions for procurement.

? Will it generate any net revenues? See: <http://keepnycfree.com/media/index.php>)

? Will the plan receive the strict scrutiny of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) review?

? Where is the federal money already due?

? Is the scheme a pilot plan that automatically sunsets (expires) or not?

? Will new transit capacity be in place first?

? Where is the money to pay for more transit first? How does the MTA factor the Congestion Tax into its 2008 budget? (It does not.)

? Where will Park and Ride facilities be built, if at all?

? What toll collection mechanism and technology will be used? At what cost?

? How will the public's privacy rights be protected when the tax plans involve the use of cameras and will there be restrictions on the use of data that might be mined?

? Why apply London's foreign model that ill fits New York City?

New York's dynamism as a true 24-hour-city reflects mixed uses where residences lie within the financial district downtown and midtown. New York's configuration and street grids differ greatly from London. It makes no sense to fit the geography of the proposed Manhattan zone into the same shoe designed for London - and Manhattan's "foot" cannot squeeze into the London boot.

The latest Transport for London report reveals many faults in London's tax scheme. This includes near doubling of excess delays in the zone from 1.4 min/km in 2003 to 2.4 min/km in 2006. In addition, congestion increased on virtually all roads surrounding the zone. Neighborhoods outside Manhattan beware. Moreover, with all the focus in New York on reducing rush hour traffic, nearly all of London's traffic reduction occurs off-peak with peak-period traffic hardly depressed at all.

Let us start with jettisoning congestion tax plans that raise so many red flags. The Queens Chamber of Commerce got it right as the first opponent of this scheme.

Instead, look at the sensible traffic mitigation measures like reducing taxi cruising by adding more taxi stands.

Better regulating our streets and others - proposed by Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free with its \$500 million or more in incidental revenues and the revenue measures - making suburban and out of state commuters share the burden of supporting mass transit - proposed by its coalition partner, the Queens Civic Congress, which raises nearly 1.8 billion (\$1,774,000,000, based on the commissions analysis).

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