

## Queens Passes On New Pricing Plan

By Juliet Werner  
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The state's Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission voted Thursday to approve a congestion pricing plan. The plan, which passed by a vote of 13 to 2, would charge drivers \$8 to bring their vehicles below 60th Street during peak traffic times – 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

It is intended to reduce pollution and generate \$491 million a year in revenue that would be directed toward expanding the City's mass transportation system.

The commission, which was created by a state law passed last July, was given eight months to tweak Mayor Mike Bloomberg's original plan. The mayor had set the northern boundary at 86th Street and capped the charge at \$4 for car trips within the congestion zone. This alternative plan will be the subject of extensive debate in the coming weeks; the state legislature has until March 31 to consider the commission's plan. The federal government has agreed to kick in an additional \$350 million if the deadline is met.

Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free Spokesman Walter McCaffrey said this 60th Street revision favors New Yorkers living uptown in some of the most upscale neighborhoods in the country.

Corey Bearak, a policy advisor for the same organization, said the tax will mostly affect outer borough residents.

"From its very inception, the public faced a stacked Commission who came to their posts hell bent on tolling and taxing New Yorkers while they protected wealthy folks from the suburbs and out of state," Bearak wrote.

According to Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, Queens' Community Boards 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 have all come out against the congestion pricing.

"Vague promises, intentions – items along those lines simply do not cut it," McCaffrey said. "The public is far too smart to fall for that kind of foolishness on the part of the commission."

The same state law that created the commission also required that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority outline its new five-year capital plan by the end of March.

On Monday, the Sustainability and Environmental Justice Initiative at the Pratt Center for Community Development presented its ideas for mass transportation improvements. Should funding become available, Pratt recommends a bus rapid transportation system that would create traffic lanes exclusively for buses along with above-ground, elevated bus stops geared toward the disabled and elderly.

"It's easily implemented and very successful mass transportation that's being used in other cities and could be placed in New York very easily if we had proper funding," Pratt spokesperson Evan Thies said, adding that overhauling the bus system is less disruptive than revamping subway lines and stations.

McCaffrey heavily questions MTA's ability to follow through.

“Even when they talk about improvements, they don’t talk about anything where the public could be assured that anything would be put into place,” he said. “We know projects should be adopted six months after approval [of congestion pricing] but there’s nothing about completion. The public has no guarantee according to the commission and their own documents that any of these improvements would in fact be put in place for the benefit of the public.”