



Friday, April 20, 2007 15 Comments

The Ultimate System: Free Mass Transit and Congestion Pricing

by Jason Varone on April 20, 2007



WABC's John Gambino spoke with Michael Bloomberg this morning. In anticipation of the Mayor's Earth Day speech, they discussed everything from congestion charging to light bulbs. Below are some highlights from their conversation, you can download to the entire show [here](#).

On congestion pricing:

If you were to charge, and I'll let you know on Sunday at 12:30, you would take the money and invest it in mass transit. We have to do a much better job of providing mass transit to parts of the city that never invested in it in the past and now we are paying for it.

If you were to design the ultimate system, you would have mass transit be free and charge an enormous amount for cars.

On Plan NYC:

A book lays out 127 different things we think we should do and the cost of every one of them, and the benefit. A handful will not be very controversial and a handful will be very controversial, most will be sort of in the middle.

We have problems right now. **Asthma and congestion cost everybody a fortune because the traffic is so bad, and if you think it's bad now it's going to get worse.**

On global warming and energy:

People argue about global warming. I can't tell you how fast the oceans will rise, whether they'll rise. I can just tell you a handful of things: dirty air isn't good for you to breathe and we aren't doing our environment any good by dumping all this crap into the air.

You want to solve the energy crisis in this country, you've got to either raise gasoline taxes or force manufacturers to make more fuel-efficient cars. That's the biggest thing you could do.

15 Comments | Last comment by Adam Leave a comment

Brad Aaron
Is it already April Fool's Day again?

April 20, 2007 at 2:32 pm [Link](#) #1

P
I saw Councilman Liu speak today and he was asked about congestion charging. He started out strongly against the proposal citing long bus + subway trips for the edges of Brooklyn and Queens.

But after the bad start he stated the need for express buses and noted that congestion is costing NYC over 50,000 jobs a year.

By the end of his comment I came to believe that a deal might be possible- we just need to provide, say, 45 minute access to Midtown from the farthest reaches of the outer Boroughs.

April 20, 2007 at 2:53 pm [Link](#) #2

Glenn
Tell me about it. Sounds like Bloomberg is a regular Sblog reader.

April 20, 2007 at 2:54 pm [Link](#) #3

Gizler
check this out:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/20/nvregion/20speech.html?hp>

"What will almost certainly be the most contentious idea, however, involves charging drivers to enter the busiest sections of Manhattan. The proposal being formulated calls for money raised from congestion pricing, which could reach hundreds of millions of dollars a year, to go into a fund for large-scale transportation investments. Those would include projects for the boroughs outside Manhattan, where drivers would be most affected by new fees that could reach \$8, minus a credit for any tolls already in effect."

April 20, 2007 at 2:56 pm [Link](#) #4

Glenn
Take the Crain's poll on congestion pricing:
<http://www.newyorkbusiness.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?category=poll>

April 20, 2007 at 3:24 pm [Link](#) #5

P
The Daily News was citing 84th or 96th Street as a border- the first time I'd ever heard it discussed so far north.

April 20, 2007 at 3:48 pm [Link](#) #6

Damian
As a Brooklyn resident (only three stops in from Manhattan), I do worry a bit about people from further out coming to my neighborhood to park and then take the train in.

I think that if congestion pricing becomes a reality, we're going to need to restrict neighborhood parking to residents by distributing permits.

But I'm behind congestion pricing 100%. I've also written my councilmember to voice support.

Have you all?

April 20, 2007 at 3:50 pm [Link](#) #7

ddartley
What Bloomberg says about how "people argue about warming" is what always comes to my mind when I hear a right winger call warming a hoax or not a big deal--regardless, shouldn't we spew less "crap" into the air?

April 20, 2007 at 4:00 pm [Link](#) #8

P
Damian- It's a valid concern but I believe that these neighborhoods are going to be some of the biggest beneficiaries of congestion pricing.

Cobble Hill and Boerum Hill are nightmares during rush hour. Many of these cars will disappear.

Furthermore, everyone acknowledges that congestion pricing has to be coupled with transit improvements. If new express buses (and subways?) cut the time of getting to Manhattan by 30 minutes (while you're taking a nap or reading a book, no less) much of the demand for the park and ride will be lessened.

In any case, your point is an argument for Shoup's market-rate parking pricing.

April 20, 2007 at 4:02 pm [Link](#) #9

Shoupista
The Shoupian "15%" curb vacancy target is best called "performance" based parking. "Market" pricing suggests renting curb space to maximize revenue. Depending on the demand, this would probably take place at a higher vacancy rate than 15%. From a street management perspective, the idea is to use the curb most efficiently, not to make the most money from it.

April 20, 2007 at 8:56 pm [Link](#) #10

Angus Grieve-Smith
You can make an argument that the congestion charging zone should include most of Brownstone Brooklyn, Astoria and LIC, and possibly the denser parts of Upper Manhattan and the Bronx (the parts where the utilities are underground). In a sane world where NYC planning didn't stop at the river, it would also include Hudson County, NJ.

The "bridge tolls" system wouldn't work very well for this, because there are so many streets connecting the optimal zone with the outside. It might be possible to put EZ-Pass on the bridges crossing the Gowanus Canal, the English Kills, Dutch Kills and Bronx River, but those are numerous, and there are still plenty of ways to get around them.

The alternative I can think of is a London-style camera system, but I'm uncomfortable with the civil liberties implications. Of course, you could argue that people give up some civil liberties in exchange for the right to drive, and that the tracking is possible with EZ-Pass and Metrocards (not to mention cell phones), but it's still problematic.

April 21, 2007 at 8:51 am [Link](#) #11

gecko
The quickest way to make mass transit free would be to take the trains out of the subways and put bike rail in at a minute fraction of the cost, though people would prefer to ride above ground if it were possible.

Eliminating the need to move more than a half ton of steel and glass per person below the current system away. Distributed and on-demand advantages makes it awesome!

April 21, 2007 at 9:34 am [Link](#) #12

Carolyn Konheim
Mayor Blows Congestion Pricing with Manhattan-centric Version of Needed Strategy

The Mayor may have just blown the best ever chance for congestion pricing of road use. His Manhattan-centric version undercuts decades of building a growing grass roots understanding that equal tolls on all entries into Manhattan below 60th Street is the best hope to reduce traffic on approach routes to the bridges that is strangulating borough economies and the quality of neighborhood life. The claims that borough motorists will pay so that affluent Manhattanites can taxi freely around Manhattan are now fueled by the Mayor's exemption of fees on taxis and extension of the cordon to 96th Street.

The attempt to cast off the onus of the northern pricing cordon to 96th Street, above which the demographics look more like the boroughs, and giving four of the nation's richest zip codes free access to the Central Business District in taxis or even in their own limousines. The exemption of nearly 400,000 vehicle trips a day across the traditional 60th Street screening would deprive transit of upwards of \$1 billion a year enough to pay the unfunded balance of the Second Avenue Subway, and without which borough motorists and transit riders will pay for that Upper East Side bonus too.

Rapid recognition by the Mayor that these flows are counterproductive and would doom the essential congestion pricing element of his sustainable growth plan will be an early test of the entire plan's viability.

April 22, 2007 at 1:47 am [Link](#) #13

Doc Barnett
The political danger there is confirmed by the Bronx's widely criticized expansion of its pricing zone into affluent neighborhoods, but in terms of fairness I'm not bristling at the idea of UESers taking cabs downtown without paying the charge. They are paying it in other ways, property taxes and the higher (taxed) expenditures all around that come with living in expensive neighborhoods. I live downtown, and very rarely take taxis, so I don't have much self interest here in either direction, I just want to face fewer aggressive commuters in personal cars on my daily walk to work and fewer unskilled suburban drivers out for a thrill on weekends.

On the question of where to draw the zone border, and why not expand it to city limits (which I'd propose as a thought experiment), it makes sense to base congestion pricing on land use and land value. Drivers who don't even live in the city can consume 80 square feet of 5th Avenue for as long as they want (driving up and down) in a way that isn't even legal for non-drivers. They're squatters with engines, formerly covered up by the relatively high cost of autos and now exposed by their cheapness.

An ideal pricing plan would have concentric zones following land value contours, charging drivers each time they enter more expensive zone and accounting for the time that they spend in its public space. It's disturbing in terms of surveillance and doesn't jibe at all with the traditional fiction of automobile freedom, but the problems caused by autos are bigger than five decades of Chevy ads. Those disturbed by the civil liberties implications (as I certainly would be) are free to transport themselves without the extra steel--most of us are already doing just that!

April 22, 2007 at 12:44 pm [Link](#) #14

Adam
RE: Free Public Transportation - You guys have got to see this Scottish party political broadcast, it's under 5 minutes and it's great. Even if you don't agree with the proposal you can't help but smile.

[clip on youtube](#)

April 22, 2007 at 4:50 pm [Link](#) #15

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WORD ON THE STREET

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— Steven F

In response to "Oddo: Bike Lanes Were Just to Grab Attention for Loosening Enviro Review"

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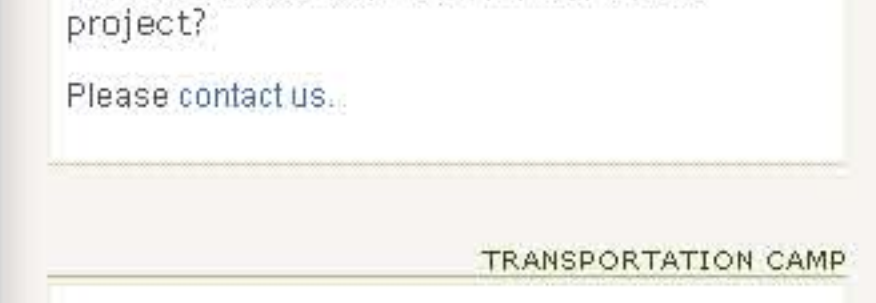
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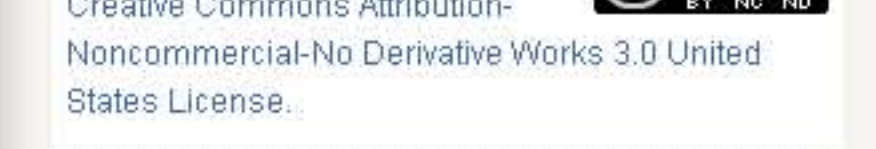
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