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01/24/2008 04:48 PM

Alternate Congestion Pricing Plan Eliminates Bus, Subway Fares

By: NY1 News



It might sound like pie in the sky— but a new plan unveiled today would not only keep bus and subway fares down, it would eliminate them altogether. It's an extreme congestion pricing plan that makes Mayor Michael Bloomberg's look tame.

NY1 transit reporter Bobby Cuza filed the following report.

In just a few weeks, subway and riders will be hit with a fare increase for the third time in less than five years. But it doesn't have to be this way, according to a radical new plan that imagines fares going down instead of up. In fact, down all the way to zero.

"The amazing thing is, is that the whole transportation system in this city will work better for the vast majority of New Yorkers if the buses and subways are made free, financed by a steep but fair and appropriate price to drive into the congested heart of New York City," said Charles Komanoff, author of this new congestion pricing idea.

Just how steep? Komanoff suggests \$16 for any car entering Manhattan below 60th Street, 24-hours a day. The fee would be double that for trucks. That's just for starters. There also would be a 25 percent taxi surcharge, and higher fees for parking on the street.

It's all the brainchild of Ted Kheel, 93, the renowned labor negotiator who commissioned the \$100,000 study, which was formally presented at a breakfast Tuesday. It may sound extreme, but supporters say the plan takes congestion pricing to its logical conclusion.

"As the city grows in size, and traffic congestion becomes greater, the plan will become more and more viable," said Kheel.

If the plan somehow were enacted, the report found, the results would be dramatic. Traffic in the zone would plummet by 25 percent. Vehicle speeds would increase 34 percent. The fees would generate almost \$4 billion annually -- offsetting the need to collect fares, with almost \$500 million left over for transit improvements.

Buses in particular would benefit from less traffic and a faster boarding process.

Though it's an understatement to say it would be a tough sell politically, supporters say the idea of free mass transit makes their plan more attractive than Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

"Maybe paradoxically, the Kheel plan might go over better with the public than the Bloomberg plan because it is going to deliver tangible benefits," said Kumanoff. "It's not something in the abstract."

However worthy an idea, it seems unlikely New Yorkers will see free subways and buses anytime soon. It's not even being considered by the Congestion Pricing Commission, which votes next week on a proposal to forward to lawmakers.

Meanwhile, that fare hike on subways and buses is set to take effect on March 2.

- Bobby Cuza

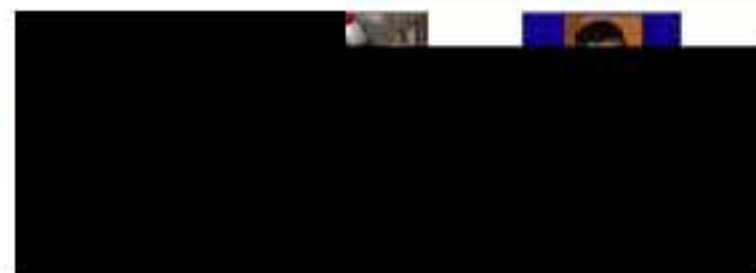
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