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Editorial thoughtfully highlighted traffic plan

To the editor:

I was lead author and "traffic modeler" for the Kheel report on pairing free transit and congestion pricing, and want to thank you for the thoughtful editorial you ran about it last week. ("Is there such a thing as a free ride," March 6)

You highlighted well Ted Kheel's critical point that the congestion pricing "stick" for automobile travel must be paired with a pricing "carrot" for mass transit travel.

I was also glad you didn't buy the notion that free transit will mean hellishly crowded subways. Our report showed that this need not be the case.

I would like to address your one criticism, that \$4 billion is too high an estimate of the value of time that drivers, truckers and bus riders would save under the Kheel Plan by not being stuck in traffic.

Like all the estimates in our report, this one was both carefully considered and conservative. To derive it, we methodically assigned values of time to the range of vehicles driven in the city - from 18-wheelers and "man with van" to single-occupant vehicles and carpools. The average worked out to around \$30 an hour per vehicle, as you reported. For comparison, the city comptroller's recent report on the cost of air flight delays used a value of \$48 an hour per passenger.

Whatever number you ultimately choose, there's no arguing that Ted Kheel's plan promises big benefits to virtually all New Yorkers, including most of those who live in Riverdale. While I hope that the City Council and state Legislature will ratify Mayor Bloomberg's congestion plan this month, we should also look to what the mayor himself has said is the "ultimate system": a steep charge for Manhattan-bound traffic, and free mass transit.

CHARLES KOMANOFF

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