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## Transportation Advocates Agree: The M.T.A. Is in 'Deep Doo-Doo'

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Last night at the New York Blood Center auditorium on the Upper West Side, Assemblyman Micah Kellner moderated a panel on post-congestion-pricing solutions for city transportation that reached a general consensus but no real solution: Congestion pricing is not a bad idea, the proposal was just executed poorly, and right now the M.T.A. is, as one panelist said, in “deep doo-doo.”

“The congestion pricing plan proposed by Mayor Bloomberg failed to gain approval in the State Legislature in the spring,” said Kellner, who was a vocal proponent of congestion pricing. “Neither the plan’s supporters nor its critics seem to have a firm idea of what to do next.”

Before introducing the panelists, he explained that they had invited a representative from the M.T.A. (“Just so it didn’t seem like we were M.T.A.-bashing”), but the authority “chose not to participate.”

The evening’s guests included labor lawyer Theodore Kheel (later introduced as “a great hero from the last century in mass transit”), Gene Russianoff of the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign and Jeffrey Zupan from the Regional Plan Association. They sat onstage in front of an audience of about 40, passing two semi-effective microphones back and forth.

“I personally supported congestion pricing as well as the millionaires’ tax,” Kellner said, “because I believe New York is really facing a traffic and mass transit crisis requiring decisive action.”

He then passed both microphones to Kheel, who is 93 years old, and whose past in New York’s transit agencies is legendary. Kheel also [made headlines recently when he proposed using revenue from](#) congestion pricing to make mass transit totally free.

On the politics of congestion pricing, Kheel said, “The promotion, I thought, was in the wrong order. If you start out with free transit, you start out with something people would welcome.”

Russianoff said, “The M.T.A. is in the middle of a gigantic financial crisis. I don’t believe they’re crying wolf, I believe they have tremendous problems.”

He went on to say that only once before, in 1980 and ’81, were there fare hikes during consecutive years (as there likely will be in 2007 and 2008) and that the M.T.A. is the fifth largest borrower in the U.S.

Jeffery Zupan took the microphone and said with some amusement, “The M.T.A. is in deep doo-doo right now and it’s only going to get worse.”

After the panel, Zupan told me he thought Bloomberg was brave to have raised the issue of congestion pricing. “People thought it was politically impossible,” Zupan commented.

He thinks the problem was in the timing.

“It was kept pretty secret, so it dropped, with PlaNYC, like a bombshell, because they didn’t share thinking.”

I caught Kellner on his way out and asked him about Bloomberg’s legacy.

“The two things he’s going to be known for as mayor are going to be more tickets and garbage trucks,” Kellner said. Later, he added that he would also be remembered for “things falling out of the sky.”

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