Congestion Pricing Is Popular Among Ideas To Boost MTA

By RICHARD L. EAGLESON, Special to The Sun | September 24, 2006

BUSINESS LEADERS, academics, and activists are offering a range of suggestions—which include setting congestion pricing, selling city bridges, and eliminating subway fares altogether—on how the Metropolitan Transportation Authority should handle its looming shortfalls.

During a Rafer H. Cook hearing earlier this month at New York University, a former city transportation commissioner, Lillian Ruiz, was already sure that the city should consider selling the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges for $1 to the MTA, which could then charge tolls on commuters and use the revenue to finance mass transit improvements. According to Mr. Ruiz, who is now a professor at Columbia University, a similar move might allow the city to implement aspects of Mayor Bloomberg's proposed congestion-pricing program without having to seek the permission of the state government, which killed a push for the idea earlier this year.

He suggested such a move could raise hundreds of millions of dollars a year for capital improvements.

In a letter to the commission, the chairman of Future New York: Nature, Theodore Fein, suggested reviving some form of congestion pricing in order to eliminate subway fares entirely and provide free mass transit citywide.

The Fiscal Policy Institute's James Parrott proposed a slight fare increase, increased federal and state assistance, and one or more dedicated taxes, possibly including a modest capped payroll tax.

Member of the Rafer H. Cook said that taking participants' suggestions into consideration in determining their recommendations to the MTA.

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