Thank Albany. By segmenting the 30-35 percent transit fare increase into three stages, the legislature has opened the door for a broad-based campaign to put an end to fare hikes and institute genuine transportation reform.

Hike 1, the 10-12 percent rise in subway, bus and rail fares set to take effect within a month, is a fait accompli. But Hikes 2 and 3, set for 2011 and 2013, are fair game. With municipal and state elections in the offing this year and next, the timing couldn’t be better.

Hikes 2 and 3 are each intended to net $400 to $500 million annually. A geographically balanced traffic-pricing plan can replace that, no sweat. The MTA rescue plan I laid out in March, featuring a time-varied ($1-$2-$3-$4-$5) price to drive into the Manhattan CBD (charged inbound only) along with a 20 percent taxi fare surcharge, would bring in $1 billion a year. The plan can be ratcheted up as need warrants and politics allow.

I know, I know — tolls have already failed, twice. But the Bloomberg and Ravitch Plans were grossly skewed, with a Jersey exemption and a Manhattan free pass, among other failings. The messengers, through no fault of their own, were flawed as well.

Rather than a billionaire mayor or another permanent-government state commission, we need a popular movement made up of straphangers, bus riders, truckers and tradespeople (who easily make up the CBD toll in saved time), business interests, pedestrians and cyclists — a true New York majority. And we should start posing the question now, as the 2009 municipal elections get in gear: Which should the MTA toll — transit users or traffic?

It is true that the recession has eased traffic congestion. By how much is hard to say, but...
vehicle volumes are down 5 percent, the drop in gridlock — time stuck in traffic — may be as great as 10 percent citywide and 20 percent within the CBD. When the Albany deal was revealed this week, a policy savant told me it demonstrated "the lack of political support for red traffic congestion." He may be right, but I believe that as fare hikes and a general economic recovery restore car use to prior levels, gridlock will again matter.

The German social thinker Wolfgang Sachs drilled to the heart of gridlock several decades ago:

Once a certain traffic density is surpassed, every driver contributes involuntarily to a slowing of traffic. The time that the individual driver steals from all the others by slowing them down is greater many times over than the time he or she might have hoped to gain by taking the car. (emphasis added)

Sachs’ "theft of time" can now be quantified. Using the Balanced Transportation Analyzer computer model I’ve developed with transit advocate Ted Kheel, I estimate it to average three hours per weekday car round-trip into the CBD and back home. Meaning: each a weekday drive into the Manhattan Central Business District imposes aggregate delays on all other motor vehicle users totaling nearly three hours (more for peak-period trips, less for off-peak). Applying an estimated per-vehicle cost of $35-40 per hour spent in NYC traffic (a blend of costs for 18-wheelers, plumbers’ vans, private cars, etc.), the societal "time cost" imposed by each car trip into and out of the CBD is around $100.

(Note: figures in the previous paragraph are derived in the BTA worksheets, "Delay Costs" and "Value of Time," and were revised by the author in August, 2009 to reflect modeling refinements following the May 7, 2009 appearance of this post.)

This “theft of time” by auto trips into the CBD should form one moral basis for our transportation reform campaign. The other, of course, is the need to prevent any further burdening of hard-pressed working people with the MTA’s financial failings.

Ted, who turns 95 on Saturday, has said that if he were younger he would run for mayor on this platform. Here’s a Plan “B”: The advocates who fought valiantly for the Ravitch Plan unite behind a new, effective and equitable approach such as the traffic-pricing plan outlined here — one that breaks, finally, the triple hell of spiraling fares, traffic gridlock, and the...
tyranny over mass transit. Candidates run for City Council and state legislature on this and we elect them.
DOT Should Bypass CB 12 and Build Out the Dyckman B Project
The Ravitch Commission unveiled its MTA financial rescue plan on December 2, 2008. It was enacted into law by the state legislature yesterday May 6, 2009. The plan raises some $1 per year in new revenues for MTA. I do believe that Governor David Paterson and Senator Majority Leader Malcom Smith deserve a lot of credit for pushing this through in a little over six months. This is lightening speed by Albany standards.

Of course, while I would disagree, the powers that be in Albany figured that riders would bear some of the pain -- thus the fare hike.

The plan puts MTA on a relatively stable footing for the next few years. The challenge now for those of us who believe in sustainable transportation for the NY-NJ-CT area to make the case for FREE public transit paid for with cordon tolls at the Manhattan CBD and other charges to motorists, aimed at substantially reducing car use in the most crowded parts of the region already well-served by public transit.

Drivini -- that's "Drive to Work Day" -- June 1, 2009 -- the first day of the fare hike, to commemorate what happens if we listen to what the politicians are encouraging us to do.

What if a bunch of us transit, bike, foot commuters all decided to drive one day. (Of course we would all have to rent or borrow a car.) Congestion is one of those non-linear relationships. If we picked the right day and hour (non-holiday mid-week in the spring or fall, 6-7am), adding a relatively small number of cars to the normal traffic volumes could really slow things down. We could scales more if we focused on one east river crossing like the brooklyn bridge. It would be an interesting experiment and potentially an important demonstration of the benefits of congestion pricing/reduced transit fares.

It would be like critical mass turned on its head.
How Much Will Fares Rise Without Closing the MTA Capital Plan Gap?
Try 25%
By Charles Komanoff | May 12, 2015
When the MTA's chief financial officer warned last month that the likely price for failing to fund the authority's capital plan was a 15 percent fare hike, the response was swift. Just 24 hours later, according to Newsday, MTA chief Tom Prendergast “backed away” from that scenario, calling it “unconscionable.” Evidently the one thing worse […]

The State Senate’s MTA Financing Plan Doesn’t Add Up
By Aaron Naparstek | Mar 17, 2009
Here’s one little problem with the Kruger, Diaz, Espada, Monserrate MTA financing plan: They got the math wrong. The State Senators (for convenience sake, let just refer to them “The Fare Hike Four” from now on) say they can satisfy the MTA’s short-term financing needs with a four percent fare and toll hike and a […]

Fare Hike 2014: Without New MTA Revenue, $137 Monthly Pass Could Happen
By Noah Kazis | Apr 7, 2011
With each passing month, the MTA comes closer to the day of reckoning on its unfunded capital plan — the maintenance work that keeps trains and buses running and the expansion projects that provide more access to the system. While the first two years of the 2010-2014 capital budget were funded, there is a $10 […]

HERE’S THE RISK TO STRAPHANGERS KICKING THE CAN ON THE MTA CAPITAL PLAN
By Charles Komanoff | Jan 11, 2016
Rumors are swirling that the long-awaited answer to the key question vexing the MTA — how the $8.3 billion share of the unfunded portion of the MTA capital plan will be paid for — is that dreaded four-letter word: D-E-B-T. According to the deal reached by Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio in October, […]

Straphangers: Cuomo Funding Top 2011 Worst-in-Transit List
By Noah Kazis | Dec 13, 2011
Looking back on 2011, there was a lot more news for New York City transit riders than good news. The Straphangers Campaign released its annual list of the ten best and worst events: subway and bus riders, and topping the “worst” list are three separate ways that Governor Andrew Cuomo has attacked […]

DiNapoli: If Cuomo Borrows More, the MTA, Get Ready for Fat Fare Hikes
By Stephen Miller | Oct 21, 2014
Without a commitment from the state to close the $15.2 billion gap in the MTA’s capital program, the cost of a MetroCard is likely to spike as the MTA adds to its cumbersome debt load, according to new report from Comptroller Tom DiNapoli. The warning comes as Governor Andrew Cuomo and the legislature […]