



## Testimony to the New York State Assembly on PlaNYC and Congestion Pricing

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Good morning. My name is Christopher Jones and I'm Vice President for Research for Regional Plan Association, a private, nonprofit research and planning organization serving the greater New York metropolitan region. We appreciate this opportunity to testify in favor of PlaNYC, the most exciting and comprehensive initiative that the region has seen in decades, and particularly to address the most critical single element of the plan—congestion pricing. We also appreciate the efforts of Speaker Silver and other members of the Assembly to giving their expeditious consideration of this rare opportunity.

For nearly 20 years Regional Plan Association has advocated for congestion pricing, paired with a robust mass transit system, as the fairest and most effective solution to traffic congestion. That is why we made it one of the most important recommendations of our Third Regional Plan in 1996. It is one of those elegant theories that economists and transportation planners agree should work, but until recently, there were just too many practical objections that were difficult to overcome: The technology wasn't ready yet. Toll plazas would cause traffic backups. It was an untested theory with no empirical evidence of success.

One by one, those concerns have fallen by the wayside. E-ZPass and other technologies allow for traffic to flow freely across boundaries of a congestion zone. Toll plazas are being phased out on bridges, tunnels and highways throughout the world, with non-stop, booth-less toll collection. And the success of congestion pricing in a growing number of cities from London to Stockholm are proving that it works.

In fact, one of the largest hurdles was a fatalistic attitude toward traffic. Much like the weather, you could predict it, you could curse it, but there wasn't much that most people thought you could do about it. Now that perception is rapidly changing as well. In fact, both supporters and opponents of congestion charging are largely in agreement that something can and must be done. Anyone who drives on or lives near any major bridge or highway knows that

traffic has gone from being a nuisance to being a crisis, and if we don't do something now, it's only going to get a lot worse. There is a growing consensus that the risks to our public health are too high, and the costs to our economy are too great.

So the question is not whether we should do anything about congestion, but what we should do about it. And if you take a close look at all the options—as RPA has done, as the Partnership for New York City has done, as Environmental Defense has done, as the Mayor has done—then you have to come to the inescapable conclusion that you can't solve the congestion crisis without congestion pricing. It is simply the most powerful, the most flexible, and, we would argue, the fairest way for dealing with congestion.

That it's the most powerful tool is beyond argument. I don't think anyone would disagree that an effective pricing system can reduce congestion more dramatically than any action short of banning cars and trucks altogether. London achieved a 30 percent reduction in congestion delays and Stockholm experienced a reduction of more than 20%. It's also powerful because it simultaneously raises revenue to improve bus, subway and rail service, improvements that can and should be prioritized to serve neighborhoods that currently have the worst transit service and fewest options. Funding is not in place to meet the critical investment need of our transit system – the \$30 billion in new funding that this Region desperately needs to improve and expand its transit system -- and there are no signs that any will be in offing without congestion pricing.

It's the most flexible congestion-fighting tool because it can be modified, improved, or even suspended if it doesn't achieve all the goals that it's designed for. Boundaries, pricing, free entry times, parking policies, exemptions and other details can all be adjusted as needed to get it right.

That's why putting a pilot in place is so important. The City has done an excellent job of modeling the effects of different policies and has designed a sophisticated and comprehensive traffic-reduction program. But there is simply no substitute for experience, as well as a wide range of program enhancements, from residential permits to varying prices by time of day, that can be implemented and fine-tuned as needed.

Finally, the congestion pricing plan proposed by the Mayor would be much fairer than the system we have in place today. This is not to make light of the cost that it would impose on people with modest means who for any number of reasons might have to drive into Manhattan on either a regular or occasional basis. But the number of people in that category is extremely small, especially when compared to the vast number of people, most of them decidedly less well-off than drivers, who would benefit. Only one percent of New York City

workers currently drive into Manhattan for free and do not have a reasonable transit option. And they, on average, have higher incomes than those who use transit. The vast majority who use transit users will benefit from better service. The few who drive will have a less congested street and highway network.

Certainly congestion pricing is fairer to the asthma-sufferers who are concentrated in poor neighborhoods, many of which have asthma rates four times the national average. And congestion pricing is fairer to the majority of drivers who already pay to enter Manhattan on bridges and tunnels that are already tolled. These drivers are footing the bill for our transportation system while those who can take the un-tolled crossings get away for free. This system is unfair, irrational and ultimately ineffective in controlling traffic.

Today, New York City has an historic opportunity to take a leadership role. There is no question but that, after the enormous success in London and Stockholm, congestion pricing is the wave of the future. Our competitors around the globe will be doing it, and our partners across the country will be doing it. The question is, will we lead on this and take advantage of the opportunity afforded by Mayor Bloomberg's bold initiative, or will we wait - for our mass transit to fall further behind our needs, for congestion to get even worse, and for our global competitors to gain more on us - before we realize that we should have done it long ago.

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