

FAIR CONGESTION PRICING ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

MTA Public Outreach & Hearing Summary

October 13, 2021

Over the last month, the MTA has held numerous public hearings on congestion pricing as part of the required Environmental Assessment. Individual hearings were targeted to specific areas in the metropolitan New York region, including Manhattan within and outside of the Central Business District, New Jersey, suburban New York counties, Long Island, and the outer boroughs of New York City.

Two hearings were held for New Jersey. The MTA began with a summary of the project and the environmental assessment process, touting the expected benefits of reduced traffic and transit funding. Preliminary ranges for toll prices were given: \$9 - \$23 for EZ Pass at peak hour and \$14 - \$35 for tolls by mail. While they cautioned that final numbers would depend on credits and exemptions, these figures are startling and give us an idea of the hit New Jersey residents will be taking to enter Manhattan's central business district.

Representatives Josh Gottheimer and Bill Pascrell testified in opposition to the pricing scheme. Their points included the high bridge and tunnel tolls NJ is already paying, as well as the NY income tax burden, the inequity that no revenue will go to improvement of NJ Transit, and the need for collaborative regional solutions to congestion and transit funding, instead of the exclusion of NJ to date. They were the only NJ officials to comment at the public hearings.

While a number of environmental and transportation nonprofits applauded congestion pricing, even supporters called for New York to cooperate with New Jersey and share revenues. Others noted the need for major transit improvements, including Gateway and the new Port Authority Bus Terminal, to be completed before congestion pricing, to give commuters a real alternative. Below are examples of comments and questions raised at the hearings:

- The MTA has no accountability; what is its spending plan?
- What revenue will go to MTA bureaucracy? There should be oversight and mandates for better service
- New Jersey should have a seat on the Traffic Mobility Review Board

- There should be credits for all NJ bridge and tunnel crossings
- Will tolls continue to rise if congestion is not reduced? High Port Authority tolls haven't discouraged traffic
- Wealthy Manhattanites benefit at the expense of others
- Motorcycles and e-scooters should be exempt
- Trying to control how people move about will fail – routes change with conditions
- Cab drivers should be exempt. They have to be in Manhattan
- Seniors and the disabled should be exempt – hard to access subway
- If commercial traffic isn't exempt, prices will go up

Even in the hearings targeted to the NY suburbs and Manhattan, while there was frequent testimony that congestion pricing would improve air quality and transit, many commenters raised concerns:

- Rockland has no one-seat ride, limited bus and train service
- Transit access is limited in many areas, including Battery Park City, Lower East Side, Roosevelt Island and outer boroughs
- Neighborhoods north of 60th Street CP boundary will be impacted by parking
- Garage prices will go up
- Small vendors, including those at Hunts Point Market, can't pay higher delivery costs from CP; will go out of business
- Manhattan has no representation on the Traffic Mobility Review Board
- The scheme is classist, antifamily, and anti-senior citizen
- The subway is not safe, and we already pay the highest taxes anywhere
- Upper East Side and Upper West Side will be collateral damage from diverted traffic and parking

A later series of hearings focused on Environmental Justice (EJ) communities, defined as minority and low-income populations. The NJ hearing did not produce any testimony from these

groups - a clear failure of MTA's outreach. New York's EJ hearing, which included many subsidized housing residents, yielded interesting comments:

- The tax is regressive; all about raising money not improving the environment
- Eliminate parking placard privileges
- NY has caused congestion by overdevelopment, use of streets for bike and bus lanes, no enforcement of double parking
- Subsidized housing residents should be credited
- Will increase costs of goods and services
- Cars are needed for family and medical visits – this divides the community. Shouldn't have to pay to move around in my own city
- Nonprofits delivering meals and services to those in need will see huge cost increases

There were certainly statements in support of congestion pricing, even that the congestion pricing area should be much larger, with no exemptions at all. But the many issues brought up by both NY and NJ citizens speak to the complexity of this proposal and its impacts – underscoring that New Jersey needs to be a full partner in evaluating this program.

We encourage New Jersey businesses and residents to express their opposition and concerns to the MTA:

- Online Comment Form: https://mta-nyc.custhelp.com/app/cbd_tolling
- Direct Email: CBDTP@mtabt.org

The main project website is: <https://new.mta.info/project/CBDTP>