

Editorial

NYC Congestion Tax Won't Solve Traffic Problems

According to a report commissioned by the Partnership for New York City, the city's central business district, all of Manhattan below 60th Street, takes in 3.6 million people each business day, 2 million of them commuters, and 44,000 trucks. Forty percent of the vehicles seen on the streets have only one occupant, and it takes 54 percent more time to get anywhere below 60th Street on a weekday than during off-peak traffic.

Traffic congestion costs New York City some 52,000 jobs and \$13 billion every year. When the 810,000 vehicles that come into Manhattan every day get caught in gridlock, restaurants lose about \$213.5 million a year, various healthcare businesses \$405 million and manufacturing a whopping \$2 billion. The problem shows no sign of diminishing any time soon. The population of New York City is expected to grow by another 1 million people in the course of the next 25 years, and logic dictates that the local economy, the environment and the quality of life in general, all of which are impacted by traffic congestion, will suffer in direct proportion. The traffic congestion even renders existing solutions useless. New York City has one of the best mass transit systems in the world, but surface traffic gridlock affects it, too. "It's faster to walk than to take a bus in New York," Partnership for New York City Chief Executive Officer Kathleen Wylde said.

To address this problem, Mayor Michael Bloomberg has proposed charging

drivers a fee to enter Manhattan and drive below 60th Street. The practice, known as congestion pricing, has already been instituted in several major cities around the world, London being a prime example. Drivers are charged the equivalent of \$16 a day to enter the central business district of the capital of Great Britain. According to reports, congestion pricing has reduced traffic in London by 15 percent. Mass transit options, such as buses, move faster and represent a practical alternative to driving.

That may very well be the case, and we're happy for London that a solution has been found to its traffic problems. It should be readily apparent, however, that congestion pricing is not the answer for New York City.

Bloomberg has said he would exempt New Yorkers from paying a fee to enter the central city. Who, exactly, does he define as a "New Yorker"? According to statistics, 16.6 percent of the drivers entering Manhattan on any given weekday are from Queens. We would hope that these drivers, as residents of the city of New York, are to be exempted from paying the fee that Bloomberg wants to charge. If not, as former City Councilmember Walter McCaffrey, who now heads a group opposed to congestion pricing, points out, large areas of Queens are vastly underserved by mass transit. Many residents of these areas have no choice but to drive wherever they need to go, especially into Manhattan. Asking them to pay more just to get to or cross Manhattan is patently

unfair. "This will hurt a lot of people who are just trying to make ends meet," McCaffrey has been quoted as saying. We agree.

If drivers are to be exempted, how will the exemption be accomplished? Putting something like the EZ-Pass lanes now in operation on toll bridges and tunnels on currently toll-free entry points will do nothing to alleviate the congestion that already exists and will certainly add to it. The same is true for checking off license plates as cars pass through a portal to Manhattan. Some poor soul who has just taken title to a car and for whatever reason has not had the time or opportunity to register new plates with whatever agency will keep track of exempted vehicles will inevitably be the cause of a traffic jam at least equal to the ones that currently afflict the city. McCaffrey's Coalition to Keep NYC Congestion-Tax Free speaks eminent good sense and anyone seeking a solution to the city's traffic congestion problems would do well to listen.

We also agree with Councilmember John Liu, head of the council Transportation Committee, who holds that the city should look for other ways, such as more express bus service, to address the problem. A "disincentive program", as Liu refers to congestion pricing, should be the last resort for solving New York City's traffic woes, not the first. We should be encouraging people to come into the five boroughs of New York City, not give them reasons to stay away.

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Thank you.
Sam Chekwas
Seaburn Books

Has Plans For P.S. 3

To The Editor:

I am writing to inform the public that I met with a coalition of parents on December 1, 2006, to discuss the latest proposal offered by the Department of Education [DOE] regarding P.S.3, affectionately known as "the little red schoolhouse". The many parents I have spoken to are adamantly against the school being converted into an Early Childhood Center as opposed to our original request for a junior high school. Any proposal that does not make provisions for the creation of additional middle school seats is not acceptable. Consequently, at the meeting we pledged to work together to ensure that we receive a proposal from DOE that is reasonable and meets the educational needs of our children.

Although we oppose the latest proposal, we appreciate and commend the Department of Education's written commitment to pre-

serve the façade of the building. As I have asserted in the past, saving P.S. 3 from the wrecking ball will help to protect the quality of life and residential integrity of the neighborhood. More importantly, it shows the Department of Education's willingness to listen to the community and their elected officials when making important decisions that affect their communities.

Once again, however, I requested that P.S. 3 be converted into a locally zoned middle school for grades 6 through 8 to help alleviate the overcrowding in our neighborhood junior high schools. The problem of overcrowding in these existing schools is a great concern among parents in my district and must be addressed. Moreover, the community is dedicated and willing to work with the Department of Education to find an acceptable solution to this problem.

During the meeting with parents, there was also a discussion about an alternative plan that we believe is a fair and sensible compromise. If the DOE is adamant about building an Early Childhood Center than the alternative to a middle school at P.S. 3 may be placing grades Pre K through 2 at that site and expand P.S.196 to accommodate grades 3 through 8. This alternative was discussed and requested at an October 20 meeting with Deputy Chancellor Kathleen Grimm. In the end, we are attempting simply to achieve the goal of middle school seats to be added for

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Astoria Has A Bookstore

To The Editor:

I would like to bring to your notice an article I read in your paper [Vallone Welcomes Bookstores to Set Up Shop In Astoria, John Toscano, Nov. 29, 2006]. It was reported that Councilman [Peter] Vallone is making an effort to lure the big chain bookstores to our community. Your article did not mention the fact that there is an independent bookstore in the community serving the Astoria community for over 15 years.

Seaburn Books is located at 33-18