



Maybe we can't change the weather, but we can fix our traffic

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I've seen it many times. My clients, often real estate developers, are stymied by environmental impact statements, specifically regarding traffic consequences and the need to demonstrate that traffic flow will be acceptable in the future. We traffic engineers are running out of tricks; gridlock, my nom de plume, will prevent many a project from reaching its potential.

But, you may say, that's inevitable. I disagree: We can fix a lot of our traffic problems so that "inevitable" is a century or more away. By then, New Yorkers will be flying around town in jet packs. Much of our traffic in Manhattan's Central Business District (CBD) is pass-through traffic. Drivers take the Brooklyn Bridge to the FDR to the Bronx to avoid a toll, and truckers go from Brooklyn to New Jersey via the Manhattan Bridge to the Holland or Lincoln Tunnel for free as compared with up to \$70 (for 5-axle trucks) to take the Verrazano Bridge to the Staten Island Expressway to the Goethals Bridge or Outerbridge Crossing. I maintain we can sharply reduce CBD traffic by as much as 20% and raise more than a \$1 billion for transit by correcting the location of our toll booths.

Here are some other examples from the current broken system:

We toll everybody driving to Staten Island as if it were one giant central business district. Drivers pay \$13 cash to enter the borough from Brooklyn, and \$12 to enter from New Jersey's three bridges. Truckers pay double or triple that amount, jacking up prices for everyone on the island.

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But when you start charging some people \$13 in roundtrip tolls, you get lots of zigging and zagging from drivers trying to avoid them. Worst hit is the Queensboro Bridge, sandwiched between the two toll crossings of the Queens-Midtown Tunnel and the RFK-Triborough Bridge; an estimated 50,000 cars and trucks drive miles out of their way to avoid the fare.

We collect about \$670 million annually from drivers going between the Bronx and Queens. Then we take most of that money and give it to the MTA, mainly for service to and from Manhattan's Central Business District. Yet transit is poor from Little Neck to Throgs Neck and Whitestone to Castle Hill. Fixing these inequities is as easy as lowering or eliminating tolls in some locations, and raising or introducing them in others.

My plan for N.Y.C. is simple: Lower the roundtrip tolls on the Throgs Neck, Whitestone, RFK-Triborough and Verrazano bridges by \$5. Lower the round-trip tolls on the two Rockaway bridges by \$2 or consider eliminating them altogether. Charge cars \$5 E-ZPass (\$7 cash) to cross the East River bridges and the same to cross the avenues and highways at 60th St. in Manhattan. I presented this part of the plan to elected officials who previously opposed mayor Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan back in 2008. A common theme I heard from these officials was that the boroughs were taking it on the chin, but Manhattanites escaped unscathed.

They were right. So I added a few cost items aimed at Manhattan, including an end to the parking

tax reduction for Manhattan residents, a surcharge on taxi fares south of 86th St. and increased fees on "black cars." The bottom line: \$1.5 billion in revenue annually.

We can view this \$1.5 billion per year as a \$60 billion revenue source through mid-century. This is exactly what Los Angeles citizens did by voting an additional sales tax for transportation infrastructure, raising \$40 billion in 30 years. But unlike past New York plans, I recommend approximately one-third of the money goes into improving our roads and bridges. The remaining two-thirds should go to the MTA for state of good repair and capital improvements. But, not a penny should be allocated for fare reduction or fare maintenance. Let's see some real improvements.

We can improve traffic dramatically in this city and, by the way, add 35,000 recurring jobs. It just takes a little bit of imagination.

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