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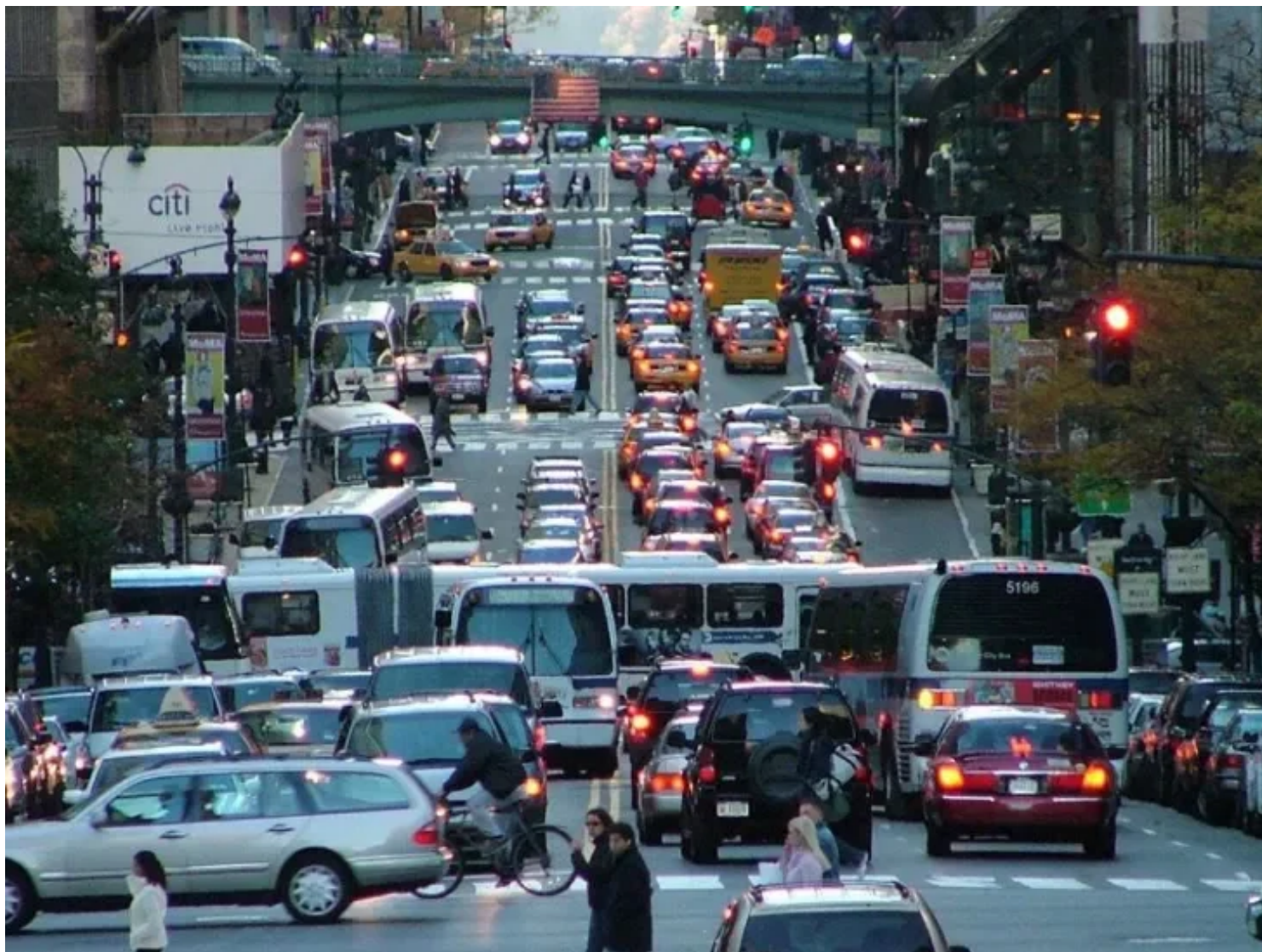
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# New York City Can Learn From London's Congestion Pricing

By: Jason Nadboy



New York City is known for having a lot of traffic. The car congestion is so heavy that drivers lost an average of 102 hours due to traffic in 2021.[1] Furthermore, fewer New Yorkers have been taking public transportation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] According to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), subway ridership was 55 percent lower in 2021 than it was in 2019.[3] Similarly, bus ridership was 44 percent lower in 2021 than it was in 2019. Before the pandemic, nearly a quarter of all trips made into Midtown and Lower Manhattan were made by cars, vans, and trucks.[4] High amounts of traffic coupled with low public transit usage led New York State lawmakers to consider charging drivers when they go into Manhattan.[5] Other cities around the world, including London, have implemented similar congestion pricing schemes over the past few decades.[6] London, in particular, has been able to effectively implement and manage congestion pricing.[7] New York can learn two lessons from the London plan. First, local leaders should play a significant role in the

implementation of congestion pricing. Second, any congestion pricing scheme should exempt drivers with disabilities, like the London system does.

Congestion pricing is a method of tolling where drivers are charged to enter all or parts of a city, with the intended goal of discouraging car use and reducing overall traffic.[8] Many economists view congestion pricing as the “single most viable and sustainable approach to reducing traffic congestion.”[9] In an analysis of motor vehicle congestion in 12 European cities, researchers at the Lund University Center for Sustainability Studies in Sweden ranked congestion pricing as the most effective way to reduce traffic in busy parts of a city.[10] The effectiveness of congestion pricing has compelled New York State lawmakers to make New York City the first city in the United States to have congestion pricing.[11] In 2019, the New York State legislature authorized congestion pricing under the Traffic Mobility Act.[12] Under the Traffic Mobility Act, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA) has to create a tolling program in the Central Business District (CBD) of New York City, comprised of most of “the geographic area in the borough of Manhattan south of and inclusive of sixtieth street.”[13] Neither the local New York City government nor the TBTA has the ability to change the boundaries set forth in the Traffic Mobility Act.[14] Implementation of the tolling program has been delayed due to issues with obtaining federal approval, which is required because federal funds went to some of the roads within the CBD.[15] These delays may soon come to an end because transit officials released the federally required environmental review in August.[16] Transit officials are aiming for tolling to begin by the end of 2023.[17]

Unlike New York City, London has had congestion pricing in place for almost two decades. In 2001, London’s local transportation authority developed a comprehensive congestion scheme that would charge many drivers five pounds each day. [18] In 2002, the mayor of London authorized the congestion pricing scheme.[19] London first began charging drivers entering the city in 2003.[20] The following year, London had a 30 percent reduction in congestion and a nearly 25 percent reduction in pollution.[21] Furthermore, most former car users switched to public transport following congestion pricing implementation.[22] London has since increased the charge to 15 pounds per day.[23] The scheme also exempted many drivers with disabilities.[24] Patients are reimbursed for trips taken to the hospital.[25] Furthermore, drivers “clinically assessed as too ill, weak or disabled to travel to an appointment on public transport” can be eligible to receive reimbursements for their congestion tolls.[26]

New York should consider following London’s congestion pricing plan for two reasons. First, local New York City officials should play a bigger role in the implementation of congestion pricing. London’s plan was developed and signed into law by city officials.[27] The Traffic Mobility Act, however, was written and passed at the State level.[28] Furthermore, the TBTA, an affiliate of the MTA, is the main implementor of the program.[29] Most members of the MTA leadership are nominated by the governor and leaders from counties outside of New York City.[30] The New York City mayor only recommends four of the 23 members.[31] Therefore, there is not enough city representation on the board of the agency that ultimately decides the structure of the tolling program. The Traffic Mobility Act provided for an additional “traffic mobility review” board that would be made up of six members and “shall be made up of regional representation, one of whom shall be recommended by the mayor of the city of New York.”[32] However, this board can only make non-binding recommendations to the TBTA.[33] Congestion pricing will impact many New York City residents, including those living in the CBD. They should have a greater say in how the tolling program functions, just like the residents of London. One possible solution would be to give the New York City Council or the mayor the power to amend or reject a congestion pricing plan.

Considering London’s congestion pricing scheme, New York should also ensure that people with disabilities are exempted from the tolls. The current proposals for congestion pricing include tolls being placed on some people with disabilities who drive into the CBD.[34] Those who rely on private cars without government-issued disability license plates will have to pay the toll.[35] Any congestion pricing plan should not disadvantage people with disabilities who usually have no reliable public transit alternative to travel into the CBD.[36] Most subway stations do not have elevators.[37] The city’s paratransit system, Access-A-Ride, has issues with reliability.[38] Therefore, many people with disabilities have to rely on cars to take them into Manhattan. New York City should follow London’s lead and ensure that people with disabilities are

either exempted from the tolls when possible or reimbursed later like in London. Following the London congestion pricing plan will better ensure the successful implementation of congestion pricing in New York City

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