



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1550-2000, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1550

Resolution calling upon the appropriate committee of the City Council to hold hearings on the feasibility of implementing congestion pricing at toll bridges and tunnels within New York City.

By Council Members Freed, Linares, Moskowitz, Reed, Fiala, Golden and Oddo; also Council Members Foster, Henry, O'Donovan and Rodriguez

Whereas, Roadways throughout the United States have experienced increases in the total annual number of miles driven, as evidenced by the fact that this figure grew from 2.026 trillion miles in 1988 to 2.619 trillion miles in 1998; and
Whereas, such increases have led to increasingly congested roadways in major cities, including New York City; and
Whereas, Vehicular traffic congestion results from an increasingly high demand for road use and a limited supply of road space; and
Whereas, This increase in vehicular traffic congestion has resulted in an inefficient flow of traffic throughout the City of New York; and
Whereas, This vehicular traffic congestion is particularly notable and problematic at bridges and tunnels in the City of New York that have tolls, as evidenced by the fact that total traffic volume at such sites grew by over two million vehicles from May 1998 to May 2000; and
Whereas, Vehicles stopping or slowing down to pay tolls at these bridges and tunnels cumulatively result in traffic jams which are particularly intense during morning and evening rush hours and on holiday weekends; and
Whereas, Congestion costs, such as wasted fuel and travel delays, cost New York and Northeastern New Jersey area residents \$7.835 trillion in delays and \$1.050 trillion in fuel, resulting in a total of \$8.885 trillion in total annual congestion costs in 1997; and
Whereas, In 1997 annual individual congestion costs for the New York and Northeastern New Jersey area reached \$640 per eligible driver and \$520 per person; and
Whereas, Individual expenditures may be even higher as a result of indirect costs resulting from higher accident rates from congestion including, additional vehicle wear and tear and higher insurance rates; and
Whereas, Environmental costs produced by vehicle emissions associated with traffic congestion can be substantially reduced through implementation of congestion pricing; and
Whereas, In 1998 the Pacific Research Institute reported that vehicle emissions such as volatile organic compounds and carbon monoxide, the major precursors to urban smog, are two-hundred and fifty percent higher under congested conditions than during free-flowing traffic; and
Whereas, Implementation of congestion pricing would also reduce energy consumption; and
Whereas, Construction of additional road capacity is not always possible or desirable in New York City; and
Whereas, Under a congestion pricing program a premium would be charged to drivers who travel during peak periods, with tolls varying according to such criteria as the amount of traffic, the time of day and the number of vehicle occupants; and
Whereas, Applying congestion pricing to City toll bridges and tunnels would permit motorists to avoid paying a premium toll in exchange for greater convenience, fewer delays and better access to more efficiently flowing highway roadways; and
Whereas, Congestion pricing would only result in a premium being paid by roadway users who elect to pay for the benefit of free-flowing traffic lanes, rather than subject the entire community to the higher roadway fees; and
Whereas, Congestion pricing would encourage motorists to carpool, use alternate forms of transportation, vary the times they travel, alter their routes or combine some trips; and
Whereas, Congestion pricing schemes have been successfully employed in areas other than transportation, such as airline ticket pricing and public utility pricing; and
Whereas, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) funded a Congestion Pricing Pilot Program in which up to five congestion pricing experimental projects nationwide were authorized; and
Whereas, While two of these authorized projects, one in Lee County, Florida and one in Houston, Texas, are still largely in the planning stages, a third project was implemented in San Diego in December of 1996; and
Whereas, San Diego's congestion pricing project has experienced considerable preliminary success as demonstrated by the fact that as of March 1997, the project had attracted and kept eighty-four percent of its "Express Pass" permit holders; and
Whereas, The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), ISTEA's successor, continues to provide funding for what was formerly known as the Congestion Pricing Pilot Program, to up to fifteen new State and local value pricing programs; and
Whereas, The California Private Transportation Company successfully implemented congestion pricing on a road in Orange County, California called "SR 91 Express Lanes"; and
Whereas, "SR 91 Express Lanes" are administered by an electronic toll system which charges varying tolls depending upon the time of day and permits vehicles containing three or more persons a discount; and
Whereas, Through early 1998, eighty-six thousand people had purchased transponders to access the "SR 91 Express Lanes" and twenty-five thousand commuters chose to pay the toll each day to avoid the more congested State Route 91 which runs parallel to it; and
Whereas, Beginning on September 30, 2000 the New Jersey Turnpike will implement a variable pricing system effective throughout the entire length of the highway which is designed to reward drivers who avoid driving during rush hour by charging them lower tolls; and
Whereas, Similar congestion pricing schemes have been successfully integrated into transportation systems in foreign countries, such as Canada, Singapore, Norway and France; and
Whereas, Toronto, Canada's sixty-nine kilometer stretch of road called the 407 Express Toll Route, which opened on June 7, 1997,

provides an excellent example of the success of congestion pricing; and

Whereas, Through August 3, 1999 over three hundred thousand transponders were purchased for travel on the 407 and the average speed on that roadway was approximately twice that of adjacent highways operating without a congestion pricing program; and

Whereas, Successful implementation by many of the aforementioned congestion pricing programs indicates that the need for tollbooths or "cash baskets" could be eliminated as tolls could be debited electronically via interaction between a microchip embedded in an in-vehicle transponder and an overhead antenna attached to a roadway sign displaying the current toll amount; and

Whereas, Vehicles would not be required to appreciably reduce speed when passing through these "toll" areas as the implementing technology is capable of processing vast numbers of vehicles per hour.

Resolved, that the appropriate committee of the City Council hold hearings on the feasibility of implementing congestion pricing at toll bridges and tunnels within New York City.

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