

EDITORIAL

Keep New York *moving*

State lawmakers should OK a new tolling plan for Manhattan to help improve mass transit for Long Island and NYC

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

New Yorkers deserve a modern transit system on par with the best around the world. They deserve to travel through Manhattan safely and smoothly. And they deserve cleaner air and better health.

It's rare that a big idea comes along that can address all of that at once.

But a plan to reduce traffic congestion in Manhattan by charging a toll to enter the central business district south of 61st Street would do that. It could have a broad impact on quality of life by reducing traffic on busy Manhattan streets, getting more trucks and cars off the roads, lowering carbon emissions, making the area safer for pedestrians, and even lowering asthma rates.

And it could provide an urgently needed infusion of cash for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Add in other funding streams, like taxes from internet sales and legalized marijuana, and there's the potential to generate \$22 billion for public transit capital projects and large-scale repairs outlined in the next five-year capital plan.

The tolling plan, known as congestion pricing, would feature higher tolls at peak times and has had great success from Singapore to Stockholm.

It is a concept applauded by economists and environmentalists, one that would be revolutionary for the region. After debating this for too many years, there are elected officials still not on board, even though they lack solid alternatives or clear reasons to object.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo hopes to get it done in the state budget, rather than in separate legislation later. He's right to make it happen now. Mayor Bill de Blasio, too, has agreed to the plan.

Now the State Legislature must get behind the effort.

Congestion pricing, when combined with other funding sources, would be the first big step toward creating a well-funded and well-managed MTA.

What would that mean for the region?

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Subway commuters could potentially count on a reliable, better ride, thanks to new signaling and cars, and other improvements. Add in expanded bus service and increased accessibility.

For Long Island Rail Road riders, it would mean new train cars, upgraded switches, improved stations, and modernized technology and communications, plus completion of the big East Side Access and third-track projects.

The urgent need for such work was clear on Tuesday when two trains hit a vehicle on the tracks in Westbury, killing three people. The LIRR's third-track project will eliminate seven dangerous grade crossings, including the site of the crash. And it will provide an alternative path for train traffic, so when problems happen, the railroad can make repairs without destroying a day of commuting.

For everyone, better public transit can spur economic growth across the entire region in the long run.

Long Island lawmakers say they back congestion pricing, but want LIRR commuters to see some money from the new tolls and for drivers not to be double-charged. Their demands are mostly reasonable, though the legislators need to

be more forceful in their overall support.

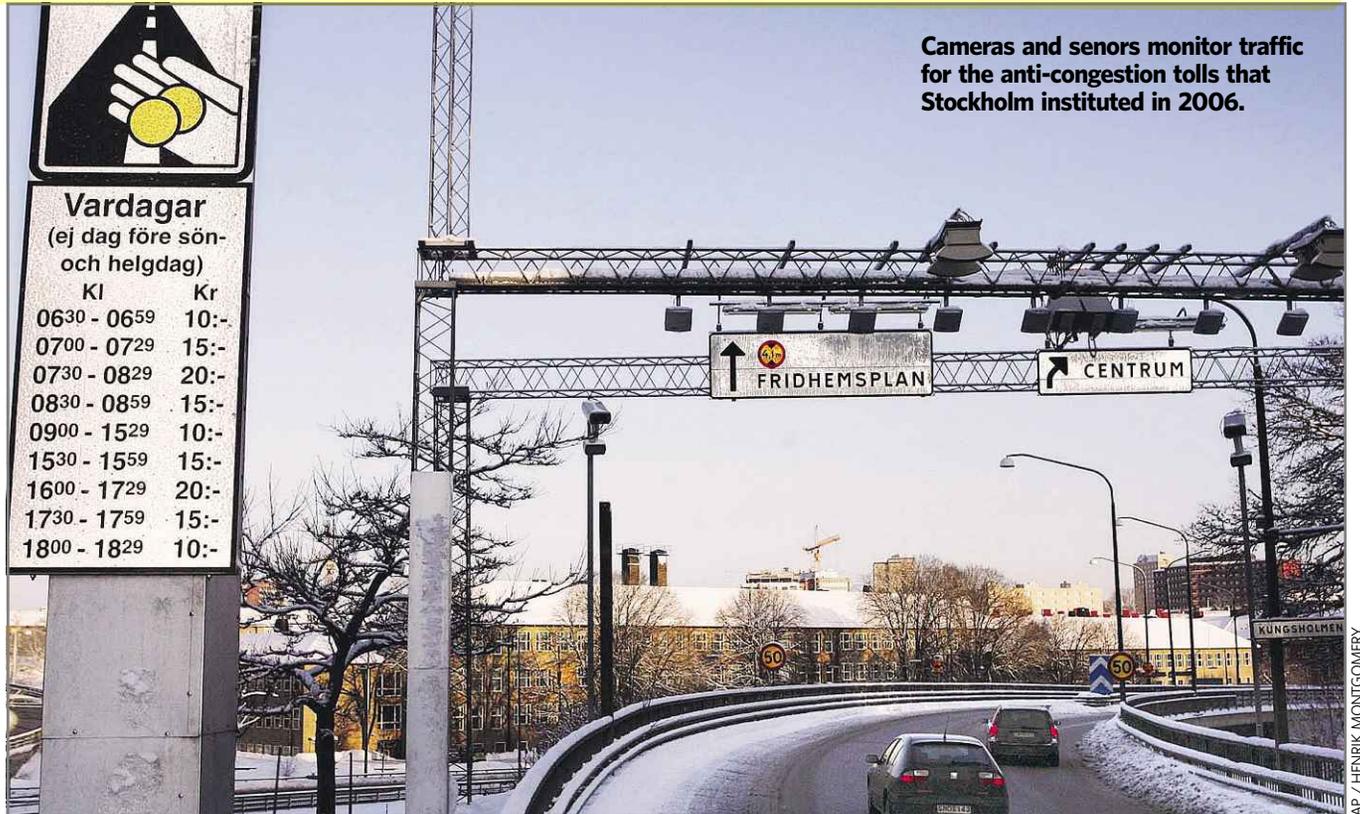
Among the biggest questions: How will the revenue be divided?

Cuomo and de Blasio have agreed that congestion-pricing revenue should go into a lockbox for the MTA capital plan, with priority given to subways and buses. That's appropriate, since the majority of the capital plan goes to New York City Transit, and because city residents will be affected by congestion pricing more. Still, Long Island commuters must see some benefit. So, there should be a commitment in the budget to dedicate a portion of the revenue to the LIRR and Metro-North.

Some New York City officials, including City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, have argued that the entire pot should go to the city. They're wrong to think so narrowly, especially when the city gets an economic boost from suburban commuters every day. And those who believe the LIRR gets too much capital-plan money forget that the city gets most of it — and always will.

Long Island's senators have raised other concerns that must be addressed. If, for instance, commuters drive over

Cameras and sensors monitor traffic for the anti-congestion tolls that Stockholm instituted in 2006.



AP / HENRIK MONTGOMERY

the JFK Bridge and pay the toll, they shouldn't have to also pay the full corridor toll at 61st Street if they drive there directly. And a proposed oversight committee that includes a New York City representative to watch over the subways also should have a commuter rail-specific representative. Plus, State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins should make her pick a Long Islander. The rules governing this committee should not give any one member veto power over a project. To stop or demand a reworking of a project should require a majority.

Then there's the need to prioritize bus service upgrades for city residents not served by the subway system.

Finally, it's important to note that we still don't know what the actual tolls would be. They would be determined by the committee at a later date. But an \$11 fee to enter Manhattan's central business district is a fair estimate — roughly what a round-trip via the Midtown Tunnel costs now.

A congestion toll won't single-handedly meet all MTA needs, save the environment or clear every road. There's more to do. But we have to start here.