

DAILY NEWS

[N.Y.ers want congestion pricing to fix transit: Members of Congress and ordinary folks agree that assessing a small fee from cars entering Midtown and Downtown makes sense](#)

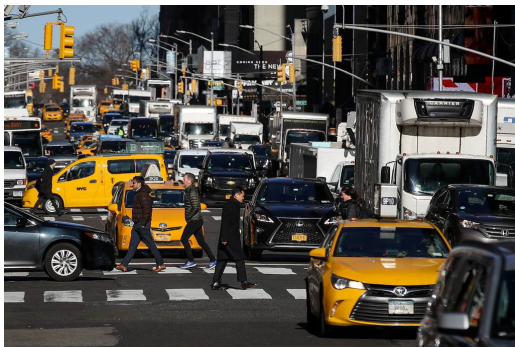
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Opinion by Dan Goldman and Jerry Nadler

In 2019, New York State authorized a congestion pricing program that will reduce traffic gridlock and automobile emissions, fix and electrify our beleaguered subway and bus systems, and make our streets safer — but its implementation has faced years of delay in Washington.

After four years of environmental assessments and studies, New York is finally on the verge of making congestion pricing a reality. The program has been signed into law, its environmental assessment has been completed, and the governor and the MTA have pledged their support. Now, with the last phase of appraisal by the federal government in the final stages, we urge the state to act quickly to make this essential environmental and public health initiative a reality.

Traffic congestion in New York City has been out of control for decades, and the emissions from cars and trucks contribute significantly to our air pollution. Our streets across the five boroughs are clogged with traffic, resulting in buses that travel at walking speed and unacceptable levels of planet-warming emissions. The average bus speed in New York City is barely above 9 miles per hour, the slowest in the country, due in large part to other vehicles blocking bus lanes.



Traffic moves along 7th Avenue in Manhattan. (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

And while New York City has the best transit system in the country, the MTA is struggling to rebound after the COVID-19 crisis sapped billions of dollars of revenue from the system, presenting a generational challenge to its future operations.

2023 public transit ridership levels are still only 81% of where they were pre-pandemic in 2019. For an agency that relies on fares for nearly a quarter of its operating budget, our subway system faces an existential threat absent the added, dedicated funding stream of congestion pricing.

Congestion pricing will generate an estimated \$15 billion annually for upgrades and expansions to our transit system, without which the quality of our public transit system will decline, impacting millions of New Yorkers and New Jerseyans who rely on it for their daily commutes to work, school, and elsewhere.

It has also been exhaustively documented that congestion pricing is a critical piece of the puzzle to combating the rapidly worsening effects of climate change. Following the implementation of congestion pricing in London, traffic was reduced while bus ridership increased so much that 30% of its roads could be repurposed for greener and more pedestrian-friendly uses. And after implementation in California, the number of commuters carpooling surged by 40%, removing more polluting vehicles from our roads and highways. Recent studies have shown that half of New York drivers would drive less often if congestion pricing were implemented.

Congestion pricing also incentivizes alternative, more climate-friendly modes of transportation than driving and reduces vehicle miles traveled, thereby reducing fossil fuel consumption and harmful emissions. New York City has one of the country's highest rates of hospitalization and death due to asthma among children and young adults, with African-American and Latino patients accounting for more than 80% of cases. The consequences of failing to implement congestion pricing, therefore, disproportionately impact low-income communities of color, who rely most heavily on public transit and have been historically forced into highway-adjacent neighborhoods that suffer from poor air quality, resulting in higher rates of asthma and respiratory illness.

To those elected leaders — mostly from outside New York City — who have been loudly critical of congestion pricing, we emphasize that the majority of New Yorkers don't own cars, and even fewer drive to work regularly. While only 3% of Upper Manhattanites would pay the congestion pricing fee, the number for the entire city isn't much larger. Only 4% of outer borough commuters drive to Manhattan for work, and those car owners earn twice as much on average as New Yorkers who don't drive. And beyond our own constituencies, let's not forget about the half a million commuter rail riders who also use the buses, trains, and accessible infrastructure that congestion pricing will improve.

Congestion pricing is the law of the land in New York City, and it is the will of the people. It is a vital tool for saving lives, improving transit, making our air more breathable, and setting our city up to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

We wholeheartedly support the program, as do our constituents. For our climate, public transportation, safety, and the city's future, we are grateful for the state's leadership and eager for its implementation.

Once the federal government gives New York the green light, we stand ready to help get this program off the ground as quickly as possible. It can't wait any longer.

Goldman and Nadler represent in Congress the business district in Manhattan where congestion pricing will be implemented.