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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Congestion Pricing Task Force
Thursday, July 22, 2021 - 6:30 PM
This meeting was conducted via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Rit Aggarwala, Michele Birnbaum, Alida Camp, Billy Freeland, Craig Lader, Valerie Mason, Sharon Pope-Marshall, Rami Siegel, Marco Tamayo,

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM. Prior to item 1, the Task Force chairs provided some updates regarding congestion pricing since the June 2021 meeting:

- The timeframe for implementation was anticipated to require approximately 18 months
- Governor Cuomo was not displaying any urgency or indicating that he was looking to expedite the implementation process, despite some officials pushing for a shorter timeframe;
- Eric Adams, fresh off his mayoral primary win, indicated he is supportive of fast-tracking congestion pricing implementation following severe flooding of the New York City Subway system caused by Tropical Storm Elsa that highlighted some of the necessary capital investments required to withstand future storms
- New York State had yet to reach out to officials in New Jersey, and had only had one discussion with Connecticut officials regarding coordination for congestion pricing implementation
- Congestion Pricing is expected to raise $1 billion annually, which would be sufficient to secure $15 billion in bonds to be used for capital improvements to the MTA transit network

Item 1: Discussion/Presentation - Impacts of Congestion Pricing in Cities Where It Has Been Implemented

Lewis Lehe, Assistant Professor in the Transportation Systems group of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, presented a synopsis of his publication "Downtown Congestion Pricing in Practice". This paper highlights the motivations, implementation, results and lessons learned from congestion pricing in London, Singapore, Stockholm, Milan and Gothenburg, using quantitative data to measure impacts.

Professor Lehe's presentation began by defining Congestion Pricing and differentiating it from other highway tolls more commonly experienced across the USA and in the New York area; he explained that London, Singapore, Stockholm, Milan and Gothenburg are the only major cities to have implemented downtown Congestion Pricing in a manner that will share similarities with what is proposed for Manhattan. He described the technologies used for downtown tolling - Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) where license plates are recognized and charged; RFID, such as EZ-Pass involving radio frequency detection, and GPS/GNSS was deployed in Singapore.

Overviews of each of the cities that were studied are as follows:

Singapore

Starting in 1975, drivers could buy a license for their windshield that would enable them to drive downtown between 7:30-9:30 A.M. It was a simple system - the color and design varied daily. The

system was effective at discouraging private car traffic, as people switched to car pools since they were exempted from the downtown restrictions. In 1997, Singapore switched to electronic road pricing (ERP), which it still uses. It employs a smart card, with in-vehicle unit (IU). Money is loaded on a card, a card reader reads it and the driver is charged when cars pass through gantries. The rates vary over the day, but not in real time. They are updated quarterly to achieve speed targets. Drivers know the fees and changes to fees in advance. The fees vary sharply over the course of the day, achieving speed targets. There are also policies involved in achieving targets.

London

Starting in 2003, London began charging vehicles entering or traveling within a zone covering much of the core of the city (but not as dense as Manhattan), with a goal of reducing traffic delays. Drivers pay once to go into zone, then can go into and out of zone, with an extensive network of cameras tracking movements for tolling purposes. The fee has increased in priced over time, from 5 pounds to 11.50. London earns 300-400 million pounds/year from the fee, which is spent on bus service improvements. The policies are not implemented in a vacuum, as pedestrian improvements and prioritized bus lanes were implemented alongside the tolling of vehicles entering the zone.

Travel times initially improved when tolling was implemented. Private car traffic volumes, which are not exempt from tolling, declined by 30% and have remained low. As the program continued, travel times started to increase once again, even though there were not increases in the number of vehicles – this is due to policy decisions such lane space shifting towards pedestrian, bus, and bikes, and due to impacts of construction, delivery vehicles and for-hire vehicles. Overall, while traffic in London is still slow, there is less pollution, fewer cars, and fewer accidents, and increased use of bicycles, taxis and motorcycles.

Stockholm

Stockholm has a similar layout to New York. The city comprises of a series of islands, allowing easier establishment of entry points for charging central business district tolls. They apply ANPR-enforced, time-variable charges when leaving and entering central Stockholm but not when driving exclusively within the zone; prices are variable throughout the day, with higher prices during rush-hour periods peaking at about 35 SEK ($1≈9 SEK). It raises about $200 million annually, which is used for transit improvements. The city is also trying to build a by-pass for traffic to go around Stockholm. It began as a trial for seven months. The public was skeptical prior to implementation, but opinion turned once population became more comfortable with it after implementation. After trial, a referendum was approved to make it permanent. This is first example of public opinion supporting it. There are now fewer vehicles going into Stockholm, with delays markedly reduced.

Milan

Unlike the other cities included in this presentation, in which the main goal of downtown tolling was to reduce congestion, Milan's motivation was to reduce air pollution and address what had become a public health crisis. Milan's tolling system is known as Eco-Pass, a daily charge around the historic city center. Drivers pay once, and are allowed to travel in and out of zone as well as within it. It targeted vehicles emitting the most pollution, and exempted cleaner vehicles; within 4 years, nearly all vehicles were cleaner and no longer being charged fees. In 2012, there was referendum to reform the program; the toll zone was now known as Area C, and had fewer exemptions and a simpler fee structure. As a result, revenues soared with funding being used to improve pedestrian infrastructure, bike lanes and tram lines. There has been reductions in CO and particulate emissions both inside and outside the zone in the range of 6% to 17%, significantly higher than anticipated.

Gothenburg

The second largest city in Sweden, Gothenburg needed funding for a rail tunnel under the city. It didn't have the same problems as other cities presented; it has the same design as Stockholm, but it was more difficult to implement than because Gothenburg is not an archipelago and has many more entry points. The plan began in 2012-2013. Vehicles entering have gone do, except in July where traffic is reduced

because of vacations. The fees raise approximately $100-200 million/year; it did reduce car traffic, but the travel time reductions were comparatively low since the baseline congestion was not particularly severe.

Following the presentation, the meeting participants had many comments and follow up questions that related to the following broader topics:

Exemptions from tolls: Professor Lehe stated that as exemptions proliferate, the system becomes more complicated for enforcement, such as checking to see whether vehicle is of a specific type exempted. He described how each case study had exemptions for certain user groups. Over time, exemptions get removed because they are more potent than had been expected. In London, black cabs had initially been exempted, but they were found to impact traffic; Stockholm and Singapore had similar experiences. There were exemptions for green vehicles, but such vehicles became more commonplace and some populations were even buying green vehicles in order to be eligible for the exemptions. London has had residential discounts and exemptions; London and Stockholm have exemptions for travel to certain health care facilities, using an identification system based on license plate readers. None of the case study cities have income-based exemptions, and Professor Lehe said implementing such a policy could be challenging due to the complexities that would be involved in crafting such rules.

Relevance of Case Study Cities with New York and the extent of Residential Populations Residing within Tolling Districts: Numerous people commented on the uniqueness of New York, it's street network, and the development patterns of other cities with congestion pricing compared to Midtown and Lower Manhattan. Professor Lehe indicated that Stockholm and Gothenburg have many residents in their respective zones; the zones in both Milan and Stockholm had some residents but were largely mixed use or commercial districts. London at one time had extended their toll district to include large a residential zone, but the Mayor of London at that time Boris Johnson worked to remove it. Ultimately it is the policy that is determinant of how congestion pricing works rather than the built environment itself.

Impacts of Congestion Pricing in areas near tolling boundaries & locations of boundaries: Several meeting attendees raised concerns regarding the placement of the congestion zone boundary at 60th Street and expressed worry about the impacts on the neighborhood immediately north of the boundary. Professor Lee stated that he had not come across any examples of drivers inundating areas near toll boundaries or parking just short of the toll zone before crossing the zone on foot or by another mode of transportation. In some of the cities he cited, the access points would preclude that type of behavior; in others like Gothenburg and London, considerable time was spent thinking about how to modify infrastructure in and around toll boundaries to address such concerns, with parking policies being a major component of their strategy. There is data to suggest that air quality benefits extend to areas bordering congestion zones, resulting from reduced vehicular traffic that is passing through communities en route to central business districts. Professor Lehe did not have enough knowledge of New York to specifically comment on the merits of a 60th Street tolling boundary versus a different street or approach.

Motivations for Cities Implementing Congestion Pricing & Relationship to other Transportation Policy Decisions: In response to several questions and comments regarding why congestion pricing as a policy was enacted in New York, Professor Lehe explained that policy decisions are often the key determinant of congestion, and that data suggests that tolling vehicles does discourage car traffic - even a relatively small fraction of behavior changes can have a significant impact on congestion levels. In each city studied by Professor Lehe, there was some kind of crisis that precipitated enactment, most commonly related to air quality and congestion mitigation. Revenue generation was not necessarily the primary motivating factor, but was viewed as a policy matter that contributed to decisions to pursue congestion pricing. In London's case, Congestion Pricing may not have moved forward without the related focus on prioritizing bus needs.

Toll Pricing Trends: Toll prices have not increased frequently in the case study cities, except in Singapore where they are changed every three months and are based on traffic levels. Toll rates have increased once in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Milan.

Tolls for passengers in Taxis and For-Hire Vehicles: In London, taxis pay a fee once per day rather than every time a vehicle crosses a boundary, and absorb the congestion fee. Ubers and other on-demand for-hire vehicles are treated differently, as Uber began in London around the same time congestion pricing was implemented, and has since been linked to some of the increases in vehicles within the congestion zone.

Item 2: Determination of Next Steps for Congestion Pricing Task Force

There was continuing concern expressed by Task Force members regarding the lack of information regarding how congestion pricing will operate in New York, the composition of the Traffic Review Mobility Board and the implications of the decisions they will make regarding fee structures and exemptions/discounts , the ability for congestion pricing to generate its revenue goals without it significantly adversely impacting New York City's economy, and privacy concerns if vehicles are being monitored by camera systems throughout the congestion zone. Multiples member suggestion the Task Force should be proactive in proposing potential exemptions such as visits to hospitals for trips starting within the congestion zone and specifying what the Traffic Mobility Review Board (TMRB) should be considering as it develops tolling policies, and potentially identify them at a resolution at a future meeting.

Given that the agency charged with implementing and operating congestion pricing is the MTA/ Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, they would be invited to a future meeting. The Task Force will also try to contact NYC Department of Finance Commissioner Sherif Soliman, who was appointed to the TMRB by Mayor Bill de Blasio.

The Task Force will also write a letter addressing the congestion fee being applied to taxis and for-hire-vehicles, stating that circumstances have changed with the pandemic since it went into effect and highlighting the need to eliminate the fees for passengers riding below 96 street riders, stating that the taxi fee is fundamentally unfair because other for-hire non-City licensed vehicles don't pay the fee. There was a vote of five in support, with three opposing letter.

Item 3: Old & New Business

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:58PM.

Respectfully submitted, Alida Camp & Craig Lader, Co-Chairs