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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Congestion Pricing Task Force
Monday, March 14, 2022, 6:30 PM
Conducted Remotely on Zoom

Please note: The resolutions contained in the committee minutes are recommendations submitted by the committee chair to the Community Board. At the monthly full board meeting, the resolutions are discussed and voted upon by all members of Community Board 8 Manhattan.

Minutes

Present: Michele Birnbaum, Lori Bores, Alida Camp, Craig Lader, John Phillips, Sharon Pope-Marshall, Barry Schneider, Cos Spagnoletti, and Elaine Walsh

Resolutions for Approval:

Item 3 - Continuing discussion of potential Task Force Recommendations to be provided to the Traffic Mobility Review Board

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM.

Item 1: Coordination with Neighboring Community Boards

Steven Brown, Chair of Community Board 7 Manhattan, provided a brief summary of CB7's views on congestion pricing. CB7 passed a resolution in 2018 in support of congestion pricing. However, he noted that although he believes their board still supports congestion pricing, there are some concerns and areas of interest that have come up since the 2018 resolution was passed since so much has changed over the past 4 years. Many of those matters mirror those that have been expressed at CB8 Task Force meetings, including how the pandemic has resulted in changes in commuting and in-person work practices, impacts on small businesses, tourism-driven economic activity, and how revenue projections have changed along with the infusion of funding post-Covid that has become available to the MTA. There was also discussion regarding parking, as some members of CB7 are concerned that recent losses of some on-street parking and a need for more parking garages will cause issues when congestion pricing goes into effect if people look to park near the toll boundary and near subway stations, which are similar to concerns raised by some CB8 members. The expensive nature of garages was also discussed.

Item 2: Updates on the Status of Congestion Pricing Implementation

One of the co-chairs of the Task Force reported that there were few updates since the last meeting of the Task Force in January. Comments from the initial outreach period can be submitted through April 27th, and then the draft Environmental Assessment is expected to be completed in the spring, at which time another public comment period will commence with public hearings expected in the late spring or early summer. An excerpt from an article was read regarding the extensive amount of data that will be included in the release of the environmental assessment, with output from modeling software generating 14 different scenarios – this information will be critical to the public's understanding of how different potential policies and pricing options to be set by the Traffic Mobility Review Board ("TMRB") will likely impact how congestion levels, air quality, and commuting patterns may change and how much revenue may be expected to be generated.

Item 3: Continuing discussion of potential Task Force Recommendations to be provided to the Traffic Mobility Review Board (see below list of options under consideration)

There was a wide-ranging discussion regarding the many issues and outstanding questions regarding congestion pricing, and how the Task Force should ultimately address these issues. The list of potential recommendations that had been generated at past meetings was reviewed as a starting point for the discussion:

Potential Recommendations Regarding Potential Policies

- *Providing municipal parking in the outer boroughs near subway stations*
- *Establishing a residential parking permit program in neighborhoods outside the congestion zone*
- *Accommodations for small businesses that will face financial strains*
- *Accommodations for non-profit businesses*
- *Revisiting taxi policies and considering eliminating all congestion fees for all yellow cabs (not just below 96th St.)*
- *Recommending hours in which tolls are in effect and timeframes of definitions for peak vs. off peak*

Potential Recommendations Regarding Discounts/Offsets/Exemptions

- *Discounts or exemptions for Motorcycles*
- *Discounts/exemptions for vehicles carrying more than a defined number of passengers (HOV) discounts*
- *Offsets for those who pay tolls on non/MTA crossings (including the Tappan Zee/Mario Cuomo Bridge)*
- *Discounts for residents living outside the congestion zone but who garage their vehicles within the congestion zone*
- *Discounts or exemptions for people performing medical-related trips*
- *Discounts or exemptions for vehicles crossing into the zone for a very short time (such as to accommodate alternate side parking activities, or if construction forces a vehicle to cross into the congestion zone)*
- *Broadening medical exemptions beyond the language in the Congestion Pricing law exempting authorized vehicles transporting persons with disabilities*
- *Tolling all entrances/exits of the Queensboro Bridge*
- *Providing no exemptions beyond those stipulated in the congestion pricing law*

With little movement by the MTA to appoint members to the TMRB, and with discussion regarding the importance of transparency, there was discussion regarding a potential resolution stating the need for the TMRB to conduct its business fully in the public domain in compliance with New York State's Open Meetings Law, which generated strong support from CB8's members in attendance.

The question of whether traffic using the Queensboro Bridge will be tolled is still unanswered, and a member proposed a resolution requesting that the policy regarding the Bridge be that all entrances and exits be tolled to avoid a chaotic situation where vehicles may inundate certain access and egress routes to avoid being tolled. The question was never called, as multiple CB8 members wished to wait to see the findings from the environmental assessment or discuss the matter further before considering a resolution. Stemming from this discussion were other proposals that related to the manner in which the Queensboro Bridge is treated, including whether the toll zone boundary could be moved further south if the bridge is tolled for all users, and tolling all East River and Harlem River crossings. Questions were raised regarding how local roads both near the Queensboro Bridge and in upper Manhattan would be impacted in different scenarios.

Other new suggestions for further consideration made were made by public attendees and CB8 members, including exempting all Manhattan vehicles, and grace periods for entering the zone for a brief amount of time, such as vehicles that did not intent to cross into the toll zone. There was extended discussion regarding the impacts that congestion pricing may have on small businesses, and NYC's critical tourist industry and Broadway in particular. Questions regarding what happens to revenue if cars stop going into the zone were also raised, along with more general concerns equating congestion pricing with a tax, and the overall high tax rates found in NYC.

There was some debate as to the purpose and intent of the Congestion Pricing Task Force, in which there was disagreement if resolutions should focus on matters that would directly affect CB8 areas both inside and outside the toll zone and in the vicinity of the toll boundary, and can inform the TMRB based on its unique situation versus whether there should be resolutions addressing broader concerns regarding the law, and, concerns regarding the revenues that will be generated as it relates to the fees that are set.

It was recognized that the next meeting of the Task Force needs to be focused on developing actionable recommendations, and that some of the issues may be better off deferred until after the Environmental Assessment is issued and the scenarios and data generated can be analyzed. Thus, it was determined that the Task Force Co-Chairs will separate any previously suggested recommendations based on whether it will be informed by the Environmental Assessment, and that a matrix of topics will be developed that identifies benefits and barriers that must be discussed before the Task Force should further consider them.

The following resolution was put forward by CB8:

WHEREAS; The Traffic Mobility Review Board (“TMRB”) is the New York State entity tasked with making recommendations regarding the central business district toll amounts and recommending a plan for credits, discounts, and/or exemptions for tolls paid; and

WHEREAS; TMRB recommendations will be provided to the Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority for approval; and

WHEREAS; the TMRB will need to hold meetings to discuss issues and make decisions with respect to rules; and

WHEREAS; the Open Meetings Law was enacted because “the public has the right to attend meeting of public bodies, listen to debate and watch the decision-making process”; and

WHEREAS; the Open Meetings Law applies to public bodies, defined to include entities consisting of two or more people who conduct public business and perform a governmental function for New York State; and

WHEREAS; the people’s right to witness and observe the governmental decision-making process in action is basic to our society. Access to public portions of meetings of public bodies must be protected and maintained; and

WHEREAS; the congestion pricing law will have an effect, and unintended consequences on residents and businesses in Manhattan and other New York City Boroughs;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Traffic Mobility Review Board comply fully with the Open Meetings Law, hold all meetings as public meetings, and allow the public to witness its deliberations and decision-making process.

Yes (9): Birnbaum, Bores, Camp, Lader, Phillips, Pope-Marshall, Schneider, Spagnoletti, Walsh

No (0): None

Item 4: Old & New Business

There was no old or new business discussed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alida Camp & Craig Lader, Co-Chairs