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Testimony of Council Member Gale A. Brewer
Before the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Regarding the Proposed CBDTP Tolling Schedule

March 4, 2024

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the City Council Member for District 6, representing most of the Upper West Side from W. 96th Street to W. 54th Street and all of Central Park. I am also Chair of the City Council Committee on Oversight and Investigations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am in favor of congestion pricing: I voted for it as a Council Member in 2008; I supported it as the Manhattan Borough President in 2019 and held a hearing on residential parking in anticipation of tolling going into effect; and I testified favorably about the CBDTP again as Council Member in 2022. My district is unique because it includes the tolling zone border at West 60th Street, and my constituents have particular concerns.

Although I have a history of supporting congestion pricing, there are major challenges that still need to be addressed.

First, I feel strongly that service improvements should be implemented before congestion pricing tolling begins. People who rarely or never use public transportation because it doesn't meet their needs must have a legitimate alternative via bus, train, or subway car.

Second, the CBD Tolling Capital Lockbox to support the MTA's Capital Plan must be transparent. New Yorkers need to see statements that show where cash is coming from, the interest it earns, and most importantly how it is spent to improve the transit system.

Traffic and Parking

Council Member Diana Ayala and I organized a meeting between elected officials from Manhattan and staff from the MTA and New York City Department of Transportation (DOT). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss parking, idling, and cars circling in communities north of W. 60th Street when tolling goes live. We learned that DOT is running a parking study to track activity before and after the "go-live" date using cameras and fieldworkers. The study

aims to distinguish residents from visitors by tracking license plates of parked cars four times over the course of the day and measuring the number and duration of incidences of double parking (DOT can also cross reference license plate data with home zip codes). All of this will help DOT determine where to install park and ride locations as well as other changes to mitigate any damage. This sounds great, but New Yorkers deserve an update before the end of 2025, and feedback from residents themselves must be part of any study.

I walked 60th St from the Hudson River to the East River with residents of the neighborhood and the staff from the MTA to discuss the singular situation of living on the congestion pricing border. We discussed tolling infrastructure and the final phase of the Traffic Mobility Review Board's rulemaking. Residents are understandably concerned about the effects on parking in their neighborhoods—especially just north of the congestion zone boundary. Many believe a negative effect of congestion parking would be partially eliminated by a residential parking system. Further, parking garages on the West Side have increased their fees dramatically. One garage in the West 60s raised monthly rates from \$440 to over \$750. That imposes yet another burden on residents who own cars.

Double parked cars and trucks are already a major traffic impediment. Riverside Blvd., specifically between West 61st and West 72nd Streets, is already a very dangerous area with vehicles not stopping at stop signs. Just yesterday, a man and a woman crossing Riverside Blvd at West 70th Street were struck by a car (not far from where another couple was hit by the driver of an SUV in October of 2023). This will only become more congested and dangerous as commuters battle for on-street parking. Riverside Blvd needs traffic lights or other form of traffic calming and control.

More from constituents:

- Crosstown bus riders are concerned that their commutes through Central Park's transverses – at 65th, 79th, and 86th Streets – will slow down as drivers shift north to avoid the toll zone.
- Heavy George Washington Bridge traffic will spill into the district due to drivers avoiding the tunnels.
- There are parking lots all along W. 59th Street where residents who live just outside the zone park their cars. It is unfortunate that they will have to pay the toll just to enter the lot.
- It is difficult and expensive to get a rental car in Manhattan. The small number of rental car agencies that do exist have terrible operating hours. Prices can be prohibitively high and inventories are small. Most rental car companies charge a premium for use of an E-ZPass. This makes it difficult to convince people to give up their cars.

Discounts and Exceptions

Yellow taxis should be exempt from congestion pricing. Unlike rideshare apps that can change

their prices at any given moment, TLC drivers are locked in at a set rate. The Independent Budget Office (IBO) estimates an exemption just for yellow taxis would cost the MTA \$35 million per year in foregone surcharge revenues, or about 3.5% of the authority's \$1 billion annual revenue estimate. One option to address the shortfall is to distribute the revenue loss equally across other passenger vehicles.

Human service programs that deliver meals up and down Manhattan as well as city-wide deserve to be exempted. For example, the Grand Central Food Program run by the Coalition for the Homeless sends three vans loaded with meals to locations throughout the city seven days a week. The van route starts and ends on East 51 Street—one van heads to the Bronx, one Uptown, and one Downtown. The Bronx and Uptown vans will be charged as they return at the end of the night.

I am pleased that the MTA created exemptions for people with disabilities (or their drivers) traveling into the congestion pricing zone. It should extend to those who visit medical facilities regularly for ongoing treatment and chronic disease. Similarly, I would like to see exemptions for healthcare workers whose shifts start or end at hours of the day or night when public transit is less available. Mt. Sinai West/Roosevelt Hospital is located at 1000 Tenth Ave which is at 59th Street, just inside the zone.

More from constituents:

- Constituents are confused about whether or not they will pay the congestion pricing toll for entering the Lincoln Tunnel from the West Side Highway (and they are mad when they find out the answer is yes).
- I know there's concern about restaurants and bars in the tolling zone losing business (and they already pay a premium to operate in Manhattan, particularly if they pay the Commercial Rent Tax).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.