



THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

ADRIENNE E. ADAMS
SPEAKER

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FHWA - NY Division
RE: CBDTP
Leo W. O'Brien Federal Building
11A Clinton Ave., Suite 719
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Environmental Justice Stakeholders Working Group:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program Environmental Assessment (EA) released on August 10, 2022 by the New York State Department of Transportation, the New York City Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. The EA does not sufficiently account for impacts on environmental justice communities and communities in the outer boroughs who cannot rely on mass transit to reach the CBD. The reality is that too many neighborhoods in New York City, like those in Southeast Queens that I represent, have long been underserved by the public transit system. It leaves them with limited transportation options beyond a reliance on automobiles. This persistent transit inequity is a major concern I share with many of my Council and elected colleagues representing communities in the outer boroughs. Many of these neighborhoods are also those that have historically been subjected to environmental racism. We must confront these realities in any planning process to enact a new tolling scheme.

While State law allows residents inside the CBD with an adjusted gross income of less than \$60,000 to be eligible for a tax credit in the amount of the tolls paid during the taxable year, there are no measures to accommodate other low-income drivers, particularly those that may not have ready access to the E-Z Pass who typically are not eligible for any discounts under the present cashless tolling program. The Executive Summary of the EA notes that "the adverse effect on low-income drivers associated with the cost of the new toll would constitute a disproportionately high and adverse effect," yet the study does not mention any efforts to lessen the burden of the CBD Tolling Program costs for these drivers. The EA should consider the potential economic impact of the CBD Tolling Program on low-income drivers, and propose proactive solutions to reduce the burden.

I am concerned about increases in parking demand within neighborhoods that are underserved by public transportation. The EA notes that although the CBD Tolling Program would result in “small changes in parking demand at transit facilities outside the CBD, corresponding to increased commuter rail and subway ridership,” no mitigation is needed. Chapter 4D, which discusses parking, only looks at neighborhoods where there is easy subway access, such as Flushing, Jamaica and Long Island City. It notes that the off-street parking facilities in these neighborhoods are already heavily used and their streets are subject to existing regulations that limit long-term parking (alternate side parking regulations) and their being a reliable source of parking. However, the study does not specifically look at the commuter Long Island Railroad stations in eastern Queens – such as in Bellerose, St. Albans, and Douglaston. These stations are not easily accessible by transit and commuters residing in or within proximity to these neighborhoods, including from outside of New York City, who currently drive into Manhattan, are likely instead to drive to these LIRR stations to park-and-ride. I urge the agencies involved in the study to examine the potential impacts on these neighborhoods to determine whether any mitigation is needed to avoid any quality of life issues for persons that live near these stations related to increased traffic. The study also notes that any increase in parking or traffic in areas just north of 60th street in Manhattan will not adversely impact the quality of life for New Yorkers that live in that area. While the authorizing legislation requires a study for 18 months after the program takes effect in the surrounding areas, the implementing agencies should take proactive measures to improve traffic in the areas just north of the CBD before the program takes effect.

The CBD Tolling Program is also likely to significantly impact the taxi and for-hire vehicle industry. At a time when drivers are already struggling to make ends meet and recover to pre-COVID-19 levels of business, the economic impact of a CBD Tolling Program could potentially be catastrophic to the industry. While the EA proposes some mitigation measures, such as working to connect drivers with licensing, training and job placement with the MTA or its vendors, and to allow the drivers to use vehicles to provide paratransit trips, the responsible agencies must take steps to prevent potential job displacement in the first place.

The EA also found that the CBD Tolling Program would result in increased commercial truck traffic in both the Bronx and Staten Island, but determined that no air quality mitigation is needed. The EA estimates that air pollutants will increase in the Bronx and Staten Island as a result of the program, but only provides that agencies will monitor particulate matter to determine whether changes in air pollution can be attributed to the changes in traffic occurring after implementation of the CBD Tolling Program. Increases in truck traffic are of particular concern in communities near the Cross Bronx Expressway and RFK Bridge that already see high volumes of truck traffic and lack access to green space. The agencies involved in the project should undertake proactive mitigation measures to improve air quality in these areas. Residents in these areas already suffer from disproportionately higher rates of asthma and other respiratory issues, and a further increase in truck traffic will only exacerbate the problem. Any eventual CBD Tolling Program should not increase environmental harm for communities that have already been forced to disproportionately endure them.

There are a number of outstanding environmental and economic concerns that need to be addressed. While the program has some admirable goals to positively impact a number of residents throughout the city, it is critical that the agencies involved do not ignore the potential adverse impacts on low-income outer borough residents, especially those in environmental justice communities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Environmental Assessment for the CBD Tolling Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrienne Adams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ADRIENNE E. ADAMS
Speaker