



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

Senator Reichlin-Melnick Demands Justice for Rockland on Congestion Pricing

ELIJAH REICHLIN-MELNICK August 10, 2022

ROCKLAND, NY - Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick (D-Rockland/Westchester) renewed his objection to congestion pricing for Rocklanders in his statement yesterday at the public session hosted by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) on August 9. The Senator strongly urged restoration of passenger service on the West Shore Rail Line or other means to get a one-seat ride to Manhattan.

When the MTA announced plans to move forward with congestion pricing last month, the Senator blasted them for unfairly taxing Rockland residents who do not have a quick or easy mass transit option to get to NYC, unlike most other suburban counties. His comments to NYMTC yesterday reinforce this message, "I urge you to reconsider the priorities set forth in the 2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program plan to include a study of restoring passenger rail service on the West Shore Rail Line as soon as possible. Providing Rocklanders with a one-seat ride from our communities into NYC on a fast, safe, comfortable train will eliminate millions of car trips from Rockland County to NYC annually."

Reichlin-Melnick said that the MTA and the NYMTC are creating a paradox that will do nothing more than create a new tax on Rockland County commuters: "The point of congestion pricing is to incentivize people to consider taking public transit. But if we put the

cart before the horse without first creating that public transit option, congestion pricing will be a new tax on Rockland commuters, and it will not reduce the number of car trips that people take - because there are just not better options.”

New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) is the regional council for New York City, Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley (Rockland/Putnam/Westchester). There are nine voting members, including the County Executives of the five suburban counties.

8/9/22 Senator Reichlin-Melnick’s Public Comment to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council:

"Good afternoon members of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, my name is Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick. I represent over 270,000 constituents from Rockland County in the NYS Senate. My constituents choose to live in Rockland County because it's a wonderful place to raise a family, with good schools, safe communities, and close proximity to economic opportunity in New York City.

With the creation of congestion pricing in Manhattan and the failure, so far, by the MTA to invest in public transit on this side of the River, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the NY Metropolitan Transportation Council will do nothing more than, I fear, create a new tax on Rockland County commuters while failing to address the problems they seek to solve.

In Rockland County, we are begrudgingly accustomed to paying very high taxes - because we know that those high taxes pay for the infrastructure and services that ensure we can continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

A 2019 study of labor commutation statistics by the Marist College Bureau of Economic Research found that more and more Rockland county residents are commuting for work, and pre-pandemic, nearly 39% of Rockland commuters traveled to New York City for work.

With the MTA's announcement that the new "Congestion Pricing" plan could begin as soon as next year, it is imperative that the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council reconsider its five-year-plan priorities to ease the burden on Rockland commuters and help fight climate change by reducing the number of car trips needed to get people to and from work.

NYMTC's 2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program plan supports the creation and implementation of Congestion Pricing in NYC, at the same time that it calls for hundreds of millions of dollars worth of investments in road infrastructure in Rockland. Meanwhile, the long term NYMTC Transportation Improvement Program plan calls for reopening passenger rail service on the West-of-hudson line as something to be considered some time before 2050! Decades in the future.

If the goal of congestion pricing is to disincentivize driving into New York City from outer suburbs, why would we think it is a good idea to invest further into road infrastructure that perpetuates the use of cars by commuters for decades to come, and gives Rocklanders no other viable option to get to work in New York City?

The MTA and the NYMTC are creating a paradox that will do nothing more than create a new tax on Rockland County commuters. The point of congestion pricing is to incentivize people to consider taking public transit. But if we put the cart before the horse without first creating that public transit option, congestion pricing will be a new tax on Rockland commuters, and it will not reduce the number of car trips that people take - because there are just not better options.

I urge you to reconsider the priorities set forth in the 2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program plan. Please include a study of re-opening passenger rail service on the West-of-Hudson rail line as soon as possible. Providing Rocklanders with a one-seat ride from our communities into NYC on a fast, safe, comfortable train will do far more than congestion pricing to get people off of the roads. It will eliminate millions of car trips from Rockland and Orange County to NYC annually, accomplishing so many goals that are desired by all of us:

1 - It will reduce the number of cars in the Central Business District.

2 - Drastically cutting CO2 emissions, helping us to slow climate change, reducing childhood asthma rates, and so much more.

3 - It will decrease car crash deaths, injuries, and general loss of property.

4 - It will reduce wear and tear on roads and bridges, saving millions of dollars in the long term for New York taxpayers.

5 - And it will increase the amount of walking done by commuters which will have positive benefits on both physical and mental health of so many New Yorkers and constituents who I represent.

These are just the most obvious effects, but we know that there are so many other benefits.

So, I urge strongly as you are reconsidering the projects in the 2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program plan, please make restoring passenger service on the West-of-Hudson rail line the number one priority for a cleaner, healthier, and safer New York Metropolitan area.