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Testimony of State Senator Liz Krueger  
to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)  
Regarding the Central Business District Tolling Program  
August 30, 2022

Those of us who live and work in Manhattan know very well the negative impacts of traffic congestion on our daily lives – the air pollution, the noise, the risks to pedestrians posed by our overcrowded streets, and the frustration of being stuck on a bus or in a car or taxi moving slower through traffic than pedestrians walking. We also know the benefits of well-funded, reliable, fast public transit. Congestion pricing is a tried and tested approach that will reduce congestion, improve the quality of life of Manhattanites, and provide desperately needed funds to support the subways and buses that the vast majority of New Yorkers rely on every day.

However, as implementation moves forward, there are important issues that need to be taken into consideration to ensure the program meets its goals. As the Traffic Mobility Review Board decides how best to implement the CBDTP, please consider these questions, concerns, and recommendations:

**Buses**

A primary goal of this program is to encourage the use of public transportation. Thus, public transit buses should be exempt from the toll. On the other hand, buses used for sightseeing through our streets should be tolled and discouraged from adding to overall congestion on our streets and parking in public spaces.

**Taxis**

Because taxis and for-hire vehicles already pay a congestion surcharge for entering Manhattan below 96th Street, I am asking that the MTA take steps to try to minimize new impacts on taxis entering the CBD. At minimum, tolls on taxis should be limited to once per day, and a full exemption should be strongly considered.

## **Trucks**

Trucks represent some of the worst effects on public safety and public health of any vehicles passing through the CBD. Thus, the amount and frequency of the toll on trucks should be enough to discourage them from driving through the zone. The tolling system needs to ensure trucks that are not picking up or delivering products to Manhattan are not cutting through the zone for their convenience, dramatically increasing congestion on narrow cross-town streets.

## **Variable Tolls**

Tolls should be varied based on day of the week and time of day, with the goals of reducing congestion and emissions and raising revenue. The more congested travel periods should see higher tolls than less congested periods.

## **Clear Communication**

Toll amounts should be clearly communicated to drivers, through multiple avenues of communication, so that they can adjust their trips according to variations by day and time. The Environmental Assessment considers higher tolls on “Gridlock Alert” days. These higher tolls should be clearly communicated to drivers ahead of time so that they can make informed decisions. While this may result in some lost revenue from people choosing not to drive into the CBD on those days, it will have the positive effect of reducing the high levels of congestion and pollution on those days.

## **Disability**

Under the currently proposed definition, the CBDTP exemption for people with disabilities applies to vehicles with disability license plates and fleet vehicles owned and operated by organizations that transport people with disabilities. This leaves out a significant number of people with permanent or temporary disabilities who might need to rely on cars to get around.

The MTA should broaden the exemption for people with disabilities, and define disability according to the federal definition in the Americans with Disabilities Act: “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”

The MTA should also find a way to exempt people with temporary disabilities or mobility issues, particularly given the number of medical institutions located in the CBD. Disability license plates and Access-A-Ride applications take a long time to process, so those are not feasible avenues for people with temporary issues. The MTA should explore how these people can be accommodated.

## **Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge**

I am concerned that if vehicles leaving Manhattan from north of the congestion zone via the Queensboro Bridge are subject to tolls, the program may encourage “bridge shopping”. Under the CBDTP, the only free bridge across the east river would be the Brooklyn Bridge, which can be directly accessed from the FDR. The program should not encourage use of this bridge by people coming from north of the zone, as this will increase congestion on the FDR Drive. It would be better to have them leave Manhattan farther north if they are coming from farther north. A vehicle traveling the one block from 60th street to the bridge should not be tolled.

## **Using Lincoln and Holland Tunnels**

Vehicles that only enter the zone to access these two tunnels via the West Side Highway should not face a toll. If the MTA does not address this, far more vehicles will use the George Washington Bridge to go to or come from New Jersey.

## **Monitor and Report CBDTP Outcomes**

The MTA should monitor the CBDTP and report outcomes to the public. This will allow for policy adjustments, which should be regularly considered to ensure that the program is meeting its goals of reducing congestion and raising revenue for the MTA. In addition, public reporting will provide transparency and encourage public buy-in for CBDTP.

## **Tax Credit for Low-Income Residents of the CBD**

The MTA should work with the state to create a seamless system to ensure the broadest possible access to the tax credit by eligible residents. The tax credit should be refundable so that low-income people with no tax liability are able to receive it.