



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

MTA Congestion Pricing Hearing

Testimony of Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson

March 4, 2024

Good evening and thank you for convening this hearing regarding the proposed tolling structure for the city's first-in-the-nation congestion pricing program. I am Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson, and I want to speak today primarily about the anticipated impacts that the congestion pricing tolling program will have on The Bronx and the people who live here.

The proposed toll of \$15 for a car during the peak period, with a 50% discount for registered low-income drivers and higher tolls for trucks, is a deterrent for people driving into the Central Business District (CBD) on a regular basis. This will likely accomplish the three outcomes that the tolling program wants to achieve: reducing congestion in lower Manhattan, reducing overall emissions, and raising a significant amount of funding for the MTA's capital projects. These tolls will be an important revenue stream for the MTA's capital funding needs, but it is also essential that we acknowledge the adverse impacts that this program will have on certain communities.

The MTA's own environmental impact study – conducted with the state and city Departments of Transportation – shows that The Bronx will see an increase in air pollution as trucks and other vehicles are diverted into our borough, even as overall pollution decreases in the city and region. This increase will especially affect areas near our major highways, including the Major Deegan Expressway and the Cross Bronx Expressway.

For decades, the Cross Bronx has been one of the main catalysts for air pollution due to vehicular traffic passing through The Bronx to access other points in the region. This air pollution has

poisoned the residents of The Bronx for so long that it has led to the area around the Cross Bronx being known as Asthma Alley. These elevated asthma rates have led to significant negative health outcomes, particularly for our children. The congestion pricing program has the potential to make this issue even worse, with the MTA study projecting up to 4,000 additional vehicle trips on the Cross Bronx daily, including up to 700 additional trucks. The study also found that the proposed fare options with the smallest potential impact for The Bronx included tunnel credits for vehicles entering Manhattan through the tunnels, meaning that vehicles passing through the tunnels would get a rebate on the congestion pricing fee. That is why it is essential that the MTA include these tunnel credits in the final pricing scheme, as proposed by the Traffic Mobility Review Board.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), released last year, prior to final federal approval of the program, proposed several mitigation measures for The Bronx to offset the higher particulate air pollution that we will be experiencing. However, these proposals were wildly insufficient to meet our already elevated needs. Our borough is already oversaturated by truck pollution, we have the highest asthma rates in the state, and we have historically taken on far more than our fair share of environmental injustices for the greater good of the city and region.

The FONSI proposed several mitigation measures that range from insufficient to disingenuous. Including expanding air quality monitoring, ramp metering, motorist information, and signage to track the impact of the program without a plan in place to mitigate potential impacts is not acceptable. The Bronx doesn't need monitoring; it needs better outcomes. The MTA has prioritized The Bronx for electronic bus rollouts, but this will only accomplish what the MTA has already promised to do. Place-based mitigations such as replacing diesel-burning trucks at Hunts Point, expanding electric charging infrastructure, installing more roadside vegetation, renovating parks, installing air filtration units in schools, and creating a Bronx asthma center are all good and

welcome improvements, but these are all things that are planned to happen or should be happening regardless of congestion pricing being implemented.

In previous discussions with the MTA regarding the air quality monitoring proposals, I called for the monitoring sites to specifically be installed at the schools adjacent to the major highways in our borough. These include PS 44 and PS 70 near the Cross Bronx and PS 43 and PS 154 near the Major Deegan. Since the increased air pollution would disproportionately harm our children, these sites should be more focused towards them. Hopefully, this monitoring will lead to concrete efforts to improve air quality in our borough and will not merely be used as window dressing.

For congestion pricing to truly work for The Bronx, we need more than these paltry measures. We require a real commitment from the MTA to prioritize the upgrading of The Bronx's transit infrastructure with the revenue generated from the CBD tolling program. I previously addressed these concerns in a letter submitted to the MTA dated June 12, 2023, and I urge the MTA to address these concerns.

The Bronx has significant transportation capital needs that must be addressed. Our borough's subway stations, like those in the other outer boroughs, are disproportionately likely to be inaccessible. While I am appreciative of the MTA's long-term commitment to making these stations accessible to all users and recognize that capital from congestion pricing will help to achieve these goals, this is an ADA compliance issue that is legally required to be rolled out across the city, and the burden for supporting these citywide goals should not continue to fall on residents of The Bronx.

Like the other outer boroughs, thousands of Bronx residents commute into the CBD by car for work. The Bronx has significant areas that are transit deserts, where the subways are inaccessible

for easy use. Because of this, many of the residents in these areas drive to work. More investments must be made to help these residents find alternatives to driving into the CBD that enable them to commute efficiently. This could include expansions to the bus system or reductions in fares for residents of transit deserts, for example. I believe that we can collaboratively find solutions for the people who now have few public transit options and feel that they must use their private vehicles.

I am also concerned about the effect that the CBDTP will have on the Hunts Points markets. These markets are a major economic engine in The Bronx and supply produce and other food products across the whole New York metropolitan region and beyond. It is also one of the major drivers of truck traffic in our borough. We have been working with the city and state governments and our partners at Hunts Point to make the necessary changes and investments to mitigate the air pollution from these trucks. But I do not believe that the effect of the congestion pricing program on Hunts Point has been fully examined.

The most important thing that the state and city can do to mitigate the air pollution crisis that our borough has been confronting for decades is to finally cap the Cross Bronx. While the revenue from the congestion pricing program cannot be directly used for this purpose, the city, state, and federal governments must make the investments necessary to accomplish this goal. Simply speaking, diverting truck traffic from Manhattan to The Bronx is an environmental injustice that can only be remedied by making significant capital investments like this.

In previous testimony, dated September 8, 2022, I submitted recommendations that were co-signed by fourteen elected officials representing the city, state, and federal levels of government and stated what other additional benefits The Bronx needs that could help offset the congestion pricing program's impact on our borough, in addition to capping the Cross Bronx. For example, the MTA

should consider reducing the intra-city fares for the Metro North CityTicket program. Parts of our borough have access to the Metro North but not the subway. Reducing Metro North fares for residents of these neighborhoods would further encourage them to take public transit into Manhattan, as opposed to driving into the CBD. Additionally, the MTA should consider expanding access to transit by providing free buses to Bronx residents in environmental justice areas in our borough. This would provide those who have borne higher environmental burdens with a concrete benefit.

There are many more projects in The Bronx requiring additional funding, which is why it is so important that the MTA dedicate a significant portion of the projected revenue from the tolling program to The Bronx. The Bronx will be negatively impacted in the form of higher air pollution as a result of congestion pricing, so it is necessary that Bronx residents see some benefits to the program.

The congestion pricing program has the potential to have an overall positive effect for our city, reducing congestion and raising much-needed capital funding for the transit system. However, it cannot be enacted in such a way as to inflict further harm on the people of The Bronx, who have already suffered disproportionate environmental injustices and deserve real mitigation options.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues, and I hope that the effect that congestion pricing will have on the residents of The Bronx will factor strongly in your considerations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vanessa L. Gibson".

Vanessa L. Gibson
Bronx Borough President

Enclosed:

Letter from Bronx elected officials, September 8, 2022

Letter from Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson, June 12, 2023



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

September 8, 2022

Dear MTA and Traffic Mobility Review Board,

The Central Business District Tolling Program (CBDTP), better known as congestion pricing, will benefit the greater New York City metropolitan area. While the overall impact of the CBDTP will be positive and will ultimately cause an overall reduction of mobile air toxins across the region, the proposed program increases air pollution within the Bronx.

Even as the Bronx has taken steps forward with reducing carbon emissions, this is a step back for the neighborhoods surrounding the Cross Bronx Expressway, due to the increased air pollution from vehicles on the highway. The MTA's report notes an overall decline in air pollution across the city and region, but an increase for the Bronx. This is primarily due to increased vehicle miles traveled on the Cross Bronx Expressway, and the reality is there would be an additional increase on other highways, including the Bruckner Expressway and Major Deegan, through secondary transportation pressure, even if the methodology doesn't show an increase. The CBDTP is therefore an issue affecting health, equity, and environmental justice issues for the communities we represent, which have historically taken on more than their fair share for decades.

In order to have our support for the CBDTP, these Bronx neighborhoods need to see direct benefits that will result in a reduction of mobile air toxins. The best solution would be prioritizing the capital funding for the capping of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Money was allocated as part of the bipartisan infrastructure bill that Senator Chuck Schumer and Congressman Ritchie Torres were both instrumental in getting passed, but the project will need additional resources and it should be prioritized by the city and state. It is also important that the deck on top of the Cross Bronx provide additional long-term benefits, such as providing green space or by creating a public transportation light rail line. This line could provide an east-west railway link stretching from Washington Heights to Parkchester, creating connections across eight subway lines and serving the nearly 600,000 people that live in adjacent neighborhoods.

In addition to fully funding the Cross Bronx decking, further priority should be given to projects that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as providing free buses across the entire city, or, at a minimum, within Bronx environmental justice areas harmed by the CBDTP to further incentivize public transportation options for residents that need it the most. The city should also pass electric vehicle supportive legislation that will remove hurdles for where electric vehicle charging stations can be located and provide opportunities for electric vehicle investment across the city. This will encourage the transition to electric vehicles, which will be key to reducing emissions within the city.

Other ways the city can support these environmental justice areas include prioritizing and further incentivizing renewable energy bonuses for building upgrades. The Bronx has many buildings with low-income residents and the city needs to support improvements to these buildings in order for building upgrades to happen. For NYCHA buildings, the city needs to prioritize and fully fund renewable energy upgrades.

We acknowledge that the CBDTP will be a benefit for much of the city, but the Bronx has been burdened by the Cross Bronx since its construction under the notion that it is good for the region as a whole. With the CBDTP adding to that historical burden, it is time the Bronx receives major capital improvements that will provide real health benefits in these environmental justice communities.

Sincerely,



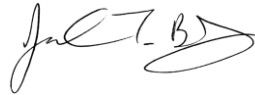
Vanessa L. Gibson
Bronx Borough President



Luis Sepulveda
State Senator – District 32



Alessandra Biaggi – District 34



Jamaal T. Bailey
State Senator – District 36



Chantel Jackson
Assembly Member - District 79



Nathalia Fernandez
Assembly Member – District 80



Jeffery Dinowitz
Assembly Member – District 81



Kenneth Burgos
Assembly Member – District 85



Diana Ayala
Deputy Speaker – District 8



Eric Dinowitz
Council Member – District 11



Kevin Riley
Council Member – District 12



Marjorie Velázquez
Council Member – District 13



Althea Stevens
Council Member – District 16



Amanda Farias
Council Member – District 18



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

June 12, 2023

Dear Richard J. Marquis, Allison L. C. de Cerreno, Nicholas A. Chourah, and Eric Beaton,

The draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) issued by the FHWA is a positive step towards the final implementation of the Central Business District Tolling Program (CBDTP), commonly known as congestion pricing. The implementation of the congestion pricing program would lead to meaningful reductions in traffic congestion, which would result in a significant reduction of particulate emissions into our city's air. This will be of great benefit to the people of New York City. However, as Bronx Borough President, I still have concerns that I believe remain unaddressed as part of the FONSI.

The environmental assessment and the FONSI recognize that the CBDTP would result in diversion of traffic from the CBD to peripheral routes, many of which pass through The Bronx. Most notably, the Cross Bronx Expressway would see an increase in traffic, particularly heavy truck traffic. According to the assessment, there could be as many as 700 additional trucks on the highway, depending on the tolling scenario. The MTA's report noted that this would result in a net increase in particulate emissions in The Bronx. Ever since the Cross Bronx Expressway was originally built, it has been an environmental injustice that has inflicted harm on our communities. The pollution spewed into the atmosphere by the vehicles that traverse this highway has resulted in elevated asthma rates in adjacent neighborhoods, particularly among children. This is unacceptable, and more must be done to mitigate these harms.

While I remain a strong advocate for finally capping the Cross Bronx Expressway, mitigation efforts must be a part of the congestion pricing rollout in the near term. It would be entirely unjust for The Bronx to bear increased pollution in an effort to reduce pollution citywide. The Bronx is already underserved and oversaturated by truck pollution, has the highest asthma rates in the state, and has taken on more than our fair-share of environmental injustices all for the 'greater good' of the city and region. While the FONSI does recognize the need for mitigatory measures surrounding the Cross Bronx, allowing three months to pass before requiring paltry mitigations such as "ramp metering, motorist information, [and] signage" is not an acceptable intervention. Additionally, while adding monitoring sites is always a good thing, that is not in and of itself a mitigation. The two-year wait after the tolling program goes into effect to see if the state will add more monitoring sites will accomplish little for the people who are being negatively affected by the increased traffic and pollution within our borough.

More direct mitigation must be done to prevent increased pollution from harming residents of adjacent neighborhoods. I stated in my previous testimony that with the capping of the Cross Bronx Expressway, public green space and a public transportation line could be created that would provide an east-west railway link stretching from Washington Heights to Parkchester, creating connections across eight subway lines, and serving nearly 600,000 people that live in adjacent neighborhoods. There have been proposals for the Interborough Express which would connect Brooklyn and Queens, and this transportation connection would have a similar impact. I understand the capital needed for the capping of the Cross Bronx Expressway cannot be directly taken from congestion pricing revenue, but the money generated will 'free up' other money the city and state can use. By improving health outcomes for an entire borough, the savings to the city would surpass the capital costs many times over.

The FONSI mentions the MTA's transition to an all-electric bus fleet will prioritize the Kingsbridge and Gun Hill depots for the rollout of these new buses. The transition to electric buses will have a positive effect on air pollution across the city, and prioritizing The Bronx and Upper Manhattan will bring those benefits to us sooner. However, this rollout was going to happen regardless of the CBDTP, so it seems tenuous and somewhat disingenuous to promote this as a mitigation measure to the truck traffic. While I do not believe it is a solution to the increased air pollution congestion pricing will bring, I am pleased this change is occurring and would like to continue working with the MTA to achieve this rollout as soon as possible.

Beyond the effects on air pollution in The Bronx, I am also concerned with the potential effects that the CBDTP will have on the taxi and for-hire vehicle (FHV) drivers of our city, many of whom live in The Bronx. Taxi and FHV rides are already subject to congestion fees, and further increasing the price of rides will likely cause the overall number of rides taken to decline, putting increased pressures on the drivers to make ends meet. In one of the proposed tolling scenarios, the assessment found that taxi and FHV rides could decline by nearly 17 percent. I was pleased to see that the final Environmental Assessment recognized that the CBDTP would have a "disproportionately high and adverse effect" on taxi and FHV drivers, and that there was required additional mitigation for these drivers. While the requirement that the final toll structure caps taxis and FHVs at one toll per day is a strong step towards mitigation, I remain concerned that the double congestion fees will prove to have a negative effect on drivers. As the program rolls out, I will be pushing the state and city to closely monitor taxi and FHV trips to ensure that the increased price will not cause an undue drop in the number of rides, threatening the livelihoods of our drivers.

The FONSI also mentions that place-based mitigations could be necessary in many Bronx neighborhoods. They mention in particular: Highbridge, Morrisania, Crotona, Tremont, Hunts Point, Mott Haven, Pelham, Throgs Neck, and the Northeast Bronx, just in our borough. The fact that these affected neighborhoods make up a large proportion of the borough's area and population should underscore the harms that the tolling program could have on The Bronx without proper mitigation. The proposed mitigation efforts must all take place for the tolling program to be worthwhile for The Bronx. The ones mentioned in the FONSI include replacing diesel-burning trucks at Hunts Point, expanding electric charging infrastructure, installing more roadside vegetation, renovating parks, installing air filtration units in schools, and providing more asthma case management programs and creating a neighborhood asthma center in The Bronx. These efforts will all make a difference, but they must be the start and not the end of the efforts to improve air quality in The Bronx.

While I have the concerns mentioned above, I still believe that the CBDTP will prove to be positive for our city. However, it must be enacted in a way that does not inflict further harm on people who have already borne disproportionate injustices. Making progress for our city cannot come at the expense of The Bronx and the people who live and work here. There must be real mitigation of these environmental harms, and there must be significant investment in ameliorating the serious negative conditions that already exist and will be exacerbated by this program. Thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vanessa L. Gibson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vanessa L. Gibson
Bronx Borough President