



December 5, 2006 Edition > Section: [New York](#)

Report Recommends City Study Option of Congestion Pricing

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Traffic congestion is costing New York City and its suburbs more than \$13 billion and as many as 52,000 jobs a year, according to a study released yesterday by the Partnership for New York City.

The 60-page study commissioned by a group of 200 business leaders concludes that the region's population and economy will soon outgrow the local transit infrastructure. It recommends the city look into the option of charging cars to drive through extremely congested areas.

In addition to congestion pricing, the partnership's study recommends higher parking fees and a major expansion to the local network of ferries to Manhattan as traffic-reducing methods.

"Busy streets are signs of our region's economic health," the president and CEO of the partnership, Kathryn Wylde, said yesterday at a press conference. "But the level of traffic congestion in New York City has now passed the tipping point and is causing serious damage to virtually every community and industry sector."

Each weekday, 3.6 million people travel into Manhattan south of 60th Street. About a third of them drive, according to the study, and traffic in the region is expected to grow by 20% over the next 20 years.

Ms. Wylde said she plans to meet with Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff later this week to recommend that the city apply for federal funding to study traffic-reducing solutions.

London has seen a 17% reduction in citywide traffic since instituting congestion pricing in 2003, according to the report. New York could not think about charging drivers to use its streets without first improving mass transit options, Ms. Wylde said.

Mayor Bloomberg said yesterday that congestion pricing was politically unfeasible right now, but he did not

totally rule it out. "I've always thought congestion pricing has some advantages," the mayor told reporters after an education announcement in Miami with Governor Bush. "Having said that, it only works when you give a break to people in the city as opposed to those outside the city. That means it's a commuter tax and the politics of a commuter tax in Albany are probably such that we would never get it passed."

Even if backed by Governor-elect Spitzer, congestion pricing would become "more of a 'legislative matter,'" Mr. Bloomberg said.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Spitzer, Christine Anderson, said congestion pricing is not now a priority for the governor-elect. "As always, we would review the specifics of any proposal, but it's not something Eliot is currently considering," Ms. Anderson wrote in an e-mail.

Keep NYC Congestion Tax-Free, a group that includes small businesses, civic associations, the American Automobile Association, and City Council Member David Weprin, was formed recently in reaction to growing interest in congestion pricing. The group will hold a press conference at City Hall today to talk about why London is no model for New York.

"London is not a good example," a spokeswoman for the group, Carolyn Daly, said. "Congestion pricing imposes a great price on businesses and workers. It's a tax. And let's face it, congestion is just going to be another boroughs problem. People will drive and stop at the perimeter."