TESTIMONY OF QUEENS BOROUGH PRESIDENT HELEN MARSHALL BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY TRAFFIC MITIGATION CONGESTION COMMISSION-JANUARY 24TH, 2008

Good evening. I want to thank the commission for holding this hearing, providing venue for comment on the commission's interim report and its various options for congestion pricing.

Yours has not been an easy task so I thank you for taking on this issue and working to find a workable solution. but, I don't believe we have found one quite yet.

It appears that the report casts the most favorable light on an alternative congestion plan that moves the northern boundary of the zone to 60th Street and generates more revenue than the mayor's plan with fewer expenses. Unfortunately, this option takes us from bad to worse.

First, it eliminates the free passage route for commuters who are not entering the zone but merely using the FDR to travel to upper Manhattan or the Bronx. that means, that drivers who use the Queensborough Bridge just to travel to 61st Street or north will be charged $8—a patently unfair option.

Second, at the same time, intrazonal auto trips would not be subject to any new fee, providing questionable relief to those actually contributing to congestion in the zone.

Finally, to add insult to injury, after being charged $8 to enter the zone, commuters would be faced with an unspecified increase in metered parking as well.

I believe the interim report's own analysis of tolling the East River and Harlem River bridges and license plan rationing clearly show the weaknesses of those proposals, weaknesses that should dismiss them as options.

In my earlier testimony to you, I noted that every day, tens of thousands of Queens residents use public transportation. But for thousands of others, that is not an option--they have no reasonable opportunities for mass transit.

I continue to believe that we must not punish those who have been ignored by government's failure to provide meaningful mass transit options. Let's put those options in place before considering the punitive measure of congestion pricing.

TO THAT END, WE MUST:

1. Reopen strategic LIRR stations in Queens. The mayor has agreed to my first priority the Elmhurst Station that will provide much needed relief to the E and #7 lines.
2. Increase LIRR stop frequency- especially at Main Street in Flushing and at Woodside.
3. Add articulated buses on main thoroughfares such as Queens and Northern boulevards and wherever heavily traveled routes will physically allow them.
4. Lengthen subway platforms to accommodate additional subway cars wherever possible.
5. Target new traffic enforcement agents to major transportation hubs including Main Street in Flushing, Sutphin and Archer in Jamaica and at the Queensborough Bridge.
6. Retire non-clean air buses.
7. Add new express routes to underserved areas.
8. Add new local bus routes and buses, particularly in eastern Queens.
9. Provide ferry service to the Rockaways and western Queens.

Our community boards and the Queens Civic Congress and have offered additional recommendations including an intermodal station at Sunnyside Yards, additional park and ride facilities for city residents, ensuring accessible stations for the handicapped, discount LIRR fares for city residents, and new north-south express bus routes.

I urge you to include these items into a comprehensive package of mass transit improvements that should take place before congestion pricing.

I know that some of those components are included in the plan but I lack faith in the ability to put those plans in place before the planned start date of the program in April, 2009. From past experience I know that it takes up to two years to obtain new buses and I share similar concerns regarding the delivery of the additional subway cars and completion of the needed signalization improvements. Indeed, the timeline for improving services appears to have taken a back seat in this discussion.

Let's put first things first-create meaningful mass transit options before punishing those who cannot take advantage of it.

Thank you.