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Regressive Toll Tax Hurts Long Island

Testimony to the New York State Senate Transportation Committee and Corporations, Authorities, and Commissions Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the impact of proposals concerning funding the MTA, the LIRR and transit on Long Island and serving the needs of Long Island residents and businesses. I am **Gary Cooke**, a long time Nassau resident and professional, representing the coalition, Keep New York City Congestion Tax Free. Our Website, KeepNYCFree.com, includes information concerning the impact of a toll-tax scheme, currently taking the form of a series of electronic scanning devices to be installed along the perimeter of Manhattan south of 60th Street, in part to avoid the overt label of bridge tolls on the four currently free bridges that allow access unimpeded by tolls into Manhattan's core.

Many Long Islanders, including this witness, drive for business and pleasure to reach destinations south of 61st Street in Manhattan. The Governor offers very misleading statistics that minimize the true data about who his toll-tax scheme will impact on Long Island. When his office argues 1.8% of Nassau residents commute to Manhattan by auto, it aplies the total number of Nassau residents, including children, retired folks, people who don't work at all to those that drive to work in Manhattan. That same analysis means only 5.4% of Nassau residents travel by mass transit. Indeed the current available data finds about 25% of those who commute to Manhattan from the suburbs commute by car, truck of van.

This week's announcement of a new scheme – this time a "10 Point Plan to transform and fund the MTA" – unsurprisingly falls short. No one opposes the needed to transform the agency responsible for transporting millions of New Yorkers to work, school, health care, recreation and other needs. No one opposes creating and ensuring dedicated and SUSTAINABLE funding streams to support adequate public transit – bus, subway, rail, paratransit. However this latest scheme advanced by City Hall and the second floor of the State Capitol demonstrates a form of collusion that raises more issues than it purports to address:

The scheme leaves out any reference to funding needing public transit enhancements for Long Island and the other suburban counties. Commuters driving from suburban MTA counties will probably pay about one-third of toll-taxes but remain totally left out in this scheme's discussions.

In particular, when it comes to Nassau and Suffolk, the scheme really fails to address transit in communities throughout Long Island that lack adequate public transit options. At a time when our local planners promote investment in revitalizing and growing our downtowns, there must be investment to support transit that facilitate this important trend that offers Long

Island a means to stabilize and sustain it population and economy.

The scheme offers no security regarding its “lock box.” Absence any language securing revenues to the bonding documents, lock box means absolutely nothing; past governors invaded lockboxes; nothing currently limits any ability to prevent a future invasion as part of future budget.

Frankly, this scheme includes no promises to limit future toll hikes in any way. If it were to decrease the number of vehicles entering Manhattan, its projected revenues would decrease absent further toll-tax hikes.

Finally, it must be noted our experts – please review our report available at KeepNYCFree.com – seriously question the revenue estimates of the current toll-tax scheme. We estimate less than $800 million not the claimed billion before further offset from building and operating that scheme. And we note those revenues are several years away.

Why go with a scheme that ignores better, sustainable revenues that, unlike tolling, allow for immediate collection and application to improving transit, and with no funding needed to be diverted for erecting and operating the revenue mode?

Our report notes several alternative revenues that unlike toll-taxes enable IMMEDIATE collection of resources for transit that more fairly apportion the burden. For example, since the current scheme of projects basically assists Manhattan commercial properties, why not a surcharge that raises $664 million – $1 per square foot on commercial and industrial property below 59th Street and another that takes $408 million – an assessment equal to 5% of real property tax due on commercial property in Manhattan. The math says those both exceeds one billion dollars – net.

Just saying.

Thank you.