

# Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free

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## City Council Testimonies & Pics

**Read the testimonies presented at the August 17, 2023 City Council Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure hearing on the implementation congestion pricing from Dr. Thomas Chan MD of the Chinatown & Little Italy Coalition for No Congestion Tax and Michele Birnbaum of The Coalition in Opposition to Congestion Pricing**

**Testimony In Opposition To Congestion Pricing  
by Michele Birnbaum of The Coalition in Opposition to Congestion Pricing**

My name is Michele Birnbaum. I am one of four founders of The Coalition in Opposition to Congestion Pricing, along with my other co-founders, Andrew Fine, Ed Hartzog and Valerie Mason.

We organized in response to the feedback we received from family, friends, neighbors, residents and businesses in our discussions about the congestion pricing scheme that is about to be implemented in our city.

Aside from cycling groups and those that have anti automobile rhetoric as part of their mantra, we could not find anyone that was touting the benefits of this program. To the contrary, we heard cries of outrage and disbelief, as no one believed that congestion pricing would actually alleviate congestion or improve air quality, as its implementation would cause congestion and diminish air quality outside the designated zone. Not a worthy trade-off. All agreed that this was a money grab by the MTA, probably the most inefficient and negligent agency in government.

Every week, newspapers and on-line sites are filled with stories of the financial mishaps of the MTA, from projects being completed late and over-budget, to statistics on fare-beaters and unwarranted overtime payments. The MTA is well-known for its poor fiscal management. So, without streamlining its financials and holding it accountable for its fiscal mishaps, it seems imprudent to award it oversight on yet more money. This, along with the federal monies and the left-over Covid money it was awarded, makes it that much more foolish to further fill its coffers. If congestion pricing works and keeps cars out of half of Manhattan, then the MTA won't raise the money they claim they need. If the plan is not successful, and traffic and pollution are not diminished, what then? It would be a money grab and another tax which would further incentivize groups of people to leave New York or abandon the business and entertainment districts. At a time when we are trying to encourage people to come into New York and rebuild our business corridor, we would, instead, be creating incentives for the opposite.

This scheme cuts Manhattan in two with every street south of 60th street being included in the zone, even little streets like Carmine Street, Bank Street, Bleeker Street, Wall Street – every single street until the tip of Manhattan is included. Originally, the rhetoric called for congestion pricing in the midtown business district, which to me would be from 34th to 59th Street which would have been bad enough, but it is even more horrific that it includes every little residential street in East and West Village, Battery Park City, Soho, the lower east side, Chinatown and Little Italy, down to the tip of Manhattan ending with the tunnels and bridges. This is an abusive tax and intrusive to our quality of life, not to mention the visual blight of large unattractive gantries hovering over our streets and every exit of the East River Drive and the West Side Highway.

The mobility impaired, the elderly, families carrying children's equipment and others will be financially burdened with this plan.

The population is growing older and thinking that you're going to force this population onto public transportation which is unsafe and mostly inaccessible is foolishness, and to postulate that bicycles will become the alternative transport of choice is unreasonable thinking.

Every product delivered to Manhattan will become more expensive. All delivery and trucking costs of everything from toothpaste to furniture will be passed on to the consumer. Thinking that such deliveries could be carried out in the middle of the night would create much detested noise during sleeping hours and would require a round-the-clock shift of workers.

We will have to pay to see our friends, our families, go to restaurants, to Broadway, to museums and neighborhoods such as Chinatown or Little Italy. Our New Jersey neighbors, after purchasing their expensive Broadway tickets, will have to pay the tunnel or bridge tolls, then pay to park their cars, and then pay the congestion toll. This will kill Broadway and all the entertainment venues and museums.

So, why is this scheme being sanctioned? Why is the Governor pushing this when it almost cost her the election? Can great minds come up with another way to finance MTA infrastructure rather than bilking ordinary, hard-working citizens, and all this while experimenting with free bus service for some. Logic is absent. Disregard for the population is in full view.

Please reverse course and kill the Congestion Pricing scheme!

Thank you!

Michele Birnbaum  
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**Testimony by Dr. Thomas Chan MD, Chinatown & Little Italy Coalition for No  
Congestion Tax**

I am Dr. Thomas Chan. I have practiced pulmonary medicine in Chinatown for 30 years. I would like to explain to you that the \$23 congestion pricing fees will be detrimental to Chinatown and Little Italy.

Let me summarize below the four major problems we will have:

1. Our LOCAL ECONOMY: After 9/11 and pandemic, our local economy is much worse. In addition, for last 30 years, we have had no new affordable housing, and there is a big housing shortage in Chinatown area. So, many families and young people have moved out of Chinatown to outer boroughs. Currently we have many elderly and new immigrants left behind in Chinatown, and they have less purchasing power. So, Chinatown and Little Italy are heavily dependent on outside consumers from outer boroughs. With \$23, many will not come to eat and shop in Chinatown and Little Italy. Our restaurants and stores will have big problems.

2. Our ELDERLY: Many elderly left behind in Chinatown are confined in old shaky buildings without elevators. Their children need to come back to take care of them and bring them household goods and take them to see doctors with their cars. The elderly who have already moved out of Chinatown still come back to Chinatown to see their doctors and socialize with their friends. They are too frail to take public transportation, and they would need their children to drive them to Chinatown. With \$23 congestion tax, their children could not afford to drive to Chinatown regularly to take care of their elderly and to take them to see doctors to get their necessary medical care.

3. Our PATIENTS: About half of the patients of most medical offices in Chinatown are from outer boroughs. Many patients return to Chinatown to get their medical care because they trust their longtime doctors and there's no language barrier. With \$23 congestion tax, they will not come to get their needed doctor visit. For instance, my asthma patients will likely not come back to see me for their asthma exacerbations because of the prohibitive \$23 dollars, and they may just end up in emergency room and hospital.

4. Our WORKERS: Many restaurant workers working in Chinatown and Little Italy are from outer boroughs, and they are often working late to midnight. They will be afraid to go back home on subway late at night because of the safety concerns on the subway. They need to drive or carpool to go home. They could not afford to pay \$23. We already have workers shortage in our area. With \$23, our Chinatown and Little Italy will lose even more workers!!!

The congestion pricing will be devastating to Chinatown and Little Italy.

We need help!!!

Thank you very much for your assistance.

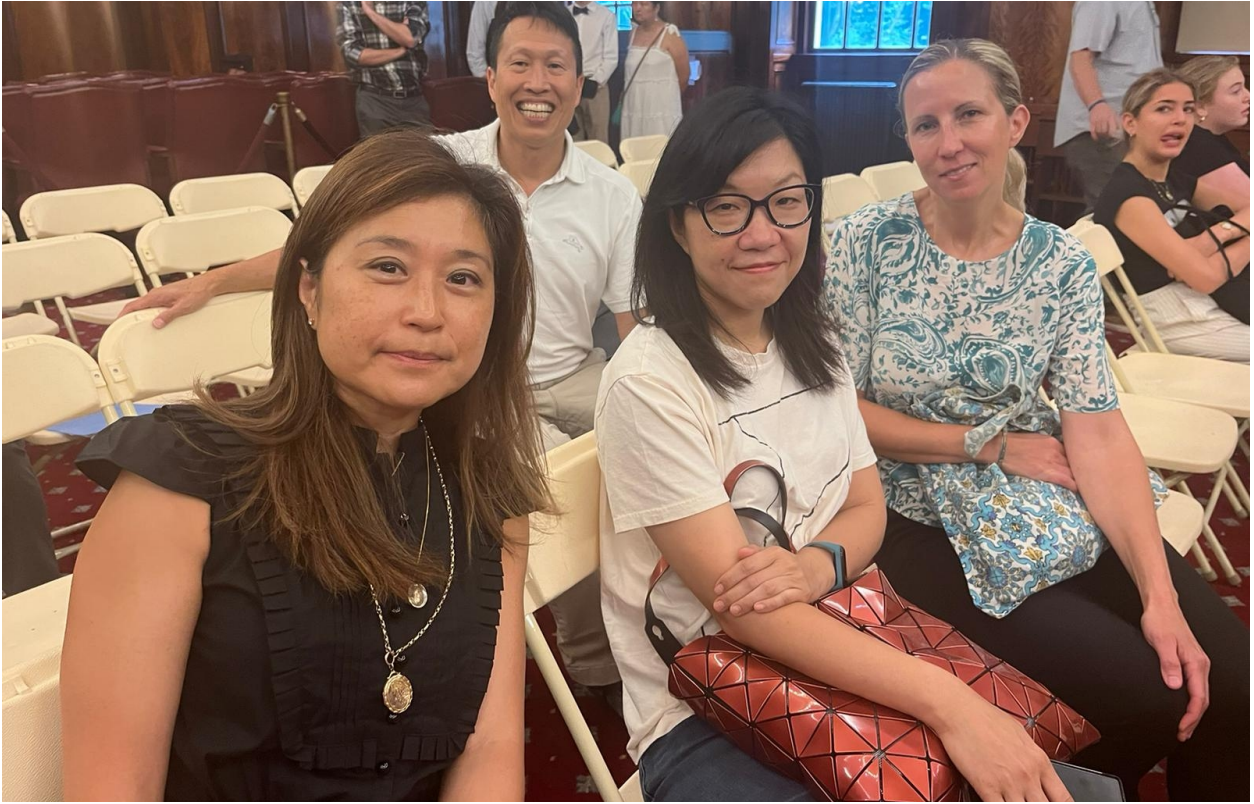
Thomas Chan, MD

[Photos follow on next two pages]





Above center facing the camera is Lower Manhattan Democrat district leader Justin Yu and of our Chinatown & Little Italy Coalition for No Congestion Tax coordinators.







Above, Assembly Member Lester Chang testifies against Congestion Pricing  
Below left, Susan Lee of the Chinatown & Little Italy Coalition for No Congestion Tax testifies.



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***Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free**, a diverse coalition of civic, business, and labor organizations and businesses throughout New York City, argues that implementing a tax on vehicles traveling south of 60th Street in Manhattan will, among other things, permanently damage efforts to revitalize the two districts.*