



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pedro Espada Jr.

Espada Throws It in Reverse:

PEDRO ESPADA, JR. March 21, 2010

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Advocates for East River Bridge Toll, But Only to Save Free Student Metro Card, Other MTA Services from Budget Ax

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New York State Senate Majority Leader Pedro Espada, Jr., who last year had been a staunch opponent to tolling motorists on the city's free bridges to generate revenue for the cash-strapped MTA, announced tonight that he will advocate as part of the state budget a \$2.00 toll each way on the four East River bridges to avert the elimination of the free student

MetroCard program and other crippling service cuts.

Senator Espada made the announcement while hosting a virtual town hall meeting live from the floor of the State Senate Chamber. He is the first-ever Bronx elected official to conduct a virtual town hall meeting for the borough's residents.

The Majority Leader said a \$2.00 toll on the four East River bridges -- Brooklyn, Manhattan, Williamsburg and Queensboro bridges -- according to the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission, would generate \$525 million annually.

Senator Espada said the new toll would also reduce Manhattan congestion and air pollution and related health problems. It would also increase mass transit ridership and, thus, increase the MTA's revenue, he added.

"The MTA's financial problems have not dissipated and it is evident that new funding is needed to prevent service cuts. Last year I opposed a toll on the 'free' bridges because the revenue was destined for a general fund. I am proposing that revenue generated by a toll on the East River bridges be earmarked specifically for the restoration of the free student MetroCard program and other subway and bus services that are being targeted with cuts or elimination. The MTA must agree to the specific use of this revenue, or all bets are off," Senator Espada said, explaining his change in position.

"I am fully confident that MTA Chairman and CEO Jay Walder would agree to this if it means preventing cuts to vital services and the free student MetroCard program. I am encouraged by Mr. Walder's comprehensive, long-term vision for the MTA, but he needs help now to get the agency back on track," Senator Espada said.

The Majority Leader said his MTA toll initiative was among several cost-reduction and revenue-generating initiatives that he would be proposing in the state budget -- some of

which he and other members of the Senate Hispanic Caucus were planning to discuss with Governor David Paterson at a meeting on Monday. One of these measures includes \$500 million in capital projects for affordable housing, which Senator Espada said would stimulate local economies by providing business to small contracting companies and jobs for local residents. #