



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

## Release: Avella, Weprin and Civic and Business Leaders Rally Against Tolling East River Bridges

TONY AVELLA March 13, 2015

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(QUEENS, NY) Today, State Senator Tony Avella was joined by Assembly Member David Weprin, Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, the Small Business Congress of New York City, which represents over 180,000 small businesses throughout New York City, the Queens Civic Congress, which represents over 100 Queens civic and cooperative associations, members of the Queens Chamber of Commerce, Friends of La Guardia, and community leaders to protest the latest congestion pricing proposal included in Move NY's transportation plan.

The plan was unveiled by the organization last month and proposes implementing tolls on all the East River Bridges crossing into Manhattan, eliminating the only remaining free routes in and out of Queens and Brooklyn. The East River bridges – which include the Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Ed Koch Queensboro Bridges – are used every day by low and middle income families who commute

between boroughs for access to hospitals, schools and other facilities. The added tolls would also pose a threat to the financial future of thousands of small businesses who use these bridges for deliveries every day.

Under the congestion pricing plan, the East River bridges would become toll routes while tolls on other bridges, such as the Whitestone and Throgs Neck, would be slightly lowered. However, the plan creates a serious concern that once tolls are implemented on the bridges crossing the East River, the price to cross the Whitestone and Throgs Neck Bridges would then go back up to their current rates, or higher.

Senator Avella previously introduced legislation (**S.1100/A.6029**), carried in the Assembly by Assembly Member Weprin, that would ban the implementation of tolls on any East River crossings, whether vehicular or pedestrian.

“In a district like mine, where public transportation is hard to come by, residents rely on their vehicles to get around the city every day. This often means crossing any of the bridges in and out of Queens and Brooklyn, including the ones over the East River. Adding tolls to these only remaining free routes does a serious injustice to the thousands of commuters who drive across these bridges. In addition, the Move NY plan provides no guarantee that the money collected from the imposed tolls would actually be used to maintain these four bridges. That is why I have introduced legislation that would prohibit placing tolls on any of the East River bridges. Clearly, we need to better fund mass transit and infrastructure, but placing these tolls is not the way to do it,” **said Senator Avella.**

“The City of New York is a very large metropolis where not all locations in the five boroughs are easily accessible by public transportation. And often times, the many outer-borough residents of this city are left with little-to-no adequate transit options for themselves and their families. They choose to drive because they have to, not because they find the drive particularly enjoyable, and certainly not because they are rich. We, as elected officials representing the various New York City communities must do everything we can to protect our neighbors, not hurt them. It is nothing but a renewed toll-tax scheme, and this type of ‘highway robbery’ does not belong in our great city,” **said Assembly Member David Weprin.**

“Those who claim to be about fair tolling and transportation reinvestment ignore the record of the City residents who use the free roads that connect Manhattan to Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. This toll-tax scheme asks these residents to bear a cost just above \$11, or \$16 cash, per day. Tolling the free East River bridges connecting Brooklyn and Queens to Manhattan certainly will not move New York. We agree that our electeds must treat support for transit seriously. Toll-tax schemes represent nothing serious when we must focus on real revenue streams to support public transit,” **stated Corey Bearak, Senior Policy Advisor for Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free.**

“Small businesses in all five boroughs serve, deliver and care for our city and they all need to travel by vehicle. Thus, tolls hurt mom-and-pops, individual independent business owners, seniors who need medical care, sole proprietors, professionals, and the handicapped and disabled. Most of the outer boroughs, except when you live close to mass transit, are underserved. Most small businesses need vehicles to operate, and the increase in cost hurts them the most,” **said Steve Barrison, President of the Small Business Congress of New York City, representing over 180,000 small businesses throughout New York City.**

“The congestion pricing initiative to impose tolls on the East River bridge crossings is totally

unreasonable. On behalf of the Queens Civic Congress member organizations spanning our borough, we must register our ardent opposition to placing tolls on the East River bridges, or any proposal which would reduce interborough industry and commerce where outer borough residents need to access Manhattan goods and services. The boroughs have spent years promoting tourism and commerce, and new tolls would discourage individuals and businesses from Manhattan and New Jersey from making the trip. We strongly oppose this proposal," **stated Harbachan Singh, President of the Queens Civic Congress, representing over 100 civic and cooperative associations.**

"This plan has the potential to hurt the small businesses of Queens and Brooklyn, for no guaranteed benefit. I stand with Senator Tony Avella and Assembly Member David Weprin in opposing any congestion pricing. Businesses and taxpayers can not afford this," **said Raymond Irrera, former President and current member of the Queens Chamber of Commerce.**

"Imposing \$16 roundtrip tolls on the East River crossings that have remained free for more than 100 years is a crushing expense and cost burden that families and seniors on a fixed income cannot afford. Outer borough residents and particularly seniors will be hurt by this proposal each time they venture into Manhattan seeking medical care or a doctor's appointment. Many parts of New York City have only limited bus service, yet the Manhattan-centric proponents of this plan have the audacity to call car ownership a luxury, when in reality, it is a necessity for many of us. These same congestion tax proponents promise to lower tolls on a few of the city's less traveled bridges. Sadly, we all know that those tolls will soon rise again and surpass pre-existing levels, only then, we'll be trapped with high tolls and no free East River crossings. This confiscatory tax tolling scheme must be stopped and our East River bridges must remain toll-free," **said Bob Friedrich, President of Glen Oaks Village.**

"Friends of LaGuardia Airport strongly oppose congestion pricing because it will prevent fair and equal access to our City's airports for City residents in Manhattan and the Bronx. We are putting at great risk our City's travel industry, which provides hundreds of thousands of jobs for New Yorkers and generates hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity for New York every single year. Any revenue and job creation the City might gain from congestion pricing we believe will be offset by the greater losses. Considering the immense impact we believe congestion pricing will have on our City's airports, and the economic impact to our City's travel industry and jobs, Friends of LaGuardia Airport strongly supports Senator Avella's opposition to congestion pricing," **said Ken Paskar, President of Friends of LaGuardia Airport.**

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