

To drive or not to drive; all options are costly as a commuter By Cooper Drummond

New York City plans to implement congestion pricing this spring in an effort to reduce automobile traffic in the Central Business District (CBD). People who drive below 60th avenue will be charged \$15 electronically.

According to the website of Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) who is in charge of setting up congestion pricing, this part of Manhattan “suffers from the worst traffic congestion in the country, affecting public health, the economy, and quality of life.” They also said “reducing traffic in the Manhattan CBD will lead to cleaner air, less traffic, safer streets, and better transit throughout the region.”

Commuters from Goshen appear at-large to not like the idea of congestion pricing. Nick Lombardi, a Goshen resident, is one of these people. He works as a credit analyst for a bond rating agency in Lower Manhattan. He is required to be in his office three times a week.

“Currently, my monthly would be \$277 and that is with \$25 a day parking in a garage,” said Lombardi, who worries congestion pricing will affect his budget.

For his typical commute, Lombardi traverses the George Washington Bridge (GWB) that connects Northern New Jersey to Uptown Manhattan. The GWB has a current toll of \$15.38 for peak hours and \$13.38 for off peak hours. Additionally, the toll was increased earlier in the month from \$14.75 and \$12.75, respectively. The GWB only charges drivers going eastbound, affecting people travelling into NYC instead of those leaving it.

“With congestion pricing and the increase in tolls, that \$277 increases to \$464.50. It almost doubles my toll every single day. Every single trip I go in, it is now adding a toll,” he said.

These prices only account for drivers using the lightest vehicle class. Automobiles with more than two axles or have more than single rear wheels will be accordingly charged more. People without a New York or New Jersey E-ZPass have to pay extra by default.

Lombardi has a couple of ways to save costs. He says he has a deal with a parking garage which gives him a discounted price. His girlfriend, who works in the city the same days as him, carpool together.

The other main way people drive into the city is via the Governor Mario Cuomo Bridge, otherwise known as the Tappan Zee Bridge (TZB). It connects Rockland County to Westchester County and eventually leads to NYC southbound. The TZB has an eastbound-only toll of \$6.25. Automobiles with more than two axles or are taller than seven feet and six inches are charged more. Also, people without a New York E-ZPass must pay extra.

Some optional paths on these routes have less expensive tolls. For instance, people who prefer taking the New York State Thruway during the first half of the trip instead of the Palisades Interstate Parkway will have to cross the Harriman Highway Gantry. Assuming the driver is carrying a New York E-ZPass and has the lightest vehicle class, the toll is \$1.25.

Driving from Goshen across the GWB or the TPZ to lower Manhattan takes over an hour, even without traffic. When budgeting, people are forced to factor in an hour’s worth of gas money with the inevitable toll and parking costs. In a few months, congestion pricing will play a part in people’s budgets too.

“I believe that it puts people who live in Goshen at a further disadvantage because it raises the price of living. That extra \$200 could have been used for something better. That money could have been spent anywhere in town, like a local business.”

Lombardi is not the only Goshen resident who might experience congestion pricing. According to a 2017 study, 19 thousand Orange County residents commute to NYC each day. Additionally, about 11% of employed residents in Orange County work in NYC. Post-pandemic numbers???

“I don’t think [people] will be more willing to go there,” said Ewa Piascik, a resident of Goshen. “They will say, ‘we are going to go somewhere else like New Jersey.’”

Piascik typically takes the GWB to NYC five times

a week for her personal assistant job. “We usually pay for E-ZPass, so I would say [currently] it’s between \$300 and \$400 a month.” Her husband also commutes to NYC for work, but they do not carpool because of different work hours. Combined, the two pay over \$500 a month.

“If I have to pay \$10 a day more, whatever the number is going to be over the course of a month, even if it’s just \$10 a day, you’re talking \$200,” said Gary Ayd, a resident of Middletown for a few years. “That’s a cable/cell phone bill. That is not okay, especially right now when groceries cost what they do and gas costs what it does.” He lived in Goshen before moving to Middletown and considers himself a “longtime Goshen resident.”

“Lately since COVID-19, I have been commuting less frequently. For five years, me and my wife commuted five days a week, Monday to Friday. We both worked at a company in Lower Manhattan which sold photography and video equipment. I was an account manager for colleges and universities and my wife did the rental department.”

There are other modes of transportation Goshen residents can take to NYC. The ShortLine Coach Bus has stops on Matthew Street and Grand Street. Goshen does not have an MTA station, but Middletown and Campbell Hall have nearby rail stops. They both go into the New Jersey Transit, which heads into NYC. Ayd typically takes the train from Campbell Hall because he says it is less expensive, but acknowledges public transportation is not for everyone.

“Maybe they work in Brooklyn or Queens where they would have to drive through those areas of prime-time, or maybe they work odd hours where public transit is harder to get. Maybe they were afraid for their safety because of the crime problems and they do not want to be in major hubs with a lot of people at rush hour. There is a lot of reasons people drive. It is not because they do not know there is another option. It is because they think it is better for them. So, this is just, in my opinion, punishing them. I think it is a very poor and short-sighted decision by the city.”

“If I know I am going to finish very late, I drive because there is no public connection,” said Piascik.

“For me, the train adds another half an hour. If I do not leave my desk by 5:30, I get home around nine. If I leave at 6:30 and I do not catch that express train, I have to stop at every stop on the main line. I want to get home to my dog, cat and my girlfriend. If she does not spend that day with me, we want to get home for dinner,” said Lombardi.

Ayd says saving costs on travel is a topic of conversation on the train every day. “People talk about this all the time, because any way you slice it, it is just brutal to do every day. I do not care if you are taking the train, bus or driving. It is two hours plus each way every day.”

Local residents believe congestion pricing will harm NYC more than it will help it.

“I believe that the concept of congestion pricing is a way of getting people to move back into the city. I also believe that using congestion pricing, the way that the city has it held up right now, is only going to cost traffic in higher parts of the city such as the Upper West Side and the Upper East Side. People who would traditionally use garage parking below 16th street will now start to use garage parking further up, and then put the burden on the MTA subways, or even start to street park their vehicles. Street parking in the cities very hard to get even in those upper boroughs. That will lead to a lot more problems with vandalism, vehicles being ticketed and towed, as well as people in those neighborhoods getting the brunt of people commuting into the city and trying to save \$15 every day,” said Lombardi.

“In my opinion, they are doing a great disservice to their own city by putting these fees in now, because people are not back in mass like they were before the pandemic for daily commuting. So many people now do work hybrid schedules, like I do. What I do now is very common, but it was not common five years ago,” said Ayd.



Campbell Hall MTA rail station
Egbertson Road & Watkins Drive
Campbell Hall, New York

Piascik, who grew up in Poland and went to college in Germany, has a different perspective. “Some of the countries or towns have congestion pricing and it’s actually it’s very beneficial for tourists and traffic.”

European cities such as Rome and London already charge congestion fees. Rome has a population of over four million and London has a population of over nine million, according to worldpopulationreview.com.

New York City would be the first city in the nation to have congestion pricing. It is also the most populated city in the United States. Eight million people there in 2020 and Manhattan alone had 1.6 million, according to the United States Census Bureau.

“If you commute, it is definitely going to affect you. It is either going to be more people on the train that you currently take, or more expensive to continue to drive. Or it is going to force you to go from driving to taking public transit because you do not want pay the fee. But either way, it is going to affect you,” said Ayd.

“If somebody is committed to commute to New York and bear all the costs, they will probably just keep continuing to do it and swallow that price increase,” said Piascik, who at the same time believes “the price is way too high and I think it should be way lower, maybe five dollars per car. Then, it will be affordable, but \$15 is just ridiculous,” said Piascik.

Another topic people have brought up is the lack of exemptions at the moment for certain workers.

“I will say is that I think this whole issue is a good reason and illustration why I think as a workforce, people need to continue to push for remote and hybrid options. Most people that commute to the city do not work in a job that they cannot do remotely. If you are a police officer, firefighter, you work at a hospital, you have to be there on site, of course. But if you are an account executive, computer programmer, certified public accountant, or an office manager, you can do all those jobs remotely very easily and very effectively,” said Ayd.

The MTA will hold public comment hearings on Thursday, Feb. 29, at 6:00 p.m., Friday, March 1, at 10 a.m., Monday, March 4, at 10:00 a.m. and Monday, March 4, at 6 p.m. Each hearing will be streamed on the MTA YouTube channel at youtube.com/@mta-live and on the project website: mta.info/CBDTP.

Additionally, until Monday, March 11, 2024, members of the public may submit written comments online and by email, mail and fax, and may submit audio comments by leaving a voicemail message. All comment submitted will be recorded and submitted for review.

Mail: CBD Tolling Program,
2 Broadway, 23rd Floor, New York, NY 10004
Phone: 646-252-7440
Fax: Send to (212) 504-3148
with Attention to CBDTP Team.



Park & Ride commuter stop for Coach Bus line. Matthews St Goshen
Full service station 10 Railroad Ave, Middletown