

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

September 09, 2022

Chair and CEO  
Metropolitan Transit Authority  
2 Broadway,  
New York, NY, 10004

Dear Chair Lieber:

Thank you for your efforts to advance environmental justice and transit equity. I am ecstatic to witness the renewed and strengthened intergovernmental partnership to improve the reliability and efficacy of the nation's largest public transportation system, and better serve millions of straphangers through the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) New York City Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program (the project). As a representative of Northern Manhattan and the Bronx, I write to express support for the adoption of a final program that provides the most environmental and public health benefits to all New York City residents, not just those who live in the project area. Additionally, I ask that the final program consider a once-per-day charge, or overall exemption, for livery base drivers. I understand that the current comment period is critical to finalizing the project's details and welcome the opportunity to comment.

The recently published environmental impact assessment shows that many scenarios will significantly increase the number of gas-emitting trucks on the Cross Bronx Expressway, RFK Bridge, and I-95.<sup>1</sup> These are all neighborhoods that have historically contributed least but are impacted most by the surge of greenhouse gases in our communities. Furthermore, as cars seek to avoid the CBD, certain highways will see increased volume such as the westbound long island expressway (I-495), westbound George Washington Bridge on I-95, the Brooklyn Bridge, and others. As such, I ask that the scenario selected for advancement most benefit all communities and include fortified mitigation and enhancement efforts to avert significant vehicle volume and rise in air pollution in any one area. As the FHWA recognized, the project could have effects on environmental justice populations, and the current public outreach coordination period is critical to ensure that these communities do not shoulder a greater burden.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, I want to draw attention to a group of small business owners that are often overlooked—livery-based drivers. In New York City, the Livery sector has seen a clear and drastic decline in active

---

<sup>1</sup>Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Triborough Bridge & Tunnel Authority, New York State Department of Transportation, The New York City Department of Transportation, and The Federal Highway Administration. (2022, August 10). *Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program Environmental Assessment*. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from <https://new.mta.info/document/92756>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

vehicles since 2015, declining from over 18,000 vehicles in January 2016 to over 7,000 active vehicles in March 2020.<sup>3</sup> The impact of COVID-19 and app-based high volume for-hire services has taken a toll on the industry, and they have expressed serious concern that continuous congestion pricing will eradicate the industry. For decades, the livery sector has played an essential role in the City’s transportation network— providing services in the outer boroughs and Upper Manhattan, where Taxi coverage and street hail options have historically been limited. In fact, nearly 70% of the trips livery-based drivers make are outside of the projects area, therefore, the request for them to be exempt or be charged just once per day will have minimal impact on the project revenue goals.

Additionally, the Livery industry continues to offer a cash-based option for those who prefer this method of payment or are unbanked. We simply cannot ignore the cries of an essential working-class immigrant industry or the communities they serve. I share the concerns that continuous congestion pricing will further push these local bases into the corner and put them on the path to extinction. For this reason, I ask that the final program consider a once-per-day charge, or overall exemption, for livery-based drivers.

As the environmental assessment (EA) comes to completion, and the Traffic Mobility Review Board (TMRB) develops recommendations on toll rates, exemptions, and crossing credits, I ask that these concerns are taken into consideration. Without a doubt, if done right, congestion pricing will benefit the entire economic well-being of our great city. As reflected in the environmental impact assessment, congestion pricing will reduce congestion, boost transit ridership, improve air quality, and improve transit service. Additionally, it will provide a dedicated revenue source that, when combined with other funding sources, will allow the MTA to fund the first wave of major expansions to New York’s transit system in over half a century.

For example, in Northern Manhattan, projects such as the Second Avenue Subway Phase II extension will alleviate crowding on the Lexington Avenue 4-5-6 lines and provide new transit alternatives.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the project’s revenue will advance our local and national goals of decreasing carbon emissions by backing the MTA’s commitment to electrify its bus fleet by 2040. Plus, the project will invest in MTA’s signal modernization program to serve riders more swiftly and precisely.

Moreover, revenue can advance our environmental justice goals including planting trees throughout the city to mitigate the urban heat island effect, an issue that disproportionality impacts New Yorkers— especially in neighborhoods of dire need such as the 125<sup>th</sup> corridor, The South Bronx, and more. And once and for all, the MTA will have adequate resources to make the MTA’s system ADA accessible. At the moment, only 114 stations of the MTA-NYCT’s 472 total stations— or just 24 percent— are considered accessible to those with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> This issue impacts all of our constituencies, and we hear from them often about it. The revenue from congestion pricing coupled

---

<sup>3</sup> (2021). (rep.). *Black Car and Livery Task Force 2021 Annual Report*. Retrieved September 6, 2022, from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/tlc/downloads/pdf/black-car-and-livery-task-force-report-2021.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>WE ACT For Environmental Justice. (2016). *Northern Manhattan and the Congestion Pricing Plan*. New York, NY. Accessed on 2022.08.09 at <https://www.weact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Northern-Manhattan-and-the-Congestion-Pricing-Plan.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> MTA Guide to Accessible Transit. (September 2018). <http://web.mta.info/accessibility/transit.htm>

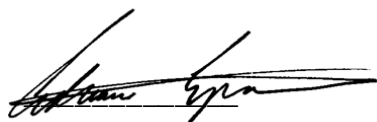
with the historic *Infrastructure and Jobs Act* dollars will guarantee that the nation’s largest public transportation system affords equal opportunity to all—setting a countrywide standard.

Furthermore, it provides the opportunity to redirect intergovernmental funding for overdue environmental justice projects such as capping the Cross Bronx Expressway which would improve hundreds of thousands of lives throughout The Bronx by reducing air pollution, building park space, and connecting communities that the road divides. While this isn’t wholly under the MTA’s jurisdiction, intergovernmental resources can and should be prioritized to protect climate justice communities and advance our nation’s climate goals.

I strongly support these large transit equity successes and am eager to see them supercharged by the \$1 billion annual revenue that the congestion pricing program is expected to generate.<sup>6</sup>

For these reasons, I ask for your continued support in protecting livery-based drivers and their consumers, advancing transit equity, and that you contemplate concerns listed in this letter as final deliberations are imminent. Thank you for your attention and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

---

<sup>6</sup>McDonough, A. (2022, August 4). *Congestion pricing's next obstacle? the exemption debate*. City & State NY. Retrieved August 9, 2022, from <https://bit.ly/3p6pL3D>