



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

December 8, 2008

Honorable David A. Paterson
Governor of the State of New York
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

Last week, the Ravitch Commission released its recommended solutions to solve the MTA's fiscal crisis. I want to thank Richard Ravitch and the members of his commission for taking on this project. I also want to commend you for your leadership in addressing the long-term needs of the New York metropolitan area's public transportation system. I firmly believe — and on this point, we can all agree — that New York's mass transit is the lifeblood of the metropolitan region's economy.

While I support some of the commission's prescriptions, specifically its calls for payroll taxes, minimal service cuts, and MTA administrative belt-tightening, I cannot support any plan that includes tolling the remaining free bridges on the East River. I detailed the reasons for my opposition to tolling in previous letters to you. I believe that East River tolls amount to a regressive tax that unfairly burdens outer-borough commuters. Vast numbers of residents likely to be the most affected by these tolls — those in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island — are not wealthy. They are hard working people who are underserved by mass transit and rely on their vehicles for their livelihoods and to obtain necessary goods and services. Some are disabled and elderly residents who cannot use subways because of accessibility issues. Tolling these bridges is tantamount to balancing the MTA's books on the backs of working people and small businesses.

The Ravitch Commission's toll proposal is little more than a back-door approach to congestion pricing, which already failed to pass in the legislature. The commission implicitly admits this similarity when it touts bridge tolling as both a revenue generator and a traffic-reducing automobile deterrent. The commission's proposals closely mirror those of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, when he was first pitching the idea of congestion pricing to the public, when it states that toll revenue would go towards the purchase and operation of new city buses. I greatly respect and agree with Mayor Bloomberg on almost every issue. However, we differ in our assessment of how the burden of tolling to enter Manhattan would affect working people.

The Ravitch Commission's proposal to toll East River bridges will increase the MTA's administrative expenses and encourage growth in the already too large MTA bureaucracy. The primary method the commission has proposed to levy tolls is by using E-Z Pass. In cases of drivers without E-Z Pass, the commission proposes photographically recording license plates and sending bills by mail to vehicle owners. The tolling of out-of-town residents will likely prove problematic because they will be less inclined to pay the MTA their due since the consequences for avoiding payment would be minimized by their out-of-town residency. This in turn will encourage growth in MTA operations to administer collection because the MTA will be forced to repeatedly solicit payment from non-residents who owe money but will not pay.

There are several other ways we can fund our mass transit system more equitably — and I'm flabbergasted that after this many months of testimony and investigation, the commission failed to bring up any of them. I would like to see a list of all the proposals that the commission rejected and a list of reasons why they were rejected. I believe that this debate would be better served by releasing all the ideas to the public, so that we can all have a chance to comment on them. Throughout the course of this debate, I have suggested many possible solutions. For example:

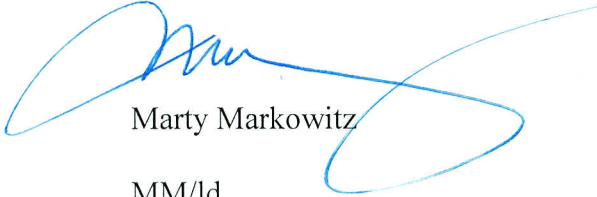
- Issuing a modest dedicated tax on gasoline in the metropolitan region, with all proceeds going to mass transit.
- Reinstating the commuter tax dedicated to mass transit, which would bring in at least \$500 million per year, as well as rectify one of the greatest legislative mistakes in this state's history.
- Increasing car registration fees within New York City, and imposing an equivalent surcharge on registrations in all MTA counties — one that links car registration fees to car models and weight — an idea put forward by NYC Comptroller William Thompson.
- Dedicating a lottery with proceeds going to mass transit.
- Increasing federal funding. NYC riders pay more of the operating costs per fare than any other system in the country. Fares pay 69% of operating costs, whereas the national average is just 37%. President-Elect Barack Obama has proposed a massive stimulus package that will include large infrastructure investments once he takes office in January. There is every reason to believe that NYC, with the nation's largest public transit system, will likely to be a major beneficiary of this future investment because New York is critical to the nation's economic stability and recovery.

A good analogy to public transit is public education. We all agree that public education is crucial to the functioning of our society, which is why every resident in a school district pays for that district's schools. Residents pay regardless of whether or not they have children enrolled. Public transportation should be no different. Everyone in the MTA catchment area should pay equitably for our mass transit system because everyone living here relies on it to keep our economy moving. Let's stop nickel—and—diming our residents and accelerating a process of people leaving the boroughs because the cost of

living is too high. I call on you, the Ravitch Commission, and all representatives of the people of New York, to scrap the tolls and find a real, reliable funding stream for mass transit. The legislature has already said "No" to congestion pricing, and I strongly urge them to say "No" to tolls on these bridges.

I look forward to receiving a positive response on this matter.

Sincerely,



Marty Markowitz

MM/ld

cc: Senator Hillary Clinton
Senator Charles Schumer
Brooklyn Congressional Delegation
Sheldon Silver, Speaker, Assembly
Dean Skelos, Majority Leader, Senate
Brooklyn Senate and Assembly Delegation
Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Comptroller William Thompson
Brooklyn City Council Delegation
Council Member John Liu, Transportation Committee Chair
Elliot Sander, MTA Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer