



STATEMENT TO NYC TRAFFIC CONGESTION MITIGATION COMMISSION
American Institute of Architects, New York Chapter
January 23, 2008

Since it was created by the NY State Legislature in July 2007, the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission, with 17 members appointed by the Governor, the Mayor, the State Assembly, the State Senate and the New York City Council, “has gone through a comprehensive process of consulting with the public, evaluating a wide range of alternative approaches to traffic mitigation, and weighing the advantages and disadvantages of those approaches.” This effort, which is supported by an interagency working group of transportation professionals, released its Interim Report to the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission on January 10, 2008. The report was developed in preparation for a final recommendation by the Commission towards the goal of the City and State approval by March 31, 2008 of a “pricing-based traffic mitigation plan that achieves at least a 6.3 percent reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in Manhattan south of 86th Street.” At stake is \$354 million of federal funding for transit and transportation improvements.

In reviewing the interim report, the Chapter is heartened to see that all of the suggestions from our October 25, 2007 public testimony (attached for reference) are either acknowledged, or included in one or more of the four alternative plans developed by the Commission. We note that the Commission’s report acknowledges that it may “select any of five alternatives, may modify one, may combine elements of two or more, or may put forward a wholly different plan.” It is clear that it was necessary to develop the five alternatives in a well-defined fashion so as to be able to provide a statistical analysis based on best engineering practices.

The key is to implement a plan that provides congestion relief with its associated benefits, but which does not impose an unfair burden on the affected populace. In order to qualify for the federal funding the plan must be pricing-based and achieve the minimum 6.3 percent reduction in VMTs. It must be flexible enough to allow “tweaking” after its implementation to allow strategies that could further improve the plan.

Given the overall goals of providing congestion relief, an increased quality of life, economic benefit and the ability to raise revenue for transportation programs to further the aforementioned, it is the Chapter’s position that any plan adopted needs to incorporate equity, simplicity and flexibility as overriding principals. The SMART Authority that would be funded as a result of the plan will need to operate with transparency and accountability to the populace it serves.

Of the five options, it appears that the “Alternative Plan” comes closest to achieving the principals mentioned while qualifying for the funding. Whether this Alternate Plan is further modified by the Commission in its final recommendation on January 31, 2008, or whether complimentary programs are initiated independently by the City, certain policies should be introduced to further improve congestion mitigation and fund transportation programs. They include:

- Develop a parking permit system throughout the city on a neighborhood basis. Besides generating revenue, it would allow for flexibility to respond the special needs of each neighborhood, in particular those adjacent to the congestion-pricing zone.
- Introduce market rate street parking, in particular within the congestion-pricing zone. The reduction of the number of vehicles coming into the zone might allow for the elimination of some street parking in

certain streets, providing real estate for additional bike paths and/or enhancement of the pedestrian environment.

- Increase the recommended fees for taxis, liveries, and other car services that are exempt with the Alternate Plan. These users of the city's streets should also contribute to the SMART Fund.

What is critical is that a congestion mitigation plan be adopted as it moves to the next steps in the City and State legislative process. To that end it is the Chapter's hope that the political forces required for the plan's success will rise above individual agendas to adopt effective legislation that will benefit New York City's and the Region's residents, commuters and visitors in a sustainable manner.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the views of the AIA NY Chapter on this important issue.

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