

August 24, 2021

Hon. Kathy Hochul
Governor
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

We congratulate you on becoming New York's first woman governor! We look forward to partnering with you at this pivotal time in our state, as we recover from the covid pandemic, confront a transit crisis and address the climate emergency.

As you know, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's subways, trains, buses, and paratransit service are the lifeblood of New York City and the entire metropolitan region, the heart of New York's economy. Pre-pandemic, the subways accounted for just shy of 60 percent of trips to the Manhattan central business district. Add buses and commuter trains, and transit's share of trips to the Manhattan core surpasses 80 percent. But now the MTA faces an unprecedented fiscal crisis owing to the pandemic, which arrived just as the agency finally began transformational upgrades to a system that serves as a critical lifeline for families and essential workers, a majority of whom are people of color, many working in low-wage jobs.

Meanwhile, an influx of car traffic onto city streets has brought gridlock to neighborhoods across the five boroughs, even with most offices still closed. Before the pandemic, the Partnership for New York City found that traffic congestion was costing area businesses and families \$20 billion each year in wasted time and resources. We cannot bear that burden, or allow it to increase, as we strive to rebuild, grow and equitably accommodate the 630,000 new New Yorkers recently documented in the 2020 US Census.

Four years ago, your predecessor called congestion pricing "an idea whose time has come," to help pay for the capital upgrades that our aging transit system desperately needs and to lessen downstate gridlock. Less than two years later, on March 30, 2019, the legislature adopted a historic budget authorizing the nation's first congestion pricing program. After fifty years of failure – Mayors Lindsay, Koch, and Bloomberg all tried to toll the East River bridges and/or the avenues along 60th Street – New York acted decisively. New Yorkers rightly celebrated.

Now, in the lingering stages of a calamitous pandemic, with New York determined to emerge stronger, we need congestion pricing more than ever. We implore you to use your full authority to implement it as quickly, fully, and fairly as possible.

Public transit has just suffered its worst year. With millions of riders needing to stay at home to combat a global pandemic, the resulting revenue shortfalls nearly destroyed the lifeblood of our city. Meanwhile, the subway is more than a century old and still not nearly as frequent, reliable, or accessible as New Yorkers need it to be. With transit ridership at barely half of pre-COVID

levels, the MTA's capital program is taking on more importance than ever. Fulfilling the full capital program, including urgently needed signal upgrades, elevators, and other station and accessibility improvements, is essential to winning riders back to public transit. **With a contribution of \$15 billion or more, congestion pricing is the foundational source of funds to fix and modernize our subway, bus and commuter rail network.**

At the same time, traffic congestion and vehicular pollution are a mortal threat to New York's recovery and our collective future. New driving habits have resulted in traffic volumes at some bridges and tunnels that already exceed pre-pandemic levels. As more workers return to their offices this fall, as anticipated, traffic in many parts of New York will become unbearable. More traffic has already brought more deadly collisions, more air pollution that leads to premature death and missed work and school from respiratory and other illnesses, and more carbon pollution that accelerates climate change and disproportionately impacts environmental justice communities. At the same time, New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act demands that we drastically cut our emissions from transportation. The expansion and reliability of the MTA's network as well as encouraging alternatives to driving are key to achieving the CLCPA's paramount goals.

After an inexcusable delay by its predecessor, the Biden administration has strongly endorsed New York's congestion pricing program. In March, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, acknowledging the indisputable environmental benefits of cutting driving, gave the MTA the green light to proceed with an environmental assessment in order to expedite the program's start date. We are glad to hear that the MTA and the state and city DOTs have come to an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration about the process to complete the assessment and we urge that it be completed and submitted without delay.

While the Trump administration's inaction unfortunately pushed off the anticipated start date, New York cannot let it drift further or saddle the program with special-interest exemptions. The longer we wait for a fair, broad-based program, the longer it will take to fix the subways and also relieve the chronic road congestion that drags down our economy, health and safety.

Economic recovery itself demands robust implementation of congestion pricing. Already, traffic congestion is interfering with commerce and new business growth and development. **It is simply physically impossible for cars to lead the return to Manhattan offices and retail.** As the city grapples with the restoration of its public education, housing, health, sanitation, and other essential services, devastating gridlock will delay and potentially reverse New York's recovery. Emergency response times and bus service are particularly imperilled. In short, starting up congestion pricing is crucial to bouncing back; delay is the harder choice.

We are eager to support you and your administration to implement North America's first congestion pricing program. We look forward to showcasing it to other cities as the type of bold policymaking that will bring about a much more accessible, equitable, and resilient future. We will do everything possible to ensure its success. We look forward to your leadership on this vital matter.

Sincerely,

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