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## **Will congestion pricing survive the state Legislature? Good question**

New York state legislators didn't have many nice things to say about Gov. Andrew Cuomo's congestion pricing plan on Wednesday — a plan that, as they repeatedly noted, remains little more than an abstract sketch.

The legislative skepticism on display during the Albany hearing underscored a point that advocates have been making for a while — Cuomo may now support congestion pricing, but the Legislature remains deeply ambivalent and that means it might not happen.

"How many people are going to be paying these tolls and what are the tolls going to be?" asked state Sen. John Liu, referring to the still-indeterminate charge the governor wants to levy on drivers entering Manhattan's central business district.

"Those analyses are still being done," said Robert Foran, chief financial officer of the MTA during the joint legislative hearing.

Liu laughed incredulously.

Amy Paulin, who chairs the Assembly's authorities oversight committee, asked how much the MTA anticipates congestion pricing will actually alleviate traffic in New York City.

"To quantify that today is not really possible, chair," said MTA President Pat Foye. "But we think it would be a significant amount."

For a year and a half, Cuomo has been touting his newfound support for congestion pricing as a way to generate revenue for the MTA and lessen the traffic on city streets.

But his plan remains largely unarticulated. The Cuomo administration has yet to release the analysis underpinning its argument that tolls would generate \$1 billion a year for the MTA, or enough to support \$15 billion over the course of five years. State officials have yet to say how much the tolls will be, how many drivers are expected to pay them, or how many drivers may take the hint and travel by mass transit instead.

The governor's budget documents, which he released two weeks ago, offer some elaboration, but mostly on the question of who will have power over, and enjoy the fruits of, city streets.

Starting, at earliest, in 2021, the MTA's Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, which Cuomo effectively controls via the MTA, will collect tolls from drivers who enter Manhattan south of 60th Street and west of the FDR Drive. The state "may occupy," city streets for the purposes of implementing congestion pricing, and the city of New York "shall cooperate fully," the budget documents say. The MTA will control the ensuing proceeds.

"Cuomo isn't proposing to give Gotham the tools to charge drivers to use the city's own resources," wrote Manhattan Institute senior fellow Nicole Gelinas earlier this week. "Rather, he's proposing a hostile takeover of New York's roads, a la [Robert] Moses of the mid-20th century."

Reinvent Albany executive director John Kaehny takes a similar view of the matter.

"It gives the [Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority] extraordinary authority, verging on poison-pill level authority if you're the city," he said.

The lack of further detail did not dampen the MTA officials' ardor for Cuomo's proposal.

"Without congestion pricing, fares and tolls would increase by nearly 30 percent by 2024," Foye said. "That means that in a span of about five years, the base fare for subways and buses would increase from \$2.75 today to approximately \$3.50, while the cost of a monthly Metrocard would jump from \$121 to approximately \$154."

Further, Foye said, congestion pricing alone won't do the trick.

The MTA's next five-year capital plan is poised to be enormous (as much as \$60 billion), and no one knows how to pay for it. It's nevertheless considered essential to making the subway system one befitting a modern city. Meanwhile, the MTA 's operating deficits could reach \$990 million by 2022.

That isn't necessarily enough to convince state Sen. Liz Krueger, a longtime proponent of congestion pricing. She would like to see more details about Cuomo's congestion pricing plan.

"Clearly we need an actual current proposal to review and understand," she said, via text.

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