



Partnership for New York City

From: Partnership for New York City
Contact: Ethan Davidson (212) 493-7488

Rubenstein Communications, Inc.
Contact: Bud Perrone (212) 843-8068

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

POLL: NYC DRIVERS' REACTIONS TO CONGESTION PRICING

Partnership Survey Finds That Lack Of Access To Mass Transit Is Not the Reason That Most New Yorkers Drive

NEW YORK, May 3, 2007 - Fewer than five percent of all commuters who live in New York City drive to work in Manhattan's Central Business Districts (CBDs). A survey of this group, commissioned by the Partnership for New York City, discovered that the vast majority has access to mass transit alternatives and drives by choice. The poll, which was conducted between March 12 and April 4, 2007, found that just 17 percent of drivers take their cars into Manhattan's CBDs because of inaccessible or inconvenient mass transit options.

Additionally, only 10 percent of drivers say that they avoid mass transit because it is too slow. In a clear indication that saving time is not a primary reason for driving, 61 percent of drivers say that mass transit would be as fast or faster than driving. That view is shared by 66 percent of drivers from both Queens and Brooklyn.

"Contrary to conventional thinking, lack of access to a convenient mass transit alternative is not what motivates most New Yorkers to drive into the crowded business districts," said Kathryn Wylde, President & CEO of the Partnership for New York City. "Ironically, drivers who live in Manhattan, which offers the best mass transit system, were more likely than those from the other boroughs to say that they use a car because mass transit is not easily accessible or is inconvenient."

According to census statistics, 267,186 workers from across the region commute by car to Manhattan's Central Business Districts (60th Street to the Battery) each weekday. This amounts to only 16 percent of all commuters into the CBDs. Of these, 141,433 (53%) are driving in from the five boroughs. Only 12 percent of New York City residents commute to work in the CBDs by car out of total 1.2 million workers coming each day from the 5 boroughs. Residents from Staten Island are most likely to drive (31% of the New York City drivers) with Manhattan residents least likely (5%). Drivers from Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens account for 11 percent, 15 percent and 17 percent respectively.

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The survey of men and women from the five boroughs who frequently drive in Manhattan for work or personal reasons found that congestion pricing would affect many drivers' habits. Sixty percent of the drivers surveyed said they would choose other options besides driving into Manhattan during peak weekday hours if there were a congestion charge up to \$8. This included a mix of people who are commuting to work every day and those coming in occasionally for other purposes. Most of those same drivers said they would not change their driving habits if the commute were 30 minutes longer.

"Our survey of New Yorkers who drive in Manhattan found that congestion pricing is the only mechanism that will entice a large portion of drivers to switch to public transit," said Partnership for New York City President and CEO Kathryn Wylde. "A significant percentage of surveyed drivers are heavily resistant to getting out of their cars, but in response to pricing there are more than enough who would to reduce congestion by a significant factor."

When drivers were asked for their opinions about congestion pricing, 43 percent initially supported the concept with 51 percent opposed. When told of the potential benefits (including a reduction in air pollution and improved traffic flow; funds dedicated to transit improvement, and that Londoners overwhelmingly approve of their system) opinion for and against congestion pricing among drivers was almost evenly divided, with 45 percent in support and 47 percent in opposition. When subsequently asked about a charge of \$8, on top of tolls and parking fees, 35 percent still were in support, while 61 percent were opposed. (Since Mayor Bloomberg's plan reduces the \$8 charge by the amount of bridge and tunnel tolls that a driver pays, charges would be capped at \$8.)

A report released in December 2006 by the Partnership for New York City found that excess or harmful congestion costs the regional economy more than \$13 billion and 50,000 jobs annually. In the study, the Partnership noted that London's congestion charging program, implemented in 2003, reduced the number of vehicles coming into the center city by 15 percent, which was enough to eliminate gridlock. In addition, London has decreased greenhouse gasses, with a 15 percent reduction in CO₂, an 8 percent reduction in NO_x, and a 6 percent reduction in PM₁₀.

A key conclusion of the survey is that, while the majority of drivers in New York City believe that traffic congestion is a serious problem (68%), few would change their habits absent congestion charges.

"While New York City drivers are one of the primary, if not the top cause of congestion, most drivers claim to have seen the enemy and it is someone else," Wylde adds in reference to the survey's findings that New York drivers blame others for congestion. Surveyed drivers cite truck and delivery vehicles (18%), taxis and livery cars (17%), people driving from the suburbs (12%) and double parking (12%) as the top four causes of congestion.

Travel time does not seem to be a major factor for most drivers. The average commute now is 30 minutes. Even if the time of an average commute doubled to one hour, only half (48%) of drivers would consider an alternative.

The survey, which was conducted by Global Strategy Group on behalf of the Partnership for New York City between March 12 and April 4, 2007, involved 500 New York City drivers, most of whom drive frequently into or in Manhattan below 60th Street between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays. The margin of error is + 4.4 percent on the entire sample. The margin of error on sub-samples may be greater.

The Partnership for New York City (www.pfnyc.org) is a network of business leaders dedicated to enhancing the economy of the five boroughs of New York City and maintaining the city's position as the center of world commerce, finance and innovation.

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