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## Panel to mull alternatives to congestion pricing

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January 10, 2008

The state panel studying Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan also will consider today a modified version with a new boundary, \$8 round-trip tolls on East River and Harlem River bridges, and a system that restricts access to parts of Manhattan based on license plate numbers.

The mayor's four plans each come with significant strengths and weaknesses, and reduce the vehicle miles traveled in Manhattan from a high of 10.3 percent to a low of 3.2 percent, according to an interim report from the commission released late yesterday.

"The goal of the commission is to come up with a proposal that gets adopted," said chairman Marc Shaw. The commission is set to make a final recommendation to the State Legislature on Jan. 31. Any plan it proposes would need the approval of the City Council and the legislature to be enacted.

The mayor's plan calls for charging motorists \$8 to enter Manhattan below 86th Street, and charging motorists who travel within the congestion zone \$4. It would generate \$420 million a year for mass transit projects, but the capital and operating costs associated with it are very high, the report said.

An alternative plan moves the boundary of the zone south to 60th Street, eliminates the \$4 intrazonal charge but adds a \$1 taxi surcharge. It also calls for an increase in metered parking rates. This plan would generate \$520 million a year and have lower capital and operating costs, the report found.

The East and Harlem River bridge tolls would raise the most money - \$859 million a year - and eliminate 7 percent of vehicle miles traveled in Manhattan. But instituting tolls on the city's free bridges has historically been a political nonstarter.

**"East River bridge tolls represent nothing more than a tax increase on the backs of working and middle class New Yorkers," said James Trent, transportation chairman and treasurer of the Queens Civic Congress, a vocal opponent of congestion pricing.**

License plate restrictions call for permitting motorists to enter below 86th Street only on certain days, based on the last number of the license plate. While the plan would reduce traffic by 10.3 percent, it generates no revenue and would have to be coupled with some kind of tax for mass transit improvements, according to the report.