



# Queens Civic Congress

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
THURSDAY, January 24, 2008

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## **Testimony to the NYC Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission**

Prepared by Queens Civic Congress Transportation chair Jim Trent (Creedmoor Civic)

Presented by Vice President Harbachan Singh (Holliswood Civic)

York College, January 24, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to present the concerns of Queens residents to the NYC Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission. My name is Harbachan Singh and I serve as Vice President of the [Queens Civic Congress](http://www.queensciviccongress.org), an umbrella organization of more than 100 neighborhood based civic organizations representing property owners, including those owning coops and condos, and tenants who reside in every part of Queens County. I present this testimony on behalf of our Transportation Committee chair, Jim Trent, also QCC's Treasurer.

This testimony builds on our [recommendations](#) delivered last week at the citywide hearing at Hunter College; it remains a part of the Commission's record. I re-state one salient point from QCC's statement from last week: "The commission's clear failure to listen to the voices of Queens residents." It boggles the mind that no alternative presented by the commission reflects our sound recommendation. You really need to go back to go.

The New York Times stated this morning, "New York needs to keep pushing congestion pricing forward — and it needs to do it right." None of the plans advanced by the commission get it right. Other than its limited focus on the proliferation of placards and permits and better enforcement, the commission ignores better and more [practical](#) congestion mitigation proposals.

These proposals include taxi stands to help reduce cruising – currently double the 6.3% amount of congestion reduction required by the agreement with the USDOT and State law creating the commission. The Times calls tolls one of "other duds;" yet the Times attempts to recast a toll/tax congestion charge variant as anything else but a toll, and even a fifth grader knows that it is a toll. If one crosses a bridge and pays, one pays a toll. Just because the commission and some others fail to acknowledge a charge for crossing a bridge by its textbook definition, does not make the charge anything other than a toll.

Governor Spitzer made a commitment to no new taxes; please explain how making city residents pay to cross a bridge into Manhattan – a toll, a charge – differs from the imposition of a *new* tax. These new tax revenues offered in the various commission plans remain small, of questionable realization and likely to replace rather than supplement existing funding.

Outer borough residents who can least afford any congestion tax would pay the bulk of this unfair tax, while most wealthy suburban and out of state commuters get a free ride. Nearly seven of every 10 residents who use the free East River crossings come from the four boroughs outside Manhattan. Brooklyn (33%) and Queens (24%) residents make up the bulk of those affected. Two-thirds all visits according to a 2003 study – involve trips for things other than commutation. (This includes medical appointment, family visits, recreational, etc.)

The best revenue [plan](#) – advanced by the Queens Civic Congress – involves no *new* tax scheme, It reforms an old measure that would net nearly \$1.8 billion annually. Unlike any other proposal, this QCC revenue reform would raise hundreds of millions of dollars for the entire MTA systems that primarily serve non-city residents. The Queens Civic Congress sees nothing wrong with making out-of-staters and other non-city residents step up to the plate.

On top of this, add the federal government's one-shot grant. The city/state/MTA can achieve compliance under the federal plan without tolls or a toll/tax congestion charge variant.

In closing, Queens Civic Congress poses these questions to the Commission, its members, elected officials, pundits and the public: How about a plan that makes sense? Why persist in a discussion of toll/tax schemes without any guarantees that anything other than alternative funding actually materializes to replace pre-existing allocations?

As we stated at Hunter College, “The commission appears poised to show its true colors as a fig leaf for the city's plan or a copycat variant – all of which gouge city residents especially those from our home borough of Queens. Our legislators ought to commit NOW to declaring any toll/tax plan *DOA*.”

The Queens Civic Congress [CIVIC 2030](#) platform states plainly: *Maintain free use of all non-TBTA East River and Harlem River bridges for all city residents, and oppose any plan or scheme to impose a tax, fee or toll on vehicles to enter Manhattan such as the "fee" proposed by the Mayor as part of "PlaNYC".* We stated [this](#) in March 2003 with respect to tolling the East River Bridges; the justification remains the same.

Thank you.