Newsday

This article can be viewed on the *Newsday* website here.

NYC congestion pricing is working, after all

By Randi F. Marshall
randi.marshall@newsday.com, @randimarshall

August 6, 2025 6:00 am

After all of the backlash, criticism, and worries about unintended consequences, there's one indisputable conclusion to draw from the first seven months of congestion pricing.

It's working.

Data from a variety of sources, including the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the Regional Plan Association, the city Department of Health, and Waze, shows the tolls' impact in Manhattan's central business district in multiple ways. The number of cars has decreased. Commute times for drivers heading into the city are down. Motorists are spending less time in traffic jams. Cars and buses are moving more quickly. Pedestrian traffic is up, especially in the busiest corridors. Air quality has improved as vehicle emissions have decreased. Pedestrian and driver fatalities have decreased, as has the number of car crashes resulting in injuries. Even traffic noise complaints, and automatically generated summonses for hor

Commute times, for instance, are down 22% for drivers heading into the Queens-Midtown Tunnel from the Long Island Expressway, the MTA says. Long Islanders driving or taking the bus into the toll zone shaved up to 13 minutes off their commutes, a Regional Plan Association analysis found.

Anecdotally, there are numerous examples of Long Islanders now choosing to take the Long Island Rail Road into Manhattan rather than driving. They say they don't want to pay the toll, even with less traffic. Perfect. That's the whole point.

Then there's the perception once you're in Manhattan — a feeling that's harder to quantify. If you've been in midtown or downtown Manhattan anytime within the last

seven months, you can see and hear the difference for yourself. It's a little quieter, a little calmer. Often, the streets aren't quite as clogged, even though the sidewalks and shops are still busy. There are, simply, fewer cars.

As for the expected problematic side effects?

They haven't happened.

Traffic outside the central business district hasn't worsened. Air quality outside of Manhattan, where drivers could take alternate routes, including in the Bronx and Queens, hasn't either; instead, it has improved or remained steady. Broadway theaters and restaurants haven't seen feared declines. And ridership on public transit is up.

Of course, there's still the occasional awful traffic jam, accident, or horn honk in the central business district. There are still rush hours where the commute into Manhattan is rough, and people grumble over the $9 charge as they enter the toll zone.

And it's still too early to know whether the shifts we've seen so far will become long-term realities.

So, now what?

On the upside, perhaps LIRR travelers will start to see the benefits congestion pricing promised, like increased accessibility, upgraded stations and new train cars. But commuters also could see LIRR ticket prices increase next year by 4.4% on average. Could that change Long Islanders' decisions regarding whether to take the train or drive? Rising fares, while necessary, certainly could make the MTA's public transit push a bit more tricky.

Whether that limits congestion pricing's success remains to be seen. So far, MTA deputy chief of policy Juliette Michaelson said she doesn't see data that gives her pause. But congestion pricing's long-term story has yet to be told.

Last year, INRIX's global traffic scorecard ranked New York City the second-most congested city after Istanbul. On average, a driver in New York City lost 102 hours to traffic in 2024, costing the city $9.5 billion and making New York the worst traffic-choked city in the country.

Only time will tell whether congestion pricing pushes New York City out of that top spot this year — and in the future.

Columnist Randi F. Marshall's opinions are her own.