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NEWS

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Now All That's Needed Is Congestion Pricing, River Tolls, Public Will

By KATHARINE JOSE

Michael Bloomberg's campaign office has released a **"Mass Transit Reform Plan"** that contains some obvious components, like reinstatement of express service on the F train, and some more ambitious-sounding ones, like "open road and gateless tolling" in "West and Northeast Queens, South and East Bronx, North Brooklyn, North Manhattan and the East shore of Staten Island."

All this seems great. But since the latest news about the M.T.A. is that it's deeply, deeply in debt, and the latest news about the city budget is bleak, it's not entirely clear how either would set about finding the money for any of this anytime soon.

There's also the issue of jurisdiction: the M.T.A. is controlled by the state, meaning that the mayor's plan, effectively, is a high-profile suggestion from a well-connected constituent. (The mayor controls less than a quarter of the seats on the authority's board, but he pointed to his success at winning mayoral control of city schools to suggest that he could forge a more equitable partnership between city and state on transportation.)

Robert Paaswell, the director of CUNY's University Transportation Research Center, has his doubts.

"All these really sound good, but 90 percent of them are beyond the mayor's control," Paaswell said. "The city doesn't put a lot of money into the M.T.A., so it's like a wish list of things the M.T.A. should do."

Also, he said, "Basically the M.T.A. knows about a lot of these things."

They do. Many of the items on Bloomberg's agenda—especially the high-tech plans like "location tracking technology" for city buses and "countdown clocks on subway routes"—are things the M.T.A. has been planning to do for years.

"They're great ideas," Paaswell said. "They just need the city to begin putting city money into the systems that run in the city, rather than trying to squeeze money out of the M.T.A. It really isn't quite as bloated as [Bloomberg] thinks it is."

Asked if the city has the money to carry out the plans, Paaswell said, "Absolutely not. Are you kidding? They don't."

Funding anything this ambitious, Paaswell says, "means getting tolls, going back to congestion pricing—the things that he wanted before."

But congestion pricing was unceremoniously killed by Sheldon Silver in the State Assembly, and a brief effort to push tolls on the East River bridges was met with absolute opposition from outer borough elected officials.

"He's going to try," Paaswell said, "but he better mend some political fences."

And it's not just about Bloomberg, Paaswell said. It's New Yorkers who ultimately have to pay for a better transportation system, and so far the city—judging by the popular resistance to new bridge tolls and congestion pricing—hasn't shown much willingness to do so.

"New York has to decide it wants to be a world-class city," Paaswell said. "And it needs to pay for it."

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MTA Reform?

posted by [poliman23](#)

I find it very interesting that the Mayor has suddenly proposed making the MTA crosstown buses free of charge after his proposterous congestion pricing plan failed to gain any momentum. This plan is yet another hollow campaign promise from the Mayor that will not gain any traction. After 8 long years of Mayor Bloomberg its time for a change and for New Yorkers to have a mayor that cared about all of us, and not just the privileged few. In my time as a volunteer for the Bill Thompson for Mayor Campaign, I have seen firsthand how Comptroller Thompson plans to revamp the MTA system, public housing and public schools. New York desperately needs change and change is exactly what Bill Thompson will bring to our city.

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Quote of the Day

August 4, 2009

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-CUNY Transportation Research Center director Robert Paaswell

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