



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER  
SHOW**

**Brian Lehrer:** The big story in New York this morning, new details coming out this morning about Governor Cuomo's congestion pricing plan for driving in Manhattan below 60th Street. If you haven't heard this yet in these last few hours that they've been out, by the year 2020 driving into the congestion zone would cost \$11.52, trucks would pay \$25.34, and there could be \$2-\$5 surcharges to enter the zone in a taxi or an Uber or other for-hire vehicle. Again the pricing zone would cover Manhattan south of 60th Street all the way down to the Battery. The East River Bridges would not be tolled per se, if you're coming in from crossings that are already tolled – we are told – you would be exempt, and you could come in on the Brooklyn Bridge and Queensboro Bridge and bypass the toll if you stay on the FDR Drive and get off north of 60th Street. If you live in the zone, you would not be exempt from what we're seeing. In other words if you drive out when you come back home with your car you'd pay the toll. The point of course is to ease congestion in one of the most gridlocked cities in America. They do this in some non-US cities, London and others, but nowhere else in this country. And the other goal is to create a reliable revenue stream to fund improvements to mass transit.

So those are some details new this morning and they bring us to our first guest, as he is generally on Fridays at 10:00 o'clock, Mayor Bill de Blasio, for our Ask the Mayor segment. And our phones are open for the Mayor at 2-1-2-4-3-3-WNYC, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2. You can also tweet a question, just use the hashtag #askthemayor. Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian.

**Lehrer:** Your reaction to the details of the Governor's plan?

**Mayor:** Well, the first thing I'll say is that we need to know a lot more. We have not gotten all the details. We haven't gotten the formal plan. We've gotten pieces that have come out publically. But, look, there's one thing I can say at the start, this plan certainly shows improvement over previous plans we've seen over the years, and that's a good thing. Definitely a step in the right direction. It does not achieve, in my view, some of the things we need the most which is a guaranteed, reliable form of funding for the MTA. I believe the millionaires tax is still the best, most reliable, most verifiable way to get that permanent funding for the MTA, especially because our vision for the millionaires tax includes the Fair Fares concept, meaning half price Metrocards for low-income New Yorkers as a matter of equity and fairness and

creating opportunity. So I think, although I see some good elements in this new plan, I still think the millionaires tax should be the leading edge of how we solve the larger MTA problem.

**Lehrer:** What – what – can I ask what are the improvements that you see compared to past congestion pricing plans?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. I think it addresses some of the particular concerns – at least partially addresses – and again we need to see all the details, but we see improvement on the question of fairness to Brooklyn and Queens by taking the bridges out of the equation. You know, five million people live in Brooklyn and Queens combined, a clear majority of residents of this city. I thought the previous plans put an undue burden on them without giving them back specific guarantees. So that's a good example of some improvement.

Now, what we still don't see is the money that would be generated being put into a lockbox that would only fund mass transit in New York City. I am concerned. I don't see wording so far that guarantees that any proceeds would only be used for buses and subways in New York City to address our crisis here. The MTA has a long history of taking New York City money and sending it out to the suburbs. We need to know that's not going to happen here. But, definitely taking the bridges out of the equation is progress.

I think the focus on for-hire vehicles and trucks is a step in the right direction because it focuses on the commercial sector. And thinking about helping – this is consistent with our congestion plan from several months ago – pushing trucks away from rush hour is a very good thing, and that's a promising thing. But we need to see the details before I can give you a fuller assessment.

**Lehrer:** If the millionaires tax turns out to be DOA in the State Legislature as many people say it is and will be, could you find your way to yes on the congestion pricing plan with some particular additional tweaks?

**Mayor:** Well these are more than tweaks, what I'm talking about. A lockbox guarantee that the money will go to our subways and buses in New York City is a major fundamental matter. Obviously I want to see the Fair Fare question addressed which my millionaires tax proposal addresses, and I have not seen in this new plan. And there's still equity issues that have to be addressed here too. Again, I think I see some real improvement here, but making sure when there's hardship cases – people having to get to medical care and other needs – that those are addressed.

Look, I think Brian, it is a misunderstanding of Albany to say 'oh millionaires tax for New York City millionaires and billionaires is quote-unquote "off the table"' while congestion pricing is singularly on the table. The State Senate has been queasy about both. I think we should proceed with the assumption that we need to fundamentally address the long-term needs of the MTA. We may need elements of both these ideas to get to that ultimate solution.

But I don't traffic in this notion of what's on the table, what's off the table in Albany. I find that really – in many ways a very simplistic read of Albany. There were many years when minimum wage increases were supposed to be impossible, and all sorts of other things were supposed to be quote-unquote 'impossible' in Albany with enough public pressure they got done. I think we should take the millionaires tax put it on the table, take these new ideas – some which I think are

quite productive – put them on the table. Get the most done we can get done to ensure the long-term health of the MTA but with a guarantee that that money stays in New York City.

**Lehrer:** Let's take one call that's coming in on this and then we'll go onto some other things. Phillip in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Phillip.

**Question:** Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. I'm a lifelong resident of the Bronx and like many New Yorkers I take the subway five days a week into work, into Manhattan. However I feel this congestion pricing plan unfairly affects us outer borough residents for a number of reasons. First, like Mr. Mayor, I appreciate you trying to guarantee that the funding will be used to fix our subway system, which in the Bronx there are needs – some major needs. However, I feel that the Bruce Schaller report that came out last couple weeks ago indicated that Uber and Lyft are the primary cause of congestion, yet that should be the primary focus in reducing congestion.

Manhattan has always been congested, it comes with being – with living there, probably since the invention of the car. Yet, this plan just affects the four outer boroughs really and not Manhattan residents. So I think there's an unfairness to it, and I appreciate you, Mr. Mayor, you fighting to alleviate this. I don't know what the solution is, but I do believe this unfairly affects the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and I guess some in State Island.

**Lehrer:** Thank you very much.

**Mayor:** So if I – first of all I appreciate your sense of history, I think you're right that Manhattan has had a congestion issue for generations. We still need to address it though. I am very, very sensitive as a Brooklynite, I'm very sensitive to fairness to the outer boroughs. That's why the previous congestion pricing missions I thought did not address those fairness issues. Again, I want to see all the details here before I decide whether this is fair. I do see progress here however. But, if the money is not guaranteed for New York City, if it's not guaranteed to improve mass transit in all five boroughs, then I think it's a plan that will backfire. This is why I think the millionaires tax needs to lead the equation. The millionaire's tax is straight up revenue from New York City millionaires and billionaires that goes to New York City mass transit needs. It's a progressive tax if ever you saw one, and it includes the Fair Fare for the folks who are most disadvantaged. I think that should be in this discussion not matter what else you talk about.

But, if we're going to do something around zones in the city then we really have to be sensitive to the fact that there – one, there needs to be guarantees. Two, we need to address the hardship cases. And on terms of Uber and Lyft, anything that's applied needs to be applied fairly across the entire for-hire vehicle industry. I am very concerned that I've seen at different times at the State level, more sensitivity to Uber in particular with all of their wealth and power than other forms of transit. I want to make sure whatever happens here is applied consistently and fairly across the for-hire vehicle sector.

**Lehrer:** What's your level of concern about Uber generally at this point, and is it growing with the recent statistics that seem to show it's an even larger share of the cars of the road in the city than was previously thought?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. Look, I had a fight with Uber a couple of years ago. And I'm the first to say I think we could have done a better job preparing for that fight and preparing to explain to people why it was important to change our policies. We still have a lot more to do to address the needs

of the for-hire vehicle sector across the board and of New Yorkers who use the for-hire vehicle sector. But what's been abundantly clear in the last few years is one – Uber is a corporation that has been very exploitative in many, many ways and very unfair in its dealings and has its wealth and power to very negative effect in terms of swaying policy makers with its wealth and power.

But second, it clearly has contributed to the congestion problem in New York City. We thought that was the case. There was an initial study we did that showed less than we expected, but the new study confirms the original expectation – or the original assumptions. Look, when you have vehicles that are not filled all the time, but still spend a lot of time on our streets that exacerbates the problem. The difference with the yellow cab that tends to be, as we know as New Yorkers the yellow cab drops someone off and another person gets in almost instantaneously. It's more efficient. It doesn't create so many cars on the street. So the sharing economy has positive and negatives, but I think one of the increasing negatives we've seen is more and more empty Uber and other car sharing –

**Lehrer:** So is there –

**Mayor:** — out there on our streets.

**Lehrer:** Is there new policy under consideration?

**Mayor:** We have to come with a total plan. I mean this – depending on what Albany does, and again I caution Brian, we don't know how the legislature is going to handle any of these proposals, but depending on what Albany does I think we have to come up with a more consistent approach to the for-hire vehicle sector that creates fairness. I think our policies, and I would say this about the City too, are still not consistent enough. I think there is an overhaul we need to do. But as part of it, we've got to figure out how to inhibit empty cars, empty commercial vehicles traveling our streets and figure out how to do that better.

**Lehrer:** Here's another public transportation question of a very different sort. Barbara in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Barbara.

**Question:** Thank you. This is a problem that de Blasio's administration has not been able to handle for some reason or another. I've missed three mega trips to Virginia because of the Access-A-Ride. The driver was rude when he finally did get there. I had to stop two ladies in the street to ask her if she could call Access-A-Ride to find out why he wasn't there at 11:46 am and he didn't get there until like 12:30 and I missed my bus going to Virginia. The other thing is when they get ready – when I have to use my walker and the snow is there, there's no way when they clear the area for a person to get up and off the bus because it is very narrow and this guy had to kick some snow so far away so that the other lady could get up on the bus. We don't get the number one service bus coming Uptown. You talk about down Lower Manhattan – the number one is disgraceful coming Uptown. There's no one to see why these buses aren't servicing the poor people –

**Mayor:** Okay.

**Lehrer:** Let me get a response. And you know Mr. Mayor, if we wanted to we could take calls day from elderly New Yorkers dissatisfied with Access-A-Ride not fulfilling its promise.

**Mayor:** Well Brian, they are right to be dissatisfied but let's get back to brass tacks here. I had a town hall meeting in Manhattan on Wednesday night and hundreds of people there – and I asked the audience a survey, I said who controls the MTA – when MTA runs Access-A-Ride, I said who controls the MTA, City or State? A handful of people raised their hands for the City, the vast, vast majority understand now it is the State of New York.

So we have got to address this more fundamentally. This has been a game for decades in the City. The MTA was literally created to try and evade responsibility for elected officials. Let's get real – the State, the Governor – name the head of the MTA, control the budget of the MTA, control the majority of the MTA board, let's get real. This is how this works. Access-A-Ride is part of the MTA.

Barbara is right. Access-A-Ride is a mess, it should be fundamentally overhauled. We have tried to work cooperatively with the MTA on the notion of converting Access-A-Ride to using the for-hire vehicle sector more productively including more and more for-hire vehicles that are disabled accessible. That's something we have done with our yellow cabs more and more. We need to do it again more consistently across the entire for-hire vehicle sector. We took a major step at the TLC recently to do that with the other types of for hire vehicles.

But it's the modern era. We do have these for-hire vehicle sector that's bigger than ever. We need to use that and reduce the reliance on the old school approach to Access-A-Ride which has been a failure.

But again the State controls that. And people need to get this. We've been talking about it for a year. People need to get it. If you are upset about Access-A-Ride call the State, call your state Assembly member, your state senator, call the Governor's Office to force action. We would love to help reform Access-A-Ride but let's be clear about where the power lies.

**Lehrer:** Another issue of state funding – money for public housing with \$25 billion now the number for infrastructure improvements said to be needed. You've complained on this show previously that the State wasn't coming forward with its expected share funding for NYCHA but Politico New York reports that in turns out much of the money you were waiting from Albany couldn't be spent until your Administration submitted a formal proposal earmarking the funds – something your Administration waited more than seven months to do for the current fiscal year they say, just submitting in November, rather than up to seven months earlier. What was the delay and what will that cost the City in the long run?

**Mayor:** First of all there is money going back now three budgets that was allocated by the State to NYCHA that we still haven't seen so again let's get our facts straight. The State of New York has not produced money for NYCHA that it pledged a long time ago.

On the money that was pledged back in April – it did take the City a while to put forward that proposal in part because there was a whole public engagement effort around it. Obviously I would have liked to have seen that put forward more quickly. That being said, it's a very thorough, careful proposal that's specifically about fixing the boilers at NYCHA for the heat problem and the elevators that have had a substantial problems.

What will affect this proposal – it will affect 42,000 residents. We took all of the State rules, all of the State stipulations, we address them in the proposal. We submitted it two months ago. So

I'm happy to say I'd like to see our NYCHA leadership move things like this more quickly, but now the State's had it for two months and they haven't approved it. It's been in the budget since April. They need to approve it and get the money over to us.

**Lehrer:** Who's that up to? Is that a legislative issue or a Cuomo issue?

**Mayor:** No, now it's in the hands of the State Budget Office.

**Lehrer:** Anita in Hamilton Heights, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Anita. Anita are you there?

**Question:** Hello Mr. Mayor. Yes I'm here. Hello.

**Lehrer:** Hi, we got you.

**Mayor:** Hi.

**Question:** Yes I'm here.

**Lehrer:** Go ahead.

**Question:** Alright, I live in a low income co-op in West Harlem that the City has put into the foreclosure process but we have been working for years to turn around our building and do everything right. I'm asking the Mayor because the problem is that we are not alone. The City is foreclosing on almost 100 low income co-ops. That's over 2,000 dwelling units all over the City in four boroughs. The human and financial cost of foreclosure is horrible. It's really serious. Many owners are working to save their buildings. Can the Mayor halt this and offer alternatives?

**Mayor:** Anita, I know about this issue and I can tell it's heartfelt for you and I appreciate that. But I don't think the way you've described it gives us the whole picture. First all these are buildings that the City has been providing financial support to for many, many years and in some cases decades. There are a number of buildings where there are big, outstanding financial issues. The City has been trying to work with the residents to address those issues building by building.

When you use a word like foreclose and a lot of people use it, I don't blame you but I think it is the wrong word in this case. It suggests that somehow that things are going to be taken away from people. I disagree with that. We have said to the residents of these buildings – work with us on a payment plan, work with us on a way to address the financial problems of the buildings, if we can work that out we are happy to and continue what's going on in the co-op.

But if we can't, if there is no viable financial way forward the City will step in but it will also guarantee that the people who are living there continue to live in affordable housing as long as they are there. And then we would make sure that it remains affordable housing thereafter. What we don't want to see is these buildings collapse financially and we don't want to see them privatized and become market housing. So we've invested a lot over the years.

But Anita, to be clear, the folks who live there now, in affordable housing will get to keep that affordable housing under our vision. And any co-op that says we have a new plan, we have a new idea on how we can address our financial problems – we will invite them in immediately and see if we can make that plan work.

**Lehrer:** Anita, thank you for your call. Criminal justice question, Mr. Mayor. WYNC's Beth Fertig reports that the number of marijuana arrests in the city in 2017 was virtually unchanged from the year before, about 17,000 arrests both years – despite your promises to keep reducing them. And the Legal Aid Society is reporting data in Beth's story showing these arrests are overwhelming, still in communities of color, way disproportional to marijuana use. Why has that stalled?

**Mayor:** I don't think again, Brian respectively that is a value judgement question. I don't think that is has stalled. I think it's reached a normal level in the sense of what we were trying to achieve. We said we would end arrests for possession for small amounts of marijuana – 25 grams or less. We proceeded to do that. The only way you get arrested if you have 25 grams or less of marijuana is if there's something else going on. If you're doing some other illegal act the same time or you have an outstanding warrant for an example.

We saw immediately, a huge reduction that has continued, so now arrests for marijuana offenses are down 38 percent since I took office. Summons have gone up simultaneously because the solution we came up with is not an arrest but a summons for something that is under our state law, illegal.

But that didn't mean it was going to incessantly decline. At a certain point if our officers confront people with marijuana on them, the law requires an action, the action is now summons now rather than arrest.

Over all in the city, for all types of offenses arrests have gone down a huge amount while we have been able to reduce crime and make this the safest big city in America. So as a general rule we are continuing to do fewer and fewer arrests, more use of summons, or in appropriate instances things like warnings by an officer. But there never was the notion here that there would no longer be enforcement. At a certain point, you're going to have a level off because there will still be enforcement.

**Lehrer:** So you are saying that you're comfortable with the number around 17,000 marijuana related arrests a year if those cases are actually where the possession or whatever it is of marijuana triggers the knowledge that this person is wanted on other things? Is that essential –

**Mayor:** Or if they are committing another offense at the same time which is perfectly possible. Look, our goal is to reduce crime while reducing arrests. And we have been doing that constantly. If you look at the overall figures I think the number is compared to four years ago over all arrests in 2017 where down 100,000 but crime has been pushed down constantly at the same time. You know, working with the city council we have more and more put into play the option of summonses as an alternative. That's all working. It doesn't mean the underlying offenses go away. So would I like to see the number go down?

Sure, I'd like to see the number go down, but that would involve people not committing the original offense to begin with.

The big question, Brian, the big question is looking at our overall trajectory – are we reducing arrests for all offenses consistently while being effective at fighting crime? Yes. Are we moving away from arrests and to summonses consistently? Yes. But it doesn't mean there aren't still situations where you don't need an arrest or obviously where you don't give a summons.

**Lehrer:** Are you becoming more open to legal recreational as governor Cuomo who's been a very big skeptic of that now seems to be exploring?

**Mayor:** I remain skeptical but willing to study. I think the – and it's something I want to see us do in the course of this term – we have a number of states now that have several years of experience, and including some states that have larger cities, which is what we'd really want to study. I don't think we're going to find that it's an ideal situation, but at the same time we need to see what's working and what's not so we can make an honest assessment. So skeptical but willing to study.

**Lehrer:** David in Manhattan, you're on WNYC. Hi, David.

**Question:** Hi, good morning. Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Good morning.

**Question:** I'm calling about something that's very near and dear to your heart and mine as I know which the homeless crisis is. You know, there's a tremendous amount of money, and you've allocated a lot of money to fighting this issue, but in the past 10 years those numbers have more than doubled. And I don't know – it seems to me traditionally the focus is on trying to meet short term needs rather than transitioning people out of being homeless in homeowners or renters. And you know I'm volunteering with an organization that's really focusing on that. I'm wondering why the City with all its resources isn't really focused on to transition these people out of homelessness permanently.

**Mayor:** I really appreciate the question, which again I can tell is really heartfelt, but again – I'd like to offer some facts that I don't think get enough attention. We've gotten – I think it's over 50,000 now people who were in shelter during the last four years to affordable housing and out of shelter. I don't know why that doesn't get paid attention to, but it's a huge number of people that we've successfully helped out of homelessness and to long term affordable housing. We're going to continue to do that.

We also have the biggest, most aggressive affordable housing plan in the history of the city. It's 300,000 apartments being built or subsidized and preserved. It's going to reach over 750,000 people. That's also going to address the underlying root cause of so much of the homelessness, which is the affordability crisis in housing. And, you know, already over 160,000 New Yorkers have gotten those new affordable apartments and preserved apartments that we created.

So these are big, major initiatives, huge amount of resources going to get to the root cause. Somehow I think people think when they see this tragedy of homelessness and the resources going to it that that's all that's happening when in fact, you know, it's well reported we have this vast affordable housing program. In fact, in 2017 our affordable housing program financed 25,000 apartments in one year, which is enough for at least 75,000 people. That's one year – it's the all-time record for production in a single year in the history of this city.

So we're aggressively going at the root cause. I think the homelessness crisis is incredibly frustrating for all of us because it is so much linked to our economic reality – the price of housing constantly going up, wages and benefits not going up as much, more and more homeless people, working people who can't make ends meet. But we're trying to drive up wages and benefits in a lot of ways. We're trying to create more and more affordable housing. We're stopping evictions with legal services. We're fighting on many fronts.

The honest truth is since this is a structural and economic reality now – not just for example a mental health or substance abuse reality as it was in the past – this will be a very long battle then because we're trying to get to things that are unfortunately foundational to our economy and bluntly unjust in our economy.

**Lehrer:** I read that you're going to put in a homeless shelter on one of the priciest blocks in the city, West 58<sup>th</sup> street near Carnegie Hall and near that West 57<sup>th</sup> super-tall luxury tower true?

**Mayor:** Well, yes. The plan has come out. It's going to be formally presented to the community, and then there will be a very substantial engagement process with the community to do everything we can to make it work as successfully as possible, but I said well before the election – I told New Yorkers the truth that we were going to create 90 new shelter facilities that would be specifically built for shelter. We would get out of the pay-by-the-day hotels. We would get out of the inappropriate cluster sites. We'd have an actual, functioning shelter system that would be safer and cleaner and more effective. And then when the day comes that we can really turn the tide and reduce the homeless population, those buildings can be converted to affordable housing or to supportive housing for folks who need special services. That's the vision. We said we were going to do it everywhere. We should be doing it in places that are the privileged parts of town as well as every other kind of community.

**Lehrer:** We'll take one more caller before we run out of time, and Vivian in the congestion pricing zone as proposed by the Governor this morning, I think is going to return us to our kick off topic. Vivian, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi.

**Question:** Hi, good morning. I am a resident of the congestion pricing zone, and I read in the Times yesterday that residents would not be exempt from this toll, and I was wondering why that would be. We would have to, you know, come home. It's not something that we could, you know, time or take a train or a bus necessarily every – well, you wouldn't need it every day, but just to come and go from our homes, doesn't it seem that we should have some sort of exemption or at the very least a reduced fare?

**Mayor:** Well, Vivian, I think it's a really fair question, so I want to again set the predicate here, and this is something that I think we need to all work on as we talk about issues. The proposal that's being put forward is being put forward by the State of New York, by the governor and a commission that he put together. We have not seen the full proposal yet. There's going to be a lot of important questions about what's fair and how to make sure this plan is functional, and again that the proceeds go directly to New York City. So I can't comment on that issue because I have not been shown the full plan by the governor and by the commission.

**Lehrer:** But on that as a break-out, individual issues – the people who live in the zone being charged the toll when they come back or the toll at full price, she says maybe a reduced toll for residents – does that ring with you?

**Mayor:** Brian, I'm hearing for the first time. I'm just not going to comment until I see how it's structured. I do think a fundamental issue in this entire plan that the State is putting forward is how do we create fairness? So you know making sure that people in each part of the city are treated fairly, making sure that the money that comes from it stays in New York City, making sure that the Fair Fare is addressed so low income New Yorkers can have accessible Metrocards and Metrocards they can afford. All of these fairness questions have to be addressed.

In the past, I felt that the previous plans from a decade ago and from five years ago were not sufficiently fair. We need to see if this one is. There are some better elements in this plan than in the past, but I still need to see if it's fair. And of course the devil will be in the details. We need to see it. It needs to have extensive hearings. People like Vivian have to have an opportunity to make their case. And we have to decide as a city whether we think it's fair or not or what adjustments are needed. But this is going to be a long debate over the next couple of month.

**Lehrer:** And by the way, for our caller earlier – Barbara in Manhattan who is concerned about Access-a-Ride – next Thursday on the show one of our guests will be the new New York City Transit chief within the MTA, Andy Byford. And he's made improving Access-a-Ride one of his stated goals, so we will definitely bring that up, Barbara and everyone else concerned about Access-a-Ride next Thursday with the new NYC Transit Chief Andy Byford.

Mr. Mayor, last thing, a Trump thing. With the president hitting his one year mark tomorrow, are you planning to be at the big Women's March here in the city, and do you give him any credit for Dow 26,000 with benefits to the city?

**Mayor:** Look, on the Dow – I mean, one, I don't think we should judge the health of our society by how the Dow is doing. It is one measure and often a misleading measure in my view because it is the measure most pertinent to those already privileged, and I think yes, they're thrilled by a tax bill in Washington that gave a huge, massive federal giveaway to corporations and the wealthy. It doesn't surprise me the Dow would go up with something like that. That's not healthy for our larger society.

But of course, look, we want businesses to thrive. We want there to be more employment, higher wages. I'm not saying there's nothing to it, but I do think it should not be overrated. As to everything that's going to happen in the coming days, I'm still working on the schedule but fully support what people are doing to organize against the Trump administration. I think it is making a huge difference. I think it's going to make a huge difference in the 2018 elections, and I think the folks who organized the original Women's March and have built since then have done one of the most important things we've seen in many years in this country – it was the single biggest protest in the history of the United States last January 21<sup>st</sup>. And I think it set the stage for more and more women running for office, for what we saw particularly in Virginia with a huge turning of the tide in that state. I think something powerful is happening that's going to have lasting consequences.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, thanks as always. Talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Take care.

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**From:** Welsh, Kevin  
**Sent:** Friday, January 19, 2018 12:27 PM  
**To:** Rothenberg, Jaclyn; Malegiannakis, Michael; Phillips, Eric; @Research Office  
**Subject:** RE: lehrer transcript

Absolutely. We're proofing it all now.

**From:** Rothenberg, Jaclyn  
**Sent:** Friday, January 19, 2018 12:27 PM  
**To:** Malegiannakis, Michael; Welsh, Kevin; Phillips, Eric; @Research Office  
**Subject:** RE: lehrer transcript

Can we get this out with header and all? thanks!

**From:** Malegiannakis, Michael  
**Sent:** Friday, January 19, 2018 11:41 AM  
**To:** Welsh, Kevin; Rothenberg, Jaclyn; Phillips, Eric; @Research Office  
**Subject:** RE: lehrer transcript

Thanks, Kevin

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**From:** Welsh, Kevin  
**Sent:** Friday, January 19, 2018 11:39 AM  
**To:** Rothenberg, Jaclyn; Phillips, Eric; @Research Office  
**Subject:** RE: lehrer transcript

*Here you go! Sorry for the delay, he had a lot to say.*

**Brian Lehrer:** The big story in New York this morning, new details coming out this morning about Governor Cuomo's congestion pricing plan for driving in Manhattan below 60th Street. If you haven't heard this yet in these last few hours that they've been out, by the year 2020 driving into the congestion zone would cost \$11.52, trucks would pay \$25.34, and there could be \$2–\$5 surcharges to enter the zone in a taxi or an Uber or other for-hire vehicle. Again the pricing zone would cover Manhattan south of 60th Street all the way down to the Battery. The East River Bridges would not be tolled per se, if you're coming in from crossings that are already tolled – we are told – you would be exempt, and you could come in on the Brooklyn Bridge and Queensboro Bridge and bypass the toll if you stay on the FDR Drive and get off north of 60th Street. If you live in the zone, you would not be exempt from what we're seeing. In other words

if you drive out when you come back home with your car you'd pay the toll. The point of course is to ease congestion in one of the most gridlocked cities in America. They do this in some non-US cities, London and others, but nowhere else in this country. And the other goal is to create a reliable revenue stream to fund improvements to mass transit.

So those are some details new this morning and they bring us to our first guest, as he is generally on Fridays at 10:00 o'clock, Mayor Bill de Blasio, for our Ask the Mayor segment. And our phones are open for the Mayor at 2-1-2-4-3-3-WNYC, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2. You can also tweet a question, just use the hashtag #askthemayor. Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian.

**Lehrer:** Your reaction to the details of the Governor's plan?

**Mayor:** Well, the first thing I'll say is that we need to know a lot more. We have not gotten all the details. We haven't gotten the formal plan. We've gotten pieces that have come out publically. But, look, there's one thing I can say at the start, this plan certainly shows improvement over previous plans we've seen over the years, and that's a good thing. Definitely a step in the right direction. It does not achieve, in my view, some of the things we need the most which is a guaranteed, reliable form of funding for the MTA. I believe the millionaires tax is still the best, most reliable, most verifiable way to get that permanent funding for the MTA, especially because our vision for the millionaires tax includes the Fair Fares concept, meaning half price Metrocards for low-income New Yorkers as a matter of equity and fairness and creating opportunity. So I think, although I see some good elements in this new plan, I still think the millionaires tax should be the leading edge of how we solve the larger MTA problem.

**Lehrer:** What – what – can I ask what are the improvements that you see compared to past congestion pricing plans?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. I think it addresses some of the particular concerns – at least partially addresses – and again we need to see all the details, but we see improvement on the question of fairness to Brooklyn and Queens by taking the bridges out of the equation. You know, five million people live in Brooklyn and Queens combined, a clear majority of residents of this city. I thought the previous plans put an undue burden on them without giving them back specific guarantees. So that's a good example of some improvement.

Now, what we still don't see is the money that would be generated being put into a lockbox that would only fund mass transit in New York City. I am concerned. I don't see wording so far that guarantees that any proceeds would only be used for buses and subways in New York City to address our crisis here. The MTA has a long history of taking New York City money and sending it out to the suburbs. We need to know that's not going to happen here. But, definitely taking the bridges out of the equation is progress.

I think the focus on for-hire vehicles and trucks is a step in the right direction because it focuses on the commercial sector. And thinking about helping – this is consistent with our congestion plan from several months ago – pushing trucks away from rush hour is a very good thing, and that's a promising thing. But we need to see the details before I can give you a fuller assessment.

**Lehrer:** If the millionaires tax turns out to be DOA in the State Legislature as many people say it is and will be, could you find your way to yes on the congestion pricing plan with some particular additional tweaks?

**Mayor:** Well these are more than tweaks, what I'm talking about. A lockbox guarantee that the money will go to our subways and buses in New York City is a major fundamental matter. Obviously I want to see the Fair Fare question addressed which my millionaires tax proposal addresses, and I have not seen in this new plan. And there's still equity issues that have to be addressed here too. Again, I think I see some real improvement here, but making sure when there's hardship cases – people having to get to medical care and other needs – that those are addressed.

Look, I think Brian, it is a misunderstanding of Albany to say 'oh millionaires tax for New York City millionaires and billionaires is quote-unquote "off the table"' while congestion pricing is singularly on the table. The State Senate has been queasy about both. I think we should proceed with the assumption that we need to fundamentally address the long-term needs of the MTA. We may need elements of both these ideas to get to that ultimate solution.

But I don't traffic in this notion of what's on the table, what's off the table in Albany. I find that really – in many ways a very simplistic read of Albany. There were many years when minimum wage increases were supposed to be impossible, and all sorts of other things were supposed to be quote-unquote 'impossible' in Albany with enough public pressure they got done. I think we should take the millionaires tax put it on the table, take these new ideas – some which I think are quite productive – put them on the table. Get the most done we can get done to ensure the long-term health of the MTA but with a guarantee that that money stays in New York City.

**Lehrer:** Let's take one call that's coming in on this and then we'll go onto some other things. Phillip in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Phillip.

**Question:** Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. I'm a lifelong resident of the Bronx and like many New Yorkers I take the subway five days a week into work, into Manhattan. However I feel this congestion pricing plan unfairly affects us outer borough residents for a number of reasons. First, like Mr. Mayor, I appreciate you trying to guarantee that the funding will be used to fix our subway system, which in the Bronx there are needs – some major needs. However, I feel that the Bruce Schaller report that came out last couple weeks ago indicated that Uber and Lyft are the primary cause of congestion, yet that should be the primary focus in reducing congestion.

Manhattan has always been congested, it comes with being – with living there, probably since the invention of the car. Yet, this plan just affects the four outer boroughs really and not Manhattan residents. So I think there's an unfairness to it, and I appreciate you, Mr. Mayor, you fighting to alleviate this. I don't know what the solution is, but I do believe this unfairly affects the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and I guess some in State Island.

**Lehrer:** Thank you very much.

**Mayor:** So if I – first of all I appreciate your sense of history, I think you’re right that Manhattan has had a congestion issue for generations. We still need to address it though. I am very, very sensitive as a Brooklynite, I’m very sensitive to fairness to the outer boroughs. That’s why the previous congestion pricing missions I thought did not address those fairness issues. Again, I want to see all the details here before I decide whether this is fair. I do see progress here however. But, if the money is not guaranteed for New York City, if it’s not guaranteed to improve mass transit in all five boroughs, then I think it’s a plan that will backfire. This is why I think the millionaires tax needs to lead the equation. The millionaire’s tax is straight up revenue from New York City millionaires and billionaires that goes to New York City mass transit needs. It’s a progressive tax if ever you saw one, and it includes the Fair Fare for the folks who are most disadvantaged. I think that should be in this discussion not matter what else you talk about.

But, if we’re going to do something around zones in the city then we really have to be sensitive to the fact that there – one, there needs to be guarantees. Two, we need to address the hardship cases. And on terms of Uber and Lyft, anything that’s applied needs to be applied fairly across the entire for-hire vehicle industry. I am very concerned that I’ve seen at different times at the State level, more sensitivity to Uber in particular with all of their wealth and power than other forms of transit. I want to make sure whatever happens here is applied consistently and fairly across the for-hire vehicle sector.

**Lehrer:** What’s your level of concern about Uber generally at this point, and is it growing with the recent statistics that seem to show it’s an even larger share of the cars of the road in the city than was previously thought?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. Look, I had a fight with Uber a couple of years ago. And I’m the first to say I think we could have done a better job preparing for that fight and preparing to explain to people why it was important to change our policies. We still have a lot more to do to address the needs of the for-hire vehicle sector across the board and of New Yorkers who use the for-hire vehicle sector. But what’s been abundantly clear in the last few years is one – Uber is a corporation that has been very exploitative in many, many ways and very unfair in its dealings and has its wealth and power to very negative effect in terms of swaying policy makers with its wealth and power.

But second, it clearly has contributed to the congestion problem in New York City. We thought that was the case. There was an initial study we did that showed less than we expected, but the new study confirms the original expectation – or the original assumptions. Look, when you have vehicles that are not filled all the time, but still spend a lot of time on our streets that exacerbates the problem. The difference with the yellow cab that tends to be, as we know as New Yorkers the yellow cab drops someone off and another person gets in almost instantaneously. It’s more efficient. It doesn’t create so many cars on the street. So the sharing economy has positive and negatives, but I think one of the increasing negatives we’ve seen is more and more empty Uber and other car sharing –

**Lehrer:** So is there –

**Mayor:** — out there on our streets.

**Lehrer:** Is there new policy under consideration?

**Mayor:** We have to come with a total plan. I mean this – depending on what Albany does, and again I caution Brian, we don't know how the legislature is going to handle any of these proposals, but depending on what Albany does I think we have to come up with a more consistent approach to the for-hire vehicle sector that creates fairness. I think our policies, and I would say this about the City too, are still not consistent enough. I think there is an overhaul we need to do. But as part of it, we've got to figure out how to inhibit empty cars, empty commercial vehicles traveling our streets and figure out how to do that better.

[...]

**Question:** Hi, good morning. I am a resident of the congestion pricing zone, and I read in the Times yesterday that residents would not be exempt from this toll, and I was wondering why that would be. We would have to, you know, come home. It's not something that we could, you know, time or take a train or a bus necessarily every – well, you wouldn't need it every day, but just to come and go from our homes, doesn't it seem that we should have some sort of exemption or at the very least a reduced fare?

**Mayor:** Well, Vivian, I think it's a really fair question, so I want to again set the predicate here, and this is something that I think we need to all work on as we talk about issues. The proposal that's being put forward is being put forward by the State of New York, by the governor and a commission that he put together. We have not seen the full proposal yet. There's going to be a lot of important questions about what's fair and how to make sure this plan is functional, and again that the proceeds go directly to New York City. So I can't comment on that issue because I have not been shown the full plan by the governor and by the commission.

**Lehrer:** But on that as a break-out, individual issues – the people who live in the zone being charged the toll when they come back or the toll at full price, she says maybe a reduced toll for residents – does that ring with you?

**Mayor:** Brian, I'm hearing for the first time. I'm just not going to comment until I see how it's structured. I do think a fundamental issue in this entire plan that the State is putting forward is how do we create fairness? So you know making sure that people in each part of the city are treated fairly, making sure that the money that comes from it stays in New York City, making sure that the Fair Fares is addressed so low income New Yorkers can have accessible Metrocards and Metrocards they can afford. All of these fairness questions have to be addressed.

In the past, I felt that the previous plans from a decade ago and from five years ago were not sufficiently fair. We need to see if this one is. There are some better elements in this plan than in the past, but I still need to see if it's fair. And of course the devil will be in the details. We need to see it. It needs to have extensive hearings. People like Vivian have to have an opportunity to make their case. And we have to decide as a city whether we think it's fair or not or what adjustments are needed. But this is going to be a long debate over the next couple of months.

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