



Congestion Pricing for Smart Streets

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What a concept: Smart Streets. Streets that perform more than serve as a conduit for polluting, oversized, noisy, and dangerous automobile traffic. Streets that are pleasant and friendly. Streets that truly serve the bustling commerce where people find goods they desire. Streets that can be destinations for people, instead of something to be feared, traversed with extreme caution or avoided altogether.

Congestion pricing is an idea that has been around for over 50 years, but there it sits on the dusty shelf of unimplemented good ideas. But there is a [renewed effort](#) by a broad coalition of environmental, business groups, public health and urban advocates to turn a good idea into public policy. Throw in a growing energy crisis that is reaching a [breaking point](#), and enter the [NY Times Regional Opinion Page](#):

While Mayor Michael Bloomberg has taken some steps to address traffic flow problems, the larger issue of actually containing or reducing traffic seems to be on the back burner...The mayor could start by taking a harder look at the success of London's congestion pricing program...The result has been a drop of nearly one-third in vehicle traffic.

Imagine that: One-third less traffic in the center of the city. That sounds wonderful, especially since most traffic is [economically useless thru traffic](#). That's not to mention the value in relieving traffic congestion:

Critics who fear congestion pricing argue that crowded streets reflect a vital economy. But in New York, traffic congestion has always been too much of a good thing. William Vickrey, a Columbia professor who came up with the notion of congestion pricing in the 1950's, could not have imagined the clogged streets we have today.

Gridlock can be measured in appointments missed, tardiness, environmental damage and even elevated blood pressure. Taking a third of the vehicles off New York's most heavily used streets can't hurt. ([NY Times](#))

Congestion Pricing is a good tool for not only reducing traffic congestion, allowing higher value traffic to flow, but also reducing ground level pollution, encouraging highly energy efficient transportation modes (mass transit, biking, walking), creating a revenue stream for further transportation improvements and overall improve quality of life in the city.

But Congestion Pricing alone will not reduce low value automobile traffic. Congestion pricing should be one part of a multi-prong traffic reduction plan including increased levels of mass transit service, reductions in government parking permits, better biking and pedestrian facilities, reductions in double parked trucks, and all [other ways to improve transit options for commuters](#).



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