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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**March 21, 2019**

**Opening Remarks of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Public Hearing on Congestion Pricing  
The Cooper Union**

My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to everyone – elected officials, transportation experts, activists, and community members—for coming together this evening to analyze, criticize, support, and ask questions about congestion pricing and its impact on the city and our lives.

Very briefly, in case anyone in the audience has been off of the planet earth for the past month or so, an updated version of the congestion pricing plan, which will require state approval, is being negotiated by the Governor, State Senate, and Assembly as we speak. The ostensible goal, as in the past, is twofold: first, to reduce traffic gridlock in the core of Manhattan by imposing a type of user fee on private cars and commercial vehicles that enter the Manhattan street grid south of 61<sup>st</sup> Street; second, to provide a permanent, dedicated funding source for our mass transit system, also known as MTA-New York City Transit, which runs our city’s subways and buses. As a first step toward a comprehensive congestion pricing plan, the state has recently imposed a new surcharge of \$2.50 and \$2.75 on taxi and for-hire car fares below 96<sup>th</sup> Street, respectively.

The Governor and Mayor are, for once, working hand in hand in support of congestion pricing, but as in years and, yes, decades past, State Senate and Assembly members in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island, Queens and the suburbs remain wary of the cost to their constituents, including small businesses, that by habit and necessity drive into Manhattan each day. With the focus mostly on their interests, and the promised benefit to bus and subway riders, the impact on Manhattan residents who drive or live above and below the 61<sup>st</sup> Street pricing boundary has been mostly ignored. Since the Governor wants the plan to be approved as part of the state budget deal, we can expect a lot of arm twisting in Albany right up until the budget deadline on April Fool’s Day- I mean, April 1<sup>st</sup>.

Now, I want to be very clear. I have long-supported some form of congestion pricing. In my view, a small charge on those who choose to drive into the Central Business District can have large benefits for a much greater number of New Yorkers: not just those of us who travel to work and home by bus and subway, but on the millions of people who live, work, or move about Manhattan on a daily basis. If you’ve been around a while, you might notice that the rationale for congestion pricing fees on motor vehicles traveling into the core is reminiscent of the “Commuter Tax” formerly assessed on those within the MTA region. The rationale back then was that the MTA’s services provided benefits to all those living and working within the MTA region—either directly or indirectly—and that it was only fair then to ask for those who received these benefits to contribute to the MTA’s upkeep. Today, faced with impossible street

congestion, a crisis in both our above- and below-ground transportation systems, and with the air and noise pollution of traffic reducing our quality of life, we need to get real about congestion pricing's potential.

I voted for the former congestion pricing plan in the City Council back in 2008. And I would vote for that same plan today, if I could. But, the plan being debated may not solve our problems. Why? Because key details that make or break a good congestion pricing plan have been largely left out of the debate, and thus may not make for a fair and workable version.

Tonight, we're here to make our voices heard for and against congestion pricing, and to help shape a version that spells out critical details on pricing and hours of operation; whether Manhattan residents who live below 61<sup>st</sup> Street should receive discounts or be exempted; what changes this may bring to street parking availability and garage parking pricing; and to how we best ensure that the MTA, the recipient of congestion pricing funds, spends this money wisely.

Finally, I would like to leave you with two key points. First, to be workable and generate adequate revenue, any congestion pricing plan should severely limit its number of exemptions. However, people with disabilities who are not able to take public transit and thus must rely on vehicles should absolutely be exempted from congestion pricing charges under any fair and workable plan. Operators of the city's licensed taxis need an exemption as well. The congestion pricing legislation enacted last year that placed a \$2.50 fee on taxi rides south of 96<sup>th</sup> Street should be put on hold for 5 to 10-years, or until new regulations stabilize the taxi industry.

Second, for congestion pricing to work, it must be one piece of a larger transportation vision. Other cities that successfully implemented congestion pricing—London, Stockholm, and Milan—did so alongside livable streets and mobility-friendly policies that made biting the congestion pricing bullet workable. It is common-sense that as we begin to charge for one service, we must increase the quality and quantity of alternatives. For us, that must mean more subway station elevators, increased bus service (and more and better enforced bus lanes), more protected bike lanes, more pedestrian plazas, and widened sidewalks.

I hope that New York can achieve these goals in the coming years. That starts with productive conversations like the one we will have tonight.