

Congestion pricing might drive NYC commuters uptown. Residents want parking permits.

A group of Upper West Side residents' long-standing push for parking permits for residents has now taken on new urgency

Uptown drivers are bracing for even worse parking in their neighborhoods after congestion pricing goes into effect as soon as this spring – and the MTA acknowledges it could be a problem.

Since the tolling program was signed into law in 2019, transit observers have worried that drivers from out of town will park north of the toll zone at 60th Street, then hop on public transit.

The MTA's analysis of congestion pricing found the program would "slightly increase the number of drivers who would seek parking near transit facilities in New York City outside the Manhattan CBD [central business district]."

"[Congestion pricing] would generate parking demand outside the Manhattan CBD, which could exceed supply if the area is currently at or over capacity," the analysis reads. It recommended the panel that selected a base fare of \$15 for congestion pricing study the program's effect on parking 18 months after it goes into effect.

A group of Upper West Side residents' long-standing push for parking permits for residents has now taken on new urgency. But New York City faces unique challenges implementing the measure in some of the country's densest neighborhoods, according to parking experts and an analysis of permit programs in other major cities.

Once congestion pricing goes into effect, "it's going to be hard to get parking anywhere, honestly," said Kevin Keenan, a super who's lived on the Upper West Side for 25 years. "Right now it's crazy because nobody's moving their car."

His neighbor **Renee Baruch** agrees. She started **NYC Residential Parking**, a group seeking permits for "local residents, retail and commercial business owners, and workforce service providers for a reasonable monthly fee." The group suggests the fee could range from \$10 to \$90 per month.

"Numerous voices have publicly charged that the proposed [congestion pricing] is a 'money grab,'" the group's website reads. "We believe that in the absence of appropriate preparation — including initiation of a resident parking permit program — the MTA is guilty as charged." The group argues that congestion pricing is "not viable without a residential parking program."

Baruch said that while her group has the support of many locals, efforts to convince politicians of the need for parking permits went nowhere.

"I thought when I had a thousand people who willingly gave all



Carolyn Cole/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

of their information and were enthusiastic and went out and canvassed for this that local politicians would recognize that it was a popular idea and get behind it," she said. "But that's not, apparently, what it takes, because it didn't happen."

A 2019 report by then-Borough President Gale Brewer, who is now a councilmember representing the Upper West Side, points to reasons why parking permit programs have not gained traction despite decades of discussion.

Her office stated that "fault lines" in the debate largely divided drivers who see permits as a "silver bullet" that would finally guarantee them a parking spot, versus those who enjoy the "hunt" for a space and oppose any fees. The report also noted that a 2013 survey found that 53% of New Yorkers said they'd be willing to pay a fee to park on their neighborhood's streets, with an average price of \$408 a year.

Brewer's report noted the successes and failures of permit programs in other major cities. The report found that in London, which launched its own congestion pricing program in 2003, residents also feared drivers would park outside of the toll zone and hop on the train. But a study from the city found the number of people who parked outside of the zone before jumping on a train actually decreased by 1% after the tolls launched.

The report also pointed to problems with other cities' residential parking permit programs. San Francisco officials had issued roughly 95,000 parking permits for only 80,000 on-street parking spaces as of 2018. But 40% of residents in two busy areas of San Francisco still spent more than 16 minutes looking for a spot despite the permit requirements.

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Brewer concluded that a fee to “curb parking demand” would have to be significantly higher than a \$195 fee imposed in one of Portland’s denser neighborhoods.

“If a high enough price is not chosen, supporters run the risk of shooting themselves in the foot by incentivizing further vehicle ownership and inducing an even greater parking crunch. In the majority of examples evaluated under this report, cities made that exact mistake — especially in high-density neighborhoods — and induced a greater demand for parking that was notably generated by the neighborhood’s own residents, not those from outside of the neighborhood,” Brewer wrote.

Brewer was not ready to endorse a parking permit program for the city.

“I would like to have what would be the New York version of the best possible registration system. And I don’t know what that is,” Brewer said. “I can say that we didn’t hear great feedback from the systems that exist.”

Department of Transportation officials testified to the City Council in 2018 that implementing a parking permit program will likely require state legislation.

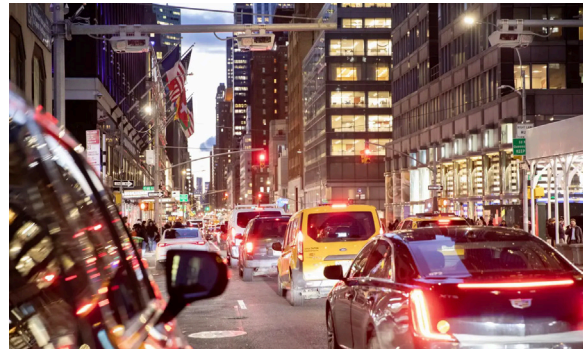
MTA Chair Janno Lieber said on Wednesday that the MTA’s research found there would be significant impact on the region, but pledged to keep an eye on it.

“Obviously, we’re going to look closely at whether there are impacts and try to work with communities when we see those,” Lieber said, speaking at an MTA board meeting. “But you might equally hope that the folks who are electing to park uptown will take mass transit from the get-go.”

Donald Shoup, an urban planning professor at UCLA who has studied parking, calculated that New York City could generate \$6 billion annually by charging \$5.50 a day for every free curb parking spot.

“New York is unusual, I’m sure in the United States and maybe of the world, that 97% of all the curb spaces are unmetered. This is some of the most valuable land on earth, and you could use it free if you bring a car,” Shoup said.

Councilmember Carmen De La Rosa of Upper Manhattan and four colleagues representing East Elmhurst, Sunset Park, Red Hook, northwest Brooklyn and Kew Gardens introduced bills to establish residential parking permit programs in their districts last year, but the measures failed to make it to a vote.



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DeLa Rosa believes her district, which includes Washington Heights, where New Jersey drivers cross the George Washington Bridge and park, could be in for painful parking problems once congestion pricing goes into effect.

“Communities like mine, where people can literally drive into the community, park their cars, and then take the transit because we’re fortunate enough to have public transit options, will become sort of ground zero for out-of-community folks coming in to park,” she said.

Department of Transportation Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez pledged to examine parking permit legislation shortly after taking office in 2021. But a DOT spokesperson said the agency needs state authorization to implement such a program.

Washington Heights resident Anthony Gomez was among those who prefers the current free-for-all approach to parking, even once congestion pricing goes into effect. Every afternoon, after returning from his job at a golf course in White Plains, Gomez sits in his car and watches videos on his phone while at least 20 minutes for a parking spot to materialize.

He said he prefers to be hopeful a space will open up rather than drive around looking for a spot.

“Everybody park here. Maybe nobody live in the area,” he said.

He said he wouldn’t be interested in a residential parking permit because he worries there are just too many cars. He thinks he’d still be stuck in his car waiting for a spot even with a permit program.