

MESSAGE FROM CHARLES KOMANOFF TO
POLICY MAKERS AND CIVIC LEADERS HE KNOWS
(SENT ON JANUARY 24, 2008)

Dear friend --

When I was asked last year to join a research team analyzing famed attorney Ted Kheel's vision of free buses and subways in New York City to be financed by a steep congestion charge, I was querulous, to say the least. Why deprive the hard-pressed transit system of revenue? Why up the ante on congestion pricing when Mayor Bloomberg's milder plan was already buffeted on many sides?

Well, I swallowed my skepticism and joined the team and began burrowing into the data. It was quite an immersion. Some months later, the proverbial chrysalis has brought forth a most revolutionary butterfly. Our 52-page report, "*A Bolder Plan: Balancing Free Transit and Congestion Pricing in New York City*," was released this morning at a well-attended breakfast meeting in mid-Manhattan and is now available on-line, on the Web site of Ted's non-profit, Nurture New York's Nature: www.nnyn.org/kheelplan/.

Our bolder plan -- the "Kheel Plan" -- is a set of interconnected policy measures, of which the key is charging a high but fair price to drive into the congested core of the New York metropolis. We project that the plan will cut traffic volumes by one-quarter in the Central Business District and nearly one-tenth citywide while increasing funds available for mass transit, all while giving transit users a free and less crowded ride.

Whether you're a "transportation professional" or an interested citizen, I invite you to not only to read the report, but to experiment with the Balanced Transportation Analyzer, the interactive computer model developed for this project that lets you devise and test other pricing plans by varying up to ten policy "levers." And unlike the opaque "black box" models used throughout the Transportation-Industrial Complex, the BTA reveals its hundreds of underlying assumptions and their interrelationships. It is a true citizen's tool.

Still, the real story here is Ted's vision, which I have come to embrace wholeheartedly. The Kheel Plan's essence of balancing the private auto and public transit through appropriate congestion pricing gives rise to synergy after synergy. To take just one, consider how fare-free boarding of buses will enable a quantum speedup in bus travel -- no more fumbling at the door with MetroCards! -- which in turn will attract more riders who would otherwise drive or travel by cab, thereby cutting traffic, which speeds bus travel and expanding ridership even further. Where will the buses come from to handle the load? They're here now; under the Kheel Plan, NYC Transit buses will be able to make six runs in the time it now takes them to do five.

The political synergies are just as powerful. Don Shoup wrote recently that the dilemma confronting congestion pricing is not that opposition is too high, but that support is too low. Free transit resolves this dilemma by offering as tangible a benefit as one can imagine. As I

said last week to a legislator from Central Brooklyn who has lined up against the mayor's congestion pricing plan, "Are you really going to tell your constituents that you walked away from a plan that would let them ride the trains and buses for free?" I wish you'd seen his double-take, followed by: "Um, okay, what's this Kheel Plan again, and how exactly is it going to work?"

The answers are in our report. I'm proud of the work we've put into it and excited by the possibilities. And I'm grateful beyond words to Ted Kheel for creating the vision of free transit, for sponsoring our work, and for pledging resources to take the BTA to other cities while we fight for the Kheel Plan here in New York City.

Please download the report, take a look at the spreadsheet model, and let me know what you think. The link again: www.nyn.org/kheelplan/.

Best,

Charles
212 260 5237
www.komanoff.net