



Congestion Pricing: It all comes down to three men in a room

Posted by [Glenn](#) on July 14, 2007 - 1:30pm in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

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[Update: [In a strange move](#), Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver is planning to convene not in Albany where they could actually hold a vote on congestion pricing, but in NYC where it is not clear what they will be doing]

Congestion Pricing remains a hot topic in the power corridors of New York City and State politics with a looming Monday deadline on Federal aid to help finance the start-up costs. As usual, a hard fought issue campaign in New York comes down to the Governor (Spitzer-D), the Speaker of the State Assembly (Silver-D) and the President of the State Senate (Bruno-R).

In New York, this is known as the three men in a room situation. It means that at this point it really doesn't matter what each individual legislators think because the leader of each branch of the legislature knows that they can swing enough votes to make whatever compromises they want happen. I spoke to two of these frustrated legislators yesterday and today that it's pretty much out of their hands and they will see what the final legislation is probably within an hour before they are forced to vote on it. Such is the poor state of our great democracy here in New York.

The main argument seems to be around equity and as usual, the rich folks are very worried about hurting poor people with excessive taxes (yeah right!). Earlier this week a Westchester (rich suburb) Assemblymember released a [report](#) that basically says that congestion pricing is unfair to lower income workers who drive to the city. This ignores the fact that most low income working people in NYC take mass transit or walk to work.

Now [Crain's](#) reports what looks to be the final act between the three men in a room.

State legislative leaders are discussing a deal that would include approval of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan as well as pay raises for lawmakers, an insider says. If an agreement is reached, it would pave the way for the city to qualify for \$530 million in federal funds to implement congestion pricing, new bus routes and other transit improvements.

But such a deal could also spell the end for campaign finance reform, since Gov. Eliot Spitzer's primary leverage for achieving that was his ability to veto pay raises. However, Mr. Spitzer also favors congestion pricing, and is under pressure to get legislative approval by Monday for the city to qualify for the federal grant.

As part of the agreement, Messrs. Spitzer and Bloomberg would promise not to criticize the salary hikes or say they were held hostage by the Legislature, according to a source privy to the discussions.

So basically, Spitzer is preparing the grand compromise: Bruno gets Campaign finance reform off

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the agenda and Silver gets pay raises for the legislators. If anyone has read "The Power Broker", this is very reminiscent of what Gov. Rockefeller did in the late 1960s by cornering Robert Moses politically and making the bridge tolls pay for mass transit improvements. Mayor Lindsey tried to bring order to the transportation network alone, but without the support of the Governor, he couldn't make it happen. Spitzer looks ready to deal and has a few goodies in his bag to offer.

But that doesn't stop NYC's kids from making a direct musical plea to Spitzer, Bruno and Silver:

Stay tuned...



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