

Behind the Wheel: Who Drives Into The Proposed “Congestion Zone?”

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LAST SPRING, MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG presented a congestion pricing plan that seeks to reduce workday traffic by charging motorists for driving into Manhattan south of 86th Street on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. (with exemptions for some vehicles such as taxis and those driven by the disabled and partial offsets to the fee for motorists paying Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and Metropolitan Transportation Authority bridge and tunnel tolls). Some opponents of the Mayor’s plan contend that the proposal would disproportionately affect low- and moderate-income residents of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. A new analysis by IBO finds that a majority of commuters into the proposed congestion zone come from outside New York City and that the median annual earnings of those who drive private cars to work exceeds the earnings of other commuters by 30 percent.

Approximately 1.6 million people commuted to the congestion zone for work in 2005, according to data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. Of these, about 269,673 (16.9 percent) used a private car, van, or truck to get to work. Over three-fourths (76.2 percent) of these motorists usually drove alone.

Where Their Drive Starts. A majority of private motor vehicle users commuting to the zone came from outside New York City. While about 64.8 percent of all congestion zone commuters lived in New York City, only 45.5 percent of motor vehicle commuters to the zone lived in the city—18.7 percent in Queens, 11.4 percent in Brooklyn, 9 percent in the Bronx, 4.5 percent in Staten Island, and 1.8 percent in Manhattan. Another quarter drove from elsewhere in New York State, including 8.2 percent from Nassau County and 6.0 percent from Westchester County. Over a quarter came from New Jersey—with Bergen County alone sending 9.5 percent. Just 3.8 percent of motorists came from Connecticut and Pennsylvania combined.

How Much They Earn. IBO found that median annual earnings of motor vehicle users exceeded median annual earnings of other commuters by 30 percent—\$51,021 for motorists versus \$39,247 for other commuters. When compared based on average annual earnings, the difference was 24 percent—\$75,523 for motorists versus \$60,889 for other commuters.

Looking at the extremes of the earnings distribution for all congestion zone commuters, motor vehicle users were less likely to be in the lowest 10 percent of earners and more likely to be in the top 10 percent. Controlling for hours and weeks worked narrows the gap somewhat, but mean and median weekly and hourly earnings of motor vehicle users were still far above those of other congestion zone commuters.

Motor vehicle users also came from higher income households; their median annual household income exceeded that of other congestion zone commuters by 28.6 percent. The median annual household income was \$97,136 for those who drove to work in the proposed congestion zone

Transportation Modes for Congestion Zone Commuters				
Main Transportation Mode	All Modes		Non-Motor Vehicle	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Car, truck or van	269,673	16.9		
Subway	806,586	50.6	806,586	60.9
Railroad	251,744	15.8	251,744	19.0
Bus	227,188	14.2	227,188	17.1
Ferry	20,073	1.3	20,073	1.5
Walk	7,688	0.5	7,688	0.6
Taxi	2,452	0.2	2,452	0.2
Bicycle	2,039	0.1	2,039	0.2
Motorcycle	1,388	0.1	1,388	0.1
Other	6,365	0.4	6,365	0.5
TOTAL	1,595,196	100	1,325,523	100

SOURCES: IBO; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Public Use File, 2005.

and \$75,550 for other commuters to the zone.

Focusing on New York City residents who work in the proposed congestion zone, IBO also finds that the median income of drivers was substantially higher than that of other commuters. The median annual income of city residents who drove into the zone was \$41,209 compared to \$32,379 for other commuters from within the five boroughs. Not surprisingly, the median income of city resident motorists driving into the zone was well below the \$63,776 median income for drivers coming from outside the city.

These findings largely counter concerns that congestion pricing would disproportionately affect workers less able to afford additional commuting costs.

Additional Commuter Comparisons. There were other striking contrasts between private motor vehicle users and other commuters. Motor vehicle users were almost twice as likely as other congestion zone commuters to hold government jobs (19.5 percent versus 10.3 percent). About one-fourth of the government motor vehicle users were in police or fire occupations; indeed, very few congestion zone commuters in these occupations took other forms of transportation. Educators represented another fourth, although many other educators used alternative transportation. Motorists were also more likely to be self-employed (11.8 percent versus 5.5 percent), while other commuters were more likely to be private sector, including nonprofits, wage-and-salary workers (84.2 percent versus 68.6 percent).

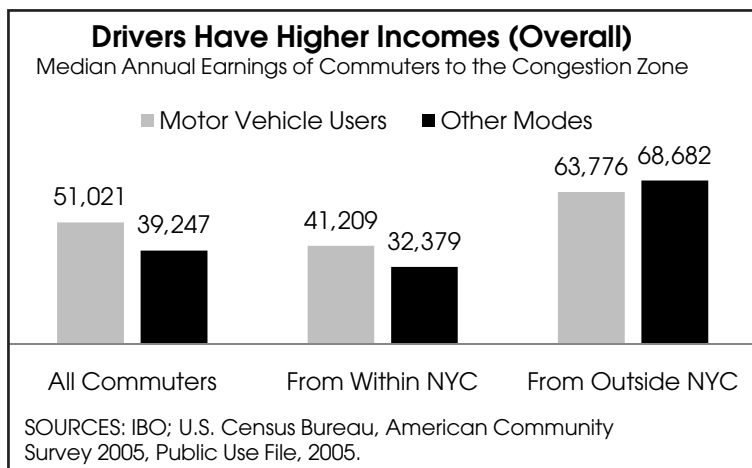
In terms of work schedules, current motor vehicle users were already less likely than other commuters to arrive during the proposed hours of 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for congestion pricing—although vast majorities of both groups arrived during those hours (85.8 percent of motor vehicle users versus 95.0

percent of others).

Personal characteristics also differed in fairly predictable ways between groups. On average, motorists were a few years older (median age 43, versus median age 40 for others), much more likely than other commuters to be married (68.1 percent, versus 50.1 percent for others), and also more likely to live in family households (85.6 percent, versus 77.0 percent). Educational attainment was very similar across groups. Disability status was the same.

About the Data. Our data come from the 2005 American Community Survey, a nationwide survey designed to collect demographic, housing, social, and economic information at the local level. Geographic location of residence is identified down to the “PUMA” level, defined as a non-overlapping area with at least 100,000 residents. For New York City, PUMAs are Community Districts. Thus, boroughs and even smaller neighborhoods of residence can be identified. Outside New York City, a PUMA may be smaller or larger than a single county, depending on population density. The survey is conducted by mail, with follow-up by telephone and in-person.

For place of work in New York City, county is the smallest geographic location reported. Thus, we observe who works in Manhattan, but not where within the borough. We define congestion zone commuters as: those who work in Manhattan but live elsewhere within New York City or outside the city in the states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut or Pennsylvania, and those who live in Manhattan outside of Community Districts 1 to 8, work in Manhattan, and travel at least 30 minutes to work. Our congestion zone commuter sample consists of 13,196 observations; using Census Bureau weights, our congestion zone commuter population estimate is 1,595,196.



Conclusion. Using recent data for congestion zone commuters, IBO found that on average, commuters who use private motor vehicles to commute to the congestion zone are generally better off than other commuters to the area. They are also less likely to be at the bottom of the earnings distribution and more likely to be at the top.

Of course, the group of workers who would pay the congestion pricing fee would differ somewhat from the current population

of drivers. Indeed, if the policy worked as intended, people would change their behavior. Some people would respond to congestion pricing by switching to public transportation or bicycling. More workers might carpool or arrive later or earlier. Living within or close to the congestion zone might also become even more popular.

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