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Statement submitted by Monica Blum, President of the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District, to Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer regarding congestion pricing and congestion tolling zone.

I would like to thank Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer for holding this public hearing on congestion pricing. I am submitting this statement on behalf of the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District to voice our concerns regarding the proposed boundary at 60th Street on the west side for the congestion tolling zone, as outlined in Governor Cuomo's FY 2020 New York State Executive Budget Legislation. While we appreciate and share the Governor's concern with and interest in alleviating the traffic congestion that ensnarls our streets as well as funding improvements to our public transit system, we have concerns and questions about implementing a tolling system through one of the busiest streets in our district. For more than 20 years, we have worked with the New York City Department of Transportation and our community to find solutions to the incredibly complex transportation and pedestrian safety issues facing Lincoln Square, particularly at the 65th Street Bowtie where Broadway and Columbus Avenue intersect and the incredibly congested and dangerous crossings at 60th Street at Broadway and Columbus Avenue. In advance of implementing congestion pricing, it is incumbent upon DOT to analyze the impact that this program will have on Lincoln Square and the streets immediately north surrounding the congestion tolling zone.

Our neighborhood is a dynamic one, home to thousands of residents, the largest performing arts and cultural center in the world (Lincoln Center with its multiple resident organizations), The Shops at Columbus Circle, Fordham University with its expanded campus, the New York Institute of Technology, the American Folk Art Museum, some 250 shops, restaurants and cultural institutions, and just to our west John Jay College and Mount Sinai West Hospital, all of whom rely on the City's streets to serve their constituents and patrons throughout the New York metropolitan area. Fordham's Ram Van shuttles students hundreds of times a week between the Bronx and 60th Street and Columbus Avenue on a daily basis. Our businesses receive multiple deliveries a day with items that are essential to ensuring their success. 60th Street is an emergency route for ambulances to Mount Sinai West.

Unlike other business improvement districts, ours is unique in that we have a very large residential population within the district, and an ever growing residential community to the west. The 10023 zip code is home to approximately 61,500 residents¹ and the area on the west side immediately north of the congestion tolling zone from 60th Street to 70th Street is home to 277 residential apartment buildings, 39 of which are in the Lincoln Square BID.² Lincoln Square is also home to a sizable senior population who disproportionately rely on driving to deal with a transit system that is inaccessible to people with limited mobility. We urge you to consider how older adults and people with disabilities would be affected by a congestion pricing plan.

¹ US Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

² New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO Data, Release 18v2.

Some four years ago, after years of many studies and as part of Vision Zero, DOT made major changes to the street grid in the heavily congested Bowtie area, adding a southbound Columbus Avenue bike lane, enlarging Dante Park, closing the eastbound intersection at 64th Street and Broadway to traffic, eliminating the turn heading east on 65th Street (pushing eastbound traffic either south to 61st Street or to 68th Street) and changing signals, all to make the neighborhood safer for pedestrians. The result: constant traffic backups and congestion. In 2018 alone, there were 277 vehicular collisions in Lincoln Square, mainly along the congested Broadway and Columbus Avenue corridors.³ The adverse impact of a seemingly arbitrary boundary at 60th Street for congestion pricing on the west side could affect quality of life, the cost of doing business for businesses and not-for-profit institutions, and could undermine the residential environment and undo the benefits of Vision Zero.

Lincoln Square is crossed by four major avenues: Central Park West, Broadway, Columbus Avenue, and Amsterdam Avenue. With the exception of Central Park West, the avenues are mixed-use and the side streets are almost exclusively residential. Spillover onto our neighborhood's side streets and numerous reconfigurations of street directions and traffic patterns have slowed traffic in Lincoln Square to a grinding halt. Delivery trucks and contractors double park and often Columbus Avenue heading south has one lane. We have similar concerns about capacity at the 59th Street/Columbus Circle subway station, the 8th busiest in the system with an annual ridership of approximately 23 million,⁴ and the subway's ability to accommodate increased ridership in Lincoln Square.

Furthermore, the congestion pricing program relies on land use definitions of the Midtown Central Business District (CBD) rather than an analysis of traffic congestion to determine the boundary for the congestion tolling zone. Lincoln Square is a mixed-use, residential neighborhood distinct in character from the CBD to the south, though with comparable vehicle speeds and traffic congestion.⁵ Pedestrian safety, walkability, and traffic congestion were listed as the top concerns affecting quality of life in Lincoln Square in our 2018 Community Survey. Implementing a congestion tolling zone at 60th street would exacerbate our existing congestion issues and encourage motorists to circle our neighborhood to try to find on-street parking to avoid paying the congestion fee. Additional traffic from motorists avoiding the congestion fee will slow traffic and increase competition for limited street parking that should serve our residents, business owners and patrons. And, we will all feel the economic impact as the increased cost of doing business will be passed on to consumers through higher prices at local businesses and higher tickets prices at cultural institutions.

We agree that traffic congestion needs to be addressed and that our transit system is in dire need of additional funding streams. Congestion pricing presents a unique opportunity to address both of these challenges in tandem. However, siting the boundary for the congestion tolling zone at 60th Street on the west side appears to be based on an arbitrary definition of the central business district rather than an actual analysis of traffic congestion in New York City. More detailed analysis of where to site the boundary on each avenue should be conducted. We urge our City and State legislators as well as the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority to work with DOT to carefully study the impact on the surrounding streets and the traffic patterns to ensure that a congestion pricing program comprehensively addresses traffic congestion rather than simply pushing the problem a few blocks north into the heart of Lincoln Square, an already heavily congested mixed-use neighborhood.

³ New York City Police Department, Motor Vehicle Collision Data, 2019.

⁴ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Ridership Data, 2017.

⁵ New York City Department of Transportation, Mobility Report, June 2018.