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## City Council Approves Fee to Drive Below 60th

By [DIANE CARDWELL](#)

The controversial proposal to charge drivers in the busiest parts of Manhattan took a major step forward on Monday, with Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) and Speaker [Christine C. Quinn](#) wrenching approval from the City Council by an unusually slim margin.

Under intense pressure from the mayor, Ms. Quinn and their allies that continued almost until the voting began, council members approved the plan to charge most drivers \$8 to enter a zone below 60th Street by a vote of 30 to 20, with no abstentions and one absence.

At a news conference after the vote, where Mr. Bloomberg made a rare appearance on the speaker's side of City Hall, officials sought to play down the narrowness of their hard-won victory, among the closest of this administration in a body that typically votes in near unanimity.

Approving the proposal, Ms. Quinn said, would send a message to the Legislature that the "people who were elected to represent the New Yorkers who live in our five boroughs are sick and tired of our streets being clogged with traffic, we're sick and tired of the children who live in our city literally having to fight to be able to breathe, and that we see congestion pricing as a solution to this problem."

But the ultimate fate of the proposal now resides in Albany, where the intentions of lawmakers whose approval is needed remained unclear. Gov. [David A. Paterson](#) and the Senate majority leader, [Joseph L. Bruno](#), have expressed their support. But Assembly Speaker [Sheldon Silver](#), who has derailed Mr. Bloomberg's ambitions in the past, remained noncommittal, telling members of the Democratic conference on Sunday night that he would not take the issue up until the state budget was completed.

If the Assembly waits to act until after the budget, it could threaten the bill's chances in the Senate, because it would come before the Legislature as a stand-alone item, making approval more elusive. Several council members complained as they voted that the mayor had reneged on a promise that they would not be asked to take up the measure until the State Legislature had agreed to support the proposal.

But other council members took the vote as a sign that Mr. Silver would ultimately back the plan, since Ms. Quinn had said privately that she would not call for a vote until she had an indication that it would gain approval from the state.

But Mr. Silver said that he had made no such assurance.

"I told her it's not before us until they vote on it," he said. "And we will deal with the issue after we pass a budget."

Speaking to reporters with Ms. Quinn, Mr. Bloomberg seemed particularly defensive about Mr. Silver. Asked if they had any indication that leaders in Albany would approve the proposal, Ms. Quinn said that she had received calls from Mr. Paterson and Mr. Bruno urging that the Council “move as quickly as possible and do what we did today, so I thought that was a very good sign.”

In response to a question about Mr. Silver, though, Mr. Bloomberg approached the lectern, sidestepped the question and then cut off the line of inquiry, saying they could not speak for Albany leaders.

Technically, the Council approved a measure known as a home rule message, which is a request for the State Legislature to pass the plan as outlined in a bill introduced into the Senate. The Legislature has until April 7 to approve the program or risk losing roughly \$350 million in federal money to help offset the costs of starting the plan. Mr. Bloomberg has said that much of that money would go toward increasing bus service in underserved areas.

Although the administration and the Council’s leadership were able to gain support with promises of programs, projects and political aid in upcoming campaigns — as well as threats of taking those things away — opposition remained strong. Several council members argued that it was unfair to essentially tax residents to move around their own city, that even after they voted to support the proposal, the Legislature could approve a different version, and that revenues would not necessarily go toward the promised transit improvements.

“This plan, while wrapped up in three incredibly important and laudable goals,” including cleaning the air, reducing traffic and paying for mass transit, said Lewis A. Fidler, a Brooklyn councilman who strongly opposed the plan, “is designed to deter people from coming into a part of the city if they can’t afford it.”

He added: “What’s next? We’re going to charge a user fee to come into Central Park because it’s crowded?”

*Jeremy W. Peters contributed reporting.*

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