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CONGESTION PRICING SETBACK MUST NOT STOP PROGRESS LET'S KEEP MOVING!

Kheel Foundation Awards \$170,000 Grant To Expand “Balanced Transportation” Plan

New York, NY – April 10, 2008 -- Today, Ted Kheel, veteran transit advocate and famed labor mediator, issued the following statement regarding the future of congestion pricing in New York City:

“The cause of better transportation in our City took a hit this week when Sheldon Silver exercised a pocket veto to defeat the most recent congestion pricing plan. But the cause is not lost and the story is not over. A plan to control traffic can, must and will be adopted. I am so confident of this that I am investing an additional \$170,000 to expand a tool we developed last year for analyzing the possible solutions to congestion. That interactive tool permits users to quantify the benefits of the different options—including the one I have proposed of eliminating the transit fare entirely, which would vastly increase the popularity of any potential plan.

“Why am I so optimistic about the future? Because I think in these last months we started a process of moving forward, and I believe the people of New York will insist that we complete that process when they have a chance to be heard in the next elections.

“Two years ago, the Mayor of our City had no interest in congestion pricing. But advocates persisted, and the Mayor changed his mind. Even then, many thought the idea of congestion pricing was the stuff of dreams, not a realistic proposal. But the Mayor, and a coalition of unlikely allies, fought on, and eventually garnered the support of a much broader array of players, ranging from small community groups to the majority of the City Council, the governor and many legislators.

“We must now sustain the momentum that has been achieved, and break through the political gridlock. I see three important steps that will help us do so:

1. **Illustrate the Incentives:** The defeated plan was depicted as an unfair burden on drivers. But large numbers of drivers would be willing to pay for the benefits of improved traffic flow, faster travel times and more reliable commutes. We need to make the benefits to this group more concrete to gather additional support.
2. **Spread the Benefits:** As advertised, the current plan had little to offer non-Manhattanites and nothing to offer users of mass transit. We need to be able to offer real benefits to all New Yorkers, not just a minority.

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3. **Success Requires Flexibility:** The plan that went down was largely monolithic. To craft a plan that is capable of being passed, future proposals should be modular in format. This will allow decision-makers to adapt to the needs of different constituents while still achieving the desired goal.

“Municipal elections are coming up next year and the people of our city will insist on knowing what the candidates plan to do about our traffic problems. Every candidate, insurgent or incumbent, will have to address the issue. I am prepared to help them do so.

“Last year, my foundation funded a major study of the feasibility of free transit. The plan we developed has the potential to cut traffic dramatically—as much as 25% in parts of the city. The plan would also generate hundreds of millions a year for the MTA. And it would save every working New Yorker that commutes by mass transit around \$1,000 a year, assuring its popularity with a large and deserving sector of the city’s electorate.

“As part of this study, our researchers developed a sophisticated software tool for understanding the traffic relief options that are available to us. The tool recognizes the possibility of variations, and allows for choices. We have made that tool available to every citizen and every politician with an interest in this area.

“Knowing what lies ahead, I have now authorized -- at substantial expense -- further development of this unique tool, to make it even more accessible to voters and allow even more refined analysis of how we can reduce congestion. I am devoting considerable funds to this cause, because I believe that traffic relief is the single most important step that can be taken to improve life in this City, which I have lived in and loved for 93 years.

“For this reason, we will be launching a campaign and recruiting a coalition to promote the continuing need for a traffic control plan in New York. As the 2009 campaign begins, we will act as a resource for candidates to help them address the issue of congestion. We will also make sure the voters know the candidates’ positions and can evaluate the options. I offer an open invitation for dialogue on this vital issue, to all candidates, including those who will face the electorate next year, as well as those who will face the voters thereafter.

“I encourage everyone to examine our proposal for free transit at www.kheelplan.org and to use the Balanced Transportation Analyzer (BTA) software tool that is available there. The version that we are preparing in anticipation of next year’s elections will be released this fall.”

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About the BTA

The Balanced Transportation Analyzer or BTA, developed by transportation activist and Harvard-trained mathematician, Charles Komanoff, is a computer program that enables users to estimate the traffic changes, time savings and other impacts of congestion pricing and reduced fare or free transit in New York City. BTA 2.0, which will be released in the fall of 2008, will add critical enhancements to improve accessibility, measure various time variables, estimate impacts on different New York neighborhoods, and add the ability to measure impacts in other cities around the world.

About Ted Kheel

For more information about Ted Kheel, visit <http://nyn.org/TWK.pdf>