



MURIEL BOWSER
MAYOR

March 10, 2026

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Councilmembers:

In 2019, the Council voted to fund a study on instituting a congestion pricing tax scheme for the District. The study was completed in 2021 and, upon our review of it, we found it to fall short on many measurements.

First, it suffers from *significant methodological flaws*. The study used pre-pandemic data for traffic volumes, Downtown commuter populations, and Metro ridership as the basis of its recommendations – data that has proven to be dramatically disconnected from the city’s post-pandemic realities.

Second, the study relies on *deeply flawed foundational assumptions*, such as:

- Workers flow to Downtown DC in unprecedented volumes and always will;
- Commuters have no other options, including telework and non-DC office locations, but to come Downtown for work; and
- Downtown retail businesses have such a surplus of consumers demanding to come and shop downtown that they can be taxed for the privilege of it.

In addition to these significant methodological flaws, there’s a more fundamental issue with trying to impose a congestion pricing tax for Downtown DC: *It’s the wrong policy at the wrong time*.

Downtown DC is an invaluable part of Washington’s identity and economic vibrancy, but it is not Midtown Manhattan. Our Downtown’s economic model, foot traffic patterns, building height limits, and sheer density are exponentially lower than Manhattan or London. While some may have an emotional appeal to using a congestion tax to raise revenue and financially penalize cars on our roadways, it is antithetical to Downtown DC’s recovery and ignores the structural changes in how people work and visit Washington.

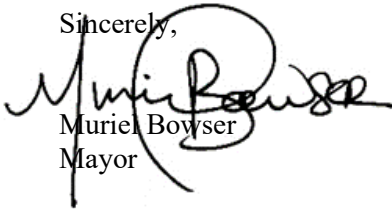
Taxing people up to \$10 to drive into Downtown DC is a bad idea – especially now. At a time when office occupancy remains well below pre-pandemic levels and local retail businesses continue to struggle with reduced foot traffic, imposing a congestion tax would undermine our collective efforts to retain and attract residents, businesses, and tourists. Prospective commercial tenants already complain about the District’s parking cashout requirement as an impediment to leasing space in the city. Adding yet another charge to the cost of doing business in the city won’t make the District any more business-friendly. Washington also has one of the highest proportions of teleworkable jobs in the nation. Remote work has fundamentally altered commuting patterns, and penalizing the people who do choose to come Downtown is counterproductive to our recovery goals.

As the nation's capital, Washington receives millions of visitors who come to Downtown DC to visit their national seat of government and meet their Congressional representatives. It's easy to imagine that an attempt by the city to tax members of Congress, their staff, and visitors from their home states would result in yet another bipartisan rebuke.

Our release of this deeply flawed study should not be interpreted as our support for either the study itself or the concept of a congestion tax. The report itself has taken on a certain mythology among some, which I wish to dispel. Though it should be obvious that charging \$10 to come to Downtown DC is a bad idea. By releasing this report, I hope Council will move on to more serious conversations about how we can strengthen, not weaken, the District's downtown core – including our commitments to WMATA. We will not be conducting any further analysis on implementing a congestion tax nor do we believe our surrounding jurisdictions have any interest in their residents being taxed for commuting into the District.

We can find a better path forward to improving the District's transportation network by working in partnership with our Downtown businesses and talking with our small business owners and residents.

Sincerely,



Muriel Bowser
Mayor