

 TheUpshot

Here Is Everything That Has Changed Since Congestion Pricing Started in New York

Fewer cars. Faster travel. Less honking.
And some questions we still can't answer.

By Emily Badger, Stefanos Chen, Asmaa Elkeurti, Winnie Hu, Francesca Paris and Ethan Singer

The reporters sought information from everyone they could think of, including the M.T.A., the Fire Department, restaurant-booking platforms, researchers and one yellow school bus company.

May 11, 2025

Policy changes often take years to show results. Even then, you may have to squint to see them.

And then there is congestion pricing in New York.

Almost immediately after the tolls went into effect Jan. 5 — charging most vehicles \$9 to enter Manhattan from 60th Street south to the Battery — they began to alter traffic patterns, commuter behavior, transit service, even the sound of gridlock and the on-time arrival of school buses.

What's changed since the toll began?

Cars on the street	Fewer
Traffic speeds	Faster
Peak commute times	Faster still

Local buses	Faster, less delayed
Traffic outside the zone	Not worse
New Jersey commutes	Faster
Transit ridership	Up, up, up
Yellow taxi trips	Up
Citi Bike trips	Up in and out of the zone
Car crash injuries	Down
Parking violations	Down
Traffic noise complaints	Down
Fire response times	Slightly down
School bus delays	Fewer
Visitors to the zone	Up
Restaurants, Broadway	Holding up
Pollution	Too soon to say
Lower-income commuters	Too soon to say
Public opinion	Not great, but improving

Evidence has mounted that the program so far is achieving its two main goals — reducing congestion and raising revenue for transit improvements — even as the federal government has ramped up pressure to halt it. In March, the tolls raised \$45 million in net revenue, putting the program on track to generate roughly \$500 million in its first year.

Congestion pricing was designed to finance more than \$15 billion in critical transit upgrades. Those investments will take years. But the parallel changes at street level are already apparent.

Here's what we know so far.

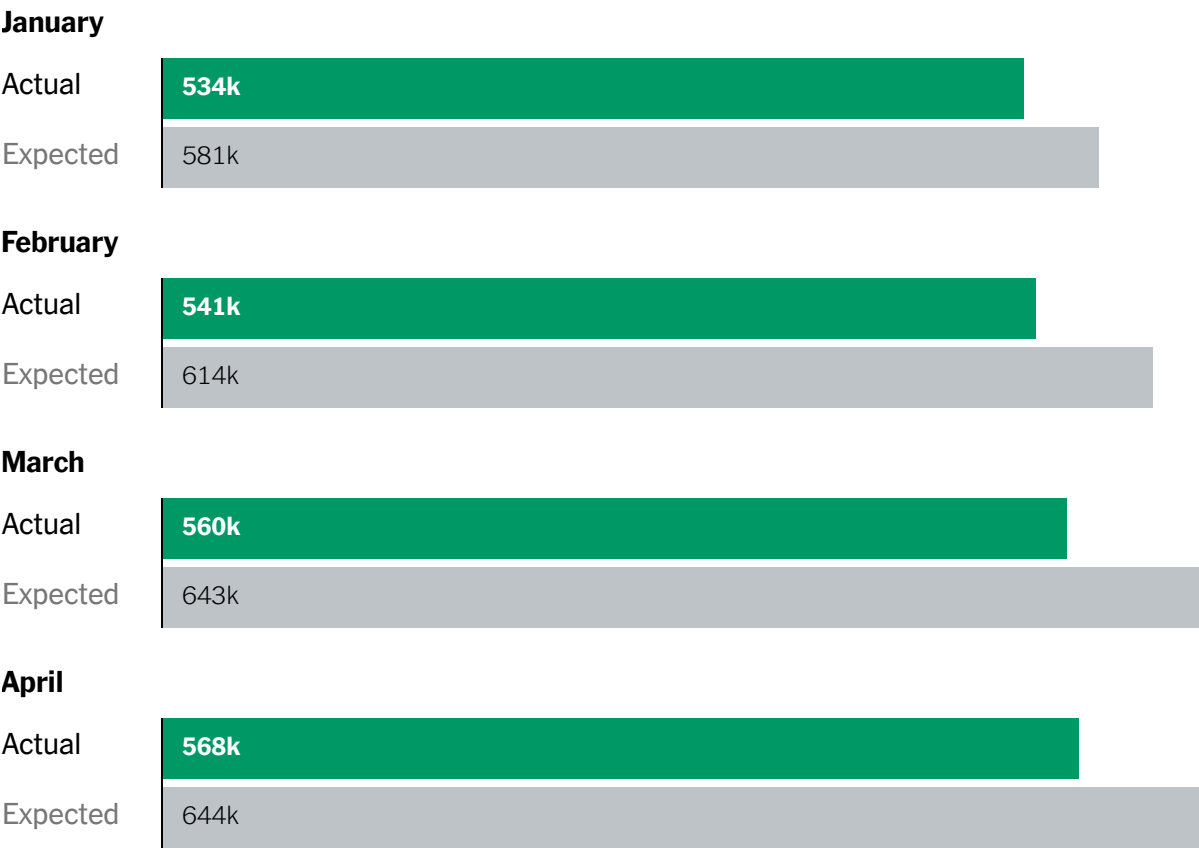
TRAFFIC IN THE ZONE

Fewer cars are entering the congestion zone than before.

The idea was that many people, faced with a toll, would stop driving into the heart of Manhattan. So far, that appears to have happened.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority estimates that about 76,000 fewer vehicles per day in April entered Manhattan’s central business district, which encompasses the congestion zone, than probably would have without the toll. That’s the equivalent of 2.3 million fewer cars for the month, or 12 percent fewer than would have been expected given historical traffic trends.

Daily average entries to the central business district



The central business district includes the congestion tolling zone and adjacent highways excluded from the tolls. Source: M.T.A.

These numbers are based on the M.T.A.'s best guess of what would have happened without congestion pricing. (The cameras that are now counting cars entering the zone every day weren't fully installed in January 2024, so we can't compare exact car counts with this same time last year.)

The Port Authority, which separately controls the tunnels entering Manhattan from New Jersey, released initial data for January showing that 8 percent fewer cars entered through the Lincoln Tunnel, and 5 percent fewer through the Holland Tunnel, compared with January 2024. But the agency has not released data for February and March.

Traffic is moving faster.

With fewer cars on the road, speeds are up.

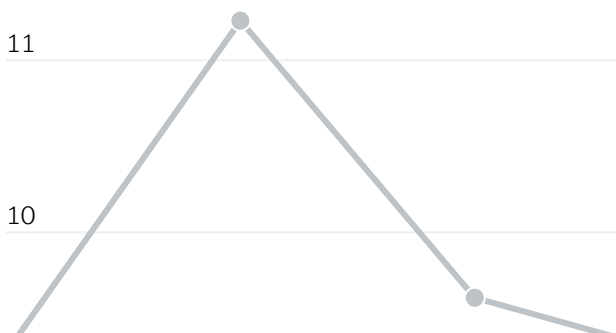
Inside the congestion zone, as more workers returned to the office after the pandemic ebbed, average speeds had steadily declined since 2021, according to New York City Department of Transportation data that tracks the movement of vehicles licensed by the Taxi and Limousine Commission. Then starting in January of this year, that trend reversed.

Average car speed in the congestion zone

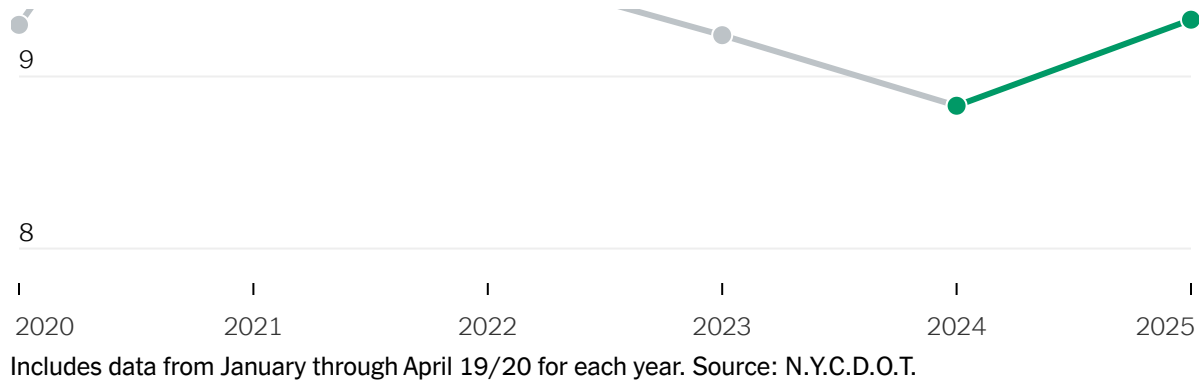
12 m.p.h.

11

10



First increase
since pandemic



An outside analysis from researchers at Stanford, Yale and Google found similar results. They looked at anonymized, aggregated data from trips taken with Google Maps and found that average traffic speeds inside the zone increased by 15 percent in the first two months of congestion pricing. That's compared with what the researchers estimate would have happened without the toll, given traffic trends in other cities.

The greatest speed gains are coming at peak commute times.

Speed improvements have been greatest at the most gridlocked times, during the evening weekday peak.

Change in car speeds, 2024-25



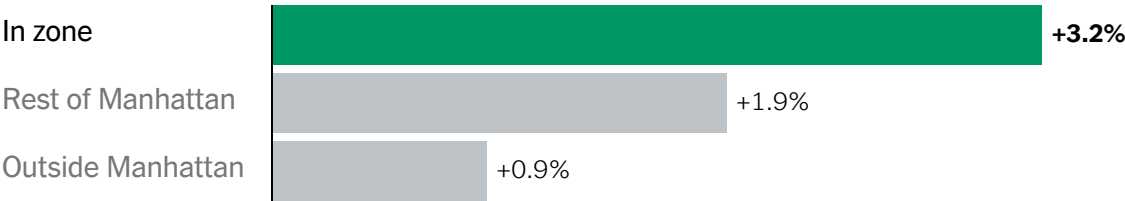
Peak commute hours refers to the evening weekday peak, from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Comparisons are between January to mid-April of each year. Source: N.Y.C.D.O.T.

The Google study found a similar pattern but an even larger effect in the program's first two months, with speeds inside the congestion zone improving by more than 20 percent during weekday rush hours from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Local buses are also moving faster.

M.T.A. bus speeds were also up January through March by about 3.2 percent compared with last year on the portions of local routes that run through the congestion zone. Gains have come on nearly every local route touching the zone.

Change in bus speeds on local routes, 2024-2025



Speeds between January through March of each year. Congestion zone speeds measure route segments inside the zone and include one stop before entry and one stop after exit. The rest of Manhattan excludes these segments. Source: M.T.A. bus speed data

Similar gains have come on express bus routes.

Some of the fastest improvements have been on local routes that cross the river on their way into the congestion zone. On route B39, which collects passengers at the Williamsburg Bridge Plaza in Brooklyn before entering the zone, speeds were up the first three months of the year by roughly 34 percent (a majority of the B39’s full route spans the bridge).

ADVERTISEMENT

TRAFFIC ELSEWHERE

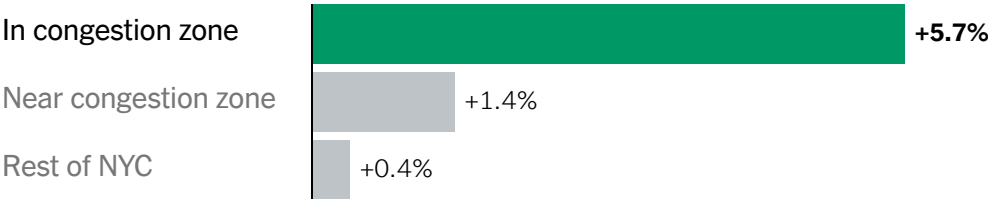
Traffic has not slowed just outside the congestion zone.

One major fear about congestion pricing is that it would improve traffic in the zone simply by pushing cars and congestion elsewhere. But so far, it appears that hasn't happened.

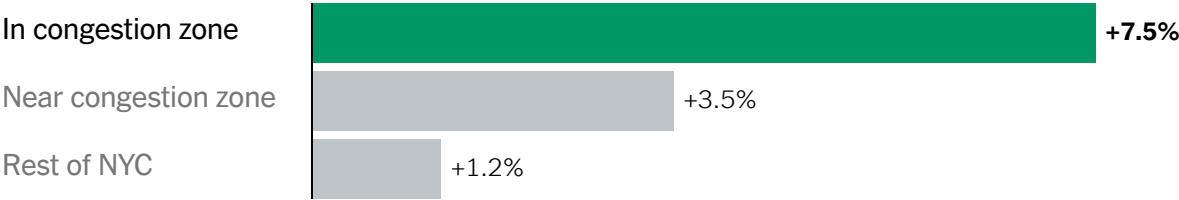
According to Department of Transportation data, speeds in adjacent neighborhoods north of 60th Street in Manhattan and just across the river in Brooklyn and Queens, as well as in the rest of the city, have been flat or slightly faster than last year, depending on the time of day.

Change in car speeds, 2024-25

At all hours



From 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays



Speeds between January to mid-April of each year. Source: N.Y.C.D.O.T.

Traffic has not surged in the South Bronx, as some predicted.

Community groups were especially concerned that drivers avoiding the tolls might be diverted and drive more pollution to the South Bronx, which has some of the highest rates of asthma in the nation. But the number of vehicles traveling daily on the Cross Bronx Expressway was down slightly in January through April, compared with last year, according to the New York State Department of Transportation. And speeds were up about 2 to 3 percent during weekday work hours.

Signs are also positive for New Jersey commuters.

New Jersey Transit has not released bus speed data, limiting what we know about New Jersey commutes. But many M.T.A. express buses from Staten Island run through New Jersey and cross into Manhattan through the Lincoln Tunnel, sharing the same lanes used by many New Jersey buses and commuters.

Express bus speeds in the Lincoln Tunnel



Speeds between Jan. 1 through April 21 of each year. Source: M.T.A.

Those M.T.A. bus routes went through the Lincoln Tunnel nearly 24 percent faster on average after congestion pricing went into effect.

The researchers using Google Maps data, who were able to analyze New Jersey commutes, found that congestion pricing increased speeds by about 8 percent for drivers making trips from Hudson

and Bergen counties into the congestion zone.

Residents of lower-income neighborhoods have seen faster travel, too.

The Google study also found consistently faster trips into the congestion zone — with speeds up by about 8 to 9 percent — whether drivers were coming from poorer or richer parts of the region.

That doesn't address all the concerns of critics who warned that the toll would burden working-class drivers. But it does suggest that those drivers are sharing in the traffic benefits.

ADVERTISEMENT

DRIVING ALTERNATIVES

Ridership is up across all modes of public transit.

While the number of cars on the road is down, transit ridership is up, suggesting many commuters have switched.

From early January through mid-April, compared with the same time last year, ridership has increased on the bus and the subway for the M.T.A. It's also up on the Long Island Rail Road, the Staten Island Railway and the Metro-North commuter lines that serve the northern suburbs and parts of Connecticut.

Average daily M.T.A. ridership

	2024	2025	CHANGE
Bus	1.1 mil.	1.2 mil.	+13%
Long Island Rail Road	186k	207k	+11%
NYC Subway	3.2 mil.	3.4 mil.	+8.2%
Metro-North Railroad	163k	176k	+8.2%
Staten Island Railway	5.4k	5.7k	+4.4%

Ridership from Jan. 5 to April 21 in each year. Source: M.T.A.

On the PATH commuter train that serves New Jersey commuters crossing the Hudson River, ridership is also up — by nearly 6 percent — in the first three months of the year compared with last year. New Jersey Transit, which runs a different rail and bus system into Manhattan, has not shared data, but stated it had “no evidence at this time that congestion pricing is having an appreciable impact on ridership.” (The policy is especially fraught in New Jersey, where officials are suing to stop congestion pricing in federal court.)

The Trump administration has seized on a number of high-profile crimes to paint mass transit as unsafe and a poor substitute for commuters who drive to the city. But on the subway, crime is dropping. In the first three months of 2025, criminal offenses in the subway fell to the second-lowest level in 27 years, with an 18 percent drop in major crime categories, police data shows.

Yellow taxi trips inside the zone are up, too.

Yellow taxi rides starting or ending in the congestion zone are up this year — there were about eight million trips across the first three months of the year, compared with about seven million in the

same period last year.

Taxi passengers on routes that touch the zone pay an additional 75 cents per ride (those riding in for-hire vehicles, like Uber, pay \$1.50). Many in the taxi industry worried that an added cost to fares would discourage riders and further harm an industry that's been losing business for years. So far, that hasn't happened.

Citi Bike trips in the zone are up, but they're up citywide.

It's less clear that people are switching to biking. According to Citi Bike, ridership in the bike-sharing program through April 20 is up similarly both inside the congestion zone and citywide, 8 to 9 percent, compared with last year. But Citi Bike has expanded the network over time, making direct trip comparisons with earlier years imperfect.

The Department of Transportation also maintains some bike counters inside the congestion zone that count cyclists on personal bikes and Citi Bikes. Those counters show a very slight decline in trips compared with last year, while counters outside the congestion zone show a small bump in trips. Biking is also more subject to weather, and this past winter was especially cold.

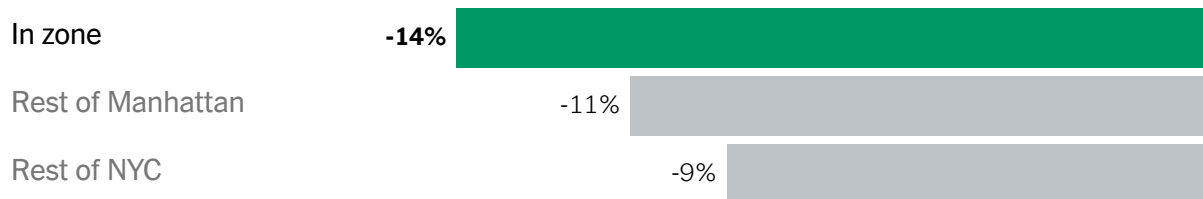
In short, it's probably too soon to say much about the effects of congestion pricing on biking.

ADVERTISEMENT

Car crashes and injuries have declined.

With fewer cars on the road in the congestion zone, there have been fewer car crashes — and fewer resulting injuries. Crashes in the zone that resulted in injuries are down 14 percent this year through April 22, compared with the same period last year, according to police reports detailing motor vehicle collisions. The total number of people injured in crashes (with multiple people sometimes injured in a single crash) declined 15 percent.

Change in number of crashes resulting in injuries, 2024-25



Crashes between Jan. 1 through April 22 of each year. Source: N.Y.P.D.

Crashes and injuries are also down citywide outside the congestion zone, but by less, suggesting that the tolls could be a factor in the difference.

The story here may largely be about fewer cars creating fewer opportunities for collision. But Philip Miatkowski, senior director for research and policy at Transportation Alternatives, said that less congestion may also be increasing safety in other ways, like less double-parking and blocked intersections, or less road rage.

Parking violations are down.

Data on parking violations suggests that certain types of risky driver behavior *are* declining. Violations issued within the congestion zone — for infractions like double-parking or parking in

no-parking zones — were down nearly 4 percent from January through mid-April compared with last year. Over this time, there was a small increase in violations in the rest of Manhattan.

Change in parking violations, 2024-25

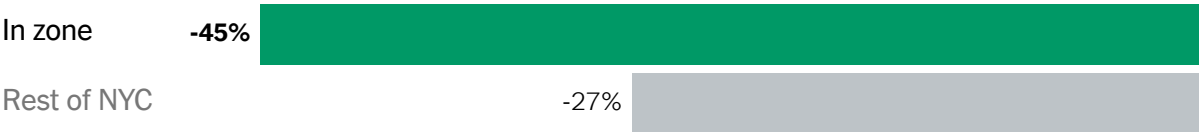


Parking violations from Jan. 5 to April 15 of each year. Source: Dept. of Finance

Fewer New Yorkers are complaining about traffic noise.

Vehicle-related noise complaints to the city’s 311 portal dropped by nearly half in the zone from 2024 to 2025. Similar car-related complaints also fell outside the zone, but not as sharply.

Change in vehicle noise complaints, 2024-25



From Jan. 5 to April 22 in each year. Includes only vehicle-noise-related complaints. Source: NYC 311 data

The city’s Department of Environmental Protection also operates two noise cameras inside the congestion zone. They detect noises greater than 85 decibels and, like a red-light camera, record the offending vehicle. Between Jan. 5 and April 4 of 2024, the department issued 27 horn-honking summonses. Over that time this year, it issued six, with another eight pending.

Fire response times are improving.

Average travel times for the Fire Department’s responses to fires inside the congestion zone dropped by about 3 percent in January through March of this year compared with the same period last year, according to Fire Department dispatch data. These times rose by less than 1 percent in the rest of New York.

Change in fire response times, 2024-25



January through March of each year. Source: F.D.N.Y.

It’s probably too early to tell whether the speedup inside the zone is the result of congestion pricing. Travel times can fluctuate year to year, and Fire Department officials cautioned that congestion pricing was only one possible factor.

Average travel times for ambulances had been steadily increasing since the pandemic, according to emergency service dispatch data. Those ambulance times rose again this year, but at a slower rate inside the congestion zone than elsewhere.

More students are arriving to class on time.

One school bus company, NYC School Bus Umbrella Services (NYCSBUS), has found that, compared with last year, the share of buses arriving at schools late has dropped more inside the congestion zone than outside it.

Percent of school buses that are delayed ...

... in the zone



From January to mid April of each year, based on an analysis of over 45,000 trips. Source: NYCSBUS

The company calculates that those reduced delays inside the zone have meant that bused students receive more than 30 additional minutes of instruction time per week on average.

NYCSBUS contracts with the city to serve about 10 percent of New York's bus routes for school-aged kids, so its numbers don't cover every school bus inside the congestion zone but offer a good sample.

City buses are becoming more dependable.

Commuters care a lot about a metric that's related to speed but distinct from it: Does the bus come when the schedule says it will?

More bus routes in the congestion zone are now running without delays, according to M.T.A. data. Bus delays have declined citywide, but the improvement has been greater within the zone.

Percent of buses delayed in the zone



January through April of each year. Source: M.T.A. bus delay data

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Visitors are up in the congestion zone.

Critics have argued that the toll would scare off tourists and hurt local businesses. So far, there’s not much evidence of that, even as some businesses report signs that declining international tourism and tariffs are starting to pinch.

Visits to business districts, 2024-25



January through March of each year. Source: NYCEDC analysis of data from Placer.ai

In March, just over 50 million people visited business districts inside the congestion zone, or 3.2 percent more than in the same period last year, according to the New York City Economic Development Corporation (its estimate tries to exclude people who work or live in the area).

And according to the Times Square Alliance, the number of pedestrian visitors to Times Square through April 22 this year was almost identical — about 21.5 million people — to the number in the same period last year.

Other business measures are doing OK so far.

Broadway theater capacity is essentially flat compared with last year, after accounting for the increased number of shows this year.

Online restaurant reservations through the platform Open Table are up by about 7 percent in the congestion zone through April 22 compared with last year. That’s similar to the trend citywide, according to the company.

And just to take a different kind of measure, The New York Times visited 40 storefronts on a stretch of Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village to gauge how businesses felt about congestion pricing. People working in four of those businesses said the change had been positive, 10 said it had been negative — and 25 said it had had no impact.

These are just slices of the Manhattan economy, and it's not hard to find individual business owners who feel things are worse because of congestion pricing. But those effects don't seem to be showing up yet at scale.

ADVERTISEMENT

TOO SOON TO SAY

It's too early to know if pollution is declining.

Supporters of congestion pricing said it would also create environmental benefits, with fewer polluting cars on the road (and idling in gridlock or circling for parking).

The New York City health department's readings of PM2.5, one air quality measure, improved citywide the first three months of this year compared with the same period in 2024. The improvement was more pronounced within the congestion zone, but it's too early to attribute that to the program, or to know if that's a lasting pattern, experts said.

If a downward trend in emissions showed up over the long term, it would mirror what happened in other cities after they put in congestion pricing. In London, rates of health problems aggravated

by car pollution, like asthma, declined.

The full effects on lower-income commuters aren't clear.

Critics of congestion pricing have warned that the tolls could harm lower-income commuters who lack access to transit. In response, the M.T.A. has carved out a 50 percent discount on peak tolls for drivers who make less than \$50,000 a year. Some drivers can also apply for a tax credit.

But if those workers still feel they can't afford to commute to the congestion zone, they may over time change jobs or face narrower job prospects. It will take time to track these changes, which could also be influenced by a worsening economic outlook.

In other ways, lower-income workers, who are more likely to use mass transit, stand to benefit from bus and rail investments that will be financed by the toll revenue. Some of the improvements, including new elevators and a more reliable signal system in the subway, are already underway.

An unpopular policy may be growing less so.

Congestion pricing was unpopular in opinion polling just before it started. But its backers expected that it would grow more popular as people saw the benefits.

It's still early to say that for sure. Several pollsters have surveyed the public about congestion pricing, but without repeating the same question across multiple surveys. That makes it harder to

track changes in opinion. Some early signs, however, suggest the program is growing more popular (or, at least, that many New Yorkers don't like President Trump's intervention).

A Siena College poll in December, for example, found that only 32 percent of New York City voters supported the program (29 percent statewide). But by March, 42 percent said it should remain in place (compared with 33 percent statewide). Most recently, in early April, a Marist poll also found that 42 percent of city voters want the program to stay — still not a majority, but perhaps getting closer.

Nate Schweber contributed reporting to this story.

Correction: May 13, 2025

An earlier version of this article mislabeled the location for an M.T.A. estimate of vehicle entries. About 76,000 fewer vehicles per day in April entered Manhattan's central business district, which is slightly larger than the congestion zone but is not the zone itself.