



Where have all the Trucks Gone?

Introduction

With my students at Hunter College, we combed through MTA open data to determine if trucks were avoiding the congestion charge and driving through the Bronx and/or Staten Island as forecast in the MTAs EA. We examined https://data.ny.gov/Transportation/MTA-Bridges-and-Tunnels-Hourly-Crossings-Beginning/ebfx-2m7v/about_data.

Analysis

We looked into the impact congestion pricing is having on truck volumes. With the assistance of my students at Hunter College and a colleague we examined before and after data that is available through the MTA's Open Data Source. Note: Port Authority data was not available at the time of this analysis. The before period is January 8, 2024 to March 1, 2024 and the after period is January 6, 2025 to February 28, 2025. There are exactly the same number of weekdays and weekend days in both samples.

There are 7 MTA bridges and 2 tunnels. We looked at all of them and have full counts by mode for all. We specifically looked at trucks since the MTA's EA identified possible diversions through the Bronx and Staten Island as a result of congestion pricing in Manhattan south of 60th Street.

Diversion Case 1 through the South Bronx: The diversion through the Bronx would most likely have come from truck drivers from NJ who took the Lincoln Tunnel previously and passed through the congestion zone en route to an East River crossing to Queens or Brooklyn (and vice versa). The EA forecasted diverted traffic would most likely use the Cross-Bronx Expressway.

Diversion Case 2 through Staten Island: The diversion through Staten Island would most likely have come from truck drivers from NJ who took the Holland Tunnel previously (larger trucks would take the Lincoln Tunnel) and passed through the congestion zone en route to an East River crossing (and vice versa). The EA estimated diverted traffic would most likely use the Staten Island Expressway.

Diversion Case 1 through the Bronx analysis:

If trucks are diverting away from the Lincoln Tunnel, they would switch to the George Washington Bridge and take the Cross-Bronx Expressway to get to Queens and Long Island (and vice versa, see Figure 1 and 2). These trucks would be picked up at the Bronx-

Whitestone Bridge or the Throgs Neck Bridge. In the before period the average weekday daily volume of these two bridges both ways was 4,057 trucks. In the after condition the number of trucks was 4,013- a negligible difference (-1%).

Through trucks that may have an origin or destination in western Queens might use the Major Deegan to the RFK Bridge. The before weekday truck volumes at the RFK was 2,045 vs. 1,973 in the after (-4%). Weekend truck volumes were down 6%.

There is no evidence to support any significant diversion of trucks through the Bronx.

Diversion Case 2 through Staten Island:

If trucks are diverting away from the Holland Tunnel (or Lincoln for larger trucks) to Brooklyn or Long Island, they would likely switch to the Goethals Bridge to the Staten Island Expressway to the Verrazano Bridge to get to Brooklyn and Long Island (and vice versa). These trucks would be picked up at the Verrazano Bridge. In the before period the average weekday daily volume both ways was 2,596 trucks. In the after condition the number of trucks was 2,644- a negligible difference (+2 %). Weekend truck volumes were down 5%.

There is no evidence to support any significant diversion of trucks through Staten Island.

There was a significant reduction in trucks using the two tunnels, the Battery and the Midtown. Weekday volumes fell from 904 to 781 (-14%) and weekend volumes from 324 to 288 (-11%). This was expected as some truckers may have ‘shopped’ for a less expensive toll by using one of 3 East River bridges. Some of the trucks that used the Battery Tunnel may now be using the Manhattan Bridge while some that used the Queens-Midtown tunnels may now be using the Queensboro or Williamsburg bridges. Counts at these crossings are not available from the open source data we examined. In addition, there may have been some consolidation of loads.

Citywide there was no discernible change in truck activity between 2024 and 2025. The total number of trucks on the 9 MTA bridges over the 53 days studied was 2,165,452 before and 2,157,231 after (0% change).

Why would trucks divert?

A question that has bothered us since the diversion through the Bronx was first identified in the MTAs EA is why? Why would eastbound trucks, presumably in the ‘before’ condition taking the most efficient route across Manhattan from the Lincoln Tunnel, divert and add

miles, time and tolls on the NJ Turnpike, to take the George Washington Bridge once congestion pricing was put into effect? For example, as shown in Figure 1, a 5-axle truck avoiding the congestion zone would save just \$3 by using the Cross-Bronx, a notoriously slow route. For through trucks that take the Queensboro Bridge the Bronx route is \$31 more expensive! Note: Tolls have been rounded off to the nearest dollar.

In the westbound direction no tolls are collected at the Port Authority Hudson River crossings. In Figure 2, truckers going westbound via the Queensboro Bridge would pay \$22 vs. \$41 by diverting. Truckers that go tunnel to tunnel (Queens-Midtown to Lincoln Tunnel) could save \$9 (\$41 vs. \$50) by going through the Bronx. A small number of truckers may look to save the \$9 but the ‘after’ truck volume numbers don’t support that theory.

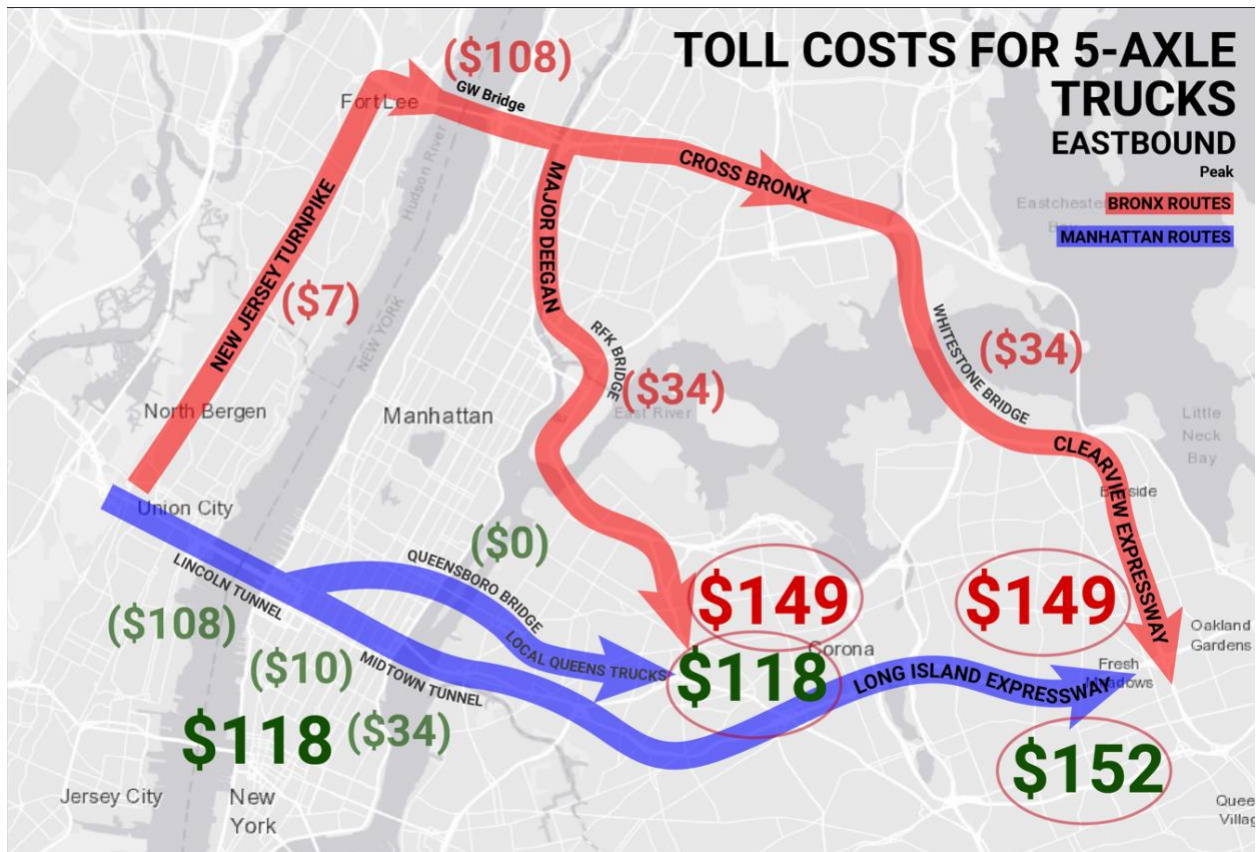


Figure 1 Some trucks that previously took the Lincoln Tunnel through Manhattan were forecasted to divert to the George Washington Bridge and go through the Bronx. Note: all tolls were rounded off to the nearest dollar.

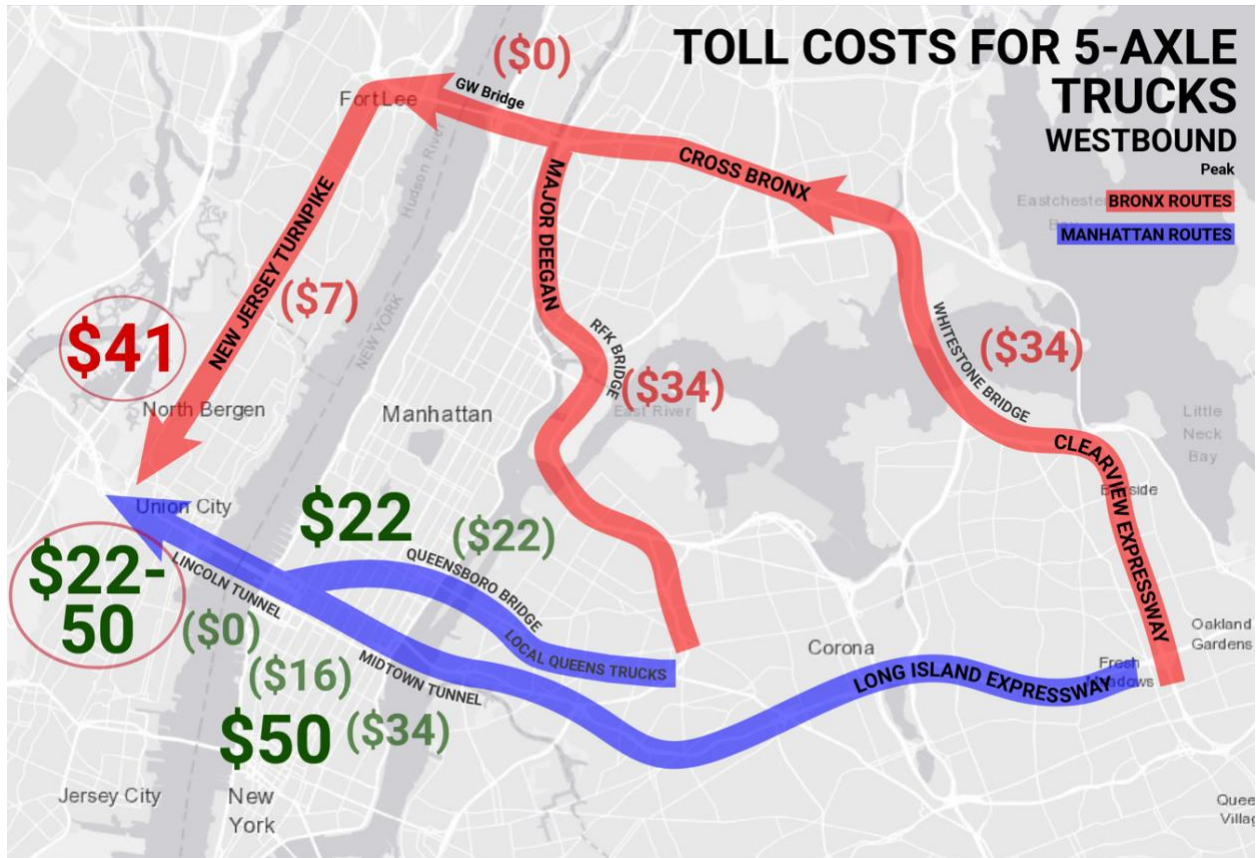


Figure 2 Some trucks that previously went from Queens through Manhattan to NJ were forecasted to go through the Bronx to the George Washington Bridge. Note: All tolls were rounded off to the nearest dollar.

Conclusions

- 1- No change in number of trucks citywide before and after congestion pricing
- 2- No evidence trucks are bypassing the zone and going through the Bronx or Staten Island
- 3- There is a reduction in trucks using the Battery and Midtown tunnels. Most likely a result of trucks, faced with an extra \$14-\$24 tolls, diverting to a less expensive East River bridge or consolidating loads.