

Untapped Revenues

Despite New York's desperate need for new revenues to pay off noteholders and help eliminate a \$500 million (or more) deficit in next year's budget, city officials once again have adamantly turned down a long-standing proposal to impose tolls on the East and Harlem River Bridges.

The tolls were initially suggested as a device to help curb motor vehicle congestion and air pollution in Manhattan. In fact, tolls are mandated under a locally developed plan to bring the city into compliance with the Federal Clean Air Act. The current administration in City Hall has, however, chosen to defy the Federal law and to ignore the environmental interests of a central city that is being choked to death by the world's heaviest concentration of motor vehicles.

Mayor Beame and his aides cannot continue much longer to sidestep the fiscal questions raised by their failure to tap a potentially lucrative revenue source or the question of equity posed by their obsessive protection of the minority of persons entering Manhattan toll-free each day—less than 10 percent of the total.

Estimates of revenues that might be derived from the Harlem and East River Bridges range up to \$400 million, depending on the rate structure. Even modest tolls limited to peak hours could yield about \$50 million a year, a revenue stream that would enable the city or the Municipal Assistance Corporation to sell up to \$400 million in bonds to help pay noteholders.

Under present circumstances, there is no reason why motorists who insist on driving their private cars into Manhattan each day should get a free ride. Citizens for Clean Air recently conducted a serious study of the costs that these motorists inflict on the city and their fellow citizens—through pollution, traffic accidents, congestion and the valuable real estate taken up by streets and highways. The environmental group estimated that these hidden costs could reach \$5 billion a year for the city as a whole, or almost \$5 for each car entering Manhattan each day.

Urban motorists should start paying their way here, as drivers already are doing in some other cities, not only through the imposition of tolls on bridges that remain free but through other levies, such as heavier fees for parking on publicly owned and maintained streets or fees for entering areas of heaviest congestion.

Singapore has drastically cut congestion and has added more than \$2 million yearly to municipal revenues by requiring cars entering a downtown restricted area during the morning rush hour to display a yellow sticker, costing \$1.60 a day. It should be worth no less to drive into midtown Manhattan; New York certainly could use the revenues, as well as the relief from crippling traffic pollution.