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Everybody In the Pool

Ride-sharing strongly urged as traffic woes predicted today

By Martin C. Evans

STAFF WRITER

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said commuters caught a break from the Yom Kippur holiday, and can expect traffic to be significantly worse today.

"We expect tomorrow to be a crowded day, so you can make life easier for us and for yourself by using public transportation," the mayor said.

Giuliani's experiment with mandatory carpooling at mid- and lower-Manhattan river crossings seemed virtually flawless, with shorter-than-usual delays throughout most of the day.

Motorists determined to beat the new carpool-only 6 a.m. curfew idled in predawn traffic for as long as an hour at the Queensboro Bridge yesterday. By the 8 a.m. rush-hour peak, traffic was moving at an almost delightfully brisk pace almost everywhere in the city.

Today, though, is expected to be a different story altogether. Checkpoints at bridges and tunnels, set up by police and the FBI in the wake of the Sept. 11 Twin Tower attacks, will remain indefinitely, the mayor said.

"I don't think anything is permanent," the mayor said. "But I think it'll be for awhile."

While the legality of the checkpoints have "not yet" been challenged, Giuliani said he expected they will be.

Tuesday, heightened scrutiny of trucks and other vehicles at checkpoints spawned massive tie-ups that went on for hours on major arteries and even side streets in Queens, Manhattan, Brooklyn and Nassau County.

Wednesday, Giuliani announced the carpool-only restriction in hopes it would reduce future checkpoint-related delays. On a typical weekday, two

of three Manhattan-bound cars arrive with a single occupant.

Under the restrictions, in effect weekdays from 6 a.m. until noon, cars cannot cross into Manhattan south of the Triborough and George Washington bridges unless they have at least two occupants. The Lincoln Tunnel joins the carpool-only plan today.

Government and commercial vehicles, cars carrying emergency medical personnel, taxis and livery cars, motorcycles and cars with permits for the disabled are exempt from the ban.

Many motorists took up the city's offer for free parking at a 4,000-space park-and-ride lot at Shea Stadium. Parking will cost \$2 after today.

Tom Bruen, 45, a carpenter who lives in Queens and works in Manhattan, drove to the lot, then took the No. 7 train to and from work. "It should have been done a long time ago," he said.

Ralph Barone, 45, of Ronkonkoma, used the park-and-ride lot even though his job is in the Queens-side shadow of the Queensboro Bridge.

With free parking and a subway at his disposal, would he fight the bridge-bound traffic for the right to drive to work? No way.

"I could be three blocks from work and it would take an hour to get there," he said.

The mayor also announced that \$250 million in small business loans — \$25 million each in city and state dollars and \$200 million from private banks — has been made available to help companies hurt by the devastation. Loans will be processed within three days to help businesses get back on their feet quickly, the mayor said.

Special correspondent Tania E. Lopez contributed to this story.

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