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In NYC, passengers wanted

River crossings into Manhattan require carpooling

By Martha T. Moore
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USA TODAY

NEW YORK — If you're driving into Manhattan, take public transit or make friends fast. Drivers entering the city through most river crossings must have two people in the car during the morning rush.

After the attack on the World Trade Center, the city pulled up the drawbridge to the island of Manhattan, closing bridges and tunnels. Most are now reopened, but traffic has been brutal.

Police also are pulling over trucks and vans entering the city to search for explosives or hazardous materials.

The carpool requirement began Thursday on nearly all crossings into Manhattan.

"We're asking people to be a little creative," said city transportation department spokesman Tom Cocola, a new rider of the Staten Island ferry.

Jac Benson drives into Manhattan from Brooklyn because it's often hard to get a taxi home late at night. On Thursday, he offered his friend, Ebony Shears, a ride so he could meet the two-person minimum on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Traffic restrictions

Traffic was lighter than usual by as much as 15% because of the Yom Kippur Jewish holiday, Cocola said. Some of the worst backups came as drivers tried to beat the 6 a.m. start of the carpool requirement.

Nearly a million cars a day enter Manhattan. About 40% of commuters already take public transit to get to work.

Transit advocates say a permanent carpool requirement could lighten traffic. "A lot of people who drive alone will have to explore other options," said Kristen Fountain of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "They may find it's not so horrible as they imagined."

But trains and buses from New Jersey are already packed.

"We're praying. We're doing everything we can to avoid an increase on the trains and the buses," said New Jersey Transit's Jeffrey Warsh. "There is no more room."

The crisis has accelerated a resurgence in ferry service. Three new ferries are running; more are planned. About 55,000 people a day now cross the Hudson River by ferry, up from 35,000 before Sept. 11.

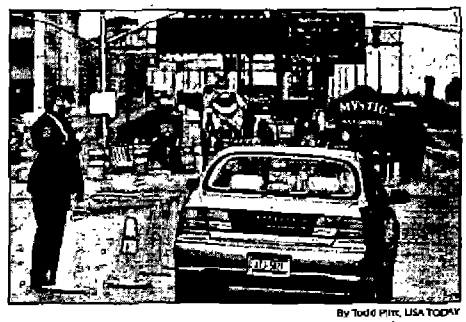
Similar requirements on Manhattan bridges and tunnels were put in place briefly during a transit strike in 1980.

The Automobile Club of New York, the local AAA affiliate, opposes making the carpool requirement permanent. "There are real hardship issues a ban will impose on people," said Marta Genovese, director of government affairs.

Pia Fernandez, a cosmetics company manager from Weehawken, N.J., left her car for the train after the Trade Center catastrophe. Her 3-mile commute by car had lengthened from a half-hour to 90 minutes even before the attack.

"I would still drive if I had the choice, but I think we need all the safety precautions we can get right now," she said.

Contributing: Traci Watson



By Todd Plitt, USA TODAY

No entry: A police officer keep vehicles carrying only a driver from getting onto the Manhattan Bridge on Thursday morning.

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