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By William B. Cassidy

NEW YORK DELIVERS AT NIGHT

The latest Manhattan project uses incentives to get freight off streets during peak hours

EAST SIDE, WEST side, congestion is choking traffic all around New York City. A pilot project that encourages off-peak deliveries may help the city clear traffic jams believed to cost New York \$13.4 billion a year.

This week, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute researchers start to work with shippers, consignees and trucking firms in a month-long test of a program they say could cut daytime truck deliveries in Manhattan by as much as 20 percent for some companies.

The program uses a key incentive — money — to convince businesses to take off-hour deliveries, in hopes they will reschedule at least a portion of the estimated 2.8 million truck trips a day in and around New York City.

“We’re talking about a policy that is being designed to be business-friendly,” said Jose Holguin-Veras, an expert in freight transportation networks and professor in Rensselaer’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in Troy, N.Y. “Only those companies for which it makes sense financially would do it.”

And if off-peak distribution can make it in New York, it can make it anywhere, Holguin-Veras said. “Barcelona is consider-

ing this type of program, and London is, too. They’re very interested in what we find in New York,” he said.

Shifting even a portion of the city’s truck deliveries to off-peak hours would have a significant impact on congestion, he

“Truckers drive in congestion because their customers demand it.”

said. “You don’t have to move every single truck to nighttime delivery. If you move only 10 percent or 20 percent, the congestion savings will be significant.”

Although New York City has nearly 3,000 miles of roads and more than 700 bridges, getting into, around and out of its five boroughs is an increasingly difficult challenge. Manhattan’s central business district, in particular, is a chokepoint.

In recent years, the city has considered several ways to get trucks off its roads during peak hours, including introducing a congestion-pricing plan that stalled in the state Legislature. The Rensselaer study eschews tolls for another route.

Funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the \$1.9 million project involves more than 20 consignees or receivers in a variety of businesses and about 25 carriers. Companies involved include Foot Locker, with six Manhattan stores; White Rose Food, the largest independent wholesale food distributor in metropolitan New York; and New Deal Logistics of South Kearney, N.J.

The receivers agreed to take deliveries between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. Consignees that complete the month-long test will get \$2,000 for each location involved. The researchers will poll businesses on the types of incentives, including tax breaks, that would get them to shift more deliveries to off-peak hours long term.

One goal is to show that voluntary programs funded by incentives can work better than higher tolls and congestion pricing, said Holguin-Veras, who is directing the project.