



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara, Palmesano organize bipartisan group of legislators and join highway superintendents, other local leaders to call on Gov. Cuomo to increase state aid for local roads and bridges (UPDATED~Watch a Replay of the news conference)

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 4, 2015

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Albany, N.Y., March 4—A bipartisan group of 114 state legislators, organized by state Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), today joined county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders from across New York to call for increased state support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

At an Albany news conference in the Capitol, O'Mara, Palmesano and other state legislators, county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders called for increasing state funding for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program, commonly known as CHIPS, by \$200 million to a total of \$638.1 million in the 2015-2016 state budget. They're also seeking the creation of a new, five-year, \$500-million "State Aid to Local Roads, Bridges and Culvert Program" that would be distributed through the existing CHIPS formula and funded by a portion of the state's \$5.4-billion bank settlement surplus.

"New York State has an unprecedented opportunity to address the local transportation crisis, and we can't afford to miss this chance," O'Mara and Palmesano said in a joint statement.

"Local roads and bridges, in every region of the state, are community and economic lifelines that are at risk from a severe lack of adequate, dedicated funding. A revitalized state commitment to local transportation is a wise use of taxpayer dollars. It's an investment in economic growth, job creation, property tax relief and motorist safety."

[[Watch Senator O'Mara's comments at today's news conference](#), and watch a replay of the entire news conference [HERE](#)]

Local highway superintendents representing every region of the state have been in Albany this week as part of their annual "Local Roads Matter" advocacy campaign

[UPDATE: Read more in the March 5th [Corning Leader](#), [Star-Gazette](#) and [WENY-TV](#)]

Two years ago the group of advocates and legislators helped promote what turned out to be the first increase since 2008 in state funding for CHIPS. An additional \$75 million was included in the 2013-14 state budget to boost CHIPS funding to a total of \$438.1 million. That base funding level was maintained last year, but it was bolstered by \$40 million in "Winter Recovery" funding to help municipalities better respond to last year's severe winter.

In his 2015-2016 Executive Budget, Cuomo has proposed to maintain this year's total CHIPS funding at last year's level of \$438.1 million while eliminating the winter recovery allocation.

O'Mara, Palmesano and other state legislators, local highway superintendents and local leaders called for increasing CHIPS funding by \$200 million to a total of \$638.1 million in the new state budget. They're also seeking the creation of a new, five-year, \$500-million dedicated state fund to undertake locally designated bridge and culvert improvement projects statewide.

[[see more photos from the March 4th news conference and rally](#)]

They pointed to reports showing the deteriorating condition of local roads and bridges and the impact the decline has on the economy, high property taxes and motorist safety.

A 2013 study conducted by the town highway superintendents association reported that New York needs to invest an additional \$1.3 billion per year on local roads and bridges to prevent them from becoming deficient. An earlier report from the state comptroller called 32% of New York's local bridges deficient and 40% of local roads fair or poor, and getting worse. A national transportation advocacy group, TRIP, has estimated that deteriorating roads cost the average driver in New York State roughly \$2,300 annually in lost time, fuel costs, vehicle repairs and other expenses.

O'Mara and Palmesano are joined by more than 100 other senators and members of the Assembly in calling for a stronger state commitment to local roads, bridges and culverts. They're highlighting statistics showing that local roads and bridges account for 87% of the roads, 52% of the bridges, and 48% of the vehicle mileage logged in New York State.

The bipartisan coalition of lawmakers has also signed a letter to the governor, legislative leaders and top Cuomo administration officials, part of which reads, "We believe the 2015-2016 New York State budget provides a tremendous, unprecedented opportunity to finally transform this critical sector of the state-local partnership. The commitment and investment we are seeking, through the CHIPS formula, will build on the foundation we have successfully made in the last two state budgets and further solidify our fundamental belief that 'local roads matter.' With the renewed, vigorous state investment we have outlined, we will finally move toward the safe and reliable local infrastructure we envision, an infrastructure that will serve as the catalyst for future economic development and job creation throughout local communities."

[see below for attached copy of letter and list of signees]

Kevin O'Brien, President of the NYS County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA), and Commissioner of Public Works for Niagara County, said, "The \$5.4 billion in foreign bank settlement funds gives the state an incredible opportunity to address the critical needs of the statewide transportation system. Considering that local governments own 87% of the roads and 50% of the bridges, it's imperative that the state boost CHIPS funding and help fund fixes to our crumbling bridges and culverts. It's great to see so much support among our state elected officials, editorial boards throughout the state and the traveling public."

Russ Page, Highway Superintendent for the Town of Leicester in Livingston County and current President of the NYS Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH), said, "The travelling public depends on all of us to maintain local roads and bridges in a safe and affordable manner. The CHIPS program is distributed by formula to every municipality in

New York and as such is the most efficient and equitable way to fund local infrastructure. We applaud the Legislature's continued support of local roads, culverts and bridges."

Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), said, "On behalf of the county governments of New York, we applaud the efforts of State Legislators to provide critical state transportation aid. Locally owned roads and bridges account for nearly 90 percent of the State's 110,000 miles of roadways, and half of the State's 18,000 bridges. Too much of this local infrastructure is in need of repair and is structural deficient. Repairing our road and bridge system is well beyond the means of local property taxpayers, particularly in light of the State's property tax cap."

Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM), said, "City and village mayors across the state greatly appreciate the leadership of Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and their colleagues on this important issue. Given the harsh winter we are currently experiencing, the need for a substantial increase in CHIPS funding is more necessary now than ever. Furthermore, solid and sustainable infrastructure is essential to both a community's economic growth and improved quality of life. The \$5.4 billion in bank settlement funds provides a rare but perfect opportunity to address the significant infrastructure needs facing our local governments. NYCOM therefore supports committing a portion of these funds to a multi-year bridge and culvert program. The condition of our extensive local roads and bridges network is of critical importance to the economic future of our communities and our state."

Gerry Geist, Executive Director of the Association of Towns of the State of New York, said, "New York needs a reliable transportation network to get people to work, goods to market and children to school. Local roads and bridges play an integral role in that network. There is an unprecedented opportunity to use settlement funds and record surpluses to invest in local roads and bridges. Investing in local roads and bridges will put people to work in good paying jobs, attract and retain businesses and allow us to continue to compete in a global economy."

Mike Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of NYS, said, "With the New York's infrastructure needs far outpacing the current funding levels, it is crucial that the Governor and State Legislature increase funding for infrastructure projects around the state. In addition to the underfunded needs of the state DOT system, localities lack the resources to meet their needs as well. The potholes and water main breaks all across the state make that abundantly clear. New York is literally crumbling. The Governor and Legislature have a unique opportunity to make a significant down payment on all of our infrastructure needs with the \$5 billion windfall from settlement New York funds has received. I commend and thank Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for their leadership on this issue and am optimistic that localities around the state and local

infrastructure investment will increase this year. Our economy and communities depend on it."

Jeff Williams, New York Farm Bureau Public Policy Department, said, "Safe, usable roads and bridges are essential to farming in New York. Unfortunately, many roads and bridges in our rural areas are in serious need of repair. Poor conditions have forced farmers to drive out of their way to move farm machinery to neighboring fields and deliver local food to consumers. It is inefficient and wastes fuel. It is time to repair our state's infrastructure."