



**TESTIMONY OF FRANK G. HOARE, ESQ.
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY AUTHORITY
JOINT HEARING OF THE LEGISLATIVE FISCAL AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEES
January 24, 2024**

Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Kennedy and Magnarelli and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Fiscal and Transportation Committees; thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Frank Hoare, and I am the Acting Executive Director of the New York State Thruway Authority.

This year the Thruway celebrates its 70th Anniversary. The first section of Thruway, a 115-mile stretch from Lowell, in Oneida County, to Rochester, opened on June 24, 1954. This ushered in a time for increased accessibility across New York for economic development, tourism and easing visits to family and friends.

We continue our storied history with the 2024 Thruway Authority budget representing a total financial commitment of \$1.3 billion. It provides the resources required to maintain the current levels of maintenance, safety and service our customers expect. This balanced spending plan includes a \$450 million capital program making necessary investments in the Thruway system. Looking ahead, our five-year Capital Program commits \$2.4 billion into resurfacing our road, rebuilding and rehabilitating bridges, and enhancing safety features like guiderail and road striping. That figure represents an increase of approximately \$500 million or 26 percent more compared to the 2023 budget. This increase is attributable to our toll adjustment that took effect Jan. 1, 2024.

The 2024 Capital Program makes critical investments and addresses infrastructure needs throughout the state and in our four operational divisions. In the Capital Region, we will be resurfacing approximately 36 lane miles between exit 25 (Schenectady) and exit 26 (Rotterdam) and increasing the bridge height at the exit 25 interchange bridge. In the Mid-Hudson Valley, we will be resurfacing nearly 50 lane miles of I-87 between exit 16 (Harriman) and exit 17 (Newburgh). In Western NY, we will begin reconstructing the first four miles of the Niagara Thruway in Buffalo between I-90 and exit 6 (Elm Street), as well as resurfacing more than 64 lane miles on the I-90 between exit 59 (Dunkirk) and exit 60 (Westfield). Central NY will see the resurfacing of approximately 50 lane miles of the Thruway between exit 29 (Canajoharie) and exit 29A (Little Falls), in addition to the rehabilitation of approximately 24 lane miles in the Rochester area between exit 44 (Canandaigua) and exit 45 (Victor). This work translates to a smoother riding surface for motorists, enhanced safety features, and a visual reminder of our reinvestment of our customer's toll dollars.

As a testament to our fiscal prudence and discipline, S & P recently raised its long-term rating on our general revenue bonds to 'A+ .' Additionally, Moody's Investors Service revised our outlook to positive from stable and affirmed the A1 rating of the outstanding general revenue bonds. This translates to real savings by enabling the Authority to borrow at lower rates and allows us to make further investments into our system.

Putting these investments into context, the Governor Thomas E. Dewey Thruway is a 570-mile superhighway spanning New York State and is one of the longest toll systems in the United States. The Thruway is comprised of more than 2,800 lane miles, 817 bridges inclusive of the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge, Grand Island Bridges, and the Castleton-On-Hudson Bridge, and 134 interchanges with the majority of the system constructed in the 1950s. In 2023, motorists took 397 million trips and drove 8.1 billion miles on the Thruway.

Besides being an important corridor in the region, the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge is also a recreation destination for many people. The bridge's bicycle and pedestrian path extends

from Westchester County, across the Hudson River at one of its widest points, to Rockland County. The path features six scenic overlooks, interpretive displays and public art across its length. In 2023, nearly 142,000 people visited the path, which is up from approximately 113,000 in 2022. Pedestrians accounted for 57 percent of visitors while cyclists were 43 percent. The path has had almost 650,000 visitors since it opened in June 2020.

Underscoring its importance to the state and region, the Thruway is a dependable and cost-effective transportation system, and serves as a vital link to interstate travel providing a major route of access to our state's tourism anchors. It's also a principal artery of commerce and serves as a catalyst of the state's economic activity with 17 percent of our total traffic coming from commercial vehicles and about one-third from out of state.

The Thruway Authority is operated and maintained solely as a user-fee system and is **NOT** supported by any dedicated federal, state or local taxpayer funding. We did **NOT** receive any portion of the \$13 billion New York received as part of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Our toll revenue goes directly toward making the Thruway one of the safest highways in the nation.

Over the past year, we have doubled our efforts to pursue federal grant opportunities. To date, we have been awarded three grants: a \$21 million Bridge Investment Program (BIP) grant for a project to restore the Castleton-on-Hudson bridge in the Albany area; a \$1.5 million Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) grant to fund the Authority's Unmanned Aerial Systems drone program; and a \$1.2 million grant for the Safe Streets for All grant to develop a comprehensive safety action plan. We will continue to pursue resiliency, safety and other infrastructure related grant opportunities.

As the major interstate highway across New York State, maintaining the viability and safety of our system is our top priority and requires significant investments. The recently enacted toll adjustment is based on the needs of our system and the increased cost of doing business. In the

past 14 years, the cost of steel, road salt and fuel has increased significantly while our spending on operating costs has seen an average growth of less than two percent annually since 2010. It has been 14 years since the last system wide increase for New York E-ZPass customers and even with the recent modest increase, our tolls will remain some of the lowest in the nation. For example, the New York E-ZPass rate for passenger vehicles is 4.7 cents per mile, compared with the New Jersey Turnpike (north of exit 9) at 30.2 cents per mile.

Our commitment to our customers to modernize the system continues off our roadway and into our service areas. The service area project is a \$450 million public private partnership with Empire State Thruway Partners, where 23 of the 27 service area restaurant buildings will be rebuilt with significant renovations to the remaining four. Applegreen, a company specializing in convenience and fuel stores, is the service area operator. Currently, we are close to half-way through the project with 13 new buildings open and another three opening in time for summer travel.

No toll dollars, nor any federal, state or local taxpayer funding is being used for the construction related to this project. The new service areas allow our customers to experience a wider variety of improved dining options and other amenities including exterior seating with access to Taste NY farm markets, playgrounds and pet walking areas with comfort stations. Expanded commercial trucking amenities at select locations include increased parking, shower and laundry facilities, and dedicated lounges.

Our service areas, just like the Thruway system, provide benefits to local communities. For example, the Taste NY Program, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, is prominently featured at our farmer's markets and in our service areas. With its addition along our system, we are supporting local farmers, and food and beverage producers. Other community benefits include partnerships with local small businesses who are awarded contracts to work on Thruway projects. The toll revenue spent on Thruway projects also support the local economy. The Authority pays annually in excess of \$270 million to contractors and other providers of

goods and services whose businesses are based in New York. This money therefore stays within the local economy and helps create jobs across our state.

We are committed to increasing MWBE utilization in our projects. The Authority has made significant improvements to support MWBE inclusion. They have been a sector of the economy that has traditionally struggled to break into the horizontal construction arena. Our assistance to MWBE firms includes facilitating relationships between our prime contractors and MWBE firms; focusing outreach to attract MWBE firms; and conducting training events on doing business with the Authority.

We assisted MWBE firms to overcome challenges to entering the heavy highway construction industry and found ways to create opportunities for MWBE utilization in our statewide program. These additional opportunities include using MWBE firms for bond counsel, legal services, engineering consulting, and professional services.

Adding EV chargers along the Thruway is part of our continued commitment to the environment. Currently, there are 59 EV charging stations in operation at Thruway commuter lots, select service areas, and welcome centers. We have an additional 38 high-speed charging stations that will be operational by this summer, for a total of 97 charging stations. Motorists can currently drive from New York City to Buffalo and be confident in their ability to access EV charging stations along the Thruway.

As part of the ongoing service area project, Applegreen will be installing at least four high-speed EV chargers at every service area. Our plan is to create a robust, end-to-end corridor of more than 130 fast charging EV stations with an average of 30 miles between each location system wide by the end of this project.

The Thruway Authority is a proud partner with the state's National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program. New York is committed to exceeding the federal mandate of

ensuring available fast charging every 50 miles on major roads along the more than 2,000 mile long designated corridor.

The Authority currently meets the EV charging needs of our customers, and we're also planning for the future growth of our customer's charging needs. Applegreen has proposed to add capacity to accommodate the future demand of our motorists. They project in approximately 10 years, to have nearly 320 EV charging stations along the Thruway system. In addition to addressing the EV needs of passenger vehicles, we are working toward addressing EV needs of the medium and heavy-duty vehicle industry.

Because tolls are our primary revenue source, we expect all motorists using the Thruway to pay their tolls and we make every effort to collect every single toll owed to us. Enforcement tools are meant to encourage payment because again, the Thruway Authority receives no dedicated federal or state funding. We believe our approach is balanced to ensure that everyone pays their fair share, and toll payers are protected. The vast majority of our customers appreciate our commitment to them and pay on time. Since 2020, when we converted to system wide cashless tolling, we have successfully processed more than 1.1 billion transactions.

To bolster our toll collection efforts, I want to express our support for Governor Hochul's Article VII toll violation proposal (TED Bill, Part C). This bill will outlaw certain common toll evasion practices that render license plates difficult or impossible to read and prohibit the sale of plate covers, materials or devices that obstruct or obscure the plate. Additionally, this proposal will enhance enforcement by increasing fines, providing law enforcement with the ability to seize materials affixed for the purpose of blocking numbered plates, and allow for the denial and suspension of registrations for vehicle owners that fail to remedy concealed or obscured plates.

On the topic of legislation, we have seen the benefits of Chairmen Kennedy and Magnarelli's Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement program that Governor Hochul signed into law in September 2021. We have seen drivers slowing down in work zones, enhancing the safety for

our crews and other motorists. The average speed in work zones with a posted limit of 55 mph was approximately 50 mph. Since the program's inception, the Authority has mailed more than 40,000 first violations to motorists and collected more than \$1.6 million in violations. Fewer than 360 motorists have disputed their Notices of Violation.

Our accomplishments are made possible because of the commitment from the 1,700 employees of the Thruway Authority. Their dedication and professionalism ensure that the Thruway continues to be a safe and reliable highway for all motorists. A recent example of their selflessness and dedication are the most recent storms in Western New York that brought lake effect snow that caused whiteout conditions, heavy winds, frigid temperatures, and several feet of snow in some areas. The Buffalo Division staff, including reinforcements from the Thruway Authority's Albany, New York, and Syracuse Divisions, worked around the clock in freezing temperatures, plowing and assisting commercial drivers who ventured out in defiance of the ban and got stuck.

In closing, please know I remain committed to keeping the Thruway the safest and most reliable means of travel in the state. Whether one is commuting to work, visiting friends or family, enjoying the recreational opportunities around our state, or supporting the freight economy, the Thruway will take you there.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.