

Testimony of Commissioner Marie Therese Dominguez

New York State Department of Transportation

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on FY 2025 Budget

January 24, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Kennedy and Magnarelli and members of the State Legislature. On behalf of Governor Kathy Hochul, I'd like to thank you for inviting me here to talk about the State Department of Transportation, our people, the communities that we serve, and how the work that we do makes a real and positive difference in the lives of all New Yorkers.

As always, I would like to start things off by saluting the dedicated DOT workforce, who work tirelessly to make sure that our roads and bridges are safe. I was in Buffalo at the height of the most recent storms last week and plan to visit our crews in Watertown very soon, which was also greatly impacted by relentless snows this past week. Our crews have been working around the clock for the better part of two weeks now and they represent the best in public service. The work that they do to keep New Yorkers safe in all weather is selfless and they make me enormously proud.

No matter the circumstances, DOT is there, meeting every challenge.

Our people are the heart and soul of this agency and each one of them deserves our thanks.

Getting the Job Done

Every year poses its own unique set of challenges and 2023 was no different. From severe storms that knocked out roads and bridges to supply chain issues, DOT was certainly put to the test last year. In the face of it all, we executed projects across the state under our five-year capital plan while Planning Forward for the future of New York transportation, kicking-off our statewide master plan development process.

But there is no better agency that rises to meet a challenge better than DOT and no staff that responds to a crisis better than ours.

This was evident early last summer when, in the span of just a few hours, up to 8 inches of rain fell on portions of our state, causing devastating flooding and inflicting catastrophic damage on several roads and bridges across our state. Among them was the Popolopen Bridge over Popolopen Creek in Highland Falls and the State Route 28N bridge over Fishing Brook in Hamilton County. Immediately our design and engineering teams got to work.

In the case of the Popolopen Bridge – which is a key access route to West Point – our team designed an innovative new geosynthetic retaining wall system to replace a 20-foot-deep mass of soil that had been washed away during the storm.

Along State Route 28N, our crews installed a temporary bridge and had the road back open to traffic negating the need for a lengthy detour. They then got to work expediting the design and construction of a permanent replacement, which opened in November.

It's this can-do spirit that makes me so proud to work with the talented team of professionals at New York State DOT.

But DOT does so much more than just respond to extreme weather. There is not a community in New York State that DOT doesn't directly touch and engage. Transportation across New York is an integrated

system – that includes transit, rail, aviation, roads and bridges as well as bike and pedestrian pathways – all these systems are working together to better the lives of New Yorkers. At the heart of all this is the Department of Transportation, and thanks to your support we accomplished a great deal last year.

During 2023, DOT improved 1,586 lane miles along state and local highways, representing a \$754 million investment in New York’s roadways. The resurfacing included over 500 lane miles of improvements that were funded from Governor Hochul’s Pave Our Potholes Program. Additionally, NYSDOT replaced or improved 2,833 bridges statewide, totaling a nearly \$1.7 billion investment that enhanced safety, improved sustainability and boosted resiliency against severe weather impacts. Thanks to Governor Hochul’s leadership and your continued support, New York is investing more in its infrastructure than at any time in history. And NYSDOT continues to put these investments to work, in the process making our communities better places to live, work and thrive.

From the Bronx to Buffalo, New York is doing more to reconnect communities in innovative ways by carrying out Governor Hochul’s vision not only for what transportation is, but what it could be, when we provide safe, reliable and equitable solutions that benefit the environment and the people we serve.

This past summer we announced the completion of Phase Two and the beginning of Phase Three of our Hunts Point Access Improvement Project, which rehabilitated and created new connections on key sections of the Bruckner Expressway and Bruckner Boulevard to establish a more direct route to the Hunts Point Market; and which also provided a shared use path that will provide added opportunities for biking and hiking.

And we broke ground on the transformative Interstate 81 Viaduct project in Syracuse, which will reconnect the city’s divided neighborhoods, create a community grid of connectors that will enhance mobility and improve access to, within and from the city’s downtown destinations.

We also continue to advance major priority projects like the Kensington Expressway in Buffalo and the replacement of the Livingston Avenue rail bridge in the Capital Region, both of which will create a greener, more sustainable transportation system that improves quality of life.

In addition to highway improvements, the five-year capital plan helps us make critical investments in aviation, freight rail, and transit. In the first year of the five-year plan, \$230 million was provided to enhance nine regional airports upstate, and an additional award of \$49 Million was made in 2023 for 36 public-use airports across New York State to invest in strategic infrastructure enhancements.

SFY 24/25 Executive Budget Proposal

This year, the Executive Budget provides nearly \$7.6 billion for the third year of the record \$32.9 billion, five-year DOT Capital Plan. The program will continue to facilitate the capital improvement of highways, bridges, rail, aviation infrastructure, non-MTA transit, and DOT facilities.

Additionally, the Executive Budget provides \$8.8 billion in mass transit operating support, with \$7.9 billion going to the MTA, \$551 million to the other downstate transit systems, and \$323 million to upstate transit systems, representing a 5.4% increase in transit operating assistance for non-MTA downstate and upstate transit systems.

Building for a Greener Future

DOT is about so much more than just transportation. We are fully committed to Governor Hochul's aggressive agenda to create a better, more inclusive and greener future for all New Yorkers.

We're a partner working to achieve statewide electrification and carbon reduction goals, we're an advocate and facilitator of transportation equity, we're a materials and technology innovator, and we're a job creator and economic driver.

At DOT, we are working aggressively to implement the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, and the scoping plan created by the Climate Action Council, where I serve as a voting member.

DOT is leveraging \$175 million the state will receive over 5 years for the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program to further advance electric vehicle charging infrastructure on our interstate highways in partnership with NYPA and NYSEERDA. Just recently, we became one of two states to open the Nation's First NEVI-Funded EV Charging Stations.

Smart climate policies also mean building a resilient infrastructure for the future. We are currently building infrastructure designed to last at least 75 years using innovative and highly durable materials that not only stand up to extreme weather but are less impactful on the environment.

Connectivity and multi-modal transportation are cornerstones of the Governor's transportation vision for the future, which is why we are investing \$1 billion in bridges and culverts under this capital plan through the Bridge NY program and the CRoSS program. The first round of Bridge NY in 2022 made funds available for 115 bridge projects and 101 culvert projects, and the second round kicked off this past November, releasing the remainder of the Bridge NY funding, and municipalities are making bridge and culvert project recommendations right now. The Department has also initiated a statewide culvert resiliency program, known as the Culvert Resiliency on State System (CRoSS), which will ultimately improve resiliency at 422 locations.

It also means encouraging other forms of transportation beyond cars. That's why we institute the principles of Complete Streets in every possible project and why we are advancing our Active Transportation Plan which will focus on how we enhance and develop pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Last year, we were provided \$5 million for complete streets planning that is now being used to support complete streets project elements identified in Community Action Plans that are being developed in concert with partner communities interested in building their planning capacity for underserved areas with an interest in improving bicycle and pedestrian opportunities.

Worker Safety

Let me close where I began, with our DOT team members.

Our highway maintenance workers and contractors are part of our family, and nothing is more important to us than the safety of our family members. They do important work in often hazardous conditions next to high-speed traffic. They deserve our thanks and our respect.

That's why in April of 2023, in cooperation with industry and organized labor, we kicked off the Automated Work Zone Speed Monitoring Pilot Program to help enforce speed limits in highway construction and maintenance work zones. This is a joint initiative between the New York State Department of Transportation and the New York State Thruway Authority that was authorized under legislation adopted by the Legislature and signed by Governor Hochul.

A total of 30 speed violation monitoring systems that rely on RADAR technology were positioned in various active work zones along New York State highways throughout the year. And the results so far have been encouraging. Through the end of December, the Department issued more than 102,000 Notices of Violations to motorists under the program, including one motorist who was clocked at going 139 miles per hour on Route 104 in the Town of Irondequoit. Over the next year, we will be analyzing the data to better understand how the program is working, but our workers feel that overall, they are noticing a reduction in vehicle speeds.

We look forward to continuing this pilot program in the coming construction season. Because nothing is more important to us than the safety of our DOT family members.

Conclusion

What I've laid out today is just a small sample of the work our team at the Department of Transportation undertakes each day.

Fundamentally, it is our mission to provide a safe, reliable, equitable, and resilient transportation system that connects communities, enhances quality of life, protects the environment and supports the economic well-being of New York State. We do this by creating equitable and accessible transportation for all and we are proud to be a partner in building a better future for all New Yorkers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today.

I am happy to answer your questions.