



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara and Palmesano rally statewide support for local roads and bridges

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 5, 2014

| ISSUE: **HIGHWAYS**



**Albany, N.Y., March 5**—A group of nearly 100 state legislators, led by 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 and bridges.

Local highway superintendents from every region of the state have been in Albany this week as part of their "2014 'Local Roads Matter' Grassroots Advocacy Campaign for Local Roads & Bridges."

“We’re seeing report after report deliver the message that the condition of local roads and bridges is critical, and getting worse,” O’Mara and Palmesano said in a joint statement. “We need a stronger state commitment to our local transportation infrastructure. Local roads and bridges, in every region of New York State, are community and economic lifelines, but they’re at risk from a severe lack of adequate, dedicated funding. State investment in the improvement and upkeep of local roads and bridges is a wise use of taxpayer dollars. It’s an investment in economic growth, job creation, property tax relief and motorist safety.”

Last year the group helped promote what turned out to be the first increase since 2008 in state funding for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program, commonly known as CHIPS. An additional \$75 million was included in the 2013-14 state budget to boost CHIPS funding.

This year the group is again urging Governor Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders to increase CHIPS funding, as well as begin a new, multi-year funding program dedicated to local bridges and culverts. Cuomo has proposed to maintain this year’s CHIPS funding at last year’s level of \$438.1 million.

At an Albany news conference today, O’Mara, Palmesano and other state legislators and local leaders called for a \$50-million increase in CHIPS funding, to \$488.1 million, in the final 2014-15 state budget. They’re also seeking the creation of a new, multi-year, \$200-million dedicated state fund to undertake locally designated bridge and culvert improvement projects statewide. [Watch the opening remarks by O’Mara and Palmesano at today’s news conference [HERE](#), and read and listen to more on [Finger Lakes Radio](#)]

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. Just last week, a national transportation advocacy group, TRIP, said that deteriorating roads cost the average driver in New York State roughly \$1,600 annually in lost time, fuel costs, vehicle repairs and other expenses.

O’Mara and Palmesano are being joined by nearly 100 other senators and Assembly members. 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 it’s the right time to transform this critical sector of the state-local partnership in the ways we have outlined. The commitment and investments we are seeking to build on last year’s foundation will further solidify our strong belief that ‘local roads matter.’ This newfound state commitment and investment will finally move us toward the fully safe and reliable local infrastructure we envision, and serve as a true catalyst for future economic development and job creation in our local communities.” [see attached copy of letter and list of signees below]

Timothy Hens, PE, President of the [New York State County Highway Superintendents Association \(NYSCHSA\)](#) and Genesee County Highway Superintendent, said, “Infrastructure is a municipality’s greatest asset and, as the storm events of the last few years have demonstrated, vitally important to the public and the economy of the State. The reality is that more federal and state resources are needed for the repair, rehabilitation, efficient operations and strategic replacement of existing local transportation infrastructure for safety, mobility and for the state to remain economically competitive. The support of our state leaders is appreciated.”

Martin D. Roberts, Highway Superintendent for the Town of Reading in Schuyler County and current President of the [NYS Association of Town Superintendents of Highways \(NYSAOTSOH\)](#), said, “Our Association appreciates the recognition from the Legislature that the conditions of our local roads and bridges are still declining despite our best efforts. Real reforms must be implemented to increase funding for New York’s infrastructure before it is too late. The CHIPS program uses a formula to distribute funding, meaning any increase will have a direct positive impact to every municipality in NY.”

Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the [New York State Association of Counties \(NYSAC\)](#) said, “I commend Senator Thomas O’Mara and Assemblyman Philip Palmesano and their colleagues in the Legislature for supporting additional C.H.I.P.S. funding for local governments. Local roads and bridges are a crucial part of New York’s transportation infrastructure. This additional state investment is critical - it will not only improve the safety for our traveling public and prevent costly repairs down the line, but it will also help grow our economy. This is an example of local governments working with the state to lower costs for our property taxpayers.”

Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the [New York State Conference of Mayors \(NYCOM\)](#), said, “City and village mayors strongly support the efforts of this coalition, and greatly appreciate the leadership of Senator O’Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and their colleagues. The condition of our extensive local roads and bridges network is of critical importance to

the economic future of our communities and our state. Building on last year's increase in CHIPS funding, along with a multi-year commitment to a bridge and culvert program, is a wise investment that will enhance public safety and the fiscal condition of local governments."

Christopher Anderson, Director of Research for the [Association of Towns of the State of New York](#), said, "The Association of Towns believes that sustainable property tax relief can be realized through a state and local government partnership that incorporates increased state funding for local infrastructure. We thank the Legislature for last year's increase in CHIPS funding. That increase made up for the loss due to inflation during the preceding five-year period of flat funding. The state Department of Transportation's 2010-2015 Capital Program calls for a total of \$2.4 billion for CHIPS funding over that five-year period. However, the 2014-15 Executive Budget proposes to fund CHIPS at last year's levels. The Executive Budget once again underutilizes the CHIPS program as a tool to spark economic growth, put people back to work, and lower property taxes. Every dollar provided through CHIPS is one less dollar that must be funded through property taxes."

The Legislature is set to adopt its respective one-house budget resolutions and convene a series of joint, bipartisan budget conference committees over the next few weeks. The public negotiations are aimed at reaching final agreements on the 2014-15 state budget before the start of New York's new fiscal year on April 1.

[[See a photo](#) of Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano, their colleagues and local highway superintendents as they gathered on the State Capitol's historic "Million Dollar Staircase."]