



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Griffo Weekly Column #8: Let's Put A Stop To Bridge & Highway Fund Raids

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO February 20, 2014

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Every time you gas up your car, rent a vehicle or use certain DMV services in New York, you pay a tax. This tax goes to a fund dedicated to state road and bridge repairs.

It makes perfect sense: We ask the people using the roads and bridges to help us keep that infrastructure safe for travel.

Here's what makes no sense: The state has been siphoning off most of that fund to pay for budget items that have little to do with repairs. Motorists contributed \$3.8 billion last year, but just 22 percent of that collection - \$847 million - went to road and bridge upgrades.

The money is needed. The federal Highway Administration has classified 12 percent of highway bridges as structurally deficient and an additional 27 percent as functionally obsolete. These are bridges that motorists travel on – and we could be making them safer.

We need legislation that stops the sweeps and protects taxpayers' money. That's why I'm supporting the Bridge and Road Investment and Dedicated Fund Guaranteed Enforcement (BRIDGE) Reform Act, S1917A. The bill would ensure that the funds collected through motorist taxes and fees would be spent on rebuilding, replacing and reconditioning highways and bridges, with a focus on safety improvements.

It would phase out the sweeps and prohibit the fund from being robbed again in the future. No longer will the fund pay for DMV staff or DOT ice and gravel runs. We'll need to budget for them as we do all other recurring costs.

I'm appreciative that this idea has won support from several newspaper boards across New York. I'm going to work with my Senate colleagues to make sure we get this bill passed again this session. Our safety is too important to not use this fund for its intended purpose.