



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy, Lackawanna Leaders Push for State Takeover of South Park Avenue and Ridge Road

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY May 22, 2014

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*With Lackawanna Financially Strained, Kennedy and City Leaders Push Legislation to Secure State Support for South Park & Ridge.*

*As Kennedy pushes in Senate, Assemblyman Kearns supporting effort in Assembly.*

*Critical routes through Lackawanna connect residents and visitors to Botanical Gardens, Our Lady of Victory Basilica, waterfront and other important destinations.*

LACKAWANNA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy is calling for legislative leaders in Albany to hold a vote on urgently-needed legislation that will empower the state to take over the maintenance and upkeep of two critical, high-traffic corridors that run through Lackawanna – South Park Avenue and Ridge Road. With Lackawanna facing financial challenges resulting from a strained tax base and rising costs, available resources for road repairs have been extremely limited. An unfortunate consequence has been the deteriorating conditions on South Park Avenue and Ridge Road, which transport large volumes of commercial and residential traffic every day.

Senator Kennedy’s legislation will re-designate South Park Avenue and Ridge Road as state highways, which will require the state to take responsibility for restoration, snow removal and maintenance of the streets. Lackawanna Mayor Geoffrey Szymanski, Assemblyman Michael Kearns and the Lackawanna City Council are standing with Kennedy to support this push, which will help advance efforts to revitalize South Park Avenue and Ridge Road.

Every day, residents and out-of-town visitors travel these critical routes to reach important destinations like the [Botanical Gardens](#), [Our Lady of Victory National Shrine & Basilica](#) and our waterfront, and commercial traffic often relies on South Park Avenue and Ridge Road to connect to Route 5 or Interstate-90 and to deliver materials to area companies. Kennedy’s proposed bills will provide the City of Lackawanna with necessary financial relief, while helping to ensure South Park Avenue and Ridge Road are rehabilitated and well-maintained for residents and travelers.

“Lackawanna is a proud city that has seen some hard times, and they could desperately use some relief from the state. A state takeover of South Park Avenue and Ridge Road would ensure these vitally important, high-traffic corridors are revitalized, alleviate a financial burden facing the city and relieve frustrations that Lackawanna residents have long endured,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “These critical routes – which connect residents and

visitors to key local assets like Our Lady of Victory Basilica, the Botanical Gardens and our burgeoning waterfront – are in serious need of improvement, but financial challenges facing the city have severely limited resources available for road repairs. It's time for the state to step in and help. South Park Avenue and Ridge Road should be state highways, and we're urging Albany to join us in taking action to strengthen Lackawanna, improve our infrastructure and boost local tourism."

**Mayor Geoffrey Szymanski** said, "With the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Olmstead Park, the Our Lady of Victory Basilica National Shrine, whose founder is one step away from being canonized a Saint by the Vatican, the evacuation route of the Southtowns during storms, and the State of New York designating US 62/South Park Avenue to be part of New York's bike paths, there is far too much importance on the short strip of road to allow it to be ignored any longer. With the City of Buffalo making major strides to improve all aspects of quality of life, so must the surrounding communities. South Park Avenue is the gateway to the Southtowns, and it must be improved."

While Kennedy is pushing hard for this critical legislation ([S.366](#) for South Park/[S.378](#) for Ridge) in the Senate, Assemblyman Michael Kearns, who represents portions of Lackawanna, is urging support for the bills in the Assembly.

**Assemblyman Michael Kearns** said, "Municipalities like Lackawanna are finding it more difficult to repair and replace aging roads. South Park Avenue and Ridge Road are important gateways into Buffalo's downtown corridors. Critical infrastructure improvements are essential for the economic vitality of the Southtowns and a growing tourist economy in Lackawanna."

As the pathway to two of Western New York's most important tourism attractions, Our Lady of Victory Basilica and the Botanical Gardens, a state takeover would provide a needed boost

to area tourism and ensure these vital local assets have an appropriately maintained road to welcome visitors.

**David Swarts, president and CEO of Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens,** said, “The Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens attracts thousands every year, and a revitalized South Park Avenue will enhance the pathway for our visitors and encourage them to stay in our community to check out all that Lackawanna and Buffalo have to offer after they visit the gardens. We support efforts by Senator Kennedy, Lackawanna city leaders and our neighbors to encourage New York State to help improve South Park Avenue and Ridge Road.”

Lackawanna residents have long been frustrated by the deteriorating conditions of South Park Avenue and Ridge Road. In fact, over the course of this year’s harsh winter, South Park Avenue became a type of poster child for the pothole problems facing the entire the region. It received high levels of public attention through several media reports detailing its worsening conditions. Municipal leaders, who have been grappling with a financially-strapped budget, have been searching for answers, and a state takeover of South Park Avenue and Ridge Road is the ideal long-term solution. The state would be required to improve, maintain and preserve the highways and would provide snow removal – both would bring fiscal relief to the city.

Traffic counts also indicate that these high-density routes should be re-designated as state highways. About 11,300 vehicles travel South Park Avenue in Lackawanna daily, according to the most recent counts for average annual daily traffic (AADT), while Ridge Road sees daily traffic above 12,200 vehicles. For comparison, Genesee Street – which is a state route in Cheektowaga – has an average daily traffic count under 8,000 between the Buffalo city line and Harlem Road, while on the other side of Harlem Road, the count is just over 12,000. Meanwhile South Park Avenue in Hamburg, which is maintained by the state,

accommodates only slightly more traffic with a daily traffic count of 14,700 vehicles.

As a county legislator, Kennedy helped spearhead the South Park Avenue Revitalization Project, which led to the redevelopment of South Park Avenue in the City of Buffalo. The project, which had key city and federal support from Mayor Byron Brown and Congressman Brian Higgins, reconstructed South Park Avenue and instilled a new energy along this critical corridor through South Buffalo. Kennedy has long desired to extend this revitalization of South Park Avenue from Buffalo into the City of Lackawanna.

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*