



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Kennedy and Scanlon to State DOT: Finish the Job and Install Gates on Remaining Skyway Onramps

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY October 30, 2014

| ISSUE: **TRANSPORTATION, AGENCIES, HIGHWAYS**



### **Kennedy and Scanlon to State DOT: Finish the Job and Install Gates on Remaining Skyway Onramps**

*After A Two-Blizzard Winter, The Costs of Shuttering The Skyway Are Clear*

*Buffalo Taxpayers Pay For a Professional, Highly-Trained Police Force – Not Human Road Blocks*

BUFFALO , NY - State Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo), and City of Buffalo Councilmember Christopher Scanlon stood at the foot of the Buffalo Skyway today to urge the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to finish the job and install gates on all Skyway onramps. Following calls from Kennedy and Scanlon, NYSDOT earlier this year agreed to install a gate at the Skyway's Church Street onramp, along with several other locations throughout Western New York. Highlighting the manpower costs associated with closing the Skyway in inclement weather, Kennedy and Scanlon said that this is a burden that ought to be shifted to New York State.

"After the two blizzards we experienced this past winter, my office calculated that the Skyway was closed for nearly sixty hours the entire season," said Senator Kennedy. "That is sixty hours when we were forced to pull police off the beat in order to position them in front of Skyway onramps. I'm thrilled that NYSDOT has begun to address the problem with the pending installation of the Church Street onramp gate, but the fact remains that this winter we will likely have to once again pull officers from the streets to act as human road blocks. NYSDOT needs to finish the job and agree to install gates on the remaining onramps."

"The use of Buffalo Police Officers to close down the Skyway during a significant weather event is as antiquated an idea as the roadway is itself," said Councilmember Scanlon. "A-District Police Officers are currently charged with covering the largest geographic district within the City of Buffalo with the least amount of manpower. Pulling these officers from their sworn obligation to protect and serve to function as barricades is dangerous to both the officers themselves as well as the residents they are sworn to protect. With the daily presence of New York State Police Officers along Route 5 and the Skyway, issuing summonses and ultimately returning revenues to New York State, it only makes sense that the NYSDOT take over the closing of the roadway during these weather events."

In a joint letter to NYSDOT Commissioner Joan McDonald, Kennedy and Scanlon thanked her for agreeing to install a gate at the Church Street onramp and reiterated their call for full implementation of a gate system on the Skyway. Noting that it can take up to seven Buffalo Police vehicles to fully close the Skyway, leaving the Buffalo Police's A District extremely short-staffed, Kennedy and Scanlon argued that NYSDOT has a responsibility to support the operation of the state-owned bridge.

In a review of alerts put out by the Niagara International Transportation Technology Coalition (NITTEC), Kennedy's office estimated that the Skyway was closed for a total of 58 hours over the 2013-2014 winter. Senator Kennedy previously wrote to Commissioner McDonald this past March where he called on NYSDOT to study alternatives to the existing system, while Councilmember Scanlon again raised the issue to the City Council and to NYSDOT in September. In early October, the Department of Transportation announced plans to install a gate at the Skyway's Church Street onramp, along with several other locations throughout Western New York including Route 219 and Route 400.

A copy of Kennedy and Scanlon's joint letter to Commissioner McDonald is below:

Joan McDonald, Commissioner

New York State Department of Transportation

50 Wolf Road

Albany, New York 12232

Dear Commissioner McDonald,

We want to thank you for your recent actions to address the community's concerns regarding the closure protocol of the Buffalo Skyway during inclement and severe weather.

We were pleased to hear that the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) will be installing gates at the Church Street entrance to be used in the event of the Skyway's closure, and we write to request that NYSDOT expedite the possible installation of further gates on the Skyway.

This development is a great first step, one that we hope is followed by the installation of similar gates at all Skyway onramps in an effort to further alleviate the burden these closures place on the Buffalo Police Department and Buffalo taxpayers. Currently, when the Skyway is closed, officers from the Buffalo Police Department's A District are assigned to block the entrances, leaving the area that covers South Buffalo and some surrounding neighborhoods woefully understaffed.

We understand the importance of studying the success of the soon-to-be installed gate at Church Street; at the same time, we respectfully request that this process move as quickly as possible. Once this overall project is complete, we are confident that our dual goals of removing this responsibility from the Buffalo Police Department's list of duties and saving taxpayer funds will be successful.

As you know, under the current protocol, when NYSDOT officially closes the bridge, it requires approximately seven Buffalo police cars and officers to serve as barricades and prevent motorists from accessing the unsafe roadway. In 2014, the Skyway was closed due to extreme weather conditions for approximately fifty-eight nonconsecutive hours. The city has had to expend thousands of dollars this past winter alone to cover the cost of the police officers and resources necessary to effectively close the Skyway. Additionally, the police officers that are required to substitute as road barricades are vital to the City of Buffalo and should not be taken away from their primary responsibilities: investigating criminal activity and protecting the residents of Buffalo.

Again, thank you for your recent action to address this matter. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this issue to address the remaining concerns. If you have any questions, we welcome your call.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy	Christopher P. Scanlon
New York State Senator, 63rd District	City of Buffalo Council Member, South

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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>.*