



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

After Monster Storm, Kennedy, Brown & Scanlon Renew Call for More Skyway Onramp Gates

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY December 2, 2014

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Buffalo Police Officers Needed to Guard Skyway Onramps During Height of Storm

Following Church Street Onramp Installation, NYSDOT Must Establish Additional Gates to Assist Police Department in Extreme Weather Events

BUFFALO, N.Y. – In the aftermath of the historic November 2014 Lake Effect Storm, Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo), Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown and Buffalo Councilmember Christopher Scanlon wrote to New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT)

Commissioner Joan McDonald to call for the installation of more onramp gates on the city's Skyway in order to close the road without the use of Buffalo Police manpower. During last week's record-setting storm, police officers were forced to spend hours serving as roadblocks at these ramps and diverting valuable resources. Officers from the Police Department's A and B Districts needed to park their cars in front of the numerous Skyway access points in South Buffalo and Downtown. According to the three officials, the installation of these gates would help ease the Buffalo Police Department's workload, and allow them to focus on greater public safety issues.

"Just like many first responders and Good Samaritans, we saw Buffalo police officers step up to the plate on a number of occasions throughout the storm," said Senator Tim Kennedy. "Unfortunately, officers were needed to block onramps for an extended amount of time, which is something we can help alleviate. We cannot tolerate taking hard-working police officers off the job to sit in a parked car while their resources can be used elsewhere. With Buffalo's winter just beginning, we must plan for Skyway closures to become even more prevalent in the future. We have seen the successful installation of the Church Street Skyway gate. Now, the DOT has to step up and finish this job as soon as possible."

"Winter Storm Knife was yet another example of valuable police manpower being diverted from A-District to handle the closure of the Skyway," said Councilmember Scanlon. "A-District covers all of South Buffalo, which received over six feet of snow during the storm, and had many of its residents lives put in danger. So, instead of having the men and women of the Buffalo Police Department, who took an oath to protect and serve the residents of the City of Buffalo, available to respond to emergency calls, they were stationed on an obsolete stretch of New York State road functioning as traffic barriers. It is time for the New York State Department of Transportation to install traffic arms at the proper locations along Route 5 and the Skyway, and take our brave men and women in blue out of path of these deadly storms."

The addition of gates along the Skyway has been an issue Kennedy has pushed for since March. 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. At that time, Senator Kennedy wrote to Commissioner McDonald to call on the NYSDOT to study alternatives to the existing system. Councilmember Scanlon again raised the issue to the City Council and to NYSDOT in September.

Their requests were answered in early October, when 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. The Church Street gate saw use within weeks of its installation, and this recent storm is evidence that more action is needed immediately.

Kennedy, Brown and Scanlon's 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 write to bring your attention to a pressing need in the City of Buffalo, where police officers are taken off the beat in order to close the Skyway during inclement weather. We respectfully request that you direct the New York State Department of Transportation to implement a full system of gates that will allow the Skyway bridge to be closed without the use of Buffalo Police Department resources.

The recent Western New York lake-effect storm highlighted the importance of fully implemented a system of gates. Presently, officers from the Buffalo Police Department's A and B Districts are required to park their cars in front of the various Skyway entry points in order to physically block any traffic from entering the bridge during inclement weather. This takes officers off the streets and forces them to instead act as traffic barriers.

Aside from the financial implications of using city resources to close a state bridge, the safety-related aspects of this issue are even more important. As you know, many drivers in South Buffalo found themselves stranded on roadsides, buried under deep snow drifts. The Buffalo Police Department, along with other first responders, did an admirable job at working as quickly as possible to rescue these drivers. However, if they were not required to expend officers for closing the Skyway, they would have had even more manpower on the streets rescuing drivers.

As you know, we have written to you previously on this issue, and were pleased to see an initial gate installed at the Skyway's Church Street on-ramp. However, with the experiences of the recent storm, the importance of expediting the process of installing further gates has been underscored for us. Again, we respectfully request that you direct NYSDOT to implement a comprehensive system of gates that will allow for the closure of the Buffalo Skyway without taking Buffalo Police Department officers off the streets.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your laser-like focus on Buffalo during the recent storm. Should you have any questions, or if we can be of assistance in any way, we welcome your call.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District

Byron W. Brown

Mayor of the City of Buffalo

Christopher P. Scanlon

City of Buffalo Councilmember, South District

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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>.