



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Area state legislators, highway superintendents, other local leaders urge a stronger state commitment to local roads and bridges ~ UPDATED, OCTOBER 20TH

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 20, 2015

| ISSUE: **LOCALITIES ROADS BRIDGES TRANSPORTATION**



**Corning, N.Y., October 19**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) today joined local highway superintendents and other local leaders from across the region to deliver a “fair share for local roads and bridges” message to Governor Andrew Cuomo.

The group **held a news conference earlier today** at the South Corning Highway Garage to draw attention to **a recent agreement between Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio** that will deliver a new \$8.3-billion, state-funded investment to downstate mass transit through the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

In a joint statement, O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend said, "If Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders are going to find billions of dollars for downstate mass transit in next year's state budget, we want to make sure that local roads, bridges and culverts across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and throughout the state, receive a fair share of state assistance through CHIPS and other investments. The improvement and repair of highways and bridges across this region and statewide are going unmet even though motorists keep delivering billions of dollars in taxes and fees to the state every year that are supposed to be dedicated to maintaining local roads and bridges."

**[UPDATE, October 20: Read and watch more from the:**

*Star-Gazette*, "**More state funding for upstate roads, bridges sought**"

*Corning Leader*, "**Officials lead rally demanding more money for upstate roads, bridges**"

*WENY-TV*, "**Local Officials Call For Fair Infrastructure Funding**"

*WETM-TV*, "**Local Officials Urge For Fair Highway Funding**"

*WBNG-TV*, "**Push for more upstate transportation funding**"

*Finger Lakes News Radio*, "**Lawmakers Call on Governor for a Fair Share to Fix Roads**"

*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, "**Upstate pushes for share of road funding**"

*PoliticoNY*, "**Upstate officials argue for 'parity' after MTA deal**"

*Albany Times Union*, "**Cuomo's pledge for MTA funding sparks call for upstate investment**"

*NY Post*, "**Upstate lawmakers want their piece of pie after \$11B MTA deal**"

*Buffalo News*, "**Upstate's crumbling roads and bridges should be next in line for a state cash infusion**"

Congressman Tom Reed said, "I am using my voice to fight to ensure that the Southern Tier has access to its fair share of state and federal transportation funding because I care about the people of our area. Investing in our roads and bridges is critical to the local economy creating immediate construction jobs and ultimately making Western New York a better place to live and work."

Corning Mayor Rich Negri said, "Mayors and local officials from across this state appreciate the ongoing focus on this fundamentally important challenge for all local governments, communities and taxpayers. We hope that New York State's newfound commitment to downstate mass transit will be matched by an equally strong and fair commitment to CHIPS and other investments in the local roads and bridges that are so critical to local economic growth."

Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli said, "Maintaining the safety and condition of local roads, bridges, and culverts is an essential service provided by local government. Investment in critical transportation infrastructure is an investment in economic development, the tourism industry, and motorist safety. We are pleased Governor Cuomo has pledged his commitment to the revitalization of the upstate economy and providing dedicated funding to local roads programs should be part of that commitment."

Kevin P. O'Brien, PE, President of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA) and Niagara County Highway Superintendent, said, "With the announced major state funding commitment to downstate transit systems, the focus of state officials must now turn to addressing the funding gaps in the State Department of Transportation's capital program, and show a greater commitment to state investment in local highways, bridges and culverts. The state needs to now step up and demonstrate the same level of financial obligation to motorists and other users of the aging statewide road and bridge system as that shown to the MTA and its transit riders."

New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH) President Jeffrey Griswold said, "Based on NYSDOT's own projections the state needed to spend about \$6.25 billion a year to bring the state and local transportation systems to a State of Good Repair –unfortunately over the past six years the state has averaged only \$3.8 billion annually or \$2.45 billion less annually than needed. Over 75 percent of the state's roads and bridges are outside the MTA region – if the MTA and DOT had parity in their five year capital programs (as they had for almost two decades) this would be a huge stimulus to upstate's weak economy."

For the past three years, **O'Mara and Palmesano have led a bipartisan group** of state legislators in the Senate and Assembly, together with county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders from across New York, to call for increased state support for local roads, bridges and culverts through the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS). This year's effort drew the support of 114 state legislators, or more than half of the State Legislature's entire membership.

During this time, beginning with the 2013-2014 state budget, CHIPS funding has been increased by approximately \$125 million to an overall level of \$488.1 million. As a result, area counties, cities, towns and villages have seen funding increases.

But O'Mara and Palmesano said they will continue to stress – particularly following the recent agreement on increased state funding for downstate mass transit – that there's nothing even approaching parity for CHIPS funding and other state investments in roads, bridges and culverts locally and statewide. They point to estimates from the state comptroller that there will be \$89 billion in unmet local infrastructure needs over the next 20 years. With the property tax cap and shrinking local revenues, they said, CHIPS funding is absolutely critical to helping local communities and taxpayers, especially upstate – noting that municipalities own and maintain 87% of the roads in the state, own and maintain 52% of New York's 18,000 bridges, and that 48% of the vehicle miles driven in the state are driven on local roads.

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. A national transportation advocacy group, TRIP, has estimated that deteriorating roads cost the average driver in New York State roughly \$2,300 annually in lost time, fuel costs, vehicle repairs and other expenses.

Furthermore, while the De Blasio-Cuomo agreement puts in motion a five-year capital plan for the MTA, no similar five-year capital plan has been discussed for the rest of the state's highways and bridges – a commitment to parity that hasn't been honored since 2010, the lawmakers said.

According to NYSAOTSOH and NYSCHSA, the “fees and taxes paid by drivers exceed over \$6 billion annually yet only about a third of these revenues are dedicated to maintaining our transportation infrastructure.”

[see the attachment at the top of this page for an op-ed article recently released by NYSAOTSOH and NYSCHSA following the Cuomo-De Blasio agreement on subsidizing the MTA].

Specifically the groups argue that the state collects approximately \$6.2 billion in motorist-related taxes and fees annually, but only \$2.2 billion of this amount is dedicated to the state's highways and bridges.

They estimate that nearly \$4 billion that the state annually collects in motorist fees and taxes, which are supposed to be kept in the state's Dedicated Highway and Bridge Trust Fund, are being diverted to other, non-transportation related purposes.