



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## State legislators and local leaders: Local roads and bridges need greater state investment

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 7, 2018

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS AND BRIDGES**



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**Albany, N.Y., March 7**—A bipartisan group of 142 state legislators, organized by State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), today joined a statewide coalition of county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders to call for increased state support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

Approximately 700 local highway superintendents and highway department employees representing nearly every region of New York State have been in Albany this week as part of the annual “Local Roads Matter” advocacy campaign. As part of the effort for the past several years, O’Mara and Palmesano have organized a bipartisan group of state legislators in the Senate and Assembly who have joined the local roads representatives and other local leaders from across the state to call for increased state support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

This year’s “Local Roads Matter” coalition includes nearly 70% of the State Legislature’s entire membership.

A news conference and rally previously scheduled to be held in The Well of the Legislative Office Building on Wednesday morning was cancelled due to the snowstorm forecast to impact counties along the north-south State Thruway corridor especially hard throughout today and into tomorrow. The local roads supporters highlighted the storm as another example of why the increased state funding they’re seeking is so critical -- and warranted.

O’Mara, Palmesano and other state legislators are joining “Local Roads Matter” representatives, and other local leaders, this year to call for increasing state base aid for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) by \$85 million to a total of \$523 million. They are also seeking the restoration of a \$65-million “Extreme Winter Recovery” allocation enacted last year but not included in Governor Andrew Cuomo’s proposed 2018-2019 state budget. Combined, this \$150-million increase would bring total CHIPS aid in 2018-19 to \$588.1 million.

In a February 28 letter to Cuomo and legislative leaders, O’Mara, Palmesano and their Senate and Assembly colleagues wrote, “We believe it is critically important to build on our past successes and renew our commitment to addressing the tremendous, unmet needs and

challenges to maintain local roads, bridges, and culverts effectively in every region of New York State... This level of state assistance, at a minimum, has become central to providing the critical flexibility and funding that localities need to help meet their growing and challenging infrastructure demands.”

Beginning with the 2013-14 state budget, their efforts have helped increase funding through the CHIPS Program/Formula by more than \$200 million, or upwards of 40%. Together with the PAVE-NY and BRIDGE-NY programs established two years ago, the programs are providing significant funding increases for counties, cities, towns and villages throughout New York State. In their own legislative districts, for example, O’Mara and Palmesano said that aid percentage increases since 2012-13 have ranged from 50% to 55%.

This year’s “Local Roads Matter” campaign is making the case for an even stronger state commitment to local roads, bridges and culverts. Supporters argue that CHIPS funding has become especially critical in an era for local governments defined by the local property tax cap, stagnant aid to municipalities (AIM) and shrinking local revenues. They note 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 on local roads.

In their February 28 letter to the governor and legislative leaders, the “Local Roads Matter” legislative coalition stresses the urgency to “recognize that local governments continue to struggle to address budgetary demands in the face of the state-imposed property tax cap and freeze, rising pension and health care costs, unfunded state mandates, and stagnant Aid to Municipalities (AIM). This clearly demonstrates the incredible challenge facing our local municipalities to meet the critical investment level needed to maintain and improve local roads, bridges, and culverts. A stronger state-local partnership is the only answer.”

The legislative coalition adds that the “investment levels we are seeking, through the CHIPS, BRIDGE-NY, and PAVE-NY programs, will build on the foundation we have successfully made in the last several state budgets and further solidify our fundamental belief that ‘Local Roads Matter!’ Through the renewed, vigorous state investment we have outlined, we will finally move toward the safe and reliable local infrastructure we envision, an infrastructure that will serve as the catalyst for future economic development and job creation throughout our local communities.”

[See the letter and list of Senate and Assembly signees attached above]

In an October 2017 report, State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli estimated that bridges owned by local governments currently need an estimated \$27.4 billion in repairs. An earlier report from the comptroller called 32% of New York’s local bridges deficient and 40% of local roads fair or poor, and getting worse. In a 2013 study, the state Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH) estimated that New York would need to invest an additional \$1.3 billion per year on local roads and bridges to prevent them from becoming deficient. A national transportation advocacy group, TRIP, has estimated that deteriorating roads cost New York motorists nearly an additional \$25 billion annually – approximately \$2,300 for the average driver in some areas -- in lost time, fuel costs, vehicle repairs and other expenses.

**Charles H. “Skip” Vezzetti, President of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA)**, said, “Legislators and the Governor are to be applauded for their efforts to increase state funding for local roads and bridges. The reality is that local highway departments still need a significant state aid boost to effectively address the daunting financial challenges to maintaining their vast ailing and aging transportation infrastructure. An increase in the CHIPS base aid as called for by members of the Legislature is the best way to assure more financial resources flow to all municipalities to improve the conditions of this

critical statewide system of roads, bridges and culverts.”

**Bernhard Meyer, President of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH)**, said, “New York’s local transportation system is the backbone of our state’s well-being. Our homes, schools, hospitals and businesses are all accessed by local highways. Our members diligently work to maintain the highest of safety standards on this huge system. We thank our partners in the New York State Legislature for their support of a local road, bridge and culvert funding increase of \$150 million distributed by formula equitably through the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS).”

**Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC)**, said, “We rely on our local roads and bridges to get to work, to school, and back home again. State investments in local roads and bridges are investments in economic development and safety. We applaud Senator O’Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for their consistent fight for more local road and bridge funding in the State Budget, and we are proud to stand with our county highway superintendents who work, day in and day out, for better, safer roads in our communities.”

**Gerry Geist, Executive Director of the Association of Towns of the State of New York (AOT)**, said, “Safe and reliable roads and bridges are essential to New York’s economy and quality of life, which is why we are calling for an increase to CHIPS funding and the restoration of the Extreme Winter Recovery Program. The Association of Towns is proud to stand with Senator O’Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano, and other state and local leaders in support of additional funding for our local roads, bridges and culverts.”

**Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM)**, said, “Local roads and bridges are the bedrock of New York’s transportation network and they

support all sectors of New York's economy. A strong and growing state investment in our municipal roads and bridges is both essential and smart. NYCOM strongly supports this bipartisan effort to increase CHIPS funding and restore the 'Extreme Winter Recovery' program."

**Jeff Williams, New York Farm Bureau Public Policy Director**, said, "Local roads matter to farmers who depend on safe, reliable roads and bridges to get products to market and move farm machinery in between farm fields. We are proud to stand with the coalition calling for strong CHIPS funding to maintain an effective infrastructure in this state that is essential for our rural economy."

**Mike Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of New York State**, said, "It's pothole season in New York—and it sure is a bumpier crop this year. As they attempt to dodge potholes on streets starting to resemble the surface of the moon, it is starkly evident to New Yorkers all across the state that our infrastructure is failing. Despite some recent progress, the level of investment in our infrastructure remains inadequate to meet our growing needs. As a result, our roads are crumbling and our bridges are deteriorating. I commend Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and their colleagues for their continued leadership on this critical issue and I am proud to stand with them in the fight for increased investment in our roads and bridges. The future of our communities and our economy depends on it."

**Gib Gagnon, Chairman of Rebuild NY Now**, said, ""The CHIPS program is a critical investment for localities struggling to provide basic services within the 2% property tax cap. The Governor, Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano, and other legislators must continue working in a bipartisan manner to invest in infrastructure for the safety of commuters and the economic benefit of our local communities. Once again, we are entering pothole season in New York, and CHIPS funding helps to improve the quality of our local roads and save

drivers from unnecessary repairs to damaged cars. The average cost of car repairs related to damaged roads in New York State is more than \$1,500, which is a lot of money for the majority of taxpayers. Rebuild NY Now will continue advocating for infrastructure investments in New York and in Washington, D.C. The New York State Congressional delegation must work in a bipartisan manner to ensure that New York gets our fair share in the next federal transportation plan. If our state leaders can work in a bipartisan manner, it's time for Washington to do the same and pass a fully-funded infrastructure program. Thank you to Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for leading the charge in demanding action for our critical infrastructure needs."