



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## 'Local Roads Are Essential' coalition calls for greater state investment in local roads and bridges across NY: O'Mara and Palmesano once again rally legislative support (WATCH HERE)

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 3, 2021

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS BRIDGES TRANSPORTATION**



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**Albany, N.Y., March 3**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and more than 60 state Senators and members of the Assembly today joined the call from county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders from throughout New York for increased state support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

The group held a news conference at the Capitol this morning and were joined by Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt (R,C,I-North Tonowanda) and Assembly Republican Leader Will Barclay (R,C,I-Pulaski).

[Watch today's full news conference [HERE](#).]

The COVID-19 pandemic is preventing hundreds of local highway superintendents and highway department employees from gathering in Albany like they have every year for most of the past decade to lobby state lawmakers. Nevertheless, the local transportation leaders are still pushing ahead with their annual advocacy campaign, renamed this year as “Local Roads Are Essential” and sponsored by the New York State Association of County Highway Superintendents (NYSCHSA) and the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, Inc. ( NYSAOTSOH).

They are once again fighting for greater state investment in local transportation infrastructure.

Since 2013, O'Mara and Palmesano have organized legislative colleagues to get behind the effort and raise awareness of the need.

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provided for New York's counties, cities, towns and villages.

In his 2021-2022 Executive budget, Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed "expanding our infrastructure plan to invest \$306 billion in the future of New York. That's not just the largest infrastructure plan in New York history. It's the largest, most ambitious plan put forward by any state in the nation."

While welcoming the governor's commitment to infrastructure investment in the new state budget, the Local Roads Are Essential advocates are calling on New York to strengthen its commitment to local transportation. In his proposed budget, Cuomo holds base level funding for CHIPS at \$438 million for the ninth straight year but eliminates funding for Extreme Winter Recovery, a \$65-million cut.

**In a joint statement, O'Mara and Palmesano said,** "We have always stood together with New York's county and town highway superintendents, and local leaders, and we will continue to do everything we can to raise awareness and call for legislative support. Local roads are essential. State investment in our local transportation infrastructure is critical to the future of local communities, economies, environments, governments and taxpayers."

**Senate Republican Leader Ortt said,** "Maintaining our roads and bridges is essential not only for the safety and well-being of our communities, but it's a critical component to help spur job creation and economic revitalization. I'm proud to join with my colleagues in support of our local highway departments because local roads are essential. Especially in light of the fiscal challenges we are facing from the COVID-19 pandemic, a strong investment in infrastructure is critical to help our local economies recover."

**Assembly Minority Leader Barclay said,** "Local roads are a critical element of New York's infrastructure and are responsible for helping millions of New Yorkers get to school, the

doctor, the grocery store, work and much more. As the state's infrastructure continues to age, the need for additional investments becomes more urgent. While COVID-19 has severely impacted the state's finances, we cannot afford to neglect our roads and bridges. We must ensure there are enough resources in place to protect these vital assets. I am proud to stand with my colleagues here today, and remain committed to fighting for our local roads and bridges – equitable and fair funding is essential.”

Among other studies, an October 2017 report from State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli estimated that locally owned bridges alone need at least \$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.

TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based national transportation research nonprofit, has found that 10 percent of bridges across the state are in poor/structurally deficient condition – the 12th highest rate in America. According to TRIP, nearly 12 million vehicles cross a poor/structurally deficient bridge in New York State every day.

In a March 1, 2021 letter to Cuomo and legislative leaders, O'Mara, Palmesano and their Senate and Assembly colleagues wrote, “We once again stress that New York State's direct investment in local roads and bridges through the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) remains fundamental to the mission highlighted above. It deserves priority consideration in the final allocation of state infrastructure investment the Executive proposes for the 2021-22 fiscal year. CHIPS is the key difference for local communities, economies, governments, motorists and taxpayers throughout the Empire State, including New York City and surrounding metro areas, and we should no longer ignore this fact. This legislative session we believe the opportunity exists to strengthen our investment to address the tremendous, still unmet needs and challenges facing the effective maintenance and improvement of local roads, bridges and culverts in every region of New York State.”

[see above attached copy of the letter]

The local roads coalition is putting forth two funding requests, each one dependent on the amount of aid New York State receives as part of the next federal COVID relief package currently being negotiated in Congress.

If New York State receives up to \$6 billion in federal aid, the group requests the following as part of the final 2021-22 state budget:

- > Full restoration of the \$120.6 million cut in local transportation aid in 2020-2021;
- > Fully funding the CHIPS base level at \$438 million;
- > Increasing Extreme Winter Recovery funding to \$100 million;
- > Fully funding the BRIDGE-NY program at \$100 million; and
- > Fully funding the PAVE-NY program at \$100 million.

If New York State receives federal aid above \$6 billion, the group is seeking:

- > Full restoration of the \$120.6 million cut in local transportation aid in 2020-2021;
- > Increasing the CHIPS base funding level by \$150 million to a total of \$588 million;
- > Increasing Extreme Winter Recovery funding to \$100 million;
- > Doubling PAVE-NY local funding from \$100 million to \$200 million; and
- > Doubling BRIDGE-NY local funding from \$100 million to \$200 million, with additional funding for culverts.

According to a recently updated analysis by the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, the local highway system outside of New York City faces an annual funding gap of \$1.7 billion.

**Joseph Wisinski, President of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association,** said, "Transportation infrastructure is an issue that impacts every New Yorker. Teachers, nurses, first responders and millions of hardworking people across the state rely on well-maintained roads and bridges every day. It is essential that Governor Cuomo and the Legislature provide the necessary funding for critical initiatives including Consolidated Local Highway Improvement Program, BRIDGE-NY, PAVE-NY and Extreme Winter Recovery in this year's budget. We thank Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and all legislators who continue to voice support for this essential funding. Working together, we can keep New York moving forward."

**Alex Gregor, President of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways,** said, "We're grateful to Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for their leadership in bringing greater awareness to the imperative of well-maintained local roads and bridges. Every essential part of our daily lives depends on our local roadways, whether it's getting to work, getting our kids safely to school, going to the grocery store or receiving package deliveries at our homes. Our local roads and bridges literally connect us to everything we need to survive and thrive, and they keep us connected to each other. We're urging all state lawmakers to support increasing CHIPS funding to ensure we continue to have safe and well maintained local roads and bridges."

**Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC),** said, "Another brutal winter of frigid temperatures, heavy snow, ice and rain has wreaked havoc on roads and bridges. NYSAC stands with our county public works and highway superintendents who work hard each and every day to keep our roads safe for travel. It is

critical, as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, that our state continue to make significant investments in our infrastructure which will help rebuild our local economies. We must fully fund the CHIPS program, provide for Extreme Winter Recovery, and do everything we possibly can to rebuild our great State of New York. I commend Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and the Legislature for making this a priority."

**Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials (NYCOM)**, said, "Local roads and bridges are a critically important component of the infrastructure network upon which New York residents and businesses rely. NYCOM fully supports this legislative effort to restore the \$65 million in Extreme Winter Recovery funding and to make it a permanent part of the CHIPS program."

**Jeff Williams, New York Farm Bureau Public Policy Director**, said, "A strong and safe infrastructure is at the core of our food system. Our farmers must be able to efficiently move product from their farms to their customers and food processors. They also need well maintained roads and bridges to drive farm equipment between farm fields. New York Farm Bureau supports the continued investment into the CHIPS program and our rural communities."

**Michael J. Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of New York State (AGC NYS)**, said, "With the COVID-19 pandemic still effecting our communities, the impact of funding for our local roads and bridges is crucial now more than ever. Poorly maintained roads cost the average driver in New York \$588 a year in additional costs, totaling \$7.2 billion. At a time when financial instability is a harsh reality for many, this is an opportunity to invest in a safer, brighter future for New York. Governor Cuomo has committed to a robust infrastructure plan, and now is the time to provide critical funding for our local roads to boost the economy, create jobs and rebuild."

**Dave Collins, Chairman of Rebuild NY Now**, said, “While potholes and rough roads may seem like a worry of the past for many New Yorkers in light of COVID-19, the investment gap to keep our communities safe continues to grow. In these times, local infrastructure funding stands to provide not only dependable transportation for people and goods, but also economic stability to communities devastated by the pandemic. We commend Senator O’Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for uniting the ‘Local Roads are Essential’ coalition and calling attention to important funding at such a critical juncture for New York.”