



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of April 26, 2021 ~ 'Local roads are essential'

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 26, 2021

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS AND BRIDGES**



State investment in our local transportation infrastructure will be essential to the post-COVID future of local communities, economies, environments, governments, and taxpayers.

Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "Local roads are essential"

Since the adoption of the 2021-2022 state budget, I have been outspoken in my strong criticism of this massive \$212-billion, tax-and-spend fiscal plan that sets in motion a whole host of future, long-term commitments to massive new spending and taxing by New York State government.

There are places in this budget, however, that do address the right priorities and that deserve to be highlighted as positive and vital to the future.

As I've also noted, that better be the case with \$18 billion in increased state spending.

Consequently, one of the most positive parts of the new state budget is that it provides significantly stronger and long-overdue state support for local roads, bridges, and culverts.

In short, this budget recognizes that local roads are essential, a state commitment that I and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano have long worked to strengthen. Since 2013, in fact, we have stood together with New York's county and town highway superintendents, and many other local leaders, to do everything we can to raise awareness and call for legislative support. In early March, like we have throughout the past decade, we rallied the support of more than 60 state senators and members of the Assembly to get behind the call for increased state support for local roads, bridges, and culverts. This annual advocacy campaign, renamed this year as "Local Roads Are Essential," is 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).

In a March 1, 2021 letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders, we 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...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."

The final 2021-2022 state budget includes critical steps and increased funding to move forward on this priority.

According to NYSCHSA President Joe Wisinski, "This year's state budget includes an extraordinary investment in transportation infrastructure. With the unwavering efforts of our partners in the Senate and Assembly, and the support of Governor Cuomo, local road and bridge

programs will receive more than \$1 billion in the coming fiscal year. This essential funding will help keep millions of motorists safe and create tens of thousands of jobs. New York State County Highway Superintendents Association members are ready get to work on these critical projects and move New York forward.”

Specifically, the new budget increases base level funding for CHIPS by \$100 million to a total of \$538 million, the first baseline increase since 2013. It increases funding for Extreme Winter Recovery to \$100 million and for the PAVE-NY program to \$150 million. It also creates a new, \$100-million City Touring Roads program to provide an additional source of funding dedicated to cities, towns, and villages.

Overall, CHIPS funding will increase by upwards of 20% to 30% in most instances for individual counties, cities, towns, and villages. Funding through both the Extreme Winter Recovery and PAVE-NY categories will increase by approximately 50%.

In other words, it’s a solid budget for local roads, bridges, and culverts.

Nevertheless, this work needs to keep moving forward. It’s very positive and it’s important. Viewed in the context of the overall \$212-billion fiscal plan, however, these are relatively tentative steps toward meeting the long-term challenge.

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.

We must remain focused on unmet needs and challenges in the future. Assemblyman Palmesano and I will remain committed. We look forward to continue working to prioritize the state’s commitment to the effective maintenance and improvement of local roads, bridges, and culverts in every region of New York.

It is as straightforward as this: State investment in our local transportation infrastructure will be essential to the post-COVID future of local communities, economies, environments, governments, and taxpayers.

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