



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 (Read and watch more)

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 8, 2022

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS AND BRIDGES**



We believe a once-in-a-generation opportunity exists to do even more and truly set a long-overdue course for the improvement, maintenance, and repair of local roads, bridges, and culverts statewide.

Albany, N.Y., March 8—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 Tonawanda) and Assembly Republican Leader Will Barclay (R,C,I-Pulaski).

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to keep hundreds of local highway superintendents and highway department employees from gathering in Albany to lobby state lawmakers like they did every year for most of the past decade. Nevertheless, the local transportation leaders are still pushing ahead with their annual “Local Roads Are Essential” advocacy campaign 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.

The coalition notes that for the past ten years, largely through a series of “Extreme Winter Recovery” (EWR) allocations distributed through the state’s Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) funding formula, and together with the PAVE-NY and BRIDGE-NY programs established in 2016, important increased state support has been provided for New York’s counties, cities, towns, and villages.

In her 2022-2023 Executive budget, Governor Kathy Hochul announced a \$32.8 billion, five-year DOT Capital Plan. The proposed Executive Budget holds baseline funding for CHIPS,

EWR, and PAVE-NY at current year levels. The governor's plan increases BRIDGE-NY funding by \$100 million and creates a new "Operation Pave Our Potholes" (POP) program that will provide an additional \$100 million in 2022-2023.

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 beyond Hochul's proposals by the following four actions:

- 1.) increasing the base funding level for the CHIPS program by \$250 million to a total of \$788 million;
- 2.) increasing EWR funding by \$50 million to \$150 million;
- 3.) distributing the \$100 million proposed for the new "Pave Our Potholes" program utilizing the existing CHIPS/EWR aid formula to ensure equity and fairness; and
- 4.) increasing the five-year, DOT Capital Plan to \$44.1 billion, an \$11.3-billion increase.

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 to New York's future. We have an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen this state's commitment. State investment in local transportation infrastructure is a fundamental responsibility and critical to the strength and success of local communities, economies, environments, governments, and taxpayers."

[WATCH Senator O'Mara's opening remarks at today's news conference]

[WATCH today's entire news conference]

Senate Republican Leader Ortt said, “I stand with my colleagues, local leaders and highway departments in recognizing that the improvement of our local roads and bridges is essential to the future of New York. Restoring damaged transportation infrastructure would help guarantee a strong economy and better future for our residents. We have the opportunity to increase state funding in programs such as CHIPS and EWR in this year’s state budget, and I strongly support those critical investments.”

Assembly Republican Leader Barclay said, “Infrastructure investment is a key component to any budget planning and is vital to keep our economy and local communities running. The reality we face in New York is that we have some of the oldest infrastructure in the nation, and as a result, a consistent focus on repair, maintenance and upgrades is required. While there has been a strong federal commitment toward funding infrastructure improvements, most of those financial resources won’t reach local municipalities. We have the unique opportunity in this year’s state budget to ensure local roads, bridges and highways are properly funded and reliable well into the future. Assembly Republicans will continue to stand alongside local highway departments to highlight the need for greater state-level investments in our transportation infrastructure.”

In a March 7, 2022 letter to Hochul and legislative leaders, O’Mara, Palmesano, and their Senate and Assembly colleagues wrote, “In the context of this moment in time, we believe a once-in-a-generation opportunity exists to do even more and truly set a long-overdue course for the improvement, maintenance, and repair of local roads, bridges, and culverts statewide...At a time of declining local pavement conditions, record state budget surpluses, and significantly increased federal aid, we strongly believe one of New York’s fundamental priorities is to finally remake a local transportation system that is so critical to the future recovery and success of local communities, economies, and environments across every region of New York State...We may never face a better opportunity or a more effective time to increase state funding for local roads, bridges, and culverts.”

[see attached copy of the letter]

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.

An analysis by the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways found that the local highway system outside of New York City faces an annual funding gap of \$1.7 billion.

According to TRIP, a national transportation advocacy group, roads and bridges that are deficient, congested, or lack desirable safety features, cost New York motorists an additional \$28 billion annually — up to \$3,200 per driver in some areas — due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic accidents, and congestion-related delays.

Andrew P. Avery, P.E., President of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association, and Commissioner of the Chemung County Department of Public Works, said, “The Executive Budget continues to invest in important local transportation infrastructure programs; and with the infusion of additional federal transportation dollars, New York can properly address our aging infrastructure. NYSCHSA and our affiliates are calling on the Legislature to make local roads and bridges a priority in this year's budget. As we recover from the pandemic and rebuild our economy, making smart investments in our transportation system has never been more important. Increased commitments to CHIPS, EWR and BRIDGE-NY will help municipalities improve the conditions of our statewide system of roads, bridges and culverts. It will also promote job creation, spur economic development, and keep motorists safe. Just like local transportation infrastructure, these investments are essential.”

Rich Benjamin, President of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, and Highway Superintendent for the Town of Thompson (Sullivan County), said, “On behalf of the NYS Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, the state's largest transportation association, I'd like to thank Governor Hochul and the Legislature for their continued support of New York’s local roads, bridges and culverts. We appreciate the opportunity to highlight these vital local funding programs like CHIPS, EWR, State Touring Routes, PAVE-NY, BRIDGE-NY and the newly proposed Pave our Potholes (POP) that help us to build the economy and protect the safety of the traveling public. NYSAOTSOH and its partners are advocating for increasing funding for the CHIPS Program by an additional \$250 million above the proposed Executive Budget level and increasing the Extreme Winter Recovery program by \$50 million. We look forward to continuing to work with our state elected officials throughout the budget process to maintain and increase these investments in the next five-year capital program.”

Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), said, “Local roads and bridges are the critical arteries of our communities, carrying residents to work and school, goods to our businesses, and first responders to the scene of an emergency. We have an historic opportunity in this year’s budget to make the kind of transformational investment in local transportation infrastructure that will benefit generations of New Yorkers. That’s why we’re proud of our Governor’s budget proposal and look forward to working with our legislative partners on both sides of the aisle to call for a final budget that seizes this historic opportunity and increases funding for local roads, bridges, tunnels, culverts, and physical infrastructure. Assemblyman Palmesano and Senator O’Mara have long championed the infrastructure funding needs at the local level and we are grateful for their continued leadership highlighting the need.”

Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials (NYCOM), said, “New York's economic future depends upon the condition and safety

of our vast network of local roads and bridges. Local governments and their property taxpayers do not have the capacity to make necessary improvements without a stronger state-local partnership. For this reason, NYCOM fully supports this legislative effort to increase state investment in CHIPS, Extreme Winter Recovery and the NYSDOT capital plan, as well as allocating the Governor's proposed Pave Our Pothole funding through the CHIPS formula.”

Gerry Geist, Executive Director of the Association of Towns of the State of New York, said, “Local roads and bridges are part of the foundation of a thriving economy and safe community. Because towns are responsible for approximately two-thirds of all road miles in New York State, the Association of Towns believes it is critical for the state and local governments to work together to ensure that potholes get filled, roads get repaved, and snow gets removed. To accomplish this goal and to reflect the important role local roads and bridges play, we urge the state to continue funding highway programs like CHIPS, PAVE-NY, BRIDGE-NY and Extreme Winter Recovery at the highest levels possible.”

Renee St. Jacques, New York Farm Bureau Associate Director of Public Policy, said, “There has been renewed attention on strengthening the supply chain and that includes ensuring New York State has a strong infrastructure in place to transport goods to market in an efficient manner. Our farms also rely on safe roads and bridges to move farm equipment between fields to produce the food we need. New York Farm Bureau supports increasing the investment into the CHIPS program to benefit communities across the state.”

Michael J. Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of New York State (AGC NYS) said, “Governor Hochul has stepped up to the plate with record funding for local roads, a welcome sign that New York is committed to fixing our deteriorating roads and bridges. Historic federal funding has presented the legislature with an opportunity to leverage New York’s multi-billion dollar budget surplus to finally improving – not just trying

to slow the deteriorating of – our state’s infrastructure; a move that not only creates safer roads and bridges for our citizens, but also generates jobs amid rising inflation. Now is the time to keep New Yorkers safe on our roads and bridges for today and tomorrow. That includes investing in a robust five-year capital spending for local infrastructure. Thank you to Assemblyman Palmesano and Senator O’Mara for continually leading the charge in demanding action for local roads.”

Dave Collins, Chairman of Rebuild NY Now, said, “Local roads and bridges are the lifeblood for day-to-day activities for schools, hospitals, businesses, and individuals; and yet New Yorkers spend \$28 billion per year on safety, congestion, and vehicle operating costs according to TRIP. In light of COVID-19, the investment gap to keep our communities safe continues to grow and CHIPS is a key component of increasing local funding. 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.”