

**Testimony of Marie Therese Dominguez
Commissioner New York State Department of Transportation
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on FY 2026 Budget
February 6, 2025**

Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Cooney and Magnarelli and members of the New York State Legislature joining us today. On behalf of Governor Kathy Hochul, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to join you today to talk about the Department of Transportation, the critical work we do, the diverse communities we serve and, most importantly, the amazing people who make it all happen.

It's NYSDOT's 8,400+ dedicated employees – snowplow drivers, mechanics, environmental specialists, drill rig operators, engineers, motor carrier and rail inspectors – every member of our team - they are truly, our most important asset. They are the ones who keep New Yorkers moving – safely.

Last year, more than 2,800 lane miles of state and local highways were improved, and more than 3,100 bridges were replaced, rehabilitated or improved thanks to the support of Governor Hochul and our partners in the legislature. That vital work continues in 2025.

Why? Because transportation moves New York Forward. Private sector employment in New York increased by more than 7,000 jobs in December alone, with the unemployment rate at 4.4 percent. One key reason for that is the historic investments being made in infrastructure, which generate an estimated 13 jobs for every million dollars invested.

New York under Governor Hochul is making nation leading investments to modernize our infrastructure, reconnect and revitalize our communities and grow our economy. The people of New York are always Governor Hochul's priority – she is always working to make our state a safer and more affordable place to live and work. NYSDOT embraces this vision and is making it a reality by putting people at the center of our transportation planning. With the largest five-year capital plan in NYSDOT history – currently proposed at \$34.1 billion – our infrastructure is being transformed and new jobs are being created across New York every single day. That growth will only continue with the investments being put forward by the Governor.

The plan includes hundreds of road and bridge projects that will enhance safety and improve quality of life for residents in every corner of the state. It is also uniting communities long divided by concrete highways - undoing the planning mistakes of the past and providing new opportunities for growth. It will literally transform the state's infrastructure, creating a safer, healthier and more sustainable New York.

We see that already in places like Rochester, where the Inner Loop Project has revitalized downtown neighborhoods, and in Syracuse, where the project to remove the Interstate 81 viaduct is generating jobs, economic development and a new vibrancy in and around central New York.

Here in the City of Albany, the Governor’s budget includes funds to begin the environmental review process to reimagine the Interstate 787 corridor and provide greater access to the Hudson River. We’re also connecting the cities of Albany and Rensselaer with a new Hudson River crossing which will provide more reliable train service by replacing the Civil War-era Livingston Avenue Bridge.

In the South Bronx, we have begun the environmental review process for a project to repair and replace five bridges along the Cross Bronx Expressway that have reached the end of their service life. This safety project, which is still in the design phase, is foundational to our efforts to Reimagine the Cross Bronx corridor and we are committed to meaningful community engagement throughout the process. Simultaneously, the Governor’s budget also contains funding to build on the work of the Reimagine the Cross Bronx Visioning Study and further assess options to connect the community - including capping portions of the highway.

In Manhattan, we are commencing a study of the West Side Highway/9A corridor to identify existing needs and potential enhancements to better serve all users of the system, including pedestrians and cyclists. In Western New York, the DOT is embarking on a project to enhance safety at a key intersection in the fast-growing Town of Orchard Park – home to the Buffalo Bills – with the construction of a roundabout along Armor Duells Road.

More than \$90 million will be spent on projects to repave the Long Island Expressway from the Nassau/Queens line to Exit 48 in Suffolk County. In the Western Southern Tier, we will begin a \$57 million Gateway Connection Project which will revitalize downtown Hornell. We’re also making our infrastructure more resilient with projects like the \$26.1 million project in Westchester County to raise Annsville Circle in the Town of Cortlandt to prevent flooding.

To achieve the objectives of DOT’s Capital Plan, the Governor’s Executive Budget includes an additional \$800 million to ensure that the Department has the purchasing power it needs to make these projects a reality. Additionally, there’s \$100 million to maintain CHIPS and State Touring Routes, bringing the overall state investment to more than \$1 billion in annual local assistance. That’s the largest amount of funding for localities ever provided in a NYSDOT capital plan and represents an increase of 85 percent over the last plan.

Governor Hochul is also a big supporter of mass transit. Transit Operating Aid under the Executive Budget proposal is projected to be over \$9 billion for statewide transit systems. Investing in clean technology is critical to achieving our sustainability goals. The Regional Transit Service in Rochester recently unveiled two new hydrogen fuel cell electric buses with support from the state and this budget proposes \$100 million in additional non-MTA transit capital funding available for similar initiatives, with \$20 million to help transit providers transition to zero emission fleets. This builds upon the \$100 million in state funding under our Zero-Emission Transit Transition Program (ZETT) just announced by the Governor.

Ensuring affordable, reliable train service is also a cornerstone of this budget, which includes \$25 million to improve rail service in the Hudson Valley – a region that is experiencing some of the state’s fastest growth and is home to several major employers and popular destinations, including Legoland.

The Governor’s vision includes game-changing investments in upstate airports, with work continuing under the \$230 million Upstate Airport Economic Development and Revitalization Competition. This innovative program is lifting nine upstate airports to new heights through terminal expansions, improved security screening areas, revitalized boarding and concession areas.

Of course, it’s the dedicated men and women at NYSDOT who make all these achievements possible, and that’s why we will continue to put a premium on worker protection. Our maintenance workers operate in inherently dangerous conditions, as we witnessed with the tragic deaths of two Thruway Authority workers last year; and with the frightening video of our own DOT worker in the Southern Tier, who was nearly killed by a distracted box truck driver. With your help, DOT implemented an Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement Pilot Program to get New Yorkers to slow down in work zones. Since the launch of the program in 2023, there have been no recorded worker injuries or fatalities in areas where we deployed the program. And in locations where the cameras have been present more than once, fewer Notices of Violation are being issued, meaning that people are slowing down. The bottom line is the program is working. The Governor’s budget proposes to make this pilot program permanent, and with support from the Legislature we will do just that. In addition, the budget proposes extending existing legislation to protect our highway maintenance workers from assault and harassment. We must do all we can to keep our people safe, because they are the ones who are out there working to keep us safe.

Our maintenance workers are also on the front lines against another menace - climate change, which is increasing the frequency and severity of weather events and battering our roads, bridges and culverts. And there is no state that does snow and ice and emergency response better than New York. New Yorkers see our DOT team out there all the time, plowing in the frigid weather, repairing damage from tropical storms and tornados, fixing bridges and culverts – 24/7/365 – we are on it.

As I have stated, the New York State Department of Transportation is integral to the fabric of every community in New York State. We keep New Yorkers on the move, and we work to provide an accessible, reliable and affordable transportation network that drives the economy forward, and above all, keeps people safe.

On behalf of Governor Kathy Hochul, I look forward to working with you in each of your communities as DOT continues to carry out our critical mission and together, we move New York Forward.

Thank you.