

FAIR Committee, elected officials and transportation experts call on New York State to end funding inequity

The FAIR Committee of WNY (Fair Apportionment of Infrastructure Revenues) was joined today by numerous elected officials, transportation experts and labor leaders at an event to highlight the growing disparity in state funding of infrastructure and transportation needs that has developed across regions in New York State.

In her opening remarks, Carley Hill, Co-Chair of the FAIR Committee called for an end to downstate favoritism and cited recent commitments by New York State to a 5 year capital improvement program for the Metropolitan Transit Authority along with lagging funding levels and project start-ups for Western New York that has “made Western New York the poster child for funding disparity in this state and it must end! There currently exists a \$6 billion disparity between the funding of roads, bridges and public transportation between New York State DOT and the Metropolitan Transit Authority”

Hill continued:

“For too long our region of the NYSDOT – Region 5- has suffered gross funding inequity. It started in 2008 when the DOT committed a math error in calculating our regions funding. Historically, Region 5 received 10% of the total infrastructure budget for NYSDOT based on the fact that we are home to 10% of the states lane miles, over 2800 miles and 872 bridges. That error saw our funding cut from the 10% level to just 4.4%. Rather than correct the error the next year, the historical funding level has yet to be restored and our region ranks third from the bottom for regional infrastructure funding. Given the needs of this region, we refuse to accept becoming permanent bottom dwellers. It must end!”

William Bing of the Carpenters Union said:

“Besides the disparity in funding, there is another issue equally damaging to our region – bureaucratic delays. In 2012, the DOT admitted to a “perfect storm of screw ups” when it came to designing, bidding, awarding and starting projects. It was so bad and produced so many project delays that our region literally saw no major projects, all of

which had been funded, actually begun that construction season. We refer to that year as “the lost construction year”. And that resulted in my members, and many other working men and women, NOT working that season and NOT being able to support their families. Unfortunately, we are seeing the same bureaucratic delays starting to happen again. We are near the bottom of all state regions for project implementation, while the New York City region enjoys full Implementation of its projects. It’s unfair and it must end!”

Hal Morse of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council said:

“The significant growth and revitalization seen in the Buffalo-Niagara region is just a start. For us to continue this transformation and become a 21st century economic powerhouse, our transportation system must be rebuilt to support it. Recent investments in infrastructure are just that, investments that are paying off in terms of development, jobs and tax base to build a sustainable future.”

Senator Michael Ranzenhoffer said:

“Governor Cuomo’s budget proposal shortchanges Upstate New York’s roads and bridges by \$6 billion, resulting in more state dollars going to downstate’s Metropolitan Transit Authority. This is why I am fighting for true parity of transportation funding. I commend FAIR for joining me in calling on New York State to end funding inequity by investing billions to address upstate’s serious transportation needs.”

Assemblyman Robin Schimminger said:

“We need to fight for equal funding of our Western New York roads and bridges. In the Tonawanda, the bridge over Parker Boulevard is in dire need of repair. According to town officials, chunks of concrete periodically fall down onto Parker Boulevard. This isn’t right. Residents deserve safe roads and bridges, and that can only happen if projects are funded equally across the state. The time for true parity is now.”

In concluding the event, FAIR released a list of deficient roads and bridges in Region 5 that impact public safety and commerce and would require major improvements to ensure New York State’s significant investment in the economic and waterfront development projects reach their full potential.

Hill concluded:

“We chose this location because it highlights the connection between economic development and transportation. Local government and private business have poured millions of dollars into the Navel Park, Canalside and Harbor Center with more attractions, like the Children’s Museum, still to come. All of this investment was done with the hope of attracting thousands of people downtown and to the waterfront. Yet to

get, here, visitors must use a deteriorating transportation system that is an embarrassment to our region and a terrible message to the people who visit these attractions. Our people are ready willing and able to build to lead an economic revitalization, but with the long history of funding disparity, we can barely build to keep up with minimal standards. It's time to reverse this and allow our region to reach its full economic potential".