



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of February 26, 2024 -- 'Local Roads Are Essential'

THOMAS F. O'MARA February 26, 2024

| ISSUE: **2024-25 STATE BUDGET; LOCAL ROADS AND BRIDGES; CHIPS**



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This week, **"Local Roads Are Essential"**

Approaching final negotiations over a new state budget, it's critical to begin stressing that this year's budget must address the right priorities -- and one of the top priorities, in my view, is the future of our local roads and bridges.

It's a priority that I and local Assemblymen Phil Palmesano and Chris Friend have long worked to strengthen. Since 2013, in fact, we have stood together with New York's county and town highway superintendents and workers, and many other local leaders, to do everything we can to raise awareness and call for legislative support.

Recently, like we have for over a decade now, we gained the support of nearly 70 state senators and members of the Assembly, including regional Senators George Borrello and Pam Helming, to get behind the call for increased state support. This annual advocacy campaign, known 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).

Unexpectedly, Governor Kathy Hochul has placed the future of state investment in local roads, bridges, and culverts in the crosshairs this year by calling for, as part of her proposed 2024-25 state budget, significant cuts to the state's investment. Most egregiously, the governor is calling for a \$60 million cut for the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), the state's primary source of funding for local roads, bridges, and culverts. Simply put, her proposal cannot move forward.

Consequently, in a February 14, 2024 letter (you can read our entire letter on my Senate website, www.omara.nysenate.gov), our Senate and Assembly Republican conferences wrote to Governor Hochul and legislative leaders, in part, "We once again stress that New York State's direct investment in local roads and bridges through CHIPS remains fundamental. It deserves priority consideration in the final allocation of state infrastructure investment in the budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year. CHIPS is the key difference for local communities, economies, governments, motorists, and taxpayers throughout the Empire State ... and we cannot ignore this fact, especially this year."

Assemblymen Palmesano and Friend and I also held a news conference at the Big Flats Town Highway Garage, joined by local leaders and representatives of regional highway departments, to reject Governor Hochul's cut. Instead, we call for this year's final budget to restore the governor's proposed cut to CHIPS base aid and then increase the CHIPS base funding level to a total of \$798.1 million.

The governor's plan fails to recognize the enormous impact inflation is having on the costs of construction and, consequently, on the budgets of local highway departments. Nationally, according to experts, highway construction costs since 2022 have increased by nearly 60 percent! These unprecedented cost increases alone make the Governor's proposal unacceptable.

The latest analysis by the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways has found that the local highway system outside of New York City faces an annual funding gap of over \$2 billion.

Local roads advocates and representatives of local highway departments from every region of the state will once again be at the Capitol next week -- wearing their trademark orange "Local Roads Are Essential" t-shirts -- to rally support. We look forward to joining them once again.

Our bottom line: The "Local Roads Are Essential" coalition has worked long and hard over the past decade to strengthen New York State's commitment to local transportation infrastructure. Now is no time for this state to begin turning its back on this commitment. Governor Hochul has proposed a budget of misguided and misplaced priorities. She commits billions upon billions of dollars to provide programs and services to thousands of illegal migrants streaming into this state with no end in sight. She is pushing forward politically driven energy mandates on all New Yorkers that will cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

Yet to afford these and many other questionable spending priorities, Governor Hochul is attempting to balance her budget by cutting fundamental responsibilities in education, transportation, and other key areas. It's wrong and it can't stand. We have long stood with New York's county and town highway superintendents and workers, and local leaders, in support of stronger state investment in our local roads, bridges, and culverts. We continue to believe this commitment is a fundamental responsibility and critical to the strength and success of local communities, economies, environments, governments, and taxpayers. We will do everything we can to raise our voices, raise awareness, and raise support for the local roads and bridges that are essential to New York's future.

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