



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of July 15, 2024 -- 'NY's all-electric school bus mandate needs an overhaul too'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 15, 2024

| ISSUE: **ALL-ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUS MANDATE**



Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature.

Pump the brakes. Slow it down. Bring it in for a complete overhaul. Take your pick. Anything will be better than allowing this electric school bus mandate to keep moving forward as it stands right now.

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, **"NY's all-electric school bus mandate needs an overhaul too"**

Now that Governor Hochul and Albany's band of Green New Dealers appear ready to finally begin rethinking their strategy to impose far-reaching energy mandates on all New Yorkers, it will be important for the rest of us to keep highlighting exactly what needs to go back to the drawing board.

At the top of any list, in my view, is a concern we spotlighted earlier this year that could very well be the most costly unfunded state mandate ever imposed on New York's local school districts and school property taxpayers -- which is truly alarming in a state already recognized as one of the most heavily mandated in the nation.

Specifically, in 2022, Albany Democrats enacted a new law mandating that, starting in 2027, all school buses purchased in this state will have to be electric. Last February at the State Capitol, our Senate and Assembly Republican conferences joined school district representatives to caution what the consequences of that action would be and warn, in a word, that the fallout would be dire.

It's worth repeating and renewing our call to reject the current timeline for implementing this specific mandate on schools.

First, it will be enormously expensive. Electric buses cost up to three times as much as conventional diesel buses. Additionally, schools will be required to undertake significant electrical infrastructure and distribution line upgrades, as well as address major workforce transitions. The cost of the conversion has been conservatively estimated at between \$8 billion and \$15.25 billion more than the cost of replacing them with new diesel buses. For already overburdened local property taxpayers, it's emerging as yet another hard hit, to say the least.

Furthermore, it would be unworkable right now. The existing electric grid can't support it. Electric vehicles are showing an inability to operate or charge in frigid temperatures, and it does get cold in New York. Designed to operate best in 70-degree temperatures, electric vehicles lose up to 40 percent of their traveling range in extreme cold and the time required to charge them is much longer. A pilot program in Vermont found traveling range decreased by 80 percent in some instances.

In short, it seems reasonable and fair to reassess and reexamine the current timeline and its potential impact on school districts, students and families, and local communities.

I have already joined Assemblyman Phil Palmesano to introduce and sponsor legislation (S8220/A8447) that, among other provisions, would delay the mandate's implementation until at least 2045 and require additional cost-benefit and safety analyses before it can take effect.

Our Western New York colleague, Senator George Borrello, has also introduced similar legislation (S8467) to rescind the mandate and replace it with a state-funded pilot program that would allow schools to test how these buses perform in a range of transportation responsibilities.

One of the school superintendents who joined us earlier this year in Albany to help sound the alarm, Dr. Thomas J. Douglas, Superintendent of Horseheads Central School District in my legislative district, summed it up very effectively, saying: "The total cost will ultimately be borne by the local tax base since this is really an unfunded mandate. The sad fact is that there is no guarantee that this technology will work predictably in Northeastern winters. All the governor, NYSERDA, and PSC need do is look to the Midwest this past winter to see electric vehicles and chargers not being able to run in frigid temperatures. We cannot risk that with our children. Put simply, the state must pump the brakes on electric busing."

The current timeline for implementing New York State's all-electric school bus mandate raises far too many troubling questions on affordability, as well as on reliability and safety for student transportation.

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