



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of August 5, 2024 -- 'Moving forward on the future of New York State'

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 5, 2024

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



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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, **"Moving forward on the future of New York State"**

State government spending has continued to spin wildly out of control over the past several years while, at the same time, it has failed to address many key priorities for all New Yorkers.

One of the top priorities, in my view, is the future of local roads and bridges. A recent state comptroller's report found that one out of every 10 locally owned bridges in New York State is rated in poor condition.

"Ensuring safe and reliable public infrastructure is an ongoing concern for local governments across the country," State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said. "Despite increased funding from the federal and state governments, there is a great deal more work that needs to be done in New York. Local governments need this funding to continue so sorely needed repairs and maintenance are completed."

It's a priority that I and area Assemblyman Phil Palmesano, together with many of our legislative colleagues in the Senate and Assembly, have long worked to strengthen. Since 2013, in fact, we have stood together with New York's county and town highway superintendents and crews, and many other local leaders, to do everything we can to raise awareness and call for legislative support.

It remains unacceptable that New York State is near the bottom in the nationwide ranking of the condition of locally owned bridges.

Earlier this year, like we have for more than a decade, we stood together with nearly 70 state senators and members of the Assembly 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 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 called 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.

In a February 14, 2024 letter to Governor Hochul and legislative leaders, our Senate and Assembly

Republican conferences wrote, 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."

The governor's plan failed 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.

While we were able to help ensure the restoration of the governor's proposed cuts and at least maintain the state's commitment to local roads and bridges in this year's final budget, the comptroller's latest update makes it clear that state support needs to be strengthened moving forward.

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.

In this year's state budget, Governor Hochul and a Democrat-led State Legislature committed billions upon billions of dollars to provide programs and services to thousands of illegal migrants streaming into this state with no end in sight. They are pushing forward politically driven energy mandates on all New Yorkers that will cost, at a minimum, hundreds of billions of dollars. Yet to afford these and many other questionable spending priorities, they attempt to balance their budget by cutting fundamental responsibilities in education, transportation, and other key areas.

It's no way to move forward in this state. 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.

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