



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of February 17, 2025 -- 'NY's all-electric school bus mandate still ignoring STOP signs'

THOMAS F. O'MARA February 17, 2025

| ISSUE: **CLCPA; CLEAN ENERGY MANDATES**



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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, "NY's all-electric school bus mandate still ignoring STOP signs"

Weekly Column from



for the week of February 17, 2025

“NY’s all-electric school bus mandate still ignoring STOP signs”

It was a year ago this week when I joined legislative colleagues and school district representatives in Albany for a “Pump the Brakes” news conference to begin calling more urgent attention to what we now know could be the most costly state mandate ever imposed on school districts and local property taxpayers – if it keeps moving forward on its current timeline.

That’s right, *the costliest mandate ever*. It’s important to keep sounding the alarm because, on multiple fronts, this state’s all-██████ majority leaders keep blindly moving ahead to impose outrageous energy mandates on all New Yorkers, including this one.

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. Despite our constant warnings over the past year, and despite more and more school districts and other local leaders joining the chorus of voices in opposition to the electric school bus mandate, the all-██████ majority leaders of the state in Albany keep moving forward.

Key reminders are in order:

- 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.
- It’s simply 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.
- It will have yet another, enormously costly impact on the upkeep and maintenance of local roads. A diesel school bus weighs about 10 tons per axle while an electric school bus carries about 14 tons on its front axle and 25 tons on its rear axle. We have seen estimates, for example, that a town’s cost for pavement maintenance would increase from a range of \$20,000 to \$50,000 per mile to about \$550,000 per mile for reconstruction. New York’s towns could see at least a ten-fold increase in the cost of maintaining their roads from this mandate.

In short, the current timeline raises far too many troubling questions on affordability, as well as on reliability and safety for student transportation. It continues to seem reasonable and fair to reassess and reexamine the current timeline and its potential impact on school districts, students and families, and local communities.

- authorize the state Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the state's top energy regulators, to override the mandate if it is determined that zero-emission school buses are not feasible for a particular application;
- direct the state Commissioner of Education to complete a cost-benefit analysis for each school district that considers the costs necessary to comply with the zero-emission school bus mandate; and
- direct the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) to consult with the state Office of Fire Prevention and Control to develop appropriate fire suppression and safety procedures related to lithium and hydrogen-based fires.

In our view, the current plan is not affordable, feasible, or reliable. To say nothing of realistic.

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