



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

State, local leaders call for stronger commitment to local roads and bridges

THOMAS F. O'MARA February 28, 2025

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS AND BRIDGES**



"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," Senator O'Mara said.

Big Flats, N.Y., February 28—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats), Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C-Corning), Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C-Big Flats), Assemblyman Joe Sempolinski (R,C-Olean), Elmira Mayor Dan Mandell, Hornell Mayor John Buckley, and other local leaders today called on Governor Kathy Hochul and the Democrat leaders of the State

Legislature to provide increased, critically needed state aid for local roads and bridges in the final 2025-26 state budget.

Joint Senate-Assembly hearings on the governor's proposed \$252-billion budget concluded this week. Hochul and the Legislature's all-Democrat majorities are set to begin final budget negotiations throughout March. The deadline for approving a new state budget is April 1.

During a news conference today at the Town of Big Flats Highway Garage, the group of state and local leaders called on the governor and legislative leaders to keep strengthening New York's commitment to local transportation infrastructure.

In a February 13, 2025 letter (see attached copy) to Hochul and legislative leaders, O'Mara, Palmesano, Friend, Sempolinski, and nearly 70 of their Republican legislative colleagues in the Senate and Assembly 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 2025-26 fiscal year...Local governments, for the foreseeable future, will continue to struggle to address budgetary demands in the face of the state-imposed property tax cap, rising pension, health care and highway construction costs, and unfunded state mandates, among other burdens... A stronger state-local partnership is the only solution to meeting the critical investment level needed to maintain and improve local roads, bridges, and culverts... Through the renewed, vigorous, long-term state investment we have outlined, we will finally move toward the safe and reliable local infrastructure we envision, an infrastructure that will serve as the catalyst for future community and economic development, job creation, and overall public and motorist safety."

O'Mara, Palmesano, Friend, Sempolinski and other state legislators, joined by local roads advocates from across the state, are highlighting their opposition to Hochul's proposal to

keep state funding at last year's level for the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), the state's primary source of funding for local roads, bridges, and culverts. They argue that the Hochul proposal 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 the Federal Highway Administration's Highway Construction Cost Index, highway construction costs over the past three years have increased by 70 percent.

They're also stressing the fundamental long-term need for greater state support. Local governments, excluding New York City, spent \$2 billion on road maintenance and improvement in the 2020 fiscal year, according to the state comptroller. A 2023 study of local highway and bridge needs commissioned by the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH) found that municipalities would need an additional \$32 billion over 15 years to restore locally owned roads through repaving and improvements or \$2.1 billion annually. In 2025, that need was updated to \$2.69 billion a year, or \$40.35 billion over 15 years, because of unprecedented inflation of construction materials costs.

Consequently, local roads advocates are calling on Hochul and legislative leaders to:

- increase the CHIPS base level funding by \$250 million to a total of \$848 million;
- consolidate five of the state's local road assistance programs into two programs which would reduce the administrative burden and recordkeeping costs at the state and local levels; and
- increase the CHIPS bidding threshold from \$350,000 to \$1,000,000 -- or eliminate the threshold all together -- to give municipalities more flexibility to pursue the most cost-

effective option to bid out or perform in-house projects.

They are also reiterating growing concerns over the impact of a state mandate that will, starting in 2027, require all new school bus purchases to be electric. New York's 1,600 municipalities will be responsible for ensuring that the local road system is capable of handling the significantly heavier weight of electric school buses. Preliminary data shows that:

- 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.
- Currently, with diesel school bus utilization most town roads have a 10-year expected life. When using a heavier electric bus, the expected life expectancy is only 8 years due to rutting of the subgrade.
- Not only is this a 20 percent shorter life but it is more costly because the subgrade failure requires the road to be replaced versus just the asphalt surface.
- 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.
- This is almost solely a town and village expense, because nearly all state, county and city roads are built to a different standard and won't be as impacted by the heavier electric school buses.

Since 2013, O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend have built a coalition of support within the state Legislature and worked closely with local transportation advocates from throughout New

York on the “Local Roads Are Essential” advocacy campaign annually 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).

The coalition notes that every \$1 invested in the CHIPS program can save from \$6-\$14 in long-term rehabilitation costs and help ease the burden on local property taxpayers.

Additionally, each \$150 million increase in funding for local roads, bridges, and culverts results in the creation of up to 4,200 highway construction-related jobs.

According to TRIP, a national transportation advocacy group, roads and bridges that are deficient, congested, or lack desirable safety features, cost New York motorists an additional \$38 billion annually, up to \$3,492 per driver in some areas, due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic accidents, and congestion-related delays.

In a joint statement, O’Mara, Palmesano, Friend, and Sempolinski said, “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 the time for this state to ramp up its commitment to local roads and bridges. We have long stood with New York’s county and town highway superintendents, and local leaders, in support of this effort. 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.”

City of Elmira Mayor Dan Mandell said, “CHIPS funding is essential for the City of Elmira to maintain our roads. The climate in our area plays a major role in the deterioration of our local

roads. Without adequate funding, our roads will become dangerous to drive on and subsequently will become a public safety hazard. The City of Elmira does not have the financial resources to adequately maintain our roads to keep them safe. I urge the Governor to increase CHIPS funding in her budget to assist municipalities like the City of Elmira to assist in maintaining and repairing our roads."

City of Hornell Mayor John Buckley said, "While Local governments have made some progress in recent years receiving increases in funding related to roads and highways, those increases continue to be eroded by the hyperinflation of the last four years. Now, the Governor has proposed a \$19 billion dollar increase in the state budget but plans to keep CHIPS funding flat in the executive budget. If the State of NY can afford to spend billions more in 2025, at the very least, it can surely increase current levels of funding for repair and replacement of our roads and highways. Road and highway funding programs such as CHIPS, PAVE NY, Winter Recovery, and Pave Our Potholes should be increased annually to keep up with inflation. Roads are a non-partisan issue and should be funded appropriately."

Matt Mustico, Town of Elmira Highway Superintendent and current President of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, Inc. (NYSAOTSOH), said, "Local highway departments work tirelessly to maintain and improve our infrastructure despite rising costs, aging systems, and extreme weather challenges. Together with NYSCHSA our members are requesting the commitment of state leaders to prioritize infrastructure investment with a \$250 million increase to CHIPS in the 2025-26 Enacted Budget. Strong infrastructure is the backbone of economic growth, public safety, and the quality of life for all residents across New York State."

Kelly Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Steuben County Legislature, said, "New York's local roads and bridges are the backbone of our state's infrastructure, yet they are continually underfunded

and underappreciated. With the skyrocketing costs of construction materials and an increasing strain from climate-related challenges, our local governments need immediate and significant support. It is essential that we secure the funding necessary to restore and maintain our local transportation network, not only to protect our communities, but to preserve the economic vitality of New York. We must act now to ensure our infrastructure remains strong and resilient for generations to come."

Lee Giammichele, Supervisor of the Town of Big Flats, said, "The Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) is vital to the repairs, rehabilitation and modernization of our local roads and bridges. CHIPS along with Pave NY, Emergency Winter Recovery (EWR) and Pave our Potholes (POP) are programs that help offset our local highway budget and not only keep our roads in great shape but also help keep our tax base stable in the town. The Town of Big Flats maintains 76 miles of roads annually and this would be almost impossible without these state funded programs. I ask that Governor Hochul reconsider and allocate more funding to local municipalities."

Ken Thurston, Schuyler County Superintendent of Highways and Facilities, said, "Local Highway Departments maintain 87% of New York's 112,000 miles of highways and more than half of the states 16,000 highway bridges. Only 13% of the States highways are maintained by NYSDOT. It is deeply disappointing that the Governor's executive budget contains no similar additional funding for our local highways and bridges despite continued explosive growth in construction and supply costs. It is critical that an additional \$250 Million be added to the 2025-2026 budget for local highway programs. Every highway department relies heavily on these flexible funding sources which distribute vital and reoccurring state funding through a formula and should be spread to every local government in the state."