



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of July 21, 2025 -- 'NY's all-electric school bus mandate needs an overhaul'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 21, 2025

| ISSUE: **ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUS MANDATE; UNFUNDED STATE MANDATES**



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

# Weekly Column from

NYS SENATOR TOM O'MARA

**for the week of July 21, 2025**

**“NY’s all-electric school bus mandate needs an overhaul too”**

Now that Governor Hochul and Albany’s Green New Deal [REDACTED] majorities appear ready to finally rethink their strategy of imposing far-reaching energy mandates on all New Yorkers – a strategy that up to now has recklessly ignored affordability, feasibility, and reliability -- it will be important for the rest of us to keep highlighting exactly what needs to go back to the drawing board in the months ahead.

Right near the top of any list, in my view, is a mandate we have repeatedly spotlighted that, if left in place in its current form, could prove to 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 [REDACTED] majorities enacted a new law mandating that, starting in 2027, all school buses purchased in this state will have to be electric. Over the past few years, our Senate and Assembly Republican conferences have joined school district representatives and others to warn, repeatedly, about the consequences of that action and what the fallout would be, which, in a word, can only be called *dire*.

As Governor Hochul and her energy czars begin readying the release of an updated draft energy plan later this summer – one that many of us believe must recognize the alarming shortcomings of the current strategy -- it’s worth repeating and renewing our call to reject the current timeline for implementing this specific mandate on schools.

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 and oh, by the way, running the heater on the bus will reduce that poor performance even more.

- It will have yet another, enormously costly impact on the upkeep and maintenance

For example, 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 has joined us over the past few years to help sound the alarm, Dr. Thomas J. Douglas, Superintendent of Horseheads Central School District in my legislative district, has summed it up very effectively, "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, NYSEERDA, 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.

Pump the brakes. Slow it down. Stop ignoring the STOP signs. 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.

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