



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## **O'Mara, Palmesano lead call to boost state support for local roads and bridges**

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**Albany, N.Y., March 6**—With final negotiations over the 2013-14 New York State budget kicking into high gear over the next two weeks, a group of state legislators, led by Senator Tom O’Mara (R-C, Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R-C, Corning), today joined county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders from across New York to call for increased state support for local roads and bridges.

Highway superintendents from throughout the state have been in Albany this week as part of their “2013 Grassroots Advocacy Campaign for Local Roads & Bridges.”

Most importantly, the group is urging Governor Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders to increase the amount of funding the state provides for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program. Commonly known as CHIPS, the program provides the bulk of state aid to counties and towns for the maintenance and improvement of local roads and bridges.

At an Albany news conference, O’Mara, Palmesano and their colleagues noted that CHIPS funding has remained stagnant since 2008. The governor has proposed \$363.1 million in CHIPS funding in his proposed 2013-14 state budget, the same level as last year. The legislators and local highway superintendents are calling for a CHIPS funding increase of \$100 million, from \$363.1 million to \$463.1 million. They note that local roads and bridges account for 87% of the roads, 52% of the bridges,

and 48% of the vehicle mileage logged in New York State.

[\[watch comments by Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano at this morning's news conference\]](#)

A recent report from State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, "Cracks in the Foundation," called 32% of New York's local bridges deficient and 40% of local roads fair or poor, and getting worse.

"We're calling for a reasonable state-level increase in CHIPS funding that would make a world of difference for our localities, motorist safety statewide, and so many local economies," O'Mara and Palmesano said in a joint statement. "The improvement and maintenance of local roads and bridges, upstate and downstate, puts taxpayer dollars to wise use. It's a smart state investment that would have a positive impact on New York's short- and long-term strategies for job creation and economic development. These roads and bridges are economic lifelines in local communities and absolutely critical to the overall quality and strength of New York's leading tourism industry."

O'Mara and Palmesano are being joined in their call to increase CHIPS funding by nearly 70 other senators and Assembly members on a bipartisan basis. [see accompanying list]

All of the legislators joined in signing a recent letter to the governor, legislative leaders and top Cuomo administration officials, part of which reads: "We all believe an improved infrastructure is vital to advance and foster economic development and job creation. However, we also believe that investment and commitment must be made not just at the state level, but the local level as well. We have continually emphasized working together and partnering to solve major challenges in our state. We believe this is an opportunity and a responsibility we have to partner with our local communities by pledging our support to share our increased transportation and infrastructure investment with our local governments."

The head of the state's County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA), William Wright, recently testified before the Legislature's fiscal committees and stressed that CHIPS funding remains frozen at 2008 levels. County highway superintendents also contend that while the current state budget included \$1.6 billion for the NY Works infrastructure improvement initiative, billed as New York's

largest-ever infrastructure development effort, not a penny of the more than one billion dollars went to local roads and bridges.

William Wright, President of NYSCHSA and Ontario County Highway Superintendent, said: "We appreciate the leadership of Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano and a growing number of legislators in calling for a significant increase in CHIPS funding, the life blood of local highway departments. This year we are facing the perfect funding storm, coming off of a five-year freeze in state funding, double-digit inflation in highway construction materials, higher fuel costs and facing substantial losses in federal highway aid as a result of the new federal transportation program, MAP-21. It's encouraging to know that our elected officials recognize the broad challenges local highway departments are facing in fixing and preserving their vast local systems of roads and bridges and that they are strongly behind us and the traveling public."

William Weller, Highway Superintendent for the Town of Florida (Montgomery County) and President of the NYS Association of Town Highway Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH), said: "On behalf of our organization's more than 900 elected and appointed transportation professionals, who maintain over half of the state's roads, we strongly support efforts to increase local highway funding."

Superintendent Weller also noted a 2012 study conducted by the town and county highway superintendents associations which reported that New York needs to invest an additional \$1.2 billion per year on local roads and bridges to prevent them from becoming deficient.

In his proposed budget, Cuomo calls for a \$300 million increase in NY Works funding this year. O'Mara, Palmesano and their colleagues want at least \$100 million of that increase to be allocated directly to municipalities for local roads and bridges.

Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) said: "Increased CHIPS funding is one of the best investments we can make in New York. It will help stimulate the economy by creating new jobs, shore up our critical local highway infrastructure that is used for transporting kids to school, parents to work and home, and goods to retailers and manufacturing facilities across the State. Crumbling roads and bridges reflect neglect, while an increased investment into our local infrastructure reflects a strong commitment to a more prosperous future."

Lori Mithen-DeMasi, Counsel to the Association of Towns of the State of New York, said: "New York cannot expect to grow its economy without quality roads and bridges. Towns rely on CHIPS and Marchiselli funding to maintain and improve local roads. While we are grateful that the Executive Budget seeks to maintain these programs at last year's level (CHIPS - \$363.1 million, Marchiselli - \$39.7 million), the state could further its goals of stabilizing property taxes and growing our economy by increasing these funding programs in the 2013-2014 enacted state budget."

Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM), said: "Over the past two years, Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature have wisely increased the State's fiscal commitment to New York's road and highway infrastructure. Unfortunately, local roads and bridges have not benefitted from this additional state funding. NYCOM, therefore, strongly supports a significant increase in New York's CHIPS program, which will allow local officials and their constituents to determine the necessary investments in local roads and bridges. NYCOM applauds Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for their leadership in organizing this legislative coalition."

The Legislature is set to adopt its respective one-house budget resolutions and convene a series of joint, bipartisan budget conference committees over the next few weeks. The public negotiations are aimed at reaching final agreements on the 2013-14 state budget before the start of New York's new fiscal year on April 1.