



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Dream Big

Have you ever stepped off a plane in another state and thought, “Wow, this airport is really nice?” Or hopped on a commuter train from that airport that was absolutely pristine? Maybe you’ve taken a road trip with your family and subconsciously noted how new and beautiful their highways were. Oftentimes, when you speak to a New Yorker who has visited another state, you almost always hear these kinds of observations. Then you hear the rants about how New York, one of the richest states in the union, can’t seem to do better.

But to be fair there are reasons for that. For starters New York is old. I mean real old. And it’s big, with so many people that infrastructure use is extraordinarily heavy. To think we have numbers crossing bridges and tunnels on an average day that exceed the population of some states! The size and scope of our infrastructure puts the task into perspective.

Let’s start with the grand dame of New York City, home to some 9 million New Yorkers. On average, her 6,400 miles of sewage lines are 84 years old while her 6,800 miles of water mains are 69 years old. The gas mains clock in at about 56 years old. Travel around the state and you get an even clearer picture:

- Of the 17,420 bridges in New York, 2,169 are considered structurally deficient and 4,718 are considered functionally obsolete

- We have 114,546 miles of public roadways and 60% are ranked in poor or mediocre condition

- We're home to 141 public use airports and all need upkeep and reinvestment

- There are 5,736 state regulated dams and 403 are considered "high hazard"

The categories are too endless to delve into here, suffice to say our state comptroller, Thomas DiNapoli, put together a comprehensive report that summarizes the situation best. New York will need to spend about \$250 billion on its water, sewer and highways over the next 20 years.

That's a tall order to be sure. But we should also remember that there was a time when the rest of the world would literally send their engineers to New York to see how it was done. Our leaders managed to build some of the biggest, most creative, long-serving infrastructure projects the world has even known. They included bridges, tunnels, highways, sewers, aqueducts, subways and railways, and millions of acres of parkland and thousands of public schools – and did most of it within the span of 100 years. We built big because we dreamed big.

Unfortunately, it was followed by a period of mismanagement and inactivity that's led to decay. But today, we've managed to right New York's fiscal ship and that's key to everything else. It's time now for us to dream big again. A sound infrastructure not only improves the health and quality of our lives, it also builds commerce. Can anyone truly question how important infrastructure improvements made over 100 years ago, like our railroad and the City's subways, continue to drive commerce all these decades later?

To be sure, we don't have \$250 billion lying around in the couch cushions. But we're now on target with \$160 billion for these improvements over the next twenty years. And we have even come into surpluses, most recently the \$3.6 billion dollar settlement with BNP Paribas Bank. As I've written in the past, I'll be working to see that a good portion of that is reinvested in New York's crumbling infrastructure. From rebuilding local roads and bridges, to key environmental initiatives like clean water and sewer upgrades here on Long Island, we have to invest in projects that bring short and long-term economic growth throughout the state. I'll never tire of repeating the old proverb: *A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.*

Friends, New York is not without her problems but we are making a comeback. It's time we dream big again.