



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo proposes statewide series of high-speed E-Z Pass Interchanges to enhance traffic flow

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO October 7, 2016

| ISSUE: **TRANSPORTATION, THRUWAY AUTHORITY, MTA (METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY)**



State Senator Joseph Griffo is calling upon the Governor and the New York State Thruway Authority to develop a series of high-speed E-Z Pass Interchanges across the state to make the highway system more efficient, including one in Marcy.

Following the Governor's announcement this week to institute state-of-the-art automatic tolling at all MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) bridges and tunnel, along with

improvements to Interstate 90 in Western New York, Senator Griffo sent a letter to the Thruway Authority outlining his recommendations for the agency to examine and implement a plan that would incorporate eight to 10 E-Z pass interchanges along Interstate 90. This plan, as envisioned by Senator Griffo, would add extra lanes to the Thruway to allow only motorists using E-Z Pass to access and exit the Thruway without stopping or significantly slowing for a toll booth.

Such interchanges would enhance traffic flow while reducing congestion and delays, and enable motorists to more directly access economic corridors that rely on vehicle traffic, Griffo said. Senator Griffo is also asking the Governor and the Thruway Authority to explore the option of expanding automatic “open road tolling” to some of the more heavily trafficked areas upstate. With this technology, motorists would not be required to stop to pay tolls because sensors and cameras suspended over the highway would read each license plate (if they don’t already have E-Z pass) and mail a toll bill to that vehicle’s registered owner.

Locally, Senator Griffo is recommending that one of the E-Z Pass Interchanges be developed in Marcy or Rome, where the region has been preparing for major economic development through local technology projects at the SUNY Polytechnic Institute and the Griffiss Business and Technology Park. As the greater Utica and Rome areas anticipate an increase in traffic activity along with this regional revitalization, Senator Griffo says E-Z pass access point should link the Thruway directly to Marcy and/or Rome.

Senator Griffo first proposed such an E-Z Pass Interchange 10 years ago, at a time when plans for a future Marcy Nanocenter were in their infancy. While this concept has continued to be discussed as part of long-term transportation plans, Senator Griffo believes the Governor’s focus on reimagining New York’s transportation system is once again an appropriate time to revisit the proposal.

“Now, more than ever, I think there is a real need with real benefits to allow motorists the ability to exit the Thruway into Marcy and Rome as efficiently as possible to avoid traffic congestion and delays,” said Senator Griffo, R-Rome. “As our region continues to evolve toward revitalization, ensuring that we have the best transportation infrastructure in place will allow us to make the most of the opportunities we have for economic development. This isn’t the first time this project has been explored, but I believe now is the ideal time to finally make this concept a priority to further enhance the Mohawk Valley.”

The parallel layout of the Thruway and the Utica-Rome Expressway puts the Utica/Marcy and Rome areas in a very unique situation, Senator Griffo explained. Connecting these two roadways would help our region take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Marcy Nanocenter projects at SUNY Poly, the Griffiss Business and Technology Park in Rome, and future development in Downtown Utica, as well as better accommodate the Walmart Distribution Center and the New York State corrections facilities.

With the Marcy interchange previously estimated to cost \$8 million, Senator Griffo suggested that 8 to 10 similar interchanges could be developed across the state as part of a \$75 million project funded through the Thruway Authority by using:

- Any savings the Thruway Authority would gain by transferring control of the Canal Corporation to the New York Power Authority.
- An estimated \$400 million in bank settlement funds that the Thruway Authority could appeal for from the state to use in projects like this.
- A portion of the \$700 million already allocated by the state to the Thruway Authority for its Capital Program.

Such a project would also maximize the interconnectivity between the Thruway and Interstate 790, as well as the North-South Arterial and Routes 5, 8 and 12.

“While the surrounding Marcy and Utica area would definitely benefit by having efficient E-Z Pass access, there are many other communities across the state that would be similarly assisted by having better high-speed access to the state’s transportation system,” Senator Griffo said. “A statewide plan to develop these interchanges could improve the economic outlook and commercial vitality of these corridors by making them more accessible to vehicle traffic.”

PLEASE SEE THE ATTACHED PDF FOR THE TEXT OF SENATOR GRIFFO'S LETTER TO NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY AUTHORITY ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WILLIAM FINCH AND THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE. THE FULL TEXT HAS ALSO BEEN PROVIDED BELOW:

October 6, 2016

*William Finch – Acting Executive Director
New York State Thruway Authority
200 Southern Boulevard
Albany, New York 12209*

Dear Acting Executive Director Finch:

I would like to applaud the Governor for his vision in transforming New York’s bridges and tunnels to better confront the transportation challenges of the 21st Century with state-of-the-art solutions. With that, I would also like to ask the Administration to consider expanding that vision to develop a modern, efficient and uniform transportation system across all of New York State.

In order for communities throughout the state to make the most of today’s opportunities for economic growth and revitalization, it is important to have an efficient and functioning transportation infrastructure. While the New York State Thruway does provide ready travel across the state, I believe there is a better way to enable motorists to arrive at their destination while limiting traffic congestion.

I am recommending that the New York State Thruway Authority develop a series of eight to 10 high-speed E-Z Pass Interchanges along Interstate 90 throughout various regions across the state. These efficient access points could improve the economic outlook and commercial vitality of the selected communities by

enabling them to become more accessible to vehicle traffic. I am also asking the Administration to explore the option of expanding automatic “open road tolling” to some of the more heavily trafficked areas upstate, so motorists would not be required to stop to pay tolls.

Among the suggested E-Z Pass interchanges, I would propose that the Town of Marcy and/or the City of Rome in Central New York be considered for such sites. The Mohawk Valley’s evolution toward economic development has the potential to perpetuate regional revitalization unlike anything the greater Utica region has experienced in decades. With high-tech projects and opportunities in cyber and nanotechnology being pursued at SUNY Polytechnic Institute in Marcy and Griffiss Business and Technology Park in Rome, along with ongoing economic development in Downtown Utica, the surrounding communities desire to have the best transportation infrastructure in place to accommodate this progress.

In order to make the most of these opportunities, a high-speed E-Z Pass Interchange in Marcy and/or Rome would provide efficient access for motorists to and from the area. Such an interchange would link the parallel highways of Interstate 90 and the Utica-Rome Expressway (State Route 49), providing a more direct path to SUNY Poly and the Griffiss Park. Traffic congestion and delays in this area would thus be reduced by allowing E-Z Pass motorists to bypass Exit 31 in Utica. Now more than ever, I believe there is a real need with real benefits to install E-Z Pass Interchanges in communities like Marcy and Rome across the state.

The Marcy interchange itself has previously been estimated to cost \$8 million, and so I am proposing that 8 to 10 similar interchanges along Interstate 90 could be developed as part of a \$75 million project funded through the Thruway Authority by using:

- > Any savings the Thruway Authority would gain by transferring control of the Canal Corporation to the New York Power Authority.*
- > An estimated \$400 million in bank settlement funds that the Thruway Authority could appeal for from the state to use in projects like this.*
- > A portion of the \$700 million already allocated by the state to the Thruway Authority for its Capital Program.*

As you know, this concept has continued to be discussed for years at local and state levels as part of long-term transportation plans. Following the Governor’s recent focus on reimagining New York’s tolling process, I believe now is once again an appropriate time to make my proposed concept a priority in order to strengthen our transportation infrastructure to the benefit of communities throughout New York State.

Thank you for your consideration, and do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions or would like to further discuss this proposal.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Griffo

State Senate, 47th District

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