



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

State legislators, local leaders urge stronger state commitment to local roads, bridges and culverts: Group calls on Governor Cuomo, legislative leaders to increase CHIPS base aid and bolster BRIDGE-NY funding (UPDATED with video)

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 8, 2017

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS BRIDGES TRANSPORTATION**



Local highway superintendents representing nearly every region of New York State have been in Albany this week as part of the annual “Local Roads Matter” advocacy campaign. As part of the effort for the past several years, Senator O’Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano have organized a bipartisan group of 137 state legislators in the Senate and Assembly, nearly 65% of the Legislature’s entire membership, who have joined the county and town highway superintendents

and other local leaders from across New York to call for increased support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

**Albany, N.Y., March 8**—The “Local Roads Matter” advocacy campaign returned to the State Capitol today as a bipartisan group of 137 state legislators, organized by State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Vice-Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), joined county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders from across New York to call for increased state support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

The group includes nearly 65% of the State Legislature’s entire membership.

At a news conference in The Well of the Legislative Office Building, O’Mara, Palmesano and other state legislators, county and town highway superintendents, and other local leaders called for increasing state base aid for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program, commonly known as CHIPS, by \$150 million to a total of \$588.1 million in the 2017-2018 state budget. They are also seeking an additional \$50 million annually, beginning in the 2017-18 fiscal year, for the local portion of the BRIDGE-NY program. The current state budget includes \$400 million in BRIDGE-NY funding to help localities undertake bridge and culvert rehabilitation and replacement projects.

Supporters of increasing funding for the local portion of BRIDGE-NY say that it would allow some of the many local bridge and culvert projects not included in the first round of funding to move forward more quickly. Supporters are also urging that a greater portion of the total BRIDGE-NY funding go to projects enhancing culverts.

In a joint statement, **O’Mara and Palmesano said**, “We’re grateful that the ‘Local Roads Matter’ campaign continues to grow, and gain support and success. Now more than ever, New York State must support a steady, strong, multi-year strategy to address local transportation

infrastructure and help build a local transportation system that our communities, motorists and taxpayers deserve. Local governments face increasingly difficult fiscal constraints due to the tax cap and long-stagnant state aid to municipalities. CHIPS, PAVE-NY and BRIDGE-NY funding is fundamentally important to local economic development. It creates local jobs through the hiring of local contractors and local workers. Every additional dollar of state support means a dollar less of responsibility for local property taxpayers. It's an investment in economic growth, job creation and property tax relief throughout New York State."

**[Watch opening remarks at today's "Local Roads Matter" news conference from Assemblyman Palmesano and Senator O'Mara]**

Local highway superintendents representing nearly every region of New York have been in Albany this week as part of the annual "Local Roads Matter" advocacy campaign. As part of the effort for the past several years, O'Mara and Palmesano have organized a bipartisan group of state legislators in the Senate and Assembly who have joined the county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders from across New York to call for increased CHIPS support for local roads, bridges and culverts.

Beginning with the 2013-14 state budget, CHIPS base aid has increased by approximately \$125 million to an overall level of \$438.1 million. The current state budget also includes an additional \$400 million (\$100 million a year over four years) for local roads being allocated through the CHIPS funding formula through a new PAVE-NY program for local roads, and another \$400 million in BRIDGE-NY funding for local bridge projects. Additionally, for the first time since 2010, the current state budget provides parity in funding between the five-year state Department of Transportation (DOT) and Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) capital plans, with each plan slated to receive approximately \$27 billion.

Combined, these programs are providing significant funding increases for counties, cities, towns and villages throughout New York State. In their own legislative districts, for example, O'Mara and Palmesano said that total, four-year aid percentage increases from 2012-13 to this year have ranged between 45% to 55%.

This year's "Local Roads Matter" campaign is making the case for an even stronger state commitment to local roads, bridges and culverts. Supporters argue that CHIPS funding has become especially critical in an era for local governments defined by the local property tax cap, stagnant aid to municipalities (AIM) and shrinking local revenues. They note that municipalities own and maintain 87% of the roads in the state, own and maintain 52% of New York's 18,000 bridges, and that 48% of the vehicle miles driven in the state are on local roads.

In his 2017-18 proposed state budget, Cuomo maintains total CHIPS base aid at its current level of \$438.1 million, and provides no additional funding for BRIDGE-NY or PAVE-NY.

In a March 3rd letter to the governor and legislative leaders, the "Local Roads Matter" legislative coalition emphasizes that "the commitment and investment levels we are seeking, through the CHIPS program and the BRIDGE-NY program, will build on the foundation we have successfully made in the last several state budgets and further solidify our fundamental belief that 'Local Roads Matter!' With the renewed, vigorous 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 economic development and job creation throughout our local communities."

A 2013 study conducted by the town highway superintendents association estimated that New York would need to invest an additional \$1.3 billion per year on local roads and bridges to prevent them from becoming deficient. An earlier report from the state comptroller called

32% of New York's local bridges deficient and 40% of local roads fair or poor, and getting worse. A national transportation advocacy group, TRIP, has estimated that deteriorating roads cost New York motorists nearly an additional \$25 billion annually – nearly \$2,300 for the average driver in some areas -- in lost time, fuel costs, vehicle repairs and other expenses.

In their March 3rd letter, the legislative coalition concludes, “We also have to recognize that local governments continue to struggle to address budgetary demands in the face of the state-imposed property tax cap and freeze, rising pension and healthcare costs, unfunded state mandates, and stagnant Aid to Municipalities (AIM). This clearly demonstrates the incredible challenge facing our local municipalities to meet the critical investment level needed to improve local roads, bridges and culverts. A stronger state-local partnership is the only answer.”

[attached above, see copy of the letter and list of Senate and Assembly signees]

**George P. Spanos, P.E., President of the NYS County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA), said,** “Unfortunately, after years of underinvestment the recent increase in state funding for local roads and bridges falls short of the maintenance demands of our aging and ailing infrastructure. A good demonstration of this need is with the BRIDGE NY Program where only a portion of the 500 applications for bridge and culvert work submitted by municipalities was able to be awarded under the current funding levels. Culvert applications were six times the available funding. Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano are to be commended for their tireless efforts to keep the funding of local roads and bridges a state budget priority.”

**Michael Boesel, Superintendent of Highways for the Town of Palmyra in Wayne County and current President of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH), said,** “Despite our best efforts local road, culvert and bridge conditions are

deteriorating at a faster pace than we can keep up with at current funding levels. More is needed to stop the decline. Forty-six percent of the vehicle miles travelled in New York are on local roads, yet the state spends less than 5 percent of its construction program on local infrastructure. We must increase our investment in order to provide a safe and efficient transportation system for our communities and the economy.”

**Stephen J. Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC),** said, “The ongoing and necessary maintenance of the local road and bridge system in New York is essential for the safety of the motoring public. The costs of maintenance and repair of this vast local system is beyond the capacity of local taxpayers, and ongoing state investment is needed. I applaud Senator O’Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano, and the numerous members of the State Legislature, for their continued commitment to help our local communities maintain safe streets and bridges.”

**Gerald K. Geist, Executive Director of the Association of Towns of the State of New York,** said, “The Association of Towns joins, applauds and supports the groups and individuals that constitute the Local Roads Matter campaign, including state Senator Tom O’Mara and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano. The proposed increase to CHIPS would mean an additional \$41 million for town roads, and the BRIDGE-NY increase, an additional \$10 million for town bridges and culverts. In an era of tax caps and crumbling infrastructure, local governments need a strong partner in the state. These measures provide just such a partnership.”

**Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM),** said, “At a time when high quality public infrastructure is universally recognized as the key to strong communities and a growing economy, New York State must further increase its investment in our essential network of local roads and bridges. NYCOM thanks Assemblyman Palmesano and Senator O’Mara and their bipartisan group of legislators for their leadership on this critically important issue and we urge the Governor and entire State

Legislature to include such increased transportation funding in the upcoming budget."

**New York Farm Bureau President David Fisher** said, "Local roads and bridges matter to farmers. We rely on our infrastructure to move equipment to farm fields and get our goods to customers in every corner of the state. Especially in rural areas, when bridges are unsafe, we are forced to drive miles out of the way to access our fields which can raise our fuel costs and delay necessary work that is needed on the farm. New York Farm Bureau appreciates Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano's efforts to improve New York's failing infrastructure."

**Mike Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of NYS,** said, "The abundance of potholes across the state prove that the demand for infrastructure investment far surpasses current funding levels. Our crumbling roads and bridges are a detriment to our safety and economy. It is critical that the Governor and State Legislature progress in the improvements necessary to make New York a safer place to live, work and visit. Because local governments manage the majority of our state's roads, the CHIPS program is not just an investment in our aging infrastructure; but also in our local businesses and contractors. Failing to increase the funding allocated for local relief of infrastructure concerns would be a step backwards in what is already an uphill battle. I would like to thank Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for once again making infrastructure needs a priority for the 2017-18 state budget. "

**[[Watch a full video replay of today's "Local Roads Matter" news conference](#)]**

Read more from the *USA Today Network*, **"[Fixing potholes: Local highway officials want \\$150M boost](#)"**