



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Next stop? Governor's Desk: Senate and Assembly approve O'Mara's legislation establishing 'Upstate Transit Funding Board'

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 23, 2017

| ISSUE: **RURAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SENIORS MEDICAID**



We need to take steps to ensure the long-term operation and viability of public transportation systems throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and across upstate, rural New York.

Albany, N.Y., June 23—Both houses of the New York State Legislature have approved legislation sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) to establish a new "Upstate Transit Funding Board" within the state the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the measure now goes to Governor Andrew Cuomo for final action.

O'Mara called it a critical piece of legislation for the future of upstate, rural public transportation.

“We need to take steps to ensure the long-term operation and viability of public transportation systems throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and across upstate, rural New York,” said O'Mara, vice chair of the Senate Transportation Committee.

“These systems provide critical links for thousands upon thousands of upstate residents and their jobs, medical appointments, schools, shopping, and other destinations. Public transit is also a cornerstone of the regional transportation systems vital to economic development, job growth, anti-poverty and housing initiatives, energy and environmental conservation.”

Governor Andrew Cuomo vetoed similar legislation in 2016. In last year's veto message, the governor said that the legislation's effective date failed to provide enough time to establish the board and issue a report. O'Mara said that the newly approved legislation (**S.2083/A.7074**) extends that timeframe by setting a December 2018 deadline for issuing the report – plenty of time to appoint the board and produce a report.

O'Mara and other supporters stress that fares alone are not sufficient to cover all the costs of providing public transit services and the systems must rely on annual state funding. He said the creation of an Upstate Transit Funding Board would ensure that discussions remain ongoing to continually identify sustainable funding options to provide for growth and stability in public transportation operating assistance, as well as create additional opportunities for supporting mobility options for upstate New York residents.

The future of upstate public transit systems has been an O'Mara priority over the past several years, particularly since the state's ongoing Medicaid redesign strategy has included a shift over the past three years in the administration and management of Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) from localities to the state. It's been viewed as a cost-

cutting move by state officials, however many local public transportation officials from O'Mara's district and across the upstate region have raised concerns about the plan and, especially, its long-term impact on rural communities and populations including the disabled, elderly, and the rural workforce.

"The Medicaid redesign effort in Non-Emergency Medical Transportation has significantly impacted public transportation services – from public transit buses to private taxi service – in many areas but especially in rural, upstate regions," said O'Mara. "The viability of public transportation in our rural areas is at risk because of Albany's attempt at a statewide, one-size-fits-all approach to these local systems. We are making every effort to bring attention to the changes underway, fully assess the consequences for our counties, and do what we can to ensure that the impact on rural, upstate public transportation receives fair consideration."

O'Mara has held numerous meetings and forums over the past several years to hear directly from local officials, mobility managers, transportation providers, and community organizations. Officials from numerous counties, including all of the counties O'Mara represents as part of the 58th Senate District (Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates), have highlighted the new system's shortcomings.