



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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State legislators and local leaders: Local roads and bridges need greater state investment (UPDATED)

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 6, 2019

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS AND BRIDGES**



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Albany, N.Y., March 6—A group of state legislators, organized by State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), today joined a statewide coalition of county and town highway superintendents and other local leaders to call for

increased state support for local roads, bridges, and culverts.

Over 600 local highway superintendents and highway department employees 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 this effort since 2013, O’Mara, Palmesano, and many of their legislative colleagues have joined local roads representatives and other local leaders from across New York to call for increased state support for local roads, bridges, and culverts. [To view a portion of Senator O’Mara’s remarks at today’s rally, [CLICK HERE.](#)]

This year the group is calling for increasing state base aid for the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) by \$150 million to a total of \$588 million. They are also seeking the restoration of a \$65-million “Extreme Winter Recovery” allocation enacted last year but not included in Governor Andrew Cuomo’s proposed 2019-2020 state budget.

In a March 4 letter to Cuomo and legislative leaders, O’Mara, Palmesano and their Senate and Assembly colleagues wrote, “Local governments, for the foreseeable future, will continue to struggle to address budgetary demands in the face of the state-imposed property tax cap, rising pension and health care costs, and unfunded state mandates, among other burdens. Furthermore, despite the state’s increased commitment to CHIPS since 2013, base aid has remained stagnant over the past seven years. There is clearly a compelling case for New York State to take these proposed steps to address urgent local transportation and infrastructure shortcomings, and we believe it is simply the right thing to do. In order to meet the critical investment level needed to maintain and improve local roads, bridges, and culverts, a stronger state-local partnership is the only answer.”

Since 2013, the “Local Roads Matter” campaign has helped increase funding through the CHIPS Program/Formula by \$240 million, or nearly 40%. Together with the PAVE-NY and BRIDGE-NY programs established three years ago, the programs are providing significant funding increases for counties, cities, towns and villages throughout New York State.

This year’s effort is making the case for an even stronger state commitment. 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), for which funding remains even more uncertain this year, and unfunded state mandates. 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 their March 4 letter to the governor and legislative leaders, legislators stress their belief that “through the renewed, vigorous, long-term 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 community and economic development, and job creation throughout our local communities.”

[Attached above is copy of this year's letter and list of Senate and Assembly signees.]

An October 2017 report from State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli found that bridges owned by local governments currently need an estimated \$27.4 billion in repairs. An earlier report from the comptroller called 32% of New York’s local bridges deficient and 40% of local roads fair or poor, and getting worse. In a 2013 study, the state Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSAOTSOH) 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. A national transportation advocacy group, TRIP, has estimated that deteriorating

roads cost New York motorists nearly an additional \$25 billion annually – approximately \$2,300 for the average driver in some areas -- in lost time, fuel costs, vehicle repairs, and other expenses.

Dennis S. Davis, President of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA), said, “Our legislative supporters, particularly Senator Tom O’Mara and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano, are to be commended for their efforts on behalf of the people of this state. The hard reality is that local highway departments need a significant boost in the level of state investment to effectively address the daunting financial challenges of maintaining their vast ailing and aging transportation infrastructure. We all agree that a substantial increase in the CHIPS base aid and the restoration of the Extreme Winter Recovery funds, as advocated for by our legislative partners and the over 600 attendees of our Local Roads Matter! event, is the best way to help all municipalities improve the conditions of our critical statewide system of roads, bridges and culverts on behalf of the motoring public.”

Patrick Mahar, Town of Denmark Highway Superintendent and current President of the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSATSOH), said, “On behalf of our members, the Association would like to thank Senator O’Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and all of the legislators who have worked so hard to increase local infrastructure funding. Fixing local roads and bridges is similar to repairing the roof or replacing windows on your home. You don’t do it because you want to, you do it because you have to. Businesses need to receive goods, children need to get to school and emergency vehicles need to be able to provide assistance – practically every facet of our daily lives utilizes our local infrastructure system. We appreciate all our state legislators whose bipartisan efforts will hopefully increase CHIPS and restore the vital Extreme Winter Recovery funding to the level our local communities and mutual constituents need.”

Stephen Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), said, “As this winter has shown, our vast system of local roads and bridges require additional funding to handle the impact of harsh weather, from preventing and repairing damage to protecting our residents from dangerous ice and snow conditions. We thank the tireless work of our county highway superintendents and call on our state lawmakers to increase base CHIPS funding, including an appropriation for harsh winter conditions experienced across the state already this year. The safety of New York's drivers depends on adequate funding to maintain, repair, and protect our local roads.”

Gerald K. Geist, Executive Director of the Association of Towns of the State of New York (AOT), said, “The time to address road and bridge funding is now. Supplemental recovery funds are welcome but not enough. Recovery is not enough; we need to improve New York’s transportation infrastructure. We’re calling for an increase in the base CHIP allocations and a fully funded 5-year capital plan. Local governments need to know they can count on the State.”

Peter A. Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM), said, “Every segment of New York’s economy – upstate and downstate – relies on our comprehensive network of local roads and bridges. A state that cares about its economy will provide a strong and growing state investment in municipal roads and bridges. NYCOM therefore urges the Governor and the entire Legislature to come together and provide an overdue increase in CHIPS funding and fully restore the ‘Extreme Winter Recovery’ program.”

Jeff Williams, New York Farm Bureau Public Policy Director, said, “Local roads matter to farmers. The state's family farms depend on safe roads and bridges to get goods to market. Infrastructure remains a priority for New York Farm Bureau and we encourage an increased investment to boost the rural economy.”

Mike Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of New York State, said, “Despite some recent progress, the level of investment in our infrastructure remains inadequate to meet our growing needs. As a result, our roads are crumbling and our bridges are deteriorating. If you placed all 12,000 miles of roads in our state that are in need of repair end to end from New York to Miami, you would have enough potholed pavement for almost five round trips. These are roads and bridges that our communities and economy depend on. I commend Senator O’Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano and their colleagues for their continued leadership on this critical issue and I am proud to stand with them in the fight for increased investment in our roads and bridges.”

Gib Gagnon, Chairman of Rebuild NY Now, said, “Once again, we are entering pothole season in New York, and CHIPS funding is crucial to improving the quality of our local roads and save drivers from unnecessary repairs to damaged cars. ‘Resurfaced’ roads in New York are a poor attempt to fix roads that need to be rebuilt and the potholes you dodge every day are the proof. Rebuild NY Now will continue advocating for infrastructure investments in New York, and thank you to Senator O’Mara and Assemblyman Palmesano for leading the charge in demanding action for our critical infrastructure needs.”

[UPDATE, March 6: Senator O'Mara is scheduled to appear on "Capital Tonight" with Liz Benjamin to discuss today's "Local Roads Matter" rally. Capital Tonight airs each weeknight on Spectrum News at 7 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.]