March 25, 2014

Richard Hanna

Congressman

22nd Congressional District

319 Cannon HOB

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Hanna,

The MAP-21 transportation bill is due to expire Oct. 1. As you negotiate a new bill, I respectfully ask you to consider creating a special highway fund for the exclusive use of states experiencing extreme winter weather.

For quite some time, governments at all levels have shortchanged road funds. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates total government spending at $37 billion annually, or about 18 percent less than what is needed to keep roadways in their current condition, to say nothing of improvements.

This winter has exacerbated this issue. New York has experienced record-shattering low temperatures and heavier-than-normal snowfalls. AAA New York said it fielded 80,000 calls just in January from stranded motorists, an increase in volume of more than 25 percent from the same month last year.

No wonder the Albany Times-Union recently declared this “the worst winter in years for potholes and general road decay.”

New York’s 11.4 million licensed drivers are the ones paying the price. TRIP, a transportation-focused research group, estimates each driver in America pays an additional $377 annually for repairs solely because of crumbling roads.

I am both aware and concerned that the federal highway trust fund will be exhausted this year. New Yorkers already pay 68.2 cents in state and federal gas taxes at the pump, so I do not believe the federal portion should be raised. However, that does not diminish the need for additional road funds.

Last month, President Obama announced California would receive an additional $183 million in federal funds to combat widespread drought. This month, Colorado received an additional $199.3 million to repair damage from last fall’s mudslides.

If the federal government can come up with funds to help these states with their weather-related disasters, then surely it can do the same for cash-strapped highway departments in New York.

I recognize the state has a role in helping its counties, towns and villages survive this winter. I have joined several of my Senate colleagues in asking for a $50 million increase in Consolidation Highway Improvement Program (CHIPs) funds as well as the creation of a dedicated $200 million local bridge and culverts program.

Local governments maintain roads that sustain more than 63 billion miles of travel. To put that in perspective, that’s the amount of miles that vehicles in all of Great Britain traveled on highways in 2007!

Clearly, there is a need for additional funding at both the state and federal level. I’m doing my best to keep that commitment. I appreciate your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to call me at (315) 793-9072.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Griffo

New York State Senator, 47th Senate District