

**Comments on New York Transportation Budget FY 2027
To Joint Legislative Hearing on Transportation 2026 February 3
New York State Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees
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My name is Mark Schaeffer, I live on Jefferson Street in Albany.

I served on the CDTA Board of Directors 2015-2021, and am an active member of People of Albany United for Safe Energy (PAUSE), the affiliate in the Capital Region of the international movement 350.org. I am also a member of the Policy Committee of the New York Renews coalition, which led the fight to pass CLCPA, New York's climate law in 2019, Citizen Action of New York, and DSA. I worked for the NYState Medicaid program 1985-2015, and am now retired. These comments are my own, do not formally represent the views of any organization.

I studied energy and environmental policy in graduate school in the 1970s, worked for the Missouri Coalition for the Environment in St. Louis and the Environmental Action Foundation in Washington DC in the 1980s, and moved to Albany in December 1985 to work for the state. I stayed here past the first winter only because I knew then that the climate was warming. Indeed, despite occasional incursions by arctic air masses due to the disrupted polar vortex, (which is a consequence of relative warming of the arctic, still frigid but less than in the past, reducing the temperature and pressure gradients that drive the circumpolar jet stream), winters have become noticeably shorter since the late 1980s.

I will discuss the political, economic, and ecological context of the state budget in general, then the transportation budget in particular

CONTEXT

Government is the way we do together what we cannot do individually

Budgets show what we care about. Matthew 6:2 "where your treasure lies, there your heart will be also"
Our society is extraordinarily wealthy but radically out of balance

The Trump regime is attacking constitutional democracy as we have known it

US history records an ongoing struggle between the ideals of liberty and justice for all, and the insatiable greed of concentrated wealth. Corruption of government by concentrated wealth, has long been part of the problem but the trump regime has used government power to corrupt civil society, for example major universities, big law firms, and mainstream media.

Prof. Timothy Snyder, author of On Tyranny, has been arguing that the regime's broad spectrum attempt at authoritarian consolidation is well along the path to dictatorship and threatens America's basic constitutional freedoms: <https://snyder.substack.com/p/the-bill-of-wrongs>

Josh Marshall of Talking Points memo wrote recently:

<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/edblog/the-fight-is-upon-us-what-the-right-to-vote-looks-like-on-trumps-terrain-of-violence>

But the regime has been hemorrhaging support, and is lashing out desperately as they continue to lose elections and court cases. If we organize and mobilize the decent and sane majority, we can limit the damage, sweep the next elections, and address our underlying problems,

The Climate Crisis

As Greta Thunberg told world leaders at Davos "**OUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE!**" In 2023, we all smelled it. UN Secretary-General Guterres said the climate crisis is a "**code red for humanity.**" Billions of people worldwide are already affected by increasingly violent weather, and millions of vulnerable people die annually from air pollution. A study last year by Bloomberg found that the economic cost of fossil-fueled extreme weather in the US in a recent 12 month period was \$1 TRILLION DOLLARS, taking into account skyrocketing insurance rates in response to increasingly destructive fires, floods, and droughts,

In business as usual scenarios, superstorms like Sandy would become increasingly frequent by midcentury, repeatedly inundating the NYC metro area, and low lying areas of Long Island and the Hudson Valley, severely damaging the downstate transportation system. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The affluent industrial countries must take the lead in reducing net greenhouse emissions to zero, then below as fast as possible. The US leads the world in cumulative Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and must now lead the world in reductions. With Congress gridlocked, states must lead, especially New York, an affluent and progressive state. I appreciate the Legislature's initiative to put climate on New York's agenda when major climate legislation was not on Governor Cuomo's priority list, to pass the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act into law. But we must fund a just transition to a clean renewable energy system fast enough to prevent disasters from triggering catastrophe. The Legislature must resist pressure and disinformation from polluter and other corporate lobbies, and our misinformed governor, to retreat from CLCPA targets.

The good news that Gov. Hochul ignores is that renewables such as solar and wind are now the least costly forms of energy supply and together with efficiency and energy storage can meet all our needs for generations forward. Solar and wind energy are free -- we only need to pay for purchase and installation of equipment to collect them. They have been on a long downward exponential cost curve, have now arrived, and now dominate new electricity generation, world wide and in the USA. We currently spend some \$50 Billion/year on fossil fuels. The NY economy is over \$2 Trillion annually - 1% invested in clean energy would pay for itself in avoided costs.

The state budget should fully fund a just transition to a clean energy economy, as fast as practically feasible - the CLCPA targets should be a floor, not a ceiling. Strengthening the targets in line with IPCC global targets for 50-52% emission reduction by 2030 would be better; best, as a progressive state in a very wealthy country, would be to adjust the targets above the IPCC's to take into account the most salient facts since CLCPA was enacted:

- 1) *greenhouse emissions and destructive violent weather have increased much faster than projected in 2019*
- 2) *clean energy has become the best buy in direct costs, which in turn are dwarfed by the indirect ecological and social costs of delay, and the corresponding benefits of prevention*
- 3) *the federal government under the trump regime is now an accelerant of the emergency, acting like arsonists, pouring gasoline and crude oil on our burning planetary home.*

Rosy Scenario:

The executive budget reflects increasing revenues resulting from the sharp rise in the stock market, but serious economists have been warning that the stock market rise, largely in the tech sector, looks like a bubble which is likely to burst.

For example, Dean Baker of CEPR, one of the few economists who warned of the housing bubble before the 2008 financial collapse: <https://deanbaker22.substack.com/p/what-the-ai-bubble-means-for-the> and Nobel economics laureate Paul Krugman:

<https://www.businessinsider.com/paul-krugman-ai-boom-dotcom-internet-bubble-crash-musk-bailout-2025-2>

NYS at very least should plan not only to stay afloat if and when the bubble bursts, but to restore funding to programs that the regime is cutting - both cuts in federal programs and cuts in assistance to states.

Runaway Inequality: Upward Transfer

The notorious Willie Sutton, asked why he robbed banks, said "that's where the money is."

New York is an affluent state in an extraordinarily wealthy country, but that wealth is much too concentrated.

Since the 1970s, there has been an **immense upward transfer of wealth** from the working and middle classes, 90% of the US population, to the wealthiest 1%. The Rand Corporation, the think tank that crunches numbers for the Pentagon, hardly a hotbed of Marxism, reported that from the mid 1970s to the mid teens the cumulative upward transfer was some \$50 TRILLION, which comes to about \$167,000 for every man, woman and child in the 90%, or 2/3 of a million dollars for a typical family of four. Nick Hanauer explained in Time:

<https://time.com/5888024/50-trillion-income-inequality-america/>

Harold Meyerson recently analyzed newer numbers, including the effects of the first Trump maladministration, showing that the total is now \$79 TRILLION, some \$250,000 per capita, or a cool million for typical four person households: <https://prospect.org/2025/12/03/79-trillion-heist-worker-pay>

Polls show overwhelming public support for more progressive tax policy to make millionaires and billionaires pay a fairer share. If New York is serious about affordability for the vast majority of the public, the state needs to

claw back some of the ill-gotten gains of the plutocracy, as proposed by the Invest in Our New York coalition. They will continue to be rich beyond the dreams of maharajahs, getting even richer a bit more slowly.

The big brutal budget bill

Trump (elected by 49%) claimed a mandate for the so-called OBBBA, which I call the One Brutal Billionaires' Bonanza.

The package included truly brutal across the board cuts in programs benefitting working families:
Cuts in many human services funded by the federal government;
Massive cuts in benefits to children and underpaid and disabled Americans, including Medicaid and SNAP food assistance;
Draconian cuts to defund clean energy programs while subsidizing polluting and destabilizing fossil fuels;
Cuts in education
Cuts in public health programs in America and worldwide: the Lancet, a leading medical journal, estimated that cuts in international health programs have caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in the global South and are on track to kill some 14 Million people in the next few years, comparable to the greatest plagues and famines in history. What goes around comes around - uncontrolled epidemics in Africa will come here;
Cuts in aid to states - the cut to New York is close to \$10 Billion a year, according to Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI).
Trillions in tax cuts, with the lion's share going to undertaxed corporations and super-rich individuals.

\$12 B annual windfall to millionaires and billionaires in NYS, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute. If the state would merely recapture that windfall, roughly balancing the cuts in federal aid to the state, New York's elite would still continue to get even richer, a little more slowly.

Unmet NYS needs

But even before Trump, New York has been underinvesting in programs to improve the lives of working families that the private market does not fund

Affordable and sustainable quality housing for every New Yorker

Universal Child Care

Education: pre-school, public education, after-school programs, smaller classes, AP education for students prepared to benefit, vocational and special education to those who need it, improvements in SUNY and CUNY, and lifetime continuing education;

Health care as a human right, through the NY Health Act, as every other advanced country provides at lower cost than the USA, with better life expectancy outcomes;

Environment and climate justice as I discussed last week;

Justice - investments in crime prevention and restorative justice that can actually reduce crime and compensate victims rather than mass incarceration which tends to cause recidivism;

Enough good Jobs at living wages for all workers, guaranteed income for those not in the labor market

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions in New York, about 30% of the total according to the NY Climate Action Council (CAC) 2022 Scoping Plan final report.

The Congestion Pricing program enacted by the Legislature in the face of scare mongering has been a dramatic success, reducing congestion, pollution, and travel time throughout the NYC metro area.

Doing the right thing well is very popular,

Below are some points for the Legislature to consider in enacting the transportation section of the NY State Budget:

1) All forms of transportation now burning fossil fuels should convert to zero emissions, especially battery electric, as fast as feasible, starting with public fleets: Albany County Executive McCoy committed to electrify the County fleet by 2025. The state should fund all public fleets in New York to do likewise.

2) Expanding, electrifying and improving public transportation must be a top priority, to reduce emissions, improve access especially for disadvantaged communities, and improve public safety and health. Transit is much safer and consumes less energy per passenger mile than private automobiles.

3) Express bus systems aka Bus Rapid Transit, on the model of Curitiba Brazil, with express bus lanes and stations at main stops, should be created in all metro areas, especially upstate.

4) Major investments to electrify, expand, and improve intercity rail transportation of both people and freight would reduce emissions, improve access, and create many good jobs.

High-Speed and especially Very High Speed Rail (aka bullet trains) can be a practical alternative to energy-intensive intercity air travel for distances up to a few hundred miles. Saved travel time would be greater for VHSR, making it competitive with air travel for longer distances, but investment costs and deployment times for suitable new VHSR tracks would also be greater.

This year's budget should fund a detailed cost/benefit study comparing HSR and VHSR for a line from Buffalo to Montauk with a Albany to Montreal and Albany to Boston branches, taking into account total life cycle costs and benefits, including external social and environmental costs and benefits, choose one and complete it before 2030, creating large numbers of good jobs which should be union jobs.

5) Transit oriented development can reduce trip lengths and congestion, save people time, and help build a sense of community while reducing emissions.

6) Complete streets policies should be expanded everywhere.

Bicycling can provide a fossil free mode of transportation and excellent exercise, especially as diesel and internal combustion vehicles are phased out, but **protected bicycle lanes** are very important for cyclist safety.

7) Financing should be made available to cover the full front end costs of new and secondhand electric vehicles, especially for working people struggling to make ends meet, because EVs have higher purchase costs but lower energy and operating costs, and increasingly will have lower total life cycle costs, on top of huge social, environmental and public health benefits.

Some additional points:

The Legislature should fully support the MTA plan

But operating assistance for Upstate transit \$370 Million is not enough compared to \$8.6 Billion for MTA.

Add transit for the west side of the lower Hudson Valley, with new a commuter rail line ASAP and express buses in the interim. Residents of that region opposed congestion pricing because they did not have adequate transit options which should be a priority

Charging capacity is a bottleneck for upstate bus systems like CDTA and must be fully funded.

Street paving should prioritize bus routes.

Diesel vehicles, especially trucks and buses, polluting EJ communities should be phased out ASAP and replaced with electric vehicles

To conclude, there is more than enough money in the NY State economy to fund everything listed above, if the Legislature and Governor summon the courage necessary to compel the plutocrats and pollutocrats to disgorge some of their ill-gotten gains to fund public interest investments that will significantly improve the lives of New Yorkers and be very popular when in service.