**COUNTY OF SUFFOLK**

**OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

**Edward P. Romaine**
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

February 3, 2026

**Statement of Edward P. Romaine**
**Suffolk County Executive**

At the Joint Hearing of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance
& Assembly Standing Committee on Ways and Means
Concerning the SFY 2026-27 Executive Budget
Proposal Relating to Transportation
Tuesday, February 3, 2026
Albany, NY

Chairman Pretlow, Chairwoman Krueger, and members of the Legislature:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today and for your continued support of public transportation across New York State. I am submitting this statement on behalf of Suffolk County to highlight a significant inequity in the distribution of Statewide Mass Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) funding and to urge the Legislature to correct this imbalance in the SFY 2026–27 budget.

STOA is the backbone of bus operations for approximately 130 transit systems across New York State. These funds determine whether local governments can maintain service levels, provide reliable schedules, attract and retain transit workers, and meet growing mobility needs.

Suffolk County residents have demonstrated that they respond to improved transit service. Following the launch of our redesigned bus network, **ridership increased by approximately 40% in just the past two years**. This growth demonstrates strong demand for frequent, direct, and reliable service. However, the current STOA allocation limits Suffolk County's ability to improve reliability and expand service to meet this rising demand. It also leaves Suffolk County at a substantial disadvantage compared to peer downstate suburban systems.

An analysis of STOA allocations to downstate suburban bus systems shows a persistent and troubling disparity between Suffolk County Transit and comparable systems in Nassau and Westchester Counties.

In 2024:

- Suffolk County received $45.4 million in STOA, while Nassau received $119 million and Westchester received $98.4 million.
- STOA covered 69.9% of Nassau's operating expenses and 51.3% of Westchester's, but only 40.0% of Suffolk's.
- Local taxpayers in Suffolk were forced to cover 32.5% of operating costs, compared to **just 1.6% in Nassau** and 14.4% in Westchester.

This funding imbalance persists despite Suffolk's higher population, larger service area and greater number of annual vehicle revenue miles:

- Suffolk's population of 1.53 million residents exceeds Nassau (1.38 million) and Westchester (1.0 million).
- Suffolk's service area spans 912 square miles, **more than triple Nassau's** (285 sq mi) and double Westchester's (450 sq mi) area.
- Suffolk operates more annual vehicle revenue miles than either peer county: Suffolk (15,211,187), Nassau (10,735,039) and Westchester (10,439,790).

This data makes clear that Suffolk County is disproportionately underfunded for transit operations. To underscore the vast difference in funding among peer transit services, if Suffolk County were to receive the average percent of STOA funding received by Nassau and Westchester (60.6%), **an additional $22.1 million would be allocated annually** for Suffolk County Transit service!

These additional funds would provide much needed reliability improvements, increased service frequencies on high demand routes and targeted service expansions. They would ensure that public transit is a viable option for residents, workers, and visitors on Long Island and reduce reliance on single occupant automobiles that continue to worsen our traffic congestion and travel delays.

At the same time, operating costs continue to rise due to inflation, fuel, maintenance, and insurance increases. Federal pandemic relief funding has been exhausted, leaving systems like Suffolk County Transit to be increasingly dependent on STOA to maintain current service levels.

Suffolk County is doing its part. We have redesigned our network, improved service productivity, grown ridership, and stretched every available dollar. What we cannot fix locally is a state funding structure that leaves Suffolk County Transit significantly underfunded compared to peer systems.

In addition to ensuring that Suffolk County is provided with its fair share of STOA, there is also a profound need for transformative capital investment in the MTA LIRR's infrastructure to provide Suffolk County with a revitalized 21st-century rail system to meet the current and future needs of its residents, businesses, and visitors.

Large portions of Suffolk County remain dependent on diesel rail service, limiting frequency, reliability, and one-seat rides. Expanding electrification and double-tracking additional Long Island Rail Road corridors like the Main Line to Yaphank and the Port Jefferson Branch, and making strategic rail capacity investments in places like the Montauk Branch are sorely needed. These projects would significantly improve regional mobility, reduce roadway congestion, and better align Long Island with the State's climate and clean transportation goals. Sustained operating support through STOA and strategic rail modernization must move forward together to deliver a fully integrated, high-performing transportation network for Long Island.

The SFY 2026–27 budget is an opportunity to correct the long-standing STOA imbalance, provide Suffolk County with a fair share of operating support, and prioritize capital project funding support for the MTA LIRR in Suffolk County.

I respectfully urge the Committees to increase STOA funding by at least $10 million dollars for the 2027 budget year ahead to allow Suffolk County Transit to reflect the scale of service we provide and the population we serve, and help us meet the burgeoning demand SCT is experiencing. Thank you for your continued leadership and for supporting Suffolk County Transit and public transportation across New York State.

Sincerely,

Edward P. Romaine

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Suffolk County Executive