

# OPINION

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### COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

## Next step for rural public transportation

The next stop for the future of rural, upstate New York public transportation will be the desk of Governor Andrew Cuomo.

The governor is going to make a critical decision on legislation I sponsored in 2017, which recently received nearly unanimous legislative approval, to establish an "Upstate Transit Funding Board" within the state the Department of Transportation (DOT). The governor vetoed similar legislation year. Many transportation advocates join me in urging the governor to reverse that decision this year.

The specific concern — one I've sought to address since 2013 — poses a crisis for the future of rural, upstate public transportation. New York State's comprehensive Medicaid redesign strategy since 2013 has included a shift in the administration of "Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation," or NEMT, from localities to the state. Viewed as a cost-cutting move by state officials, many local transportation leaders have raised concerns about the plan — especially the impact the state takeover is having on rural communities and populations including the disabled, the elderly, and the rural workforce.

The state Department of Health (DOH) has been transitioning the management of transportation systems from locally based administration to a state-level system operated out of Albany. However,

local officials, mobility managers, transportation providers, and community organizations from impacted upstate regions say that the new, one-size-fits-all approach, which might be workable in suburban and urban areas downstate, has not proven cost-effective or efficient in their rural communities.

That represents the crux of the challenge. Many forums and meetings I have held over the past few years have reaffirmed this reality: the transition is not working. We have discussed the shortcomings of the new system, including the elimination of existing transportation routes, the future of locally based cost-efficiency initiatives, and the overall disruption of services.

A number of local systems are at risk (and in Tioga County, for example, already eliminated) by Albany's attempt at a blanket, statewide approach to their management and operation. Stated another way: think of this transportation network as a wheel and Albany bureaucrats are taking spokes out of the wheel.

The changes have lacked common sense and cost too much. Local officials from numerous counties, including all of the counties I represent as part of the 58th Senate District (Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates counties), have highlighted the flaws. We've been constantly working to bring more widespread attention to the changes underway, fully assess the consequences, and do what we can to ensure that

the impact on rural residents receives a full and a fair hearing.

The legislation I sponsor stresses that fares alone are not sufficient to cover the costs of providing public transit services and the systems must rely on annual state funding. Consequently, 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.

I believe we make a strong case. This action would ensure the long-term operation and viability of public transportation systems throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and across Upstate New York.

For thousands upon thousands of upstate residents, these systems provide indispensable links to their jobs, medical appointments, schools, shopping destinations, and other needs.

Public transit systems also stand as cornerstones of regional transportation networks vital to economic development, job growth, anti-poverty and housing initiatives, energy and environmental conservation.

We continue to urge Governor Cuomo to make the next step for rural, upstate public transportation a positive one.



### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Canfield Park work a job well done

To the Editor:  
 It's nice to know that in Coming, N.Y., good sense usually wins the day.

The decision to re-invigorate Canfield Park, or erroneously, "Court-house Park," was a good one.

For years the potential was present for making a "reader's park" from such a lovely setting. To that end I tried it out on Tuesday morning and C. S. Lewis jumped right off the pages at me!

Trails of packed pebbles was a good idea for two reasons — keeping skateboards at bay (sorry, kids, but you don't need to take them everywhere) and to facilitate those who love to walk on a rainy day.

The benches are ergonomically correct and there's lots of them.

I hope we do not panic by denying the smoker a place to mix oxygen with his tars and nicotine, for no doubt to him, smoking

is a pleasure. Here, however is a tip for keeping the place clean and visually perfect. Do what a friend of mine has done all his life — that is, pop the last little bit of tobacco out of your ciggy and place the filter in your pocket. My friend considers this his responsibility and really, it's an agreeable solution. I puff cigars and always take them away with me.

Congratulations Mr. Chuck King. You and your staff are taking good care of our nifty parks around town!

Many thanks to THE CORNING LEADER for your civic heart.

Alan De Wolfe  
 Corning

#### Pension divestment could cost billions

To the Editor,  
 I'm retired, and on a fixed income. I'm growing concerned about the proposed divestment plan. It could mean real cuts in services or more taxes.

Their basic idea is that pensions would be required to pull all investments from any fossil fuel related company. This would require a lot of money to be moved, and forcing this change will result in a pension portfolio that is less diversified and more dependent on riskier and lower-yielding investments. I've never worked on Wall Street, but I can tell you, that kind of move is not smart.

Experts agree. Comptroller DiNapoli hates this idea. DiNapoli and others believe that this plan will mean billions in losses. But you don't have to be an expert to understand that a plan that is expected to lose billions is a bad one.

I do not scare easily. But this plan scares me. I am going to be stuck footing the bill for this bad idea, either through tax hikes or spending cuts. For someone who's on a fixed income, like me, this bad plan will have real consequences.

Jim Valpone  
 Hammondsport

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Sun. 7/9	3:15, 6:15	3:15, 6:15
Mon. 7/10	3:15, 6:15	3:15, 6:15
Tues. 7/11	3:15, 6:15	3:15, 6:15
Wed. & Thurs.	3:15, 6:15	

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Sat. 7/8	3:30, 6:30, 9:15	3:30, 6:30
Sun. 7/9	3:30, 6:30	3:30, 6:30
Mon. 7/10	3:30, 6:30	3:30, 6:30
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