



**TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW J. DRISCOLL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY AUTHORITY**

**JOINT HEARING OF THE LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES -
TRANSPORTATION
TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2021**

Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Kennedy and Magnarelli and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Fiscal and Transportation Committees; thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Matthew Driscoll and I am the Executive Director for the New York State Thruway Authority.

The Governor Thomas E. Dewey Thruway is a 570-mile superhighway spanning New York State, and is one of the longest toll systems in the United States. Underscoring its importance to the state, region and nation, the Thruway serves as a vital link to long distance interstate travel and provides the major route of access for visitors to our state's tourism anchors – it is also a principal artery of commerce and serves as a primary catalyst of the state's economic activity.

The Thruway Authority is operated and maintained solely as a user fee system and is not supported with any state Taxpayer funding.

The 2021 Thruway budget represents a total financial commitment of \$1.1 billion. It is a budget that is balanced; provides the necessary resources to operate the system at a high level; and maintains our infrastructure by maximizing funding for critical projects through our multi-year Capital Plan.

As we are all aware, the COVID pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges to almost every aspect of our daily lives. Throughout this crisis, the Thruway Authority has continued to progress transformative changes.

On November 14th, six weeks ahead of schedule, cashless tolling went live on the Thruway's entire ticketed system. Implementing cashless tolling is a long-term capital investment that improves the safety and convenience of the system for all our customers. The environmental benefits are clear, and we have already seen reduced congestion and improved traffic flow with the reduction of stop and go traffic and idling at toll plazas. We've already removed the toll plazas at six high volume interchanges which means approximately 50 percent of all traffic no longer passes through a toll booth.

The remaining toll plazas will be removed this year making driving through toll booths a thing of the past on our entire system.

Along with the conversion to system-wide cashless tolling, the Authority has expanded its aggressive education and marketing campaign to raise awareness and promote E-ZPass usage – the most convenient way to pay for tolls. This is a multi-platform campaign including social media, drive-time radio ads and targeted in-app advertisements on Waze and search engines.

The rebuilding and redevelopment of the Thruway's 27 service areas is also advancing. The selected proposer, Empire State Thruway Partners, was approved by the Authority Board in May 2020 with their \$450 million investment plan. Service area improvements include enhancing customer amenities, technology, commercial truck services and overall facility energy efficiency, including electric vehicle charging stations.

To support the ChargeNY program, we are creating an expansive network of electric vehicle charging stations, which is key to the increased adoption of zero-emission electric vehicles. We currently have 39 EV charging stations operating at 23 locations on the Thruway system. This foundation,

coupled with the redevelopment of our 27 service plazas and accompanying charging stations, will result in a robust corridor of more than 100 fast charging EV stations with an average of 30 miles between each location along the Thruway.

On June 15, 2020, we opened the 3.6-mile shared use path on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. To date, more than 250,000 visitors have taken advantage of this one of kind destination featuring six scenic overlooks, digital kiosks, and impressive public art installations. We also feature dedicated parking spots reserved for electric vehicle charging at the Westchester and Rockland landings. Last year's opening included safety protocols to limit the potential spread of COVID and those efforts continue to be in place.

Maintaining and modernizing a superhighway requires continual reinvestment. Last year, the Authority reinvested approximately \$544 million into its infrastructure, by undertaking roadway and bridge rehabilitation and replacement projects across the state. To support our continuing investments, we instituted a modest toll adjustment on the Mario M. Cuomo Bridge that went into effect on January 1, 2021. The Thruway Authority Board

of Directors approved the proposal in December 2020, after a lengthy public process that began in the summer of 2019. It had been more than a decade since any previous adjustment to our tolls. To be clear, NY E-ZPass customers will see no change in their tolls, except for the Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. That said, we fully appreciate the impact the Bridge has on the local economy and at our public meetings in Rockland and Westchester Counties, we clearly heard the importance of keeping tolls low for residents and commuters.

So, to address that feedback, we created a new resident E-ZPass plan for Westchester and Rockland County residents that keeps their toll rate flat through 2022 when traveling over the Bridge. Approximately 250,000 qualified residents who have a vehicle registered in one of those two counties were automatically enrolled. For commuters, their tolls also remain very low – they pay only 15 cents more this year, and another 30 cents in 2022. Again, in all other areas of our system, NY E-ZPass customers will see no toll increase whatsoever.

These accomplishments have been possible because of the commitment from the men and women of the Thruway Authority. Their dedication and

professionalism during these most trying times has kept the Thruway a safe, reliable system for all motorists, and has been integral in allowing for the continued movement of goods throughout the state. Those that work out on the roadway each day are key to our success, and they deserve to have a safe work environment as much as any other employee. As part of that commitment, we continue to promote awareness about the Move Over Law and look forward to the day when we can be back out interacting with motorists at our service areas to talk about the importance of the law.

In closing, please know that I remain committed to keeping the Thruway the safest and most convenient means of travel in the state. Whether one is commuting to work, visiting friends or family, enjoying the recreational opportunities around our state, or supporting the freight economy, the Thruway will take you there. Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.