



NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE

March 8, 2016

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Executive Chamber
State Capitol, Second Floor
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Matthew J. Driscoll, Commissioner
NYS Department of Transportation
50 Wolf Road
Albany, NY 12232

Hon. John J. Flanagan
Senate Temporary President & Majority Leader
Senate Coalition Co-Leader
Room 330 Capitol
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl E. Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly
Room 932
LOB
Albany, NY 12248

Hon. Jeffrey A. Klein
IDC Conference Leader
Senate Coalition Co-Leader
Room 913 LOB
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Democratic Conference Leader
Room 907
LOB
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Brian Kolb
Assembly Minority Conference Leader
Room 933 LOB
Albany, NY 12248

Hon. Joseph Morelle
Assembly Majority Leader
Room 926 LOB
Albany, NY 12248

Hon. Joseph E. Robach, Chair
Senate Transportation Committee
Room 803 LOB
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. David Gantt, Chair
Assembly Transportation Committee
Room 830 LOB
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo and Legislative Leaders:

As we have for the past three years, we once again appreciate and welcome the opportunity to contact you on behalf of local transportation leaders, municipalities and taxpayers from throughout our respective legislative districts and across New York State, concerning critical funding for our local roads, bridges and culverts.

We first would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that equitability, fairness and parity is essential when funding our state's infrastructure. We support and recognize the

importance of funding for the five-year MTA Capital Plan as a critical infrastructure investment that is necessary to meet the transportation needs of residents, commuters and visitors for our downstate region. In addition, we believe just as strongly that funding for the five-year DOT Capital Plan is a necessary and critical investment for the residents, motorists and taxpayers of the State of New York, particularly for our upstate region. We are one state, with challenging infrastructure needs statewide, and therefore we believe it is critically important that the five-year capital plans for the MTA and the DOT should reflect true parity and equal funding -- as it was always achieved by previous Governors and legislatures prior to 2010.

As we focus on working to improve our statewide infrastructure, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight an important achievement from our last three enacted state budgets that has made a great difference for so many communities, economies and motorists statewide: the much-needed and long-overdue increase in state funding for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) which, over the last two years, was combined with the Winter Recovery funding distributed through the CHIPS formula.

We continue to value your commitment and leadership on this important issue and we ask for your support as we look ahead to the 2016-17 budget negotiations. We believe it is critically important to build on this past success and renew our commitment to addressing the tremendous, unmet needs and challenges facing our local roads, bridges and culverts in every region across New York State.

We believe an even stronger commitment in this year's final budget to our locally maintained transportation infrastructure is not only feasible and justified, but also imperative to realizing our shared economic, fiscal and community development goals.

Therefore, we are again proudly joining with our local leaders to urge you to support a multi-year strategy to address local infrastructure needs in order to help provide our citizens, local property taxpayers, tourists and motorists with the kind of local transportation system they need and deserve.

First, we are seeking a \$250-million increase to the CHIPS base aid program, which would bring total state aid to \$688.1 million. This proposed funding would restore the \$50 million in Winter Recovery funds that are eliminated in the 2016-2017 Executive Budget proposal and include it in the CHIPS base aid. We would also provide for an additional \$200-million increase to the CHIPS base to help meet the increasing infrastructure needs of our local communities.

Secondly, we propose a multi-year "State Aid to Local Bridge and Culvert Program" distributed fairly and regionally with local control and decision making to ensure that every region of our state benefits from this important and needed infrastructure investment. Specifically, we are seeking a four-year, \$600-million commitment (\$150 million per year) to improve our local bridges and culverts throughout communities statewide.

As we work together to finalize our five-year MTA and DOT capital plans to improve New York State's overall infrastructure, we have a tremendous opportunity to work within the

context of this year's budget proposal to readily meet this commitment to our local roads, bridges and culverts. We believe we can and we should share a portion of this unparalleled infrastructure commitment with our local municipalities through the CHIPS program, as well as the proposed Local Bridge and Culvert Program. This will provide the critical flexibility and funding localities need to help meet their growing and challenging infrastructure demands.

We not only believe there's a compelling case for New York State to take these proposed steps to address these urgent local transportation and infrastructure shortcomings, we also believe it's simply the right thing to do. Please consider these points, which we have mentioned before, as you consider our request:

- Local governments are responsible for maintaining nearly 87 percent of the roads in New York State, and one-half of the state's 18,000 bridges;
- Drivers on local roads contribute nearly half of the gas taxes collected in New York State;
- 48 percent of the vehicle miles traveled in New York are on local roads, yet less than 12 percent of the taxes and fees paid to the state by these drivers go back to maintaining local roads;
- Federal transportation aid to New York (FAST Act) is primarily directed to the National Highway System (interstates, principal arterials and expressways) which means even less funding getting to the local systems;
- In 2012, the state-owned system benefited from a \$1-billion accelerated bridge and pavement program – a program credited with improving or replacing more than 100 bridges and repairing 2,000 miles of state-owned roads, among other public works projects. A similar state investment must now be given to our local needs, particularly for critical pavement, bridge and culvert work;
- Estimates by the State Comptroller, state DOT and other independent studies have shown a large number of local road mileage deteriorating and many local bridges rated structurally deficient or functionally obsolete;
- 32 percent of bridges are deficient and 40 percent of road pavements are rated fair or poor, and getting worse;
- According to TRIP, a national transportation advocacy group, roads and bridges that are deficient, congested or lack desirable safety features cost New York motorists an additional \$24.9 billion statewide annually – nearly \$2,300 per driver in some areas – due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic accidents and congestion-related delays;
- Although much has been mentioned about choosing projects that have a statewide economic development impact, we contend that businesses locate in towns, villages and cities and it is equally important to ensure local roads and bridges are maintained to spur economic

development and job creation, while helping to control property taxes for individuals and businesses in local communities;

- Every \$1 invested in the CHIPS program is \$1 less the local property taxpayer has to pay. Furthermore, every \$1 invested in the CHIPS program can save from \$6-\$14 in long-term rehabilitation costs;

- Safety – how many of our first responders travel over our local roads and bridges to get to an emergency or crisis? How many of our children and grandchildren are placed on school buses every morning and travel over local roads and bridges? It is beyond comprehension that we continue to risk tragic accidents involving our children, first responders, families, farmers and motorists overall because we are not making the critical and necessary safety improvements to address this growing crisis to fix our local roads and bridges;

- Our nationally and internationally recognized agriculture and tourism industries are equally dependent upon a well-maintained and viable local infrastructure. Going from a well-conditioned state road to a deteriorating local road or deficient bridge does not send the right message to our local visitors and farmers;

- Locally administered highway projects will result in business for local contractors and work crews that will provide local employment and economic opportunities;

- The State Comptroller further estimates there will be \$89 billion in unmet local infrastructure needs over the next 20 years, with much of this shortfall on the already deteriorating local transportation system; and

- According to an analysis by the NYS Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, the local highway system faces an annual funding gap of \$1.3 billion. Adding to the alarming urgency of all of the above, we also have to recognize that local governments continue to struggle to address budgetary demands in the face of the state-imposed property tax cap and freeze, rising pension and healthcare costs, unfunded state mandates, and stagnant Aid to Municipalities (AIM). This clearly demonstrates the incredible challenge facing our local municipalities to meet the critical investment level needed to improve local roads, bridges and culverts. A stronger state-local partnership is the only answer.

In closing, we believe the 2016-17 New York State budget provides a tremendous opportunity to resume true parity for New York's transportation infrastructure and transform this critical sector of our state-local partnership. The commitment and investment we are seeking, through the CHIPS program and the proposed State Aid to Local Bridge and Culvert Program, will build on the foundation we have successfully made in the last three state budgets and further solidify our fundamental belief that "Local Roads Matter."

With the renewed, vigorous state investment we have outlined we will finally move toward the safe and reliable local infrastructure we envision, an infrastructure that will serve as the catalyst for future economic development and job creation throughout our local communities.

As always, we thank you for your leadership and thoughtful consideration of this very important request. We look forward to working with you once again to achieve these critical goals and thereby make the 2016-17 New York State budget truly transformative for our local transportation system.

Sincerely,

Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
58th Senate District

Assemblyman Philip A. Palmesano
132nd Assembly District