



NEW YORK STATE
COUNTY HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION, INC.

New York State County Highway Superintendents Association
Joint Legislative Public Hearings on the
2021-2022 Executive Budget Proposal -- Transportation

Good morning Chairs Kreuger and Weinstein, and the members of the Senate and Assembly. I am Joseph Wisinski, President of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association (NYSCHSA) and Madison County Highway Superintendent. Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments today on the 2021-2022 Executive Budget and its impact on counties' local road and bridge programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone, and our county highway departments are no exception. We adhere to and keep current on all requirements to minimize the spread including rigorous cleaning and sanitizing of vehicles and equipment, social distancing, and mask wearing as we go about the business of reconstructing, repairing, and maintaining our local transportation systems.

As you know, local roads and bridges make up the bulk of the statewide system. Eighty-seven percent of the roads and over half of the bridges are owned by local governments. Our crews are out plowing county roads as well as many state-owned highways to assure safe winter travel for motorists who need to get to and from their jobs, homes, schools, hospitals, and other destinations through all kinds of Northeast winter weather events.

The state budget adopted in April of last year established a 2-year, \$11.9 billion Transportation Capital Program. While that plan was \$3 billion higher than the last two years of the previous plan, appropriations for local transportation programs (CHIPS, Marchiselli, PAVE-NY and BRIDGE NY) were held flat. The level for CHIPS funding has been the same for eight years.

Recognizing the needs of the local systems were underfunded in the Executive Budget, you and your colleagues restored the Extreme Winter Recovery program at \$65 million. Without this critical funding added by the Legislature, it would have been even more difficult to maintain the vast local road and bridge systems. Our association certainly recognizes and appreciates the Legislature's role in promoting a fair distribution of funding among the various modes of transportation and diverse regions of the state.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the economy was shut down to contain the infection and state and local tax revenues plummeted. The first impact to highway departments was a 69-day delay by the State Department of Transportation in the official notification to municipalities of funding allocations. During this period, unverifiable rumors of expected significant funding cuts prevented municipalities from moving forward with many road and bridge projects as they could not be certain of full state reimbursement. When official notification did come, it advised all local highway departments that only 80% of their funding would be guaranteed. Statewide, this meant a direct loss of over \$120 million in programming this construction season.

Our transportation system cannot afford funding reductions. According to a recent update to the study by the New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (A 20 Year Needs Assessment of Local

Jurisdiction Highways and Bridges in New York State), nearly half of our local roads are in fair or poor condition and, excluding New York City, localities must now spend an additional \$1.75 billion annually just to bring our system into a 12-year paving cycle. With sales tax revenues plummeting, and county budgets stretched to the limit, full state capital funding support is essential.

That is why we are encouraged by the provisions in the Governor's Executive Budget that seeks to reimburse municipalities for local assistance "withholds" and anticipates that an improving state receipts picture, the availability of federal Coronavirus Relief resources, and other positive fiscal developments will allow for the partial restoration of these funds to be reconciled and repaid in the final quarter of FY 2021.

At this juncture, however, we have not been advised by NYSDOT or the Division of the Budget if the local transportation capital programs are included in this payback scenario and, if so, how would the return of this funding to highway departments be administered.

To ensure long-term economic revitalization and a safe, resilient, and functional infrastructure, especially for essential workers to travel to their jobs, the funds appropriated and allocated to counties and municipalities in the 2020-2021 state budget for CHIPS, PAVE-NY and EWR must be fully restored and made available in a timely manner by the state Department of Transportation and Division of the Budget. We are urging your support and assistance in working with the Governor to restore this funding as soon as possible.

Since the pandemic, local governments have seen a massive drop in sales tax collections. This is hurting their bottom lines, and many have few options to "plug the hole," according to State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. Bridges owned by New York's local governments need an estimated \$27.4 billion in repairs, according to a report (Local Bridges by the Numbers, October 2017). DiNapoli's review found local bridges are more likely to be structurally deficient than state-owned bridges (12.8 percent to 9 percent). While the cost for repairs is staggering, DiNapoli found the number of "structurally deficient" locally owned bridges has declined in recent years. But concerns about how local governments will find funding for repairs is growing as Washington considers changes to infrastructure aid, DiNapoli said. In 2016, statewide, 91 bridges were listed as closed. Most of those are local bridges.

BRIDGE-NY is helping. Over the last four years, \$450 million was awarded for 179 bridge and 118 culverts projects. But that represents only 36.6% and 13.4% of total applications, respectively. The BRIDGE-NY program limits the number and value of bridge and culvert project applications that can be submitted to the state by each municipality, so the need is demonstratively greater.

This year, BRIDGE-NY is budgeted for \$100 million but the solicitation for bridge and culvert projects has yet to be released. BRIDGE-NY is an important source of work which has a return on investment by its impact on local businesses, jobs, and the state's overall economy. We are urging that this program move forward as soon as possible.

Infrastructure is a municipality's greatest asset and, as the storm events of the last few years have demonstrated, vitally important to the public and the economy of the State. The repair, rehabilitation, efficient operations, and strategic replacement of existing transportation infrastructure are required for safety, mobility, and for the State to remain economically competitive.

Today, funding shortages mean many local governments' preventive pavement preservation strategies—to apply well-timed and targeted maintenance treatments—fall short of what is necessary to avoid more costly major rehabilitation or reconstruction down the road. The inability to stabilize pavement and bridge conditions in our state is a huge concern for the future viability of the economy.

Our Association wants to help achieve the Governor's articulated vision to "reimagine, rebuild, and renew New York." Local roads generate jobs and support employment. Thousands of New York citizens are employed through the road and bridge construction and maintenance industry. It is estimated that each \$150

million in funding for local roads, bridges and culverts results in up to 4,200 highway construction-related jobs. Fiscal experts agree that borrowing for infrastructure is a prudent investment. The Executive Budget documents highlight that total State debt has increased by only 0.7% annually since the Governor took office in 2011. Borrowing costs are at an all-time low and the State's credit ratings have been upgraded with the State having its highest credit rating since 1972 prior to the pandemic.

NYSCHSA SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING:

2020-2021 Budget Actions

- √ Full restoration of the \$120.6 million 2020-21 cut
- √ Immediate rollout of the 2020-21 \$100 million BRIDGE-NY program

2021-2022 Budget Actions

- √ Fully fund CHIPS at \$438 million
- √ Increase Extreme Winter Recovery funding to \$100 million
- √ Fully fund BRIDGE-NY at \$100 million
- √ Fully fund PAVE-NY program at \$100 million

Local roads are essential, with hundreds of thousands of daily trips allowing New Yorkers and visitors to be part of a great state and an even greater community. These trips are not made exclusively on state roads or local roads or interstate highways. People use both state and local roads and bridges to take them to work, school, doctor's offices, airports, restaurants, and recreational and tourism destinations. Truckers go where the goods need to be delivered: every corner of New York State. Tourists visit our cities and explore the back roads. Agriculture depends on local roads and bridges to get products to market. A seamless, well-maintained transportation system is essential to keeping New York State moving.

Our association appreciates the support of our state elected officials who partner with us to insure we all "get the job done" when it comes to providing the public with a safe and functional statewide transportation system; one that supports jobs and economic growth for our communities.

Our county highway superintendents and public works commissioners continue our commitment to work with you and our county leaders during these difficult times to respond effectively to the challenges of the pandemic, advocate on the state's behalf, and rebuild New York's economy. LOCAL ROADS ARE ESSENTIAL. INVEST IN LOCAL ROADS!

Thank you.
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