



State Senate Assembly Joint Budget Hearing on Transportation

Public Testimony: The 2021 Executive Budget

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Thank you, Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, and your colleagues for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Felicia Park-Rogers, I am the Director of Regional Infrastructure Projects for Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a 29-year-old organization dedicated to advocating for sustainable, equitable, and safer mobility in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

If you care about infrastructure and transportation, this is an exciting time for our country and for our state. The passage of IIJA, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is the single largest investment in infrastructure and transportation our nation has ever seen. It has the potential to do much good for New York State, as we see reflected in the sheer magnitude of the New York State Capital budget of \$32.8 billion. However, due to the compromises required to pass the bill in Washington, DC, the bill also has the potential to do significant harm as we stand on the precipice of catastrophic climate change. The IIJA maintains the status quo of an 80/20 split in funding for roads vs transit. So, even as we see historic levels of funding for transit, we also see the biggest roads bill since the Interstate Highways Bill of the Eisenhower Administration.

However, the USDOT has built some off-ramps into the bill and today I strongly encourage you to take them.

Following the guidance of Stephanie Pollack, the acting head of the FHWA you have the power to invest these funds in ways that prioritize equity, the environment, safety, and the economy. There are flexible spending options which for the first time don't require funds to be spent only on new, flashy, but ultimately destructive, carbon-focused transportation options. I encourage you to look away from the status quo and instead to spend these capital dollars to embrace fix it first repairs, build complete streets, support multi-modal transportation, support active transportation access for cyclists and pedestrians, build sidewalks, take down highways and increase boulevarding, and support the growth and service levels of mass transit.

Governor Hochul has voiced support for prioritizing environment and equity projects. In line with these principles we urge you to avoid projects that directly undermine these goals with highway expansion projects such as the Van Wyck, Kew Gardens, and I-85 expansions.

We commend Governor Hochul for proposing to legalize accessory dwelling units statewide, and boosting transit-oriented development around rail stations within commuting distance of



New York City. These are important first steps toward expanding car-optional living beyond the city, and for increasing the supply of transit-accessible affordable housing. Given the climate emergency we are facing, we recommend that the state goes further, following the lead of other states like California, to ban parking minimum requirements and single-family owning zoning, which reinforces unsustainable and inequitable land use.

Transportation contributes over 30 percent of New York's total emissions, making it a critical part of our move to a cleaner, greener New York. Reducing our state's reliance on fossil fuels by improving public transit and vehicle electrification are necessary and feasible steps to meeting our climate goals.

- **We support passage of the Green Transit ([S3535/A3090](#)), Green Jobs ([S3405/A2083](#))** bill package that would mandate NY State transit agencies to only purchase zero-emission buses by 2029 and utilize a best value framework when purchasing the zero-emission buses to incentivize the creation of good jobs in NY.
- The Governor's budget makes a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimizing the public health impact from New York State's transportation sector with her pledge to **transition the state's school buses to zero-emission vehicles fully by 2035**. This is an important step towards reducing the state's overall transportation emissions with a realistic timeline, but falls short of a full commitment to prioritize equity for communities that would stand to benefit the most from school bus electrification. The final state budget should include specific earmarked funding for electric school buses and related infrastructure to ensure that the state meets its own deadline.

Automated Bus Lane Camera Enforcement

New York City's buses are the slowest in America, in part because buses have to compete with ever-worsening congestion on New York City's streets. Bus lanes are one of the most effective tools used to improve speed and reliability of buses, but only when cars and traffic are not blocking these dedicated lanes. We support the governor's proposed changes to state transportation law that would make permanent New York City's bus lane enforcement program which has proven to be effective in reducing total bus lane violations while speeding up service for riders.

Crash Victim Rights & Safety Act

New York State is faced with a growing epidemic of traffic violence, with traffic fatalities on the rise. In order to fight back against this epidemic and protect public safety, Albany must support the **Crash Victim Rights and Safety Act**, a package of life-saving legislation that will make streets safer for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers across the state.

Additional Items we would like to briefly highlight include:

- The **Gateway/Hudson Tunnels** project is vital to the region's transportation network and economy. We support state investment in moving this vital infrastructure project forward.



- We strongly support **Congestion Pricing Implementation to begin as quickly as possible** in NYC. This will bring \$15 billion dollars in revenue to the MTA capital projects budget, improve air quality for NYC residents, reduce congestion, and dramatically improve the safety and quality of life of more than a million residents of Manhattan South of 60th St.
- Regarding the **Penn Station Area GPP**, we need clarity on the state's contribution and the financing scheme of the ESD Penn Station GPP. This is a massive urban renewal project. The timeline and financial contribution of the real estate projects to advancing the stated transit improvements are vague and need clarification. This project requires your careful attention and monitoring to insure the best possible transit investments.
- We commend Governor Hochul for halting the wrong way to **LGA Air Train** plan and support the serious analysis of other options, for ex N/W extension. We would like to see the immediate addition of increased bus service to connect workers and travelers to LGA.
- TSTC supports the resumption of the **Cross Harbor Freight Program's Tier II EIS**. This important project will connect vital rail freight routes from the mainland US to rail routes in Brooklyn. This is good for the economy and the environment, will reduce congestion and road damage from wear and tear, crashes, and improve security and create redundancy in the system for our movement of goods. The linked project, the **Interborough Express**, would provide improved transit access for the many riders and workers who would like to travel more efficiently between Queens and Brooklyn. We favor the rail option for the IBX, but eagerly await the findings of the MTA evaluation.
- Lastly, we support **flipping the percentage of gas tax funds** to put two-thirds of the funds created through the tax to transit. Even after the unprecedented federal covid relief funds to save transit, the MTA faces on-going farebox revenue shortfalls even as service demands remain constant. The MTA is staring down multi-billion dollar deficits in 2024 and 2025. Keeping the region's workforce moving and fighting climate change requires greater state investment and re-thinking the gas tax revenue spending ratio.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments with you. I will be happy to answer questions at the appropriate time during the hearing or in follow up conversations.