



The Voice of Long Island's Highway & Infrastructure Professionals

**Marc Herbst, Executive Director
Long Island Contractors' Association, Inc.**

New York State Joint Legislative Hearing on Transportation

Tuesday, February 6, 2023, 11:30 AM

**Hamilton Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York**

Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, Senator Kennedy, and Assemblyman Magnarelli, my name is Marc Herbst, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Long Island Contractors' Association.

The Long Island Contractors' Association (LICA) represents the interests of Long Island's premier heavy construction general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, and industry supporters. Our industry is focused primarily on building and maintaining our region's vital infrastructure: its highways, bridges, and transit systems, as well as utilities, water quality and wastewater systems, and other public works. We are proud that many of LICA's 170-member firms are multi-generational. These family-owned businesses are located on Long Island and continue to work and employ neighbors in our communities.

In her annual message and budget address, Governor Kathy Hochul announced that her priority agenda item for this legislative session is workforce housing. We appreciate her desire to address this critical need for the State of New York. However, needed housing availability cannot be provided without the necessary infrastructure additions and enhancements. New York State has the unprecedented opportunity to create thoughtful

and strategic housing improvements that will profoundly impact generations of New Yorkers. To accomplish this in the most cost-effective, timely way, we must work together as trusted partners from the ground up. Here on Long Island, that means from the groundwater up.

Therefore, we remind you that investment in utilities – electric, gas, sewer, telecommunications, transportation, and water – must occur before or simultaneously with new housing construction. We ask you to be cognizant of this connection during the budget deliberations.

Long Island has several exciting economic development opportunities, potentially creating thousands of new jobs and necessitating additional workforce housing units. Two specific proposals include the Midway Crossing Long Island Life Sciences Center in Ronkonkoma and the Las Vegas Sands Casino Resort project in Uniondale. These projects are among others requiring private-public partnerships (P3s). While private investors will support their businesses, it is critical that the public sector ensures the necessary public infrastructure for the community's stability and growth. This includes housing support, as the Governor clearly recognizes. But, again, I remind you that support needs to have infrastructure simultaneously. Housing growth without necessary infrastructure investment is an unviable proposition. The infrastructure industry on Long Island is poised to partner with New York State to help realize the Governor's vision.

LICA's top state legislative priority this session is the "Suffolk County Water Restoration Act," which creates a county-wide wastewater management district by consolidating existing un-sewered areas and town and village sewer systems. It will work to protect the Long Island aquifer and our coastal waters. Beyond addressing the essential water quality needs, this proposal will create jobs and a pathway for expanding needed workforce housing and local businesses. We are encouraged the Governor includes language in her budget proposal to allow the residents of Suffolk County to consider implementing this program through a voter referendum. However, the budget language submitted to the legislature on this topic omits a vital component. Voters deserve transparency when considering ballot initiatives in the polling booths. In the current draft, the budget bill does not specify the revenue source of a 0.008% sales tax adjustment and continuation of the County's successful drinking water protection program. LICA and our

environmental, labor, and business partners strongly urge the Governor to correct this flawed omission in her 30-day amendment period or the legislature to do so before the budget's final adoption. Otherwise, the voters will be at a disadvantage in deciding not only the region's future environmental sustainability but the ability to advance the Governor's housing plan.

Without the county-wide wastewater management district and its financial plan in place, it won't be easy to meet the Governor's desired housing goals. One long-standing proposal, the Heartland Town Square development in Brentwood, projects 9,000 desperately needed housing units. If the state truly wishes to address the workforce housing needs in our region, LICA strongly suggests you view the Heartland Town Square project among its remedies. In addition, the state must advance nearby highway improvements. Specifically, the Sagtikos State Parkway/Sunken Meadow State Parkway Operational Study (PIN 33900) explicitly recommends highway operational improvements, notably adding northbound and southbound travel lanes. The housing inventory cannot increase without this infrastructure improvement.

Other infrastructure systems required for housing structures include clean water system upgrades. Our counties, towns, and villages need assistance in securing funding to help with up-front engineering costs. The Environmental Planning Grants (EPG), administered through the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation, are now only available for wastewater projects. We recommend expanding this program to include drinking water projects. In addition, we suggest the agency expand its Asset Management Planning Grants to support localities to regularly catalog, maintain, and upgrade their infrastructure.

The Governor's housing initiative has emphasized transit-oriented development (TOD), similar to the Station Yards project at the Ronkonkoma Hub and the Wyandanch Rising development, both now under construction. One compatible infrastructure plan that underscores the attractability for residents to use mass transit within walkable distances is accessibility for all. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's capital program provides for ADA (American Disabilities Act) improvements, such as escalator and elevator replacements, at several railroad stations, namely Amityville, Copiague, Massapequa Park, and Valley Stream. We also strongly urge advancing plans to award a design-build project to relocate the Yaphank Station before the end of this year.

The other development proposals mentioned earlier, Midway Crossing and Sands Casino Resort, and others, will also necessitate already-needed infrastructure enhancements. As examples, LICA recommends two projects for the state's transportation improvement plan (TIP): first, the reconstruction of the Meadowbrook/Southern State Parkway interchange, and second, adding eastbound and westbound lanes on the Northern State Parkway between the Wantagh Parkway and New York Route 110. Adding these projects to the TIP will make them eligible for federal funding consideration.

Two other proposals needed to advance to relieve the frustrations of current Long Island homeowners that currently serve as detractors to others considering residing here involve the Oakdale Merge (New York Route 27) and the Southern State Parkway. Last year, the legislature authorized funding to initiate an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for the Oakdale Merge, and we thank you. As the EIS progresses, we ask that the study consider offering opportunities for P3 engagement; local residential and commercial developers have expressed interest in supporting these improvements. Regarding the Southern State Parkway, infamously called "Blood Alley," LICA commissioned a study last year that suggests P3 solutions could help the unacceptable injury and fatality accident counts. We ask the state to build upon this study and commission a more detailed analysis of potential P3 remedies. Additionally, we urge you to immediately support Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages's legislative proposal to identify the Southern State Parkway as a Highway Safety Corridor, allowing immediate safety enforcement to protect the traveling public.

The abovementioned projects demonstrate that the state must acknowledge today's congestion and the region's infrastructure condition before considering additional housing stock. Last year, the legislature adopted a five-year transportation capital plan, and the Governor's budget proposal commits to honoring the program's second-year funding plan, which we appreciate most. Yet, we ask you to be mindful of how devastating inflationary costs have impacted the industry. Today's bedroom community of Long Island requires support for its highway system upkeep. Our local residential communities benefit significantly from the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), and we ask you to consider enhancing the current funding levels for this program. Remember that the last dollars from the federal "Clean Water Act" reached Long Island in

1980. That program paid for most of the region's existing residential sewers, and the roadways reinstalled over those systems are now exceeding or reaching their expected 50-year life span – our residential neighborhood streets may simultaneously fail if not supported adequately through investment. Additionally, LICA also suggests increasing funding for the PAVE-NY and BRIDGE-NY programs, which address safety concerns for the residents of our communities.

Whether housing, commercial, or infrastructure construction, funding is not the only factor to be considered in determining costs. Much intelligent thought and planning must occur in advance to ensure the optimum value of projects. We recognize the state assesses risk and develops cost-effective project delivery programs. LICA wishes to express its views on several of the delivery programs. First, the legislature authorized design-build options for appropriate jobs to expedite project completion, and this program will sunset unless the legislature decides to reauthorize the delivery system. We strongly recommend this remain a valuable tool in the state's toolbox. Next, Best Value options are occasionally implemented for more complex projects, such as specific bridge rehabilitation jobs, and again, we recommend the state continue to use this delivery as appropriate. Finally, we suggest New York review "Pre-Qualified" bidder systems employed by most states, including neighboring New Jersey, and evaluate whether such a system would help ensure more excellent workplace safety and better workmanship on construction sites.

LICA also wishes to encourage the state to use its budget process to promote consistency and stability in long-range planning for its transportation capital investment. Therefore, we are suggesting implementing targets beyond the expenditure of dollars. For example, we recommend the regional state highway system be analyzed and scheduled on a repaving cycle on segments before expected surface failure (potholes), and base the segment sizes on expected annual material use (e.g., 300,000 tons of asphalt per year). This planning will minimize dramatic swings in material needs each year and yearly employment fluctuations (avoiding increased unemployment costs one year and shortage of available workers the following year).

We further suggest that policies for new housing and other construction be considerate of the size and scope of a construction project. If the desire is to use these projects to help spur the local economic engine, please understand that larger mega-

projects will likely attract firms from outside the region. International or national firms will not support the local economy as family-owned businesses whose owners and employees live, work, and spend tax dollars in their hometown communities. Regarding transportation projects, jobs estimated between \$25 and \$50 million are ideal for attracting our local unionized contractors to submit bids. Here is a listing of some desired projects of that size range the Department of Transportation could include in its letting program for Long Island this construction season:

- Northern State Parkway (North Hempstead/Oyster Bay) repaving
- Northern State Parkway (Huntington/Smithtown) repaving
- Long Island Expressway (Sunnyside Blvd to Round Swamp Rd) repaving
- Long Island Expressway (Exit 64 – east) repaving
- New York Route 110 (LIE to New York Route 109) repaving
- Robert Moses Causeway (south of Montauk Hwy) repaving
- Concrete Median replacement – all parkways
- Wooden Sound Wall Replacement – various expressways and parkways
- Parkway System Drainage Study

LICA also wishes to express appreciation for the many projects now under construction that improve our communities' safety and quality of life. These efforts will help in supporting the planned increase in the housing inventory. One example is the multi-phase New York Route 347 highway rehabilitation program, which must remain on schedule to address the anticipated growth in traffic from new housing.

In closing, LICA is ready to assist our state leaders in paving the way to build additional housing on Long Island through infrastructure. Thoughtful, strategic infrastructure investments are the foundation upon which the Governor's vision rests.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information.