



**TESTIMONY OF FRANK G. HOARE, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY AUTHORITY
JOINT HEARING OF THE LEGISLATIVE FISCAL AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMITTEES
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Good afternoon Chairs Pretlow, Krueger, Cooney, Magnarelli, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Fiscal, and Transportation Committees; thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Frank Hoare, and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Thruway Authority.

Recognized year after year as one of the safest highways in the nation, the Governor Thomas E. Dewey Thruway remains a dependable, affordable, user-fee supported superhighway. The Thruway Authority is committed to operating and maintaining a system that delivers the highest levels of safety, service, and reliability that our customers have come to expect.

The safety—of our employees, our contractors, Troop T, first responders and the traveling public will continue to be the foundation of everything we do at the Thruway Authority. Throughout my tenure as Executive Director, I have made it my highest priority to create a culture of safety and embed it into every decision we make and every action we take. We have made significant progress, and throughout my testimony today, you will hear how this commitment continues to drive our work forward.

Why is safety so important? Because for our workforce, there is no such thing as a routine day out on the road. We are reminded of this when we walk into work and pass the new memorial wall outside our Administrative Headquarters in Albany, just a stone's throw from the State Capitol. The wall bears the names of 22 fallen Thruway workers and one Canal Corporation employee who lost their lives while on the job. Two of those names were added less than two years ago. This is our why. This is why we focus relentlessly on safety and why we must continue doing everything in our power to enhance it.

I want to thank Governor Hochul and the Legislature for their unwavering commitment to protecting our workforce in work zones through meaningful legislative action. This commitment is evident through the five-year extension of the Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement pilot program through 2031.

Looking ahead, we strongly support the FY2027 Executive Budget Proposals, which expand this program to more roadways, and enhances protections for transportation workers, including increasing penalties for work zone intrusions, assaults against transportation workers and includes the crime of menacing highway workers. In addition to the Department of Motor Vehicle's strengthened license-point system, these enhancements will make a real difference and create safer conditions for our employees who work every day to keep our system moving.

Few metrics speak more clearly to the impact of our safety efforts than the Thruway's low fatality rate. In 2024, the Thruway-wide fatality rate was 0.22 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, one of the lowest recorded rates on the Thruway system since fatality rates have been documented in 1954. The figure is significantly lower than the projected nationwide traffic fatality rate for 2024 of 1.2. Even with that, our dedicated employees are driving forward initiatives that continue to strengthen our commitment to safety for both motorists and staff.

Just last month, the Authority launched a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan (CSAP), a systemwide initiative to improve roadway and employee safety, strengthen emergency response, and reduce serious injuries and fatalities across the Thruway. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program is funding this effort, which will deliver a first of its kind statewide safety strategy covering the entire 570-mile Thruway system. This effort builds on our ongoing commitment to safety and operational excellence.

The plan will use a data driven Safe System Approach to analyze crash trends, identify high-risk areas, evaluate current safety protocols, and recommend strategies that better protect travelers, employees, commercial drivers and emergency responders. This approach creates multiple layers of protection including safer roads, safer drivers, safer speeds, safer vehicles and improved post-crash care, with the goal to reduce crash severity and work toward eliminating roadway deaths and serious injuries.

We believe that safer roads begin with changing motorists' behavior. As I previously mentioned, the Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement (AWZSE) pilot program sponsored by Chair Magnarelli in the Assembly and signed into law by Governor Hochul in September 2021 is a great example of the impact of innovation. The 2026 Enacted State Budget extended the pilot program to 2031, doubled the number of work zones, and expanded participation eligibility to include MTA Bridges and Tunnels and NYS Bridge Authority facilities.

The program started as a joint effort by the Thruway Authority and New York State Department of Transportation, with the goal of improving work zone and highway safety by getting motorists to slow down in work zones. Since it went into effect in 2023, more than 234,000 violations have been issued on the Thruway alone. Nearly 15,000 violations have been sent to repeat offenders.

Data indicates that the average speed in work zones has decreased year-over-year showing that motorists are changing their behavior and slowing down in work zones.

The 2026 Thruway Authority Budget allocates \$12 million for safety initiatives related to work zones. That's more than triple the amount invested in 2025. These funds will support new impact attenuators, arrow board trailers, speed feedback signs, real-time- intrusion detection systems, and other critical equipment that protects employees and contractors on the Thruway.

Funds generated from the AWZSE program are also reinvested to enhance worker safety, including a pilot program which uses advanced technology to detect intrusions and immediately alert crews through sound, vibration and lights via wearable devices. The

Authority plans to equip ten work zone traffic control trucks with this technology and equipment. This pilot will enhance crew safety today while generating data that will inform future strategies to reduce work zone intrusions systemwide.

To further strengthen these efforts, the Authority has established a dedicated Work Zone Safety Task Force to explore new strategies for improving work zone safety and created a Bureau of Employee and Traffic Safety to streamline and align safety and health functions across the organization.

We also plan to launch a statewide public education and awareness campaign focused on making sure more motorists comply with the State's Move Over Law and promoting work zone safety. The Thruway Authority has been awarded \$250,000 through the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee (GTSC) 2026 Traffic Safety Grant to lead this effort. A PSA will be distributed across streaming platforms, social media, and traditional media to maximize reach, while complementary educational materials will be available at service areas, public events and through agency partners during the 2026 construction season.

We are also moving ahead with a \$61 million overhaul of our aging emergency communications system. The current system was installed in the late '90s and early 2000s. The new, enhanced radio system will use modern digital technology to ensure reliable communication for everyone involved in operating the Thruway system including the Thruway Statewide Operations Center (TSOC), first responders, New York State Police Troop T and Thruway maintenance staff. Work is currently underway to install more than 1,500 mobile radios in vehicles across all four Thruway Maintenance Divisions. Significant progress has been made on this project since it began in late 2024, and the new system is scheduled to be operational in 2027.

Finally on the safety front, bridge strikes remain a serious concern on the Thruway and an issue that every state has to deal with. Bridge strikes can lead to infrastructure damage, major traffic delays and costly diversions of maintenance resources. Nearly all bridge strikes are preventable - drivers are required to know their vehicle height and operate responsibly. Since 2021, the Thruway system has experienced 372 bridge hits, including 73 in 2025, with several structures repeatedly struck. To combat this, the Thruway Authority is taking action, including a new technology detection initiative which is scheduled to roll out at eight locations on the Thruway system in spring 2026. It will use real-time analytics and camera infrastructure to identify over height vehicles before they reach bridges, allowing for law enforcement to intervene. This initiative underscores the Authority's commitment to preventing bridge strikes, protecting workers and motorists and safeguarding the integrity of the Thruway system.

In addition to our focus on safety, we're committed to investing in our infrastructure. In 2025, the NYS Thruway processed more than 400 million cashless tolling transactions, representing more than 8.2 billion miles traveled on "New York's Main Street." To support this critical statewide corridor, the Thruway Authority's 2026 budget reflects a \$1.46 billion commitment to maintaining and enhancing the high levels of maintenance, safety and service on a nearly 72-year-old interstate highway system. This balanced spending plan includes \$461 million for operations; \$71 million for State Police Troop T; \$520 million dedicated to our capital program; and \$404 million for debt service. Together, these

investments ensure the long-term reliability and resilience of one of the nation's most important transportation arteries.

The Authority's 2026–2030 Capital Plan is a historic \$2.8 billion investment in the long-term safety and reliability of the Thruway system. The plan includes more than \$520 million of capital investment in 2026, an increase of more than \$38 million from the 2025 budget projections. The five-year plan will fund the replacement or preservation of 150 of the Thruway's 819 bridges and the resurfacing of more than 1,500 of its 2,800 lane miles.

The 2026-2030 Capital Plan includes more than \$1.3 billion dedicated to paving, rehabilitation, and reconstruction projects and more than \$835 million invested in bridge replacements and preservations across New York. Notable projects in every region of the state include: \$90 million for the pavement rehabilitation on the first four miles of the Niagara Thruway (I-190), a vital commuter corridor into downtown Buffalo; \$100 million concrete pavement restoration project to 60-plus total lane miles on I-90 between exits 39 and 40 west of Syracuse; \$85 million bridge rehabilitation project on the Kaaterskill and Catskill bridges on I-87 between exit 20 and exit 21, enhancing safety and extending structural longevity to two highly traveled crossings in Greene County; and, \$160 million in pavement improvements on the always busy I-87 commuter corridor in Westchester and Ulster counties.

All of this work means a smoother ride for New Yorkers, enhanced safety features, and a visible display of how toll dollars are being reinvested back into the system. These are your toll dollars at work.

Toll rates across the Thruway system remain unchanged in 2026, with the exception of the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. There, as part of the multi-year toll adjustment plan that took effect in January 2024, the passenger rate for NY E-ZPass customers increased by 50 cents, bringing the round-trip toll to \$7.25. Since that toll adjustment plan took effect, the Authority has reinvested more than \$860 million back into the system, reflecting a 45 percent increase in capital funding.

Underscoring its importance to the state and region, the Thruway remains a dependable, cost-effective transportation system and a vital link in interstate travel. It provides essential access to many of New York's leading tourism destinations and serves as a principal artery of commerce. Sixteen percent of all Thruway traffic comes from commercial vehicles, and nearly one-third originates from out-of-state travelers - clear evidence of the system's critical role in supporting economic activity across the state.

The Thruway Authority is operated and maintained solely as a user-fee supported system and does NOT receive any dedicated federal, state or local taxpayer funding. Our toll revenue goes directly toward making the Thruway one of the safest highways in the nation. Through fiscally responsible asset and program management, the Thruway continues to offer some of the lowest toll rates in the country. The Thruway's base passenger toll rate is less than 5 cents per mile, the Pennsylvania Turnpike (more than 17 cents per mile) and the New Jersey Turnpike (up to 41 cents per mile).

Our commitment to investing in the Thruway is the cornerstone to our modernization efforts and this extends to our 27 service areas across the system. These locations are

open 24 hours a day, where motorists can take a break, get food and coffee, wait out inclement weather, and refuel or charge their vehicles. We are proud to announce that in November 2025, our final service area reopened as part of the \$450 million private investment to redevelop and reimagine all 27 service areas.

It is important to continue to note that NO toll dollars, nor any taxpayer funding was used for the construction related to this project. The new service areas allow our customers to experience a wider variety and improved dining options and other amenities including exterior seating with access to Taste NY farm markets, playgrounds and pet walking areas with comfort stations. Expanded commercial trucking amenities at select locations include increased parking, laundry facilities, and dedicated lounges.

As part of the service area project, we have committed to increasing the availability of electric vehicle charging. Our motorists expect they will be able to safely and reliably charge their vehicle while traveling across the state. As of today, the Thruway has more than 120 electric vehicle charging stations along the I-87, I-90 and I-190 corridors. With the existing infrastructure, we are exceeding our customers' current EV charging needs for passenger vehicles.

Our charging stations are comprised of a combination of fast charging, or Level 3 high-speed chargers, which can charge a vehicle in about 30 minutes. These Level 3 chargers are primarily located at Thruway service areas. There are also Level 2 chargers, which take approximately four or more hours to fully charge a vehicle. Level 2 chargers are primarily located at nine commuter lots directly off the Thruway. Each service area will have a minimum of four high speed chargers, with some having up to 12 charging points.

The Thruway Authority also continues to advance its medium and heavy-duty (MHD) electrification efforts through several coordinated initiatives. Working with state partners in a cross-agency working group, the Authority is evaluating funding opportunities, such as NEVI-related options, to support future MHD charging projects. At the same time, it is collaborating closely with utility providers to accelerate power delivery to service areas, enabling faster expansion of EV infrastructure. For example, we are working with National Grid on a proposed battery storage solution at the Angola Service Area in Western New York and ongoing feasibility reviews for similar systems at Ontario and Guilderland Service Areas. To guide long-term fleet planning, the Authority has also engaged with the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment that will inform a strategic roadmap for electrifying our fleet.

The Thruway represents one component of the Governor's clean energy goals and is committed to providing EV charging services for our customers and scaling up as the demand increases. The Authority continues to monitor the growing need for MDH EV charging infrastructure. While the Authority evaluates EV needs throughout its system, we will continue to work collaboratively with our state partners in a cross-agency working group led by the Governor's office. This working group meets regularly to discuss and strategize the use of EV funds across participating agencies and authorities.

Now that the Service Area Project is substantially complete, our focus is shifting to issuing a Requests for Proposal for a new fueling services contract later this year. To prepare for this effort, the Thruway Authority launched a customer survey in August 2025 to help

shape the future of fueling facilities at all 27 service areas. With the current contracts set to expire in 2027, the survey is informing development of the 2026 RFP by capturing feedback on visit frequency, vehicle type, fueling experience and desired improvements. Commercial drivers were also surveyed on truck parking availability, fuel purchasing habits, travel patterns and EV readiness. More than 1,800 surveys were completed, and this feedback will directly guide the next fuel services contract(s) to ensure future facilities meet the evolving needs of Thruway users.

In April 2025, one of the largest back-office customer service upgrades in E-ZPass history was completed with the most visible transformation being the launch of a new website that combined E-ZPass and Tolls by Mail. The upgraded platform streamlines the experience for millions of customers, giving them one place to view toll bills, see transaction images and dispute charges. It adds live chat, expands payment options to include Apple Pay and Google Pay and introduces a single customer service number. Plus, it features a redesigned automated phone system and new self-service tools, such as the ability to update information and enroll in text or email alerts, making support faster and more convenient. A refreshed toll bill format with account numbers further simplifies account management, marking a significant leap forward in customer service and accessibility systemwide.

The Thruway Authority is also enhancing its cashless tolling system by constructing two new gantries at the exit 25 and exit 25A interchange ramps along I-90. These improvements are designed to streamline toll processing and improve the timeliness of transactions for customers traveling through the Albany–Schenectady corridor. By consolidating toll collection points, drivers will see fewer transactions on their E-ZPass statements or toll bills, reducing from as many as six transactions to just two for certain trips.

Toll rates will not change as a result of this project. The existing gantries between exit 26 and exit 25A and the 25/25A mainline gantry will be decommissioned for tolling purposes. This initiative also brings long-term cost savings by reducing image review and toll processing expenses. The upgrade is scheduled to be completed this year.

Toll enforcement continues to remain a priority. Tolls represent 90 percent of our revenue and without collecting tolls, we would not be able to operate, maintain and enhance our system. It's critical to balance toll collection with enforcement, and we use a variety of enforcement tools to ensure that everyone pays their fair share. These tools protect the safety and affordability of our 570-mile highway. Most importantly, enforcement protects the toll payers who use the Thruway and pay their tolls.

A major focus for the Thruway Authority this past year was ensuring that every driver pays their fair share in tolls so we can keep rates affordable and as low as possible for everyone. Working in partnership with State Police Troop T, toll enforcement details were conducted across the system to hold chronic violators accountable. Through seven dedicated enforcement efforts, Troop T issued nearly 2,000 tickets and carried out more than 300 tows, recovering more than \$100,000 in unpaid tolls. These actions protect revenue integrity and promote fairness for all Thruway customers. We intend to hold more targeted enforcements in 2026.

The Thruway Authority remains deeply committed to advancing the state's Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) Program and strengthening MWBE participation across all aspects of our work. Our efforts include embedding MWBE goals into every stage of our procurement processes, fostering stronger connections between prime contractors and MWBE firms, offering training on how to do business with the Authority, and implementing targeted outreach to attract and support MWBE partners.

In 2025, MWBE participation on Thruway contracts surged more than three percentage points from the previous fiscal year, reaching an impressive 29.44 percent. Participation by Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses also continues its steady upward climb. This progress demonstrates the meaningful impact of our efforts—and we are committed to building on this momentum.

As I wrap up, I want to reaffirm my commitment to the Governor's charge: keeping the Thruway the safest, most reliable and most affordable highway in the country. This is possible because of the professionalism and dedication of more than 1,800 employees who make up the Thruway Authority. With historic investments, new and expanding safety programs, and a dedicated team, we are building a safer Thruway for our employees, contractors, and the millions of travelers who rely on us every day.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.