



**Department of
Transportation**

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NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES
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INTRODUCTION

Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Kennedy, Magnarelli and distinguished members of the Legislature, on behalf of the Department of Transportation, I want to personally thank you for this opportunity to discuss the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020-21 Executive Budget recommendation for the Department of Transportation. It has truly been my pleasure to meet with many of you in your districts and here in Albany to discuss the issues that are important to you and your constituents. I am joined here today by Ron Epstein, the Department’s Executive Deputy Commissioner.

As you are aware, the most important function of the Department of Transportation is to enhance the safety of the traveling public. This is accomplished through conducting bridge safety assurance inspections; targeted and comprehensive bus, truck and freight rail inspections; providing traffic signal maintenance; and performing winter snow and ice control and responding to natural disasters.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary professionalism and work ethic of the women and men of the Department of Transportation. Since joining the Department last May, New York has experienced extreme weather events in nearly every region of the State. As a member of the Lake Ontario Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative, or REDI, Commission, I saw firsthand the widespread devastation in this eight county area caused by intense flooding. I also witnessed how the Department’s employees responded with compassion – helping New Yorkers during many months of sustained flooding. I would like to recognize our employees for the difficult work that they do each day to keep us safe and thank them for the positive impact that they have had on the lives of all New Yorkers.

UNPRECEDENTED INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

For too long, generations of Americans have lived off the legacy of the country’s last New Deal Program - the construction of the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System. Governor Cuomo recognized that New York’s economic security was inextricably linked with making nation leading investments in the renewal and modernization of the State’s roads, bridges, transit systems, airports and seaports. He knew that the renewal and modernization of transportation infrastructure was fundamental to rejuvenating and enhancing the economic competitiveness of the State’s communities; providing cleaner climate-friendly alternatives; alleviating congestion and reducing air pollution; and rebuilding in a way that is more resilient and less susceptible to extreme weather events. New York is not only investing more today in transportation infrastructure than at any period in our State’s history, but the State is building back better,

faster and stronger - far outpacing the rest of the nation. With the support of the Legislature, transformative projects completed under this Administration by the Department include the:

- New Kosciuszko Bridge in the New York City Region;
- Modernization of commercial service airports in the North Country, Central New York, Southern Tier, Finger Lakes and Capital regions;
- New rail stations in Western New York, the Finger Lakes and the Capital Region;
- New North-South Arterial in the Mohawk Valley Region;
- New interchange at Woodbury Common in the Mid-Hudson Region;
- New Interstate 87 Exit 3 interchange in the Capital Region;
- New Interstate 81 and Route 17 interchange in the Southern Tier;
- New State Route 26 Fort Drum Overpass in the North Country Region; and
- Empire Bridge Program, which replaced 100 aging, vulnerable bridges across the state to make them more resilient against extreme weather.

These projects have transformed communities across the State in ways which we have not yet imagined. But the story does not end there. There are literally thousands of transportation projects around the State being implemented through the Department of Transportation that will continue shaping the future of our communities and allow each region in the State to grow their own unique and diverse economies.

Building upon New York's historic investments in support of ensuring mobility, enhancing safety and facilitating economic competitiveness, the Governor has put forth a new unparalleled \$175 billion infrastructure plan, including new enhanced funding for roads and bridges. The State Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Executive Budget ensures that the Department of Transportation has the resources necessary to renew, modernize and continue to drive economic development across the State, including:

- An unprecedented \$5.4 billion in new funding to support State and local construction activities;
- Historic direct State aid to local governments for highway and bridge renewal at \$678 million;
- Nation-leading operating support of \$6.9 billion for local public transportation systems statewide; and
- An extraordinary commitment of \$319 million in new capital support for airports, transit systems and passenger and freight rail.

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

The renewal of our State's infrastructure affords New York unprecedented opportunities to reimagine how building can be harmonized with the natural environment. In parallel, building resilience into transportation infrastructure not only increases durability, it enhances functionality – especially during extreme weather events - and reduces overall maintenance costs. Investing in resiliency - or as commonly referred to as hardening – is not only a long-term investment in infrastructure, it is an investment in our communities – one that will greatly benefit future generations.

Earlier this year, with the leadership and overwhelming support of the Senate and Assembly, New York enacted the nation's most comprehensive and aggressive environmental law. Benchmarks established in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) include reducing greenhouse-gas emissions (from 1990 levels) by 85 percent by 2050; and mandating that 70 percent of the state's electricity be produced by renewable sources like wind or hydro by 2030. With the adoption of smart

policies and deployment of new technologies, the State can speed the implementation of innovative transportation solutions that significantly reduce non-renewable energy consumption. Initiatives under way by the Department to help achieve these goals include: providing financial incentives to accelerate the integration of advanced electric vehicle technologies in the commercial truck and bus sectors; promoting a self-sustaining market for plug-in electric vehicles (PEVs) and deploying PEV charging stations along designated alternative fuel corridors; and; collaborating with other State agencies and authorities on developing policies and strategies to increase the overall number of personal PEVs registered in New York State. These policies will help prepare New York for a future with zero-emission vehicles and lay the foundation for a diverse portfolio of new manufacturing, support and service related industries and jobs in support of the CLCPA goals.

Enhancing Safety

Safety is the Department of Transportation's utmost priority. One of the most sacrosanct and sacred responsibilities of the Department is to enhance the health and safety of the women and men - who everyday - are out working in traffic so that rest of us can get to where we need to go safely. As Commissioner, I will do everything within my authority to afford these highway workers every protection. This past construction season - at the Governor's direction - State Police, the Department of Transportation and the Thruway Authority commenced Operation Hardhat. Operation Hardhat is a targeted initiative to crack down on work zone violations and highlight the importance of safe driving when encountering construction, maintenance and emergency operations along State highways. Throughout Operation Hardhat, New York State Troopers, disguised as highway workers, were stationed in active work zones. These Troopers ticketed motorists who knowingly violated conspicuously posted work zone speed limits and other restrictions, jeopardizing the safety of highway workers and other travelers. In total, the New York State Police issued a total of 1,048 tickets statewide during special traffic enforcement details after directly observing motorists drive recklessly through work zones, including speeding, failure to move over, and failure to obey traffic control devices. So that these workers return safety each day to their families, I urge you to enact new heightened criminal and civil penalties for work zone violations.

In addition to enhancing worker safety, New York State needs to afford similar protections for pedestrians and bicyclists involved in crashes caused by inattentive or distracted motorists. To mitigate the impacts of pedestrian and bicycle crashes, the Department is implementing the State's first ever Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP). This aggressive safety initiative, developed in conjunction with our safety partners at the Department of Health and the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, relies on what is known as the "3E" approach: Education, Enforcement and Engineering. As the lead for Engineering improvements, NYSDOT has evaluated more than 6,000 signalized and unsignalized intersections and other crossings. Where appropriate, the Department has upgraded and installed additional pedestrian and bicycle safety countermeasures, such as improved pavement markings and signs, to enhance safety. NYSDOT also continues to progress intrusive corridor-wide solutions in more challenging corridors across the State including, Erie Boulevard in the City of Syracuse; Niagara Falls Boulevard in the towns of Amherst and Tonawanda; and Route 25A in the towns of Huntington and Brookhaven.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR TRANSPORTATION

Later this year, the current federal surface transportation program authorization, referred to as the FAST Act will expire. During the prior DOT plan period, federal aid accounted for approximately 40 percent of DOT's capital program. Moving forward, given this uncertainty, we can no longer assume this level of support. As Congress deliberates the successor to the FAST Act, they will need to contend with a series of complex and daunting issues, including addressing the long-term insolvency of the federal Highway Trust Fund; developing and implementing programmatic and policy changes with respect to the future of the nation's mobility and the impact of country's transportation programs and projects on resiliency; and retaining support for the current long-standing federal/state partnership that pre-dates the Eisenhower Interstate Era. Considering the landmark issues requiring action in the next federal transportation bill, the Department has been aggressively working with the Governor's Washington DC Office; other State transportation agencies and authorities; and regional and national transportation associations to ensure that our needs and priorities are well known and embraced. Moving forward, recognizing the potential impacts for New York, continues to work with our State's Congressional delegation to protect and enhance our interests in Washington.

CONCLUSION

The Executive Budget introduced last week demonstrates the undeniable fact that New York continues to lead on issues that impact the lives of individuals. On issues that matter the most to the people we serve. That is why the State can and will deliver the nation's largest and most aggressive building program, building bigger than anything we've done before, while simultaneously implementing the country's most aggressive and legally enforceable climate protections. That is why New York will leverage its infrastructure spending to facilitate economic growth. To facilitate growth in every community across this great State. That is why the Department is prepared to deliver on the Governor's clear and bold vision for New York. With your support, we will collectively take nation-leading and historic actions to make progress happen in the State of New York.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to respond to any questions that you may have.