

Legislators push for increased funding for local roads and bridges amid rising costs

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State and local leaders are urging Governor Kathy Hochul and the Democratic-controlled Legislature to boost funding for local roads and bridges in the upcoming 2025-26 state budget, citing skyrocketing construction costs and infrastructure deterioration.

During a press conference at the Town of Big Flats Highway Garage on February 28, State Senator Tom O'Mara, Assemblymen Phil Palmesano, Chris Friend, and Joe Sempolinski, along with local officials, called for an increase in funding for the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), which provides essential resources for maintaining local transportation networks.

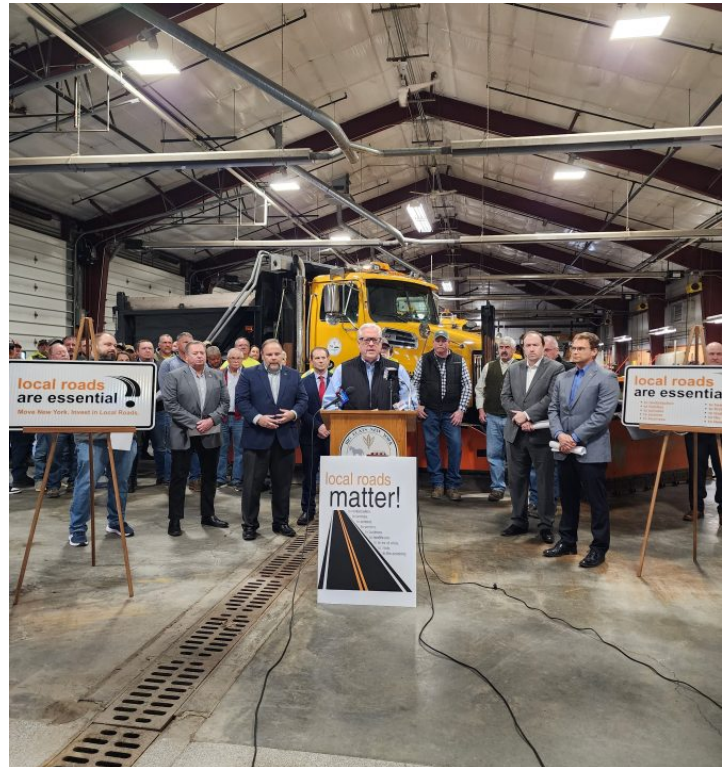
A bipartisan coalition of nearly 70 Republican legislators sent a letter to Hochul earlier this month, stressing that state investment in local infrastructure must be prioritized. "A stronger state-local partnership is the only solution to meeting the critical investment level needed to maintain and improve local roads, bridges, and culverts," the letter stated, warning that municipalities are already struggling with rising costs, unfunded mandates, and the state-imposed property tax cap.

Despite a proposed \$252 billion state budget, Hochul has opted to keep CHIPS funding at last year's levels. Legislators and local officials argue this decision ignores inflation's impact on highway construction costs, which have surged by 70% over the past three years, according to the Federal Highway Administration. The New York State Association of Town Superintendents of Highways (NYSATSOH) estimates that municipalities need \$2.69 billion annually—or \$40.35 billion over 15 years—to adequately maintain and improve local roads.

To address these challenges, lawmakers and infrastructure advocates are calling for:

- A \$250 million increase in CHIPS base funding, bringing the total to \$848 million.
- Consolidation of five state road assistance programs into two to reduce administrative burdens.
- An increase in the CHIPS bidding threshold from \$350,000 to \$1 million—or eliminating it altogether—to give municipalities more flexibility in awarding contracts.

They are also raising concerns over a looming state mandate requiring all new school bus purchases to be electric by 2027. Officials warn that electric buses, significantly heavier than their diesel counterparts, will accelerate road deterioration, increasing costs for towns and villages. Preliminary data suggests that maintaining roads for heavier electric buses could cost municipalities up to \$550,000 per mile—ten times current expenses.



"The climate in our area plays a major role in the deterioration of our local roads," said Elmira Mayor Dan Mandell. "Without adequate funding, our roads will become dangerous to drive on and subsequently a public safety hazard."

Hornell Mayor John Buckley echoed these concerns, criticizing the state's decision to increase overall spending without prioritizing road funding. "If New York can afford to spend billions more in 2025, it can surely increase funding for our roads and highways," he said.

Infrastructure advocates argue that investing in local roads is not only a safety issue but also an economic one. A study by TRIP, a national transportation research group, found that poor road conditions cost New York drivers an extra \$38 billion annually in vehicle repairs, accidents, and congestion-related delays. Meanwhile, every \$1 invested in CHIPS is estimated to save between \$6 and \$14 in long-term rehabilitation costs.

"With inflation continuing to drive up costs, the time to act is now," said Steuben County Legislature Chair Kelly Fitzpatrick. "Our local roads are the backbone of our communities, and we need a stronger commitment from the state to ensure they remain safe and reliable."

As final budget negotiations ramp up in March ahead of the April 1 deadline, lawmakers say they will continue to push for increased infrastructure funding. "Local roads are essential," O'Mara said. "Now is the time for New York to step up and make them a priority."