

Submitted Testimony



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**THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS**
of New York State

**JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING
ON 2016-2017 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL
TRANSPORTATION**

**TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT FISCAL COMMITTEES OF THE
NEW YORK STATE SENATE AND NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY**

January 20th 2016

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

Introduction

My name is Barbara Bartoletti and I am Legislative Director of the League of Women Voters of New York State. On behalf of the League, I want to thank the Legislature for this opportunity to provide comments about the 2016-2017 proposed transportation budget as set forth in the Appropriations bill and the related Transportation and General Government Article VII legislation.

The League is a nonpartisan political organization working to promote civic responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government. We have 50 local leagues from Buffalo to Long Island, Plattsburgh to New York City. The League does not support or oppose political candidates.

The New York State League's interest in transportation policy stems from our League's National position. That position encourages energy-efficient and environmentally sound transportation systems which would afford better access to jobs. We continue to examine transportation and transportation infrastructure policies in light of these goals.

While we applaud the Governor for his improvements to the financial picture of transportation infrastructure in New York State, it clearly does not go far enough. The Governor's Briefing Book indicates that New York State enjoys good financial health. The League sees this as good news and an opportunity to invest in improvements to New York State transportation infrastructure, supporting future economic growth for all New Yorkers.

The League would like to touch upon the following four points:

Point I. Funding for upstate New York's roadways. Although the Governor has dedicated a significant amount of money (\$22.1 billion over five years) for upstate transportation and infrastructure, the League believed this does not go far enough.

Point II. Upstate New York's need for public transportation. In the past upstate there has been an imbalance between funding for the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and upstate public transportation services. Upstate public transportation has seen a significant increase in ridership in the last decade; the League had hoped that this year the Governor would dedicate more funding to upstate transit to fulfill this increased demand.

Point III. The funding dedicated to the MTA. The League applauds Governor Cuomo for making such a substantial investment in New York City public transportation but we are concerned over the source of funding.

Point IV. The Governor's proposal to help increase the efficiency of the Long Island Railroad by adding an additional track. While the League believes this is an important initiative, we continue to be concerned that there is not a sustainable source of state funding to launch this project.

I. Upstate Infrastructure

Last year the Governor dedicated a mere \$115 million towards infrastructure improvements for upstate New York transit, which was in addition to the \$1.285 billion commitment that was made in 2010 to cover road, rail, port, and airport enhancements. In the 2016-2017 FY budget the Governor has allocated \$22 billion for upstate roads and infrastructure over the next five years. These projects are ambitious but the League does not believe that \$22 billion is enough to update and maintain upstate New York's ailing infrastructure. Upstate New York infrastructure needs \$500 million just to maintain its everyday usage; \$22 billion will not cover the cost of the Governor's many projects.

Governor Cuomo's proposals also include \$1 billion in state funding to freeze tolls on the New York State Thruway through 2020. This proposal will result in a significant loss of state income at the same time that the Governor's budget does not address how to pay for his ambitious projects, including the revitalization of upstate bridges and roadways. Eliminating tolls for agricultural traffic and offering a tax credit worth 50% of tolls for passenger vehicles with E-Z Pass that spend more than \$50 in tolls are great incentives for agriculture and commuters, but will further erode a critical source of transportation funding.

In Governor Cuomo's speech he said "We must provide the vision and daring for the next generation. To continue to grow in size and strength, we must develop a new interconnected, planned system of mass transportation, roads and bridges and airports for the next 100 years. We can and we will." Although we can applaud the Governor for his vision, we need to be sure that his vision can be realized and that takes revenue. This budget is long on vision but short on ensuring the state's ability to pay for these initiatives.

II. Upstate Public Transportation

From 2010 until 2015 the state dedicated a flat amount of funding towards upstate public transportation. In FY 2015-2016, the state was unable to fully fund a state-wide capital transit plan. Public transport systems in upstate have seen significant increases in ridership over the last decade. For example, the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) reported a 23% increase in ridership over the past five years¹. With an increase in riders, a flat appropriation from

the state, and a low transit fee, CDTA has struggled to maintain adequate service.

For FY 2016-2017, the Governor has dedicated a small \$5 million budget increase for all upstate transit services, relative to the massive \$4.5 billion that has been dedicated to the MTA. All Upstate transit services will receive only \$194 million for operations, not nearly enough to provide satisfactory service for upstate riders.

Public transportation funding is an issue facing many upstate cities. The League believes that all New Yorkers deserve to have adequate public transportation systems in place, even in rural areas of the state.

III. Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Although the \$26 billion for New York City public transit to replace subway cars and buses is much needed, our concern again is whether or not there is an adequate revenue sourceⁱⁱ. We understand federal tax dollars will be used and that New York City will fund the rest of the initiative. The state will only fund \$1 billion for these projects; this funding is insufficient and will force New York City to supplement much of the cost.

IV. Long Island Rail Road

Governor Cuomo has decided to relaunch a push to add an additional track to the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) in order to help reduce road traffic and make the rail cars safer and more comfortable. The League does not believe that the Governor has adequately addressed this initiative in his Executive Budget. To build a new rail line would cost upwards of \$1 billion; if the Governor truly wishes to add an additional rail line he will need to designate funding specifically towards this initiative.

In conclusion, the League is generally pleased to see the Governor's vision articulated in his executive budget. However, our concern remains that his vision does not match its funding requirements and we fear that many of his planned projects will go unfunded.

ⁱ CDTA "CDTA Posts Record Ridership for Second Straight Year" April 29, 2015

ⁱⁱ Nicole Gelinas. "When It Comes to Infrastructure, Cuomo Has Tunnel Vision" City & State. January 8, 2016.