

200+ Organizations Call on Governor Cuomo to Protect Revenues for Public Transportation

Broad Coalition Urges the Governor to Sign the "Transit Lockbox" Bill

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, November 4, 2013

CONTACT: Nadine Lemmon, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, 917-767-7698

Today, a statewide coalition sent a letter to Governor Cuomo, urging him to sign the “transit lockbox” bill that was delivered to his desk on Friday, November 1st. The statewide coalition is made up of a diverse group of over 200 organizations representing labor, business, transit, the environment, disabled, aging, faith-based, smart growth, good government, bicycling, housing, and transportation groups who have joined together in a rare moment to deliver one shared message: public transportation is crucial to the state’s economy and the well-being of its citizens. ([The letter is available here.](#))

The Lockbox Bill (S.3837/ A.5084), sponsored by State Senator Martin Golden and Assemblyman James F. Brennan, unanimously passed both houses of the New York State legislature in June 2013. The bill helps to assure revenues dedicated to public transportation are spent on public transportation, not diverted to plug budgetary holes in the state’s general fund. The bill was introduced in response to the dramatic negative impacts to the economy after Governor David Paterson diverted \$260 million of dedicated transit funds in 2010, at the height of the recession. This diversion contributed to the worst service cuts and fare hikes in recent memory, impacting transit riders, as well as employers and transit manufacturers across the state. This bill will protect the revenue streams of over 130 transit providers across the state.

If this bill becomes law, it will not prohibit diversions, but it will provide decision makers and the public with vital information. As the coalition's letter states, the bill’s “key provision requires the State to issue a ‘diversion impact statement’ in the unfortunate event that state dedicated transit funds are diverted. The impact statement details what effect the diversion will have on transit service, safety and maintenance.”

While the bill aims to improve budgetary transparency and governmental accountability with regards to transit, it also attempts to protect the transit manufacturing sector which helps stabilize New York’s economy. Transit is big business in New York, and the state has one of the largest transit manufacturing clusters in the world: Kawasaki, Bombardier, Alstom and Nova Bus all have manufacturing plants in the state. An August 2011 report from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) estimates that the MTA’s capital program alone impacts 325,000 jobs, and generates almost \$41 billion in overall economic impact, from the Adirondacks to Western New York to the Hudson Valley. Diversions also devastate transit providers and manufacturers who rely on this dedicated transit revenue stream for planning.

The transit lockbox concept has been supported by newspapers, upstate and down. *The Buffalo News* and Plattsburgh's *Press Republican* both recently urged the Governor to sign S.3837/A.5084; in 2011, the *New York Times* and *Crain's* endorsed a similar bill that impacted the MTA alone.

"The unanimous support of both houses of the legislature demonstrates the statewide concern that public transportation revenue be spent on public transportation," stated Senator Golden, the NYS Senate sponsor of the bill. "I believe this bill accomplishes this goal and I urge the Governor to sign it into law."

"The Locked Box Bill will provide essential financial protection by assuring that dedicated transit funding be spent on public transportation instead of being diverted elsewhere," stated Assemblymember Jim Brennan, the NYS Assembly sponsor of the bill. "This Bill is exactly the type of legislation we need to protect our public transportation systems and I ask that the Governor sign the Bill today."

"New York City is unimaginable without its unparalleled transit network, as Superstorm Sandy showed last year," stated Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney, NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign. "The Straphangers Campaign urges Governor Andrew Cuomo to join a unanimous legislature and sign a bill that helps to make sure that funds dedicated to transit are spent on transit."

"For tens of thousands of people across our region, public transit provides a vital connection to jobs, services and loved ones," stated Mike Governale, Executive Director of Reconnect Rochester. "This is not a luxury item. Full transparency just makes sense when it comes to something this important."

"Mobility is key to older New Yorkers remaining in their homes. And affordable and reliable public transportation is crucial to people's ability to live independently in the community as they age," said Beth Finkel, State Director for AARP in New York State. "AARP fully supports this legislation and, for the sake of our families, we urge Governor Cuomo to sign it."

"Dedicated funds should be just that – dedicated to funding the purpose for which they were allocated," said Denise Richardson, managing director of The General Contractors Association of New York. "We urge the Governor to sign the Lock Box bill into law."

"This is a great opportunity for Governor Cuomo to do something good for our public transportation system, and doesn't cost the state a dime. It's just good public policy," stated John Samuelsen, President of Transport Workers Union Local 100.

"The significance of this bill should not be underestimated. It is crucial in securing safe, reliable public transportation for the people of New York, especially those in the upstate region," stated John Lyons, Chairman of Amalgamated Transit Union NYS Legislative Conference Board. "The Legislature recognized this and the Governor should 'Get On The Bus' with them by signing."

"Millions of hardworking New Yorkers rely on public transportation to get to work, take their kids to school, and carry out the everyday necessities of life," said Mario Cilento, President of

New York State AFL-CIO. “When funding for those services is diverted, there are real life consequences for people and businesses. By strengthening existing MTA lockbox protections and extending them to other public transportation entities, New York will ensure that decisions to divert transportation funding are made with full consideration of their impact on service, safety and maintenance.”

"This legislation will help ensure that dedicated funds needed to sustain New York's essential transit services will remain where voters and the legislature intended them to go," said Regional Plan Association President Bob Yaro.

“By signing this legislation into law, Governor Cuomo can underscore his commitment to strengthening New York State’s economy,” said New York League of Conservation Voters President Marcia Bystryn. “Mass transit doesn’t just benefit commuters in large cities – in fact, our transportation system is the lifeblood of the entire state’s economy. The New York League of Conservation Voters joins our partners in the economic development, transportation and environmental communities in encouraging the governor to sign this legislation and maintain investments in critical infrastructure.”

“Riders rightly expect dedicated transit funds to be spent on their intended purpose. Past diversions have led to painful service cuts, but this legislation ensures that elected officials will be clearly accountable for their decisions if future diversions are considered,” stated William Henderson, Executive Director, Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC/LIRRCC/MNRCC/NYCTRC).

“Maintaining a dependable and affordable public transportation system is vital to the region’s economic future and requires a steady, reliable stream of revenues that are protected from day-to-day budgetary pressures,” said Richard T. Anderson, President, New York Building Congress. “The Transit Lockbox Bill is a small but important step in the right direction. The New York Building Congress urges Governor Cuomo to sign this legislation and work with the Legislature to identify additional sources of dedicated funding urgently needed for the MTA’s 2015-2019 capital program.”

"Securing public transportation funds for their intended purpose is precisely what Long Island residents and businesses expect from their government. This bill will shore up funding for rail and bus service that benefits Long Island transit users and support our local downtowns," stated Eric Alexander, Director, Vision Long Island and representative of 50-member LI Lobby Coalition that strongly supports this legislation.

"Hundreds of thousands of Long Islanders rely on public transportation to get to school, their jobs, and to participate in daily life," said Charlene Obernauer, founder of the Long Island Bus Riders' Union. "We urge Governor Cuomo to sign the Transit Lockbox bill, which simply ensures that money allocated towards public transportation will be used for its intended purpose."

“The Transit Lockbox bill is good for both transit riders and tax payers,” said John Kaehny, Executive Director of Reinvent Albany. “It increases fiscal transparency, and makes it harder for

Albany to break the promise to taxpayers that transit dedicated taxes will be spent solely on transit.”

"The transportation sector is a leading cause of the air pollution that triggers asthma and other lung ailments and is responsible for over one third of the pollution that is altering our climate. Robust and well-maintained public transit systems help to counteract these impacts by providing comfortable, reliable, and efficient alternatives to the use of personal vehicles. By signing this law and limiting diversions from transit funds, Governor Cuomo will help to ensure that dedicated transit funds do the job they were intended to do," said Katherine Nadeau, Policy Director for Environmental Advocates of New York.

"Proper funding of the MTA and other public transit systems in New York State is a key climate strategy to hold down the State's green house gas emissions. The transit lockbox bill is a modest but critical climate initiative," added Jim Tripp, Environmental Defense Fund Senior Counsel.

“This bill adds sunshine to an opaque process. Legislators will understand more clearly the impact to riders and service of using transit funds for other purposes,” stated Veronica Vanterpool, Executive Director of Tri-State Transportation Campaign. “New York’s economy and quality of life are dependent on good transit. Signing this bill into law is a sensible way of protecting New York.”

"Signing the transit lock box bill into law would be a great stroke of leadership for Governor Cuomo. Support for this bill runs far and wide across New York State: from the hundreds of legislators who voted for it to the millions of commuters around the state who rely on public transit daily," says Paul Steely White, Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives.

"Andrew Cuomo ran to lead New York on the promise to restore transparency to Albany and with his pen stroke this bill will fulfill that promise by making sure transit dollars are spent on their intended purpose: transit."

###