

LONG ISLAND BUSINESS COUNCIL – LONG ISLAND BUS RIDERS UNION – LONG ISLAND JOBS WITH JUSTICE – LONG ISLAND LOBBY COALITION – MELVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE – NEW YORK STATE BUS ASSOCIATION – NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST GROUP – SUFFOLK INDEPENDENT LIVING ORGANIZATION, INC. – TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN – VISION LONG ISLAND

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Groups Call for Additional State Transit Funding for Suffolk County Transit Bus System

Rider Advocates, Businesses, Environment, Labor and Transportation Groups Support County Executive Bellone's Request for Additional Bus Funding

Hauppauge—Bus and paratransit riders, were joined by business, labor, planning and transit advocates Tuesday afternoon, to urge Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state legislature to include additional funding for Suffolk County's bus system in the final state budget.

Last week, County Executive Steve Bellone sent a letter to Governor Cuomo and Suffolk County's state delegation requesting \$10 million in additional state funds to be used to expand service to Sunday's and later into evenings. Last year, Suffolk County used \$2.01 million in additional state transit funds to expand service to ten Sunday routes, an unprecedented service expansion that has proven popular since its launch in January. Since its launch, ridership on those ten routes has grown consistently.

But even with that additional funding, Suffolk County still receives, as a percentage, much less state support than other counties in the region. For example, state funding for Nassau County's bus system makes up well over 50 percent of the bus system's total operating budget while state funding only accounts for roughly 35 percent of Suffolk County Transit's operating budget. At the same time, Suffolk County contributes over 50 percent to its transit-operating budget while Nassau County contributes only 2 percent.

Advocates said that state support for Nassau's system is important and must be maintained, but Suffolk County needs additional state support to provide the level of service that is being demanded by riders, businesses and residents.

"Suffolk County Transit ridership has grown roughly 40 percent since 2001," said Ryan Lynch, associate director for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit policy watchdog. "Suffolk County has done a good job supporting its system and riders have paid higher fares for better service, but Governor Cuomo and the Senate and Assembly leadership need to do more to support workers, businesses and students who depend on the system."

"As a Suffolk county bus rider who relies solely on the buses to get to work, my daily commute is often stressful because the buses are systemically late or frequently don't show up at all," said

Aaron Watkins-Lopez, a Suffolk County Transit customer. "Suffolk bus riders need more service so we aren't constantly worried that we can't get to the supermarket, we'll be late for work or we'll be stranded for hours because our bus never arrived."

Helping to ensure that employees could get to work on time made Suffolk County business leaders particularly supportive of the call for additional state funding.

"The businesses and residents of Suffolk County thrive in a vibrant 24 hour/7day a week community that never takes a day off or goes to sleep," said Michael DeLuise, President of the Melville Chamber of Commerce. "To hinder the health and growth of those who live, work and do business by offering them only part-time access to public transportation can only stand in the way of our growth and posterity."

"The Long Island Business Council supports County Executive Bellone's request for additional state funding for Suffolk County Transit," said Richard Bivone and Robert Fonti, chairmen for the Long Island Business Council. "Using this funding to increase efficient and reliable transportation options on Sunday's and later into weekends will provide small businesses the workforce they need to be successful and help bring in additional customers to support our local downtown economies."

According to riders, additional service would go a long way towards improving access to education and jobs in Suffolk County.

"Suffolk County buses are an affordable way for college students to get where they need to go," said Ben DeAngelis, NYPIRG Campus Program Director working at Stony Brook University. "Increased State Operating Aid (STOA) will help better maintain the services that students need to commute to campus, connect to the LIRR, and off-campus jobs."

Additional funding would go a long way towards creating a more equitable transportation system for paratransit riders as well. A vast portion of paratransit riders were left out of this years' service addition due to the lack of resources to cover expansion in the whole county. Additional state funds will allow for a broader expansion of service for later evening hours and other Sunday routes, enhancing a critical lifeline for the disabled population in Suffolk County.

"Having access to transportation is critical to the disabled community as it ensures our population the opportunity to live comparable lives as the non-disabled community," said Joseph Delgado, executive director of Suffolk Independent Living Organization, Inc. "In Suffolk County people with disabilities make up a large segment of the public transportation ridership and depend on public transportation to access medical services, go to work, shop and enjoy the many recreational activities afforded to people who have other means for traveling in Suffolk County."

"For many residents of Suffolk County, the bus is the only mode of transportation that can get them to work, school, and doctor's appointments. Suffolk County needs a bus system that reflects and supports the needs of bus riders, and the only way to sustain that is if our State's leadership shows a deeper investment in our public transportation system," said Anita Halasz, Executive Director of Long Island Jobs with Justice.

Leaders in Albany have until the end of the month to adopt a final budget for the coming fiscal year making the next few weeks important for Suffolk County's delegation to Albany to advocate for additional funding.

"Bus riders in Suffolk County need the same accommodations as riders in all of the other suburban counties," said Jerry Kremer, counsel for the New York State Bus Association. "They need a modern transit system which allows them to work, shop or be with their families on a Sunday. This is the right thing to do for hundreds of thousands of people."

"To get our fair share of transportation resources from Albany more substantial funding for Suffolk bus service is a needed and logical request, said Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island and co-chair of the Long Island Lobby Coalition. "More folks are in need of transportation options and new planning and job development require these services. The 75 member strong LI Lobby Coalition endorses additional support for Suffolk County Bus Service. Vision and the Coalition join County Executive Steve Bellone in pushing for these resources to be made available for residents and workers."

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