



January 20, 2016
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Veronica Vanterpool, 917-957-9748
Nadine Lemmon, 917-767-7698

Lack of Financial Details in NYS Executive Budget Undermines Transparency and Accountability

Statement of Tri-State Transportation Campaign Executive Director Veronica Vanterpool on the first hearing on Governor Cuomo's proposed 2016-2017 budget:

As the New York State Legislature commences its first hearing today on Governor Cuomo's proposed 2016-2017 budget, members of the Assembly and Senate must address the opacity of the transportation budgeting process and seek answers to the myriad questions raised by the lack of financial detail.

While the governor has taken a strong interest in statewide transportation over the past year, this lack of clarity for many of his proposals, and insufficient funding for others, undermines a stated commitment to invest in the state's road, bridge, bus and rail infrastructure and the public's ability to participate in decisions about spending.

For instance:

- There is no list of projects for the governor's proposed five-year NYSDOT Capital Plan, and the public has no idea which transportation projects will advance in this five-year plan, on what schedule, and at what funding levels. Even last year's two-year NYSDOT Capital Plan is still not available to the public.
- The Executive Budget's briefing book mentions that the first phase of transit on the New NY Bridge, known as Hudson Links, will be funded. To our knowledge, there is no appropriation to verify that the remaining \$31 million gap will be filled.

- The governor mentions a \$100 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative partially using NYSDOT “Complete Streets” funding. However, to date there is no such dedicated “Complete Streets” state funding.
- While we applaud the Executive Budget for recognizing the need for a five-year capital plan for non-MTA transit systems, the amount proposed in the budget (\$295 million) substantially underfunds these systems' identified need of \$1 billion.
- For the past several years, the Bronx community has been calling for the inclusion of \$3 million in NYSDOT’s Capital Plan to fund the environmental review of the reconfiguration of the Sheridan Expressway. Again, without a detailed list of capital projects, there is no way to tell if this funding has been included in this Executive Budget.
- The public has been calling for a financial plan for building the New NY Bridge for years to no avail. Although still not disclosed, given the funding precedents to date for the new bridge, it is likely future settlement funds and other financial support will be diverted to subsidize construction and drivers on the Thruway. At a minimum, state taxpayers should expect to see financial details for large infrastructure projects at the onset. Sources should not be cobbled together at the last minute. This use of settlement and other taxpayer funds to freeze tolls is bad public policy, undermines the transit and environmental goals of the lower Hudson valley, and without a financial plan, puts state taxpayers at risk of being tasked with further subsidizing the construction in the future.
- Lastly, this budget contains no appropriation for the MTA, not only this year, but any outlying years, only a re-appropriation of the \$1 billion from last year’s budget. Instead of comparable cash akin to the funding of the \$22 billion for roads and bridges program, the MTA will be given an IOU. This budget leaves the door wide open to be funded with an unsustainable level of debt financing for the MTA. While we were supportive of the agreement made this fall between Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio to fill the \$11 billion gap in the \$26.9 billion five-year capital plan, we see now that the governor had an entirely different idea of "fully-funded."

As the legislature holds several more budget hearings through February 9, our elected leaders must ensure the governor’s verbal commitment to transportation is substantiated with actual dollars, and put an end to NYSDOT's opaque transportation planning process. Without such details, transparency and accountability to the public become a mockery.

###

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.