

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



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SENATOR, 58TH DISTRICT

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January 9, 2011

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Re: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority Assistance Request

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am writing regarding a serious funding shortfall that is threatening to disrupt public transportation throughout the Buffalo-Niagara region. The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, NFTA, has asked New York State for \$10 million in deficit reduction assistance coupled with 8 additional megawatts of power from the New York Power Authority.

Given the necessity of public access to transportation to ensure the economic growth and job creation of our region, I support the NFTA's request and ask for your serious consideration of this matter. While I recognize the tight fiscal restraints within which we are forced to craft a budget that is equitable both regionally and across service and education sectors, it is imperative that any discussion about state transit operating assistance includes serious consideration of the NFTA's financial challenges.

State transit operating assistance to the NFTA has been reduced by \$4.3 million over the past two years, roughly 9%. During the preparation of their upcoming budget for fiscal year 2012, the NFTA realized they were facing a \$15 million shortfall, due to these cuts and also rising costs. In an attempt to forestall this current budget crisis, the NFTA tried to close this gap with 50 employee layoffs and other efficiency measures. Despite this, a \$7 million gap still loomed, which prompted the Board recently to vote in favor of service reductions just to break even.

As a State Senator, I represent the City of Buffalo, the City of Lackawanna, and four towns within the Western New York region, all of which will be gravely impacted by these proposed cuts in service. Fares will not increase, but the sheer number of route reductions will have an immediate effect on patrons, who count on this public transportation to maintain their employment and support their families.

I have heard from constituents already about the serious disruption that prior cuts to service have caused, and many no longer have the ability to arrive at their jobs during off-peak hours or on weekends. The new service reductions that have been proposed are more drastic and will have catastrophic effects on the neediest members of our region.

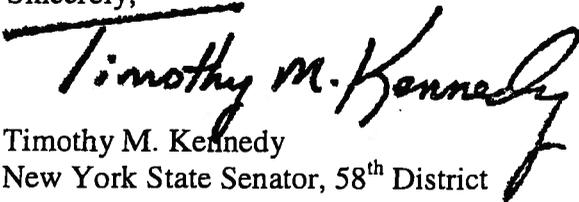
Without access to public transportation, many Western New Yorkers may lose their jobs. The result may be more families on public assistance and more people seeking unemployment benefits, which would put further fiscal strain on the state and drive our region deeper into economic hardship.

Additionally, prior cuts to the NFTA have affected constituents in my district who rely on paratransit services, which are available to individuals with disabilities. My office has received several complaints about tardiness and service reduction, and one disabled woman was left outside of the McKinley Mall in Western New York waiting for a pickup that was delayed for hours. These issues are a particular concern of mine, given that those accessing paratransit services often have no other means of transportation. This severely affects their quality of life and ability to access healthcare and employment. This is a serious matter that begs serious consideration from our state leaders.

During this upcoming budget season, we are going to be asked to support the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, MTA, something which the taxpayers of New York did in 2009 by offering a \$2.26 billion rescue plan. The importance of the MTA cannot be overstated, but neither can that of the NFTA. As we prepare to deliberate the upcoming budget, we must do our best to support public transportation in Western New York.

Once again, I ask that you support the NFTA in its request for assistance during this crucial time. I look forward to working with you to restore public transportation in Western New York. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


Timothy M. Kennedy
New York State Senator, 58th District