

# Herbst: The infrastructure buck stopped here on Route 347

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With all due respect to the President of the United States and his remarks for America's infrastructure offered during January's State of the Union Address, Route 347 here on Long Island can't wait for an act of Congress.

This key Suffolk County artery is perhaps one of the most underappreciated roadways in our transportation network, yet it carries millions of cars a year towards such key destinations as SUNY at Stony Brook, retail centers, and corporate headquarters. Public support has

been made over the course of years by state Senator (and now Majority Leader) John Flanagan, and Assemblymen Steve Englebright and Michael Fitzpatrick to create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Route 347, but all the dollars required never quite seem to be allocated during the annual Albany horse trading known as "budget negotiations."

As a result, the Route 347 modernization project is barely a third completed and there is no funding slated for this year's construction season. Equally disturbing, neither are there any dollars allocated for the remainder of the existing five-year capital transportation program. The New York State Department of Transportation, which is totally dependent on the governor's view of priorities, has given Route 347 a "placeholder" date of 2025 to resume a funding plan.

For the 60,000 drivers who use that road every day, there is one word for that current status: unacceptable.

By way of background, Route 347 is approximately 15 miles. To date only 4.3 miles of the corridor have been completed.

No project as comprehensive as the reconstruction of Route 347 can be accomplished in a single year. It calls for a phased timeline to minimize disruption and delays and to ensure orderly approaches to engineering and funding. The next phase (designated Phase 5) would run for a distance of two miles and, if comparable to similar efforts, would be in the \$40 to \$60 million range. (Total reconstruction is estimated between \$350 and \$550 million.)

The state would be able to manage these phases through an efficient "Design-Build" contract. (Design-build is a method of project delivery in which one team works under a single contract with the DOT to provide design and construction services. This is opposed to splitting design and construction services among separate entities with separate contracts, separate work assignments, etc. Design-Build ensures cost saving efficiencies.)

Route 347 is not the only Long Island project that needs financial support and priority funding. As the nation's oldest suburb, there are any number of road infrastructure projects that need to be given the green light with dollars from Albany. They include the Oakdale Merge on the south shore, the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway Rehabilitation, improved drainage along Veterans Memorial Highway, reconstruction along Route 112 that sits between the LIE and Route 25, the sorry condition of the Northern State Parkway ramps along Glen Cove Road, not to mention bridge repairs and road resurfacing throughout the bi-county region.

Many of our state elected officials have issued prior statements of support for many of these projects only to have drivers discover later that no dollars have been allocated to even permit engineering drawings to be begun. At a time when Gov. Andrew Cuomo is enthusiastic about a Long Island Sound tunnel, when he has overcome opposition to a much needed third LIRR main line track, and has cut the ribbon on a replacement for the Tappan Zee Bridge, one

would suggest that we need only ask him to support funding for Route 347. What is needed now is a strong advocacy effort during state budget discussions that enlists the governor's enthusiasm for transportation improvements on behalf of a region of 2.7 million people who not only drive their cars, but a sizeable portion of the state's economy.

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