

Office of the NEW YORK STATE
COMPTROLLER

Locally Owned Roads by the Numbers



New York State Comptroller
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Introduction

People may take for granted the roads they drive on every day, but their importance to the economy becomes evident whenever our roadways are in poor condition, under construction or being repaired. Local governments own 85 percent of all roads in the State, from city and village streets to major multilane highways to rural roads both paved and unpaved. The remaining 15 percent are mostly State and federal highways.

General purpose local governments (counties, cities towns and villages) outside New York City reported spending about \$2 billion on road maintenance, repairs and upgrades in fiscal years ending in 2020 (FY 2020, reflecting the most current available data). This represents about 6 percent of their total expenditures.¹ County and town governments account for about three-quarters of this local government road spending. A list of surface transportation projects for which federal funding is proposed includes \$2.2 billion over four years for projects outside New York City.² However, one study found that a least \$1.3 billion a year more may be needed to maintain and improve locally owned roads.³

New York State is expected to receive \$13.5 billion over five years for formula-funded highway and bridge programs through the recently enacted Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. In addition to these amounts, New York State also has access to a range of competitive grants and other new funding made available through the Act. It is unclear at this point how much total supplemental funding will be received by the State and its local governments, but the additional federal aid presents an opportunity for New York to make good progress in improving the condition of its transportation infrastructure.

This report profiles local government spending on roads. It also looks at the aid that local governments receive from the State and the federal government for road-related purposes. Lastly, the report examines data availability related to the condition of locally owned roads, the risks of flooding and other climate events, and the financial needs for road maintenance and improvement.

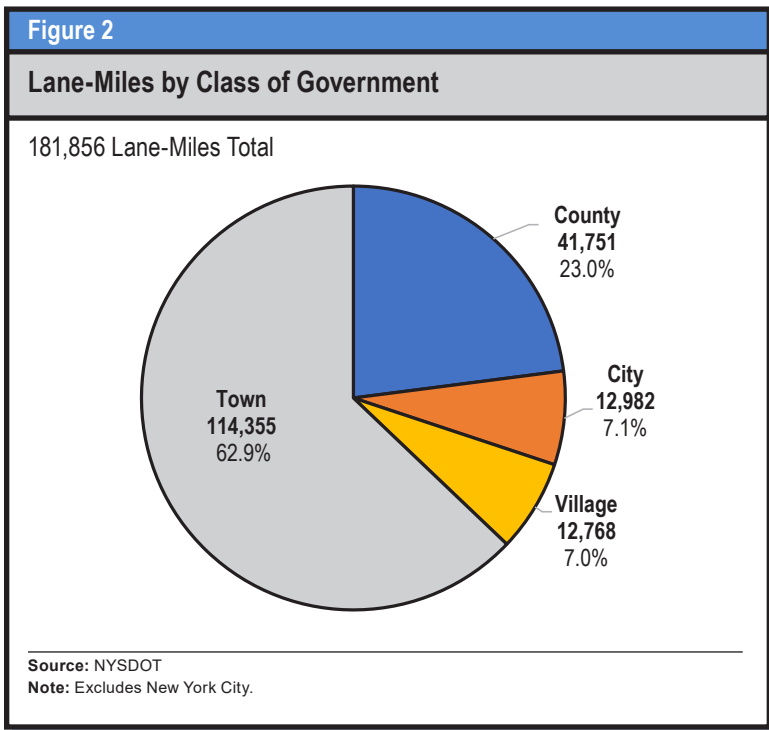
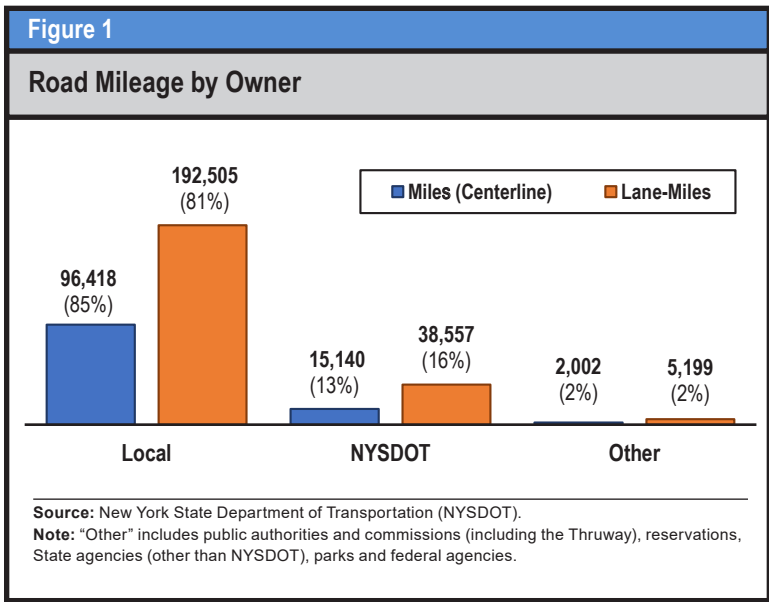
Another major component of transportation infrastructure, closely connected to roads, is bridges. A report by the Office of the New York State Comptroller in 2017 entitled *Local Bridges by the Numbers* examined the condition of the State's local bridges and the cost of their repair.⁴

Highlights
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local governments maintain over 96,000 miles of roads, 85 percent of all the roads in New York State.• Local governments, excluding New York City, spent \$2.0 billion on road maintenance and improvement in the 2020 fiscal year.• Road spending by local governments declined by 7 percent over the last ten years, after adjusting for inflation.• Road spending per capita is higher downstate, while road spending compared to full value assessment is higher upstate.• The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program dedicates \$2.2 billion over 4 years to local transportation projects.• State road and highway aid in fiscal year 2020, including CHIPS aid, was \$477 million, while federal aid was \$419 million.

Overview of Locally Owned Roads

Local governments own and maintain the vast majority of the roads in New York State. By total length of roadway, a concept known as “centerline miles,” local governments own 96,418 miles, or 85 percent of New York’s roads. Another way to look at this is by “lane-miles,” which multiplies the length of the road by the number of lanes. By this measure, these locally owned roads account for 192,505 lane-miles, or 81 percent of the lane-miles in the State.⁵ (See Figure 1.)

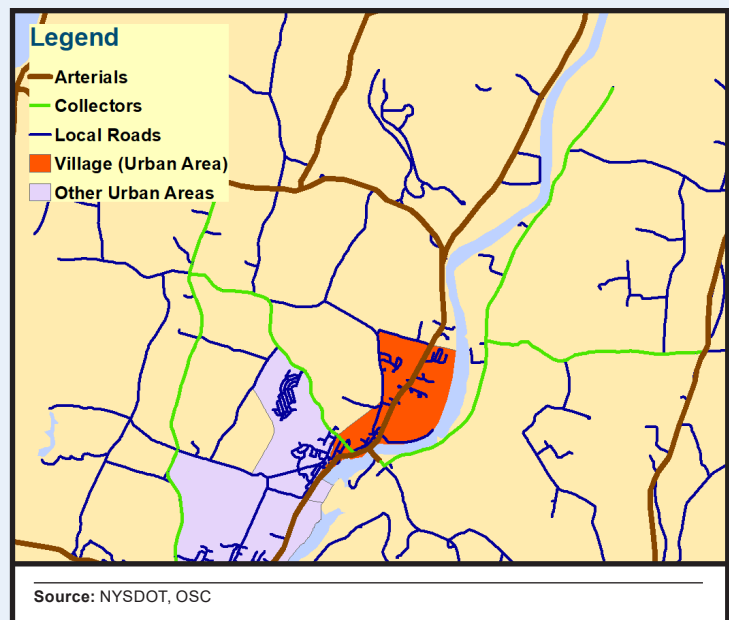
New York City’s streets and highways account for 10,649 lane-miles. This report focuses on the 181,856 locally owned lane-miles located outside of the City. Looking at these roads only, towns maintain 114,000 lane-miles (62.9 percent), counties maintain 42,000 lane-miles (23.0 percent), cities maintain 13,000 lane-miles (7.1 percent) and villages maintain 13,000 lane-miles (7.0 percent). (See Figure 2.)



About 105,000 lane-miles, or 58 percent of all locally owned roads outside New York City, are rural roads, which refers to any road outside of a designated urban area.⁶ The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines three major classifications of roads: arterials, collectors and local roads. (See “FHWA Road Function Classifications” on this page.) For both urban and rural roads, 5 percent (9,000 lane-miles) are arterials, 17 percent (31,000 lane-miles) are collectors and the remaining 78 percent (over 140,000 lane-miles) are local. Additionally, 46 percent of local roads (approximately 83,000 lane-miles) are rural and over 10 percent (nearly 19,000 lane-miles) of locally owned roads are unpaved, mostly rural local roads.⁷

FHWA Road Function Classifications

- **Arterials** include the Interstate system, freeways, multilane highways and other important roadways.⁸ They connect the nation’s principal urban areas, cities and industrial centers. Direct access to land, businesses and residences is limited. Generally, speed limits are over 50 miles per hour (mph).
- **Collectors** are major and minor roads that connect local roads and streets with arterials. Collectors provide less mobility than arterials at lower speeds and for shorter distances. They balance mobility with land access. Speed limits are usually 55 mph or lower.
- **Local roads** provide limited mobility and are the primary access to residential areas, businesses, farms and other local areas. Speed limits are usually 45 mph or lower.



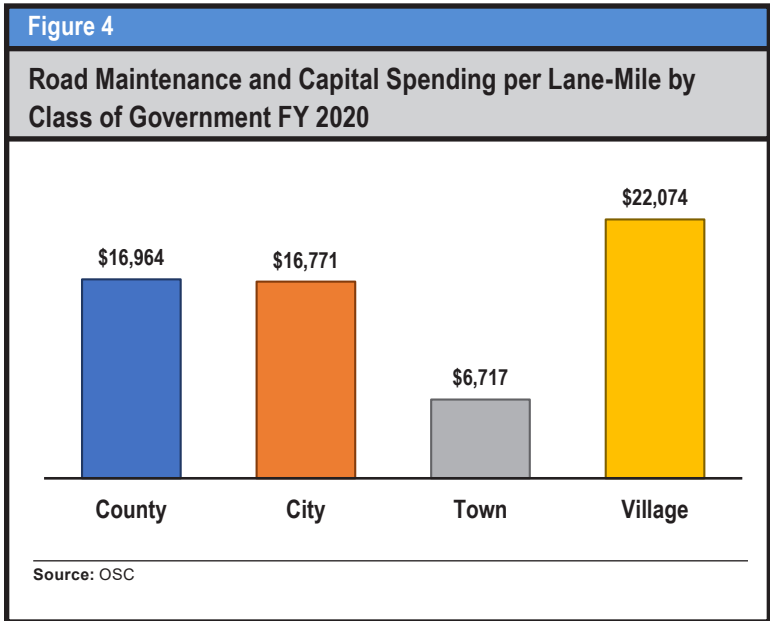
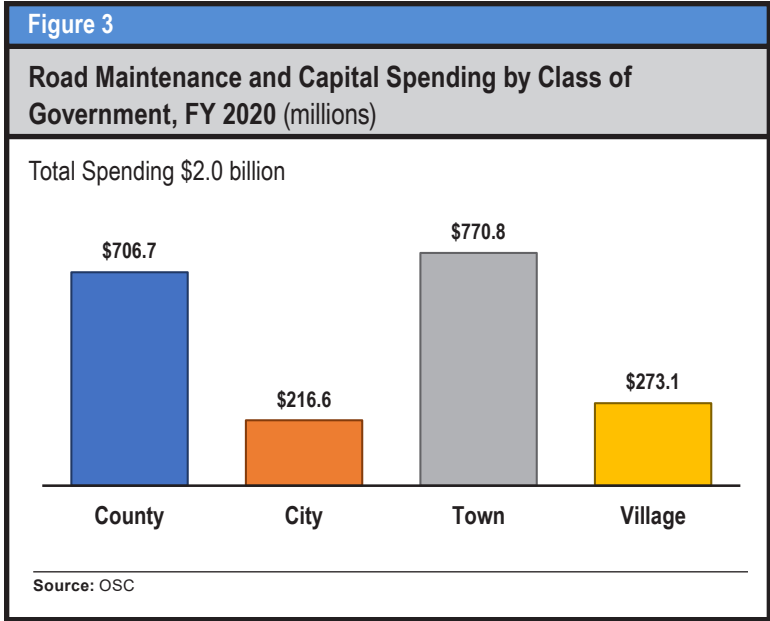
Spending on Locally Owned Roads

Road Maintenance and Capital Spending

Local governments outside of New York City spent \$2.0 billion in FY 2020 for road and highway maintenance and capital improvements.⁹ Towns spent the most, at \$771 million, counties spent \$707 million, villages \$273 million and cities \$217 million. (See Figure 3.)

However, measuring spending per lane-mile of road, villages spend the most, almost \$22,100 per lane-mile, with counties and cities spending about \$17,000 and \$16,800 per lane-mile, respectively. Towns spend the least, at about \$6,700 per lane mile. (See Figure 4.)

This variation may be explained in part by the kinds of roads that each class of government tends to own. Generally speaking, villages and cities have residential and commercial streets that will be frequently repaired and improved for the convenience of their residents and businesses. Counties own and maintain roads that are predominantly arterials or collectors, and usually have moderate to heavy use. Towns have the greatest mileage of roads, but many of them are rural and have relatively lighter use, and therefore may require less maintenance and improvement.¹⁰

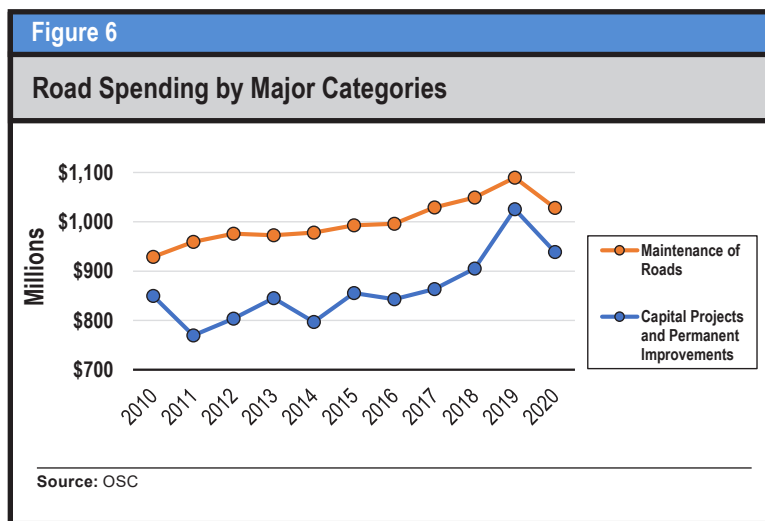
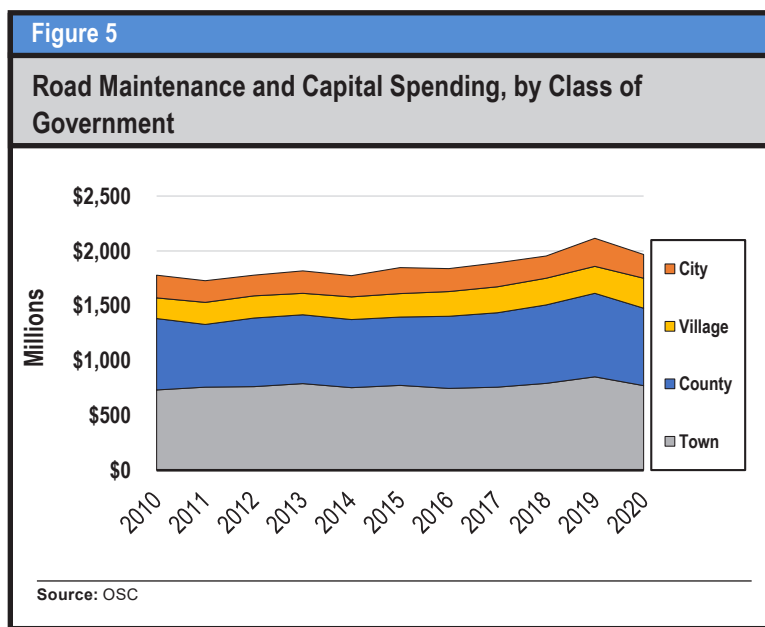


Spending Trend

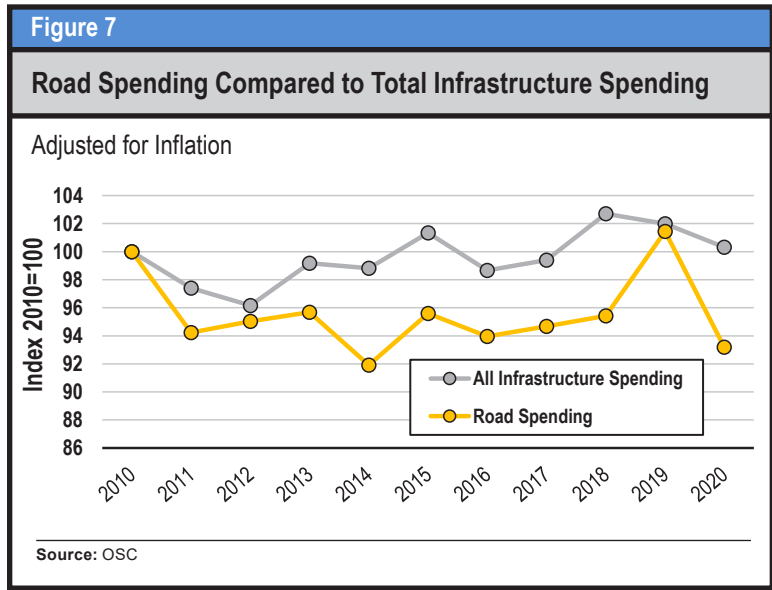
Spending for all road-related purposes increased by 11 percent between FY 2010 and FY 2020, an average annual rate of 1.0 percent. This was significantly slower growth than the average inflation rate of 1.7 percent for the same period. Growth was faster for villages, with an average annual increase of 3.8 percent.¹¹ (See Figure 5.)

Road-related spending declined in 2020 for all classes of government except villages. Health restrictions and budget effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may have been a factor, as local governments reduced many operations, including road and highway maintenance and repair.¹² The decline in all road spending was 7 percent in FY 2020. This followed an unusually large increase of 8 percent in road spending in FY 2019, over half of which took place in five municipalities: Erie and Nassau counties, the City of Port Jervis, and the towns of Hempstead and Oyster Bay.

Local governments report road spending separately for maintenance of roads and for capital projects and permanent improvements. Much of the volatility in spending is in the capital projects and permanent improvements category. Local governments can postpone this kind of spending in financial hard times and accelerate it when they have ample resources. (See Figure 6.)

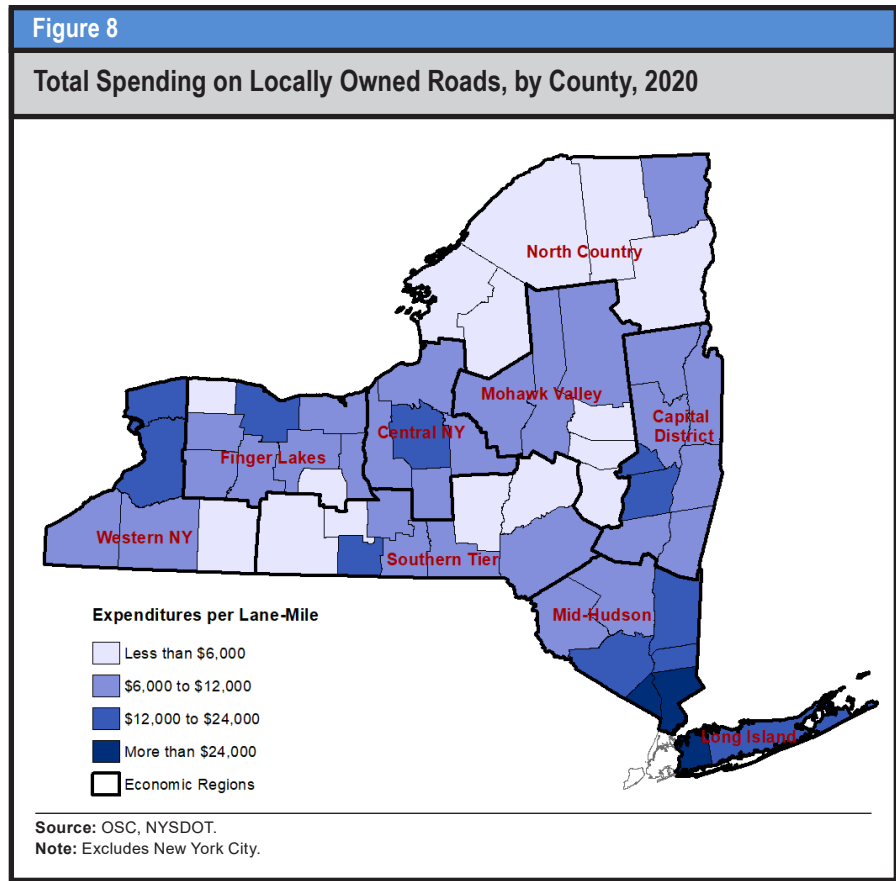


Over the last ten years, local government spending on roads has declined compared to overall local infrastructure spending.¹³ (See Figure 7.) Adjusted for inflation, total infrastructure spending was about the same in FY 2020 as it was in FY 2010. However, during the ten-year period, road spending declined by almost 7 percent, although it showed significant one-year growth in FY 2019.



Regional Spending

Local spending for roads varies significantly across the State. More densely populated suburban counties downstate have the highest total road spending by all local governments per lane-mile, while more rural upstate counties have the lowest. Highest overall in FY 2020 was Westchester County in the Mid-Hudson region at \$25,944 per lane-mile. Nassau County on Long Island and Rockland County (Mid-Hudson) also spent over \$24,000 per lane-mile. Conversely, Lewis County in the North Country region spent the least, at \$3,169 per lane-mile. (See Figure 8.)



The amount that local governments pay for roads also varies by region when considering measures of the tax capacity of local government (represented by property values, since most local governments depend heavily on property tax revenues) and population. Statewide, road spending was \$1.48 per \$1,000 of the full value of property in 2020, and spending per capita was \$177.¹⁴ (See Figure 9.) Downstate, where property values are generally higher, spending compared to full value is lower, only \$0.75 per \$1,000 full value in the Long Island region and \$1.23 per \$1,000 in the Mid-Hudson region. Upstate it is higher, with the Southern Tier region being the highest at \$3.85 per \$1,000. Per capita spending was lowest in the Long Island region, at \$151, while the highest was the Southern Tier region at \$257.

Figure 9				
2020 Local Government Road Spending Measures, by Region				
Region	Total Spending (millions)	Per Lane-Mile	Per \$1,000 Full Value	Per Capita
Upstate				
Capital District	\$193.2	\$9,563	\$1.80	\$175
Central New York	\$150.5	\$9,618	\$3.23	\$192
Finger Lakes	\$188.8	\$9,094	\$2.44	\$154
Mohawk Valley	\$90.1	\$7,203	\$3.13	\$209
North Country	\$89.0	\$5,078	\$2.76	\$214
Southern Tier	\$176.9	\$6,823	\$3.85	\$253
Western New York	\$241.9	\$11,263	\$2.64	\$171
Downstate				
Long Island	\$427.1	\$19,072	\$0.75	\$146
Mid-Hudson	\$409.7	\$16,224	\$1.23	\$171
Total	\$1,967.1	\$10,827	\$1.48	\$173

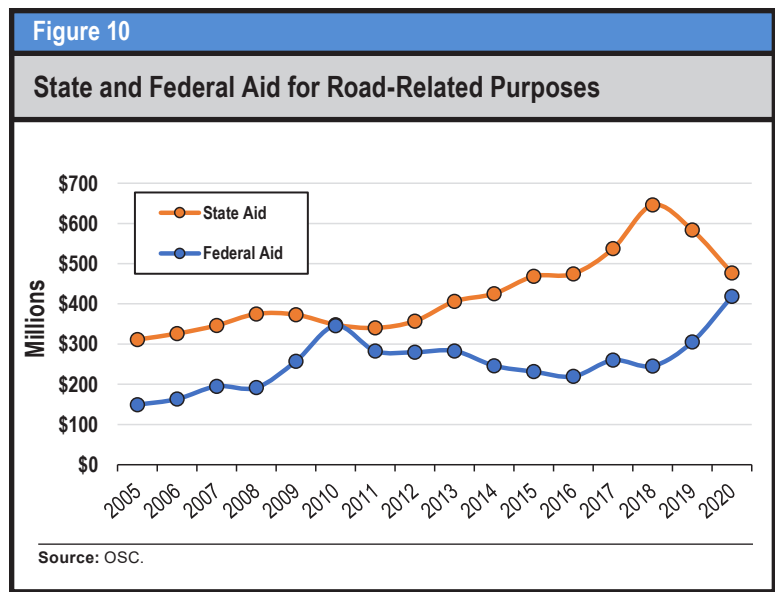
Source: OSC, NYSDOT, New York Department of Taxation and Finance, U.S. Census.

State and Federal Road Aid

Local governments receive transportation aid from the State and from the federal government for roads and certain other transportation infrastructure. Excluding aid that is specifically earmarked for other elements of the State’s transportation network including mass transit and airports, State aid in FY 2020 was \$477 million and federal aid was \$419 million.¹⁵

State aid for roads is provided through several programs. The largest is the long-standing Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), which supports the construction and repair of highways, bridges, highway-railroad crossings, and other facilities that are not on the State highway system. PAVE-NY was established in 2016 to aid local road rehabilitation and reconstruction, and Extreme Winter Recovery funding (which includes funding for roads and bridges) has been provided in most years since 2014. Local governments can “bank” their aid allocations from these programs from year to year and then use the accumulated amounts for projects as they are undertaken.¹⁶ In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021-22, CHIPS funding was increased from the annual amount of \$438 million – the level unchanged since 2013 – to \$538 million, PAVE-NY was increased from \$100 million to \$150 million, Extreme Winter Recovery was increased from \$65 million to \$100 million and a new program was created that will distribute \$100 million for the upkeep of “State touring routes” – about 600 miles of roads (and bridges) that are owned by local governments but have State route numbers. This would include, for example, city-owned streets that are part of State highways.¹⁷

State aid can fluctuate with the State’s financial condition and has declined in times of fiscal stress. The exact level of State aid also depends on when local governments choose to undertake projects and get reimbursed. In contrast, the federal government can increase aid in response to economic problems, such as when funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) awarded grants for “shovel ready” infrastructure projects to jump-start the economy after the 2007-09 recession.¹⁸ From FY 2018 to FY 2020, local governments reported that State aid declined and federal aid increased. Some of this change in 2020 may be attributed to the State and federal reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. (See Figure 10.)



New York State is expected to receive \$13.5 billion over five years for formula-funded highway and bridge programs through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act enacted in November 2021. Of the \$13.5 billion, \$4.1 billion represents new funding, including \$2.25 billion for highway with \$1.7 billion for existing highway programs, and \$551 million for new highway programs. An additional \$1.9 billion is anticipated for the new Bridge Investment Program.

In addition to these amounts, New York State also has access to a range of competitive grants and other new funding made available through the Act. It is unclear at this point how much total supplemental funding will be received by the State and local governments.¹⁹

Unlike ARRA, the federal government has indicated it is not limiting this funding to only existing projects and the funding is expected to remain in place for at least five years, avoiding the fluctuations seen in federal road-related aid during the 2009 to 2011 period.²⁰ Federal aid is awarded to local governments in accordance with a statewide plan. (See “STIP and Federal Highway Aid” on this page.)

STIP and Federal Highway Aid

Federal law requires each state to cooperate with local officials to develop a long-range statewide transportation plan and a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).²¹ The STIP is a four-year list of surface transportation projects for which federal funding is proposed; these projects may include roads, mass transit or other kinds of surface transportation. In New York State, the STIP is aggregated by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) in consultation with local officials in non-metropolitan areas and with metropolitan planning organizations in urbanized areas.

STIP projects may be allocated federal funds for up to 80 percent of project costs. These federally funded projects are often also allocated State funding. Called “Marchiselli Aid,” this State program might cover another 15 percent of the total costs, leaving the municipality with 5 percent of the project’s costs to be financed from local resources. In SFY 2020-21, the State made \$15.1 million in Marchiselli Aid payments, about \$4 million of which went to local governments outside of New York City.²²

The most recent STIP covers the period between October 1, 2019, and September 30, 2023. It allocates \$2.2 billion dollars over those four years to local projects outside of New York City. About 56 percent of this funding goes to projects in the downstate regions (Long Island and the Mid-Hudson).

STIP Project Funding (millions)						
	Federal Fiscal Year				4-Year Total	Percentage of Total
	2020	2021	2022	2023		
Downstate	\$155.7	\$414.9	\$353.0	\$315.0	\$1,238.6	56%
Upstate	\$264.2	\$335.7	\$224.7	\$161.2	\$985.8	44%
Total Local Funding	\$419.9	\$750.7	\$577.7	\$476.1	\$2,224.4	

Source: U. S. Federal Transit Administration.
Note: Excludes New York City

The 2019-2023 STIP allocated 6.9 percent of federal transportation aid to local governments outside of New York City. If this percentage were to hold true for the federal highway aid allocated to the State by the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, then local governments would get about \$155 million in additional aid over five years, or about \$31 million a year. The exact amount of additional local road aid will depend on the projects that are included in future versions of the STIP.

Assessing Need

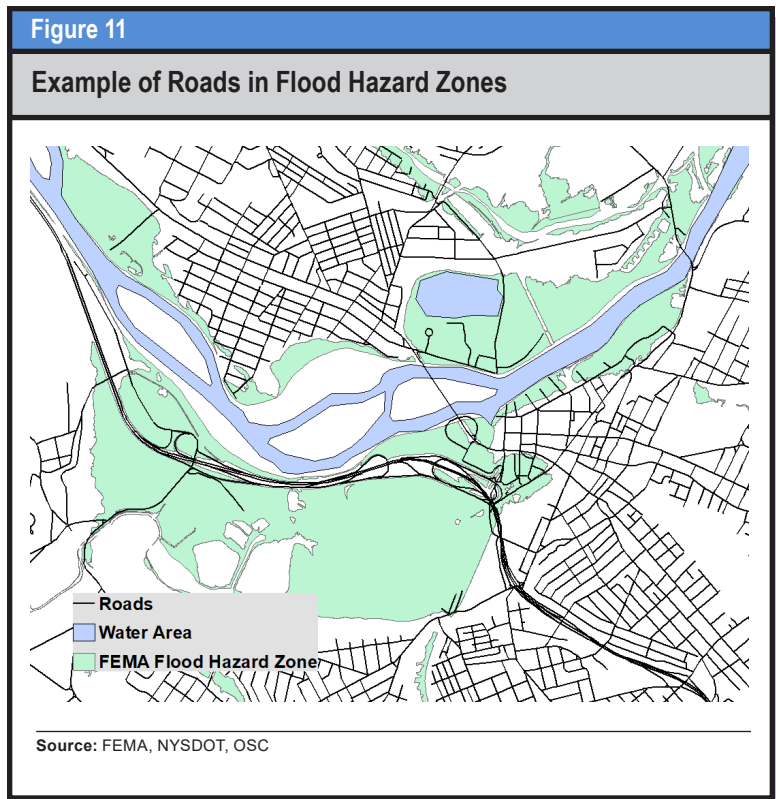
Although many local governments maintain adequate information on the condition of their own roads and the investments needed to maintain and repair them, this practice is not universal.²³ In addition, there is no comprehensive central repository of data on local road conditions to allow for comparative analysis or an overall assessment of need statewide. NYSDOT maintains current data on State and federal highway conditions. NYSDOT has also recently performed an assessment of the condition of locally owned roads that are eligible for federal funding. This assessment includes about 21,000 lane-miles of the 182,000 lane-miles of locally owned roads outside of New York City and generally covers arterials and collectors.²⁴

A 2013 study of local highway and bridge needs published by the NYS Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, based in part on a 2007 “Transportation Needs Assessment” by NYSDOT, found that locally owned roads would need about \$32 billion over 15 years to restore locally owned roads through repaving and improvements. The report estimated that there was a spending gap of \$1.3 billion a year for locally owned roads and bridges. There has been no more recent comprehensive assessment of local funding need, even while this gap may have increased, as local spending has dropped over the decade relative to inflation.²⁵

One concern that has acquired urgency since those assessments of road needs is the problem of roadway flooding, as increasingly intense storms and wet weather events associated with climate change create new hazards. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maintains flood hazard maps, which show roads and other infrastructure that are in designated floodplains.²⁶

Figure 11 is an illustration of typical flood risks for roads. Many locally owned roads cross or extend into flood risk zones. Local governments can use these maps to determine which of the roads they own are at risk of flooding. However, as with road conditions, there is no comprehensive, centralized list of which locally owned roads are prone to flooding.

Risk is a function both of whether roads are in flood-prone areas and whether there are enough mitigating measures (such as drains or other flood abatement devices) in place to prevent flooding. As the climate changes, the risks of flooding increase as well, potentially putting many more locally owned roads at risk, and raising the costs of maintaining or moving them.²⁷



NYSDOT has condition data on about 12 percent of locally owned roads outside New York City that are eligible to receive federal funding, these – along with the State maintained highways - include the most heavily used roads in the State. However, a significant number of locally-owned roads, including the less used local roads and some minor connectors and arterials, are not included in NYSDOT and the FHWA data sets.

Conclusion

Local governments in the State dedicate significant resources to road maintenance and capital improvements. A large portion of these resources come from State and federal aid. However, the lack of comprehensive, regularly updated data on local road conditions makes it impossible to determine what level of local spending would be sufficient to maintain roads in safe and adequate condition. This also means that local governments' need for additional support at the State or federal level cannot be estimated with sufficient accuracy. As noted above, one study found that significantly more resources are needed to maintain existing road infrastructure.

While some data on the condition of locally owned roads has been collected by NYSDOT, it is the responsibility of local governments to collect and update data on the conditions of most of the roads that they own. In the absence of a comprehensive statewide database, local governments must be aware of the need to maintain these important assets and engage in effective capital planning when making spending decisions. The State should offer resources and assistance to help local governments develop and maintain this data, to help ensure the most effective targeting of funds available for maintenance and improvement of locally owned roads. Maximizing the return on available infrastructure resources would improve the ability of local governments to keep their roads in good operating condition, promote safe travel, facilitate vibrant commercial activity and better meet the needs of their residents.

The recently enacted federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes billions of dollars in additional resources for road and bridge maintenance and improvements across the nation. New York State is expected to receive several billion dollars in supplemental funding, although it is not yet clear how much of these funds will flow to local governments. Also, the SFY 2023 Executive Budget proposes a \$32.8 billion, five-year Transportation Capital Plan, which includes a new multi-year initiative designed to improve State and local road conditions, as well as continued funding for CHIPS and Marchiselli, extreme winter recovery, the PAVE NY program, and the BRIDGE NY program.²⁸ Efforts by the State, working with local governments, to improve the availability and quality of data on local road conditions, maintenance needs, and associated costs, could improve the prioritization of projects and the best use of these critical resources. In addition, effective planning and coordination by the State and its local governments may increase the amount of competitive grant funding the State and its local governments will receive.

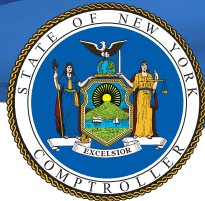
Notes

- ¹ This report only examines local government roads and finances outside of New York City.
- ² U.S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA), *Metropolitan, Statewide & Non-Metropolitan Planning*, 2015 at www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/transportation-planning/metropolitan-statewide-non-metropolitan-planning.
- ³ New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), *Multimodal Investment Needs and Goals for the Future*, 2007 at www.dot.ny.gov/programs/repository/multimodal%20investment%20needs.pdf; John J. Shufon, *An Assessment of Local Jurisdiction Highway and Bridge Infrastructure Needs in New York State*, NYS Association of Town Superintendents of Highways, Inc., November 2013 at www.nystownhwys.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2013LocalNeedsAssessmentUpdate.pdf.
- ⁴ Office of the New York State Comptroller (OSC), *Local Bridges by the Numbers*, October 2017, at www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/publications/pdf/local-bridges-by-the-numbers.pdf.
- ⁵ All road mileage data is from NYSDOT, Highway Data Services, at www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/technical-services/highway-data-services. Data is as of 2017. NYSDOT defines any road that is less than 16 feet in width as a one-lane road, even if it carries two-way traffic. For an explanation of centerline roadway length measurement, see NYSDOT, *Local Highway Inventory Manual, 2018*, p. 8, available at www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/technical-services/hds-respository/Tab/NYSDOT_Local_Highway_Inventory_Manual_April_2018.pdf, accessed January 27, 2022.
- ⁶ Generally, urban areas are defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, but may be modified by NYSDOT; see U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), *Highway Functional Classification Concepts, Criteria and Procedures*, 2013, p. 49, at www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/processes/statewide/related/highway_functional_classifications/fcauab.pdf.
- ⁷ NYSDOT, *Highway Data Services*, “Roadway Inventory 2017,” at www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/technical-services/highway-data-services/inventory-listing.
- ⁸ For all road classifications, see FHWA, *Road Function Classifications*, November 2000, at www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov/speedmgt/data_facts/docs/rd_func_class_1_42.pdf.
- ⁹ All expenditure and revenue data in this report is taken from data as reported by local governments to OSC annually. For some entities that had not reported their FY 2020 data by August 31, 2021, FY 2019 data was used in place of the missing FY 2020 data. This measure combines road maintenance, road improvement and highway capital spending. It does not include employee benefits spending except as noted.
- ¹⁰ NYSDOT, Highway Data Services, “Roadway Inventory 2017.”
- ¹¹ Inflation is measured by CPI-U, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Consumer Price Index*, at www.bls.gov/cpi/.
- ¹² OSC, *Pandemic and Recovery: Local Government Finances and Federal Assistance, Lessons from the Mid-Hudson Region*, October 2021, www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/publications/pdf/pandemic-and-recovery-lessons-from-the-mid-hudson-region.pdf.
- ¹³ Total infrastructure spending includes spending on transportation, sewers, water, electricity and other utilities. It does not include employee benefits spending.
- ¹⁴ Taxable full value data uses data supplied by the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, Office of Real Property Tax Services, with additional calculations by OSC.
- ¹⁵ As noted above, revenue data, including State and federal aid data, are as reported to OSC by local governments.
- ¹⁶ NYSDOT, *Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS)*, at www.dot.ny.gov/programs/chips.

Notes

- ¹⁷ New York State Division of the Budget, *FY 2022 Enacted Budget Financial Plan*, p. 155, and data provide to OSC by NYSDOT.
- ¹⁸ Shoshana Lew and John D. Porcar, “Eight Years Later: What the Recovery Act Taught Us About Investing in Transportation,” *The Avenue*, Brookings, www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2017/02/22/eight-years-later-what-the-recovery-act-taught-us.
- ¹⁹ Public Law No: 117-58, *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, signed November 15, 2021; Andrew Olson, *Highway Funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, Issue Brief 21-10, Federal Funds Information for States (FFIS), September 2, 2021; FFIS, *State Funding In IJJA*, November 30, 2021. These funding amounts include support for New York City.
- ²⁰ Adie Tomer, Caroline George, Joseph W. Kane, and Andrew Bourne, “America has an Infrastructure Bill. What Happens Next?” *The Avenue*, Brookings, November 9, 2021, at www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/11/09/america-has-an-infrastructure-bill-what-happens-next.
- ²¹ FTA, *Metropolitan, Statewide & Non-Metropolitan Planning*, op. cit.
- ²² Marchiselli Aid data provided by NYSDOT to OSC. See NYSDOT, *Federal Aid Process*, at www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/operating/opdm/local-programs-bureau/srts/repository/FedAid101SRTS%20Overview%20Handout%20-%20Circle%204-6-12.pdf.
- ²³ OSC, *Towns’ Road Management Plans*, 2014-MR-2, March 2015 at <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/audits/2017-11/lgsa-audit-swr-2015-Town-Road-Management-global.pdf>.
- ²⁴ NYSDOT, *Pavement Management Unit*, at www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/technical-services/pavement-management. Additional data provided to OSC by NYSDOT.
- ²⁵ NYSDOT, *Multimodal Investment Needs and Goals for the Future, 2007*; Shufon, *An Assessment of Local Jurisdiction Highway and Bridge Infrastructure Needs in New York State*.
- ²⁶ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), *Flood Maps*, at www.fema.gov/flood-maps.
- ²⁷ One presentation of the increased flood risk comes from the non-profit First Street Foundation, which created an on-line tool *Flood Factor*, found at www.floodfactor.com.
- ²⁸ New York State Division of the Budget, *FY 2023 Executive Budget Five-Year Capital Program and Financing Plan*, p. 47, www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy23/ex/cp/fy23cp-ex.pdf. These funding amounts include support for New York City.

Contacts



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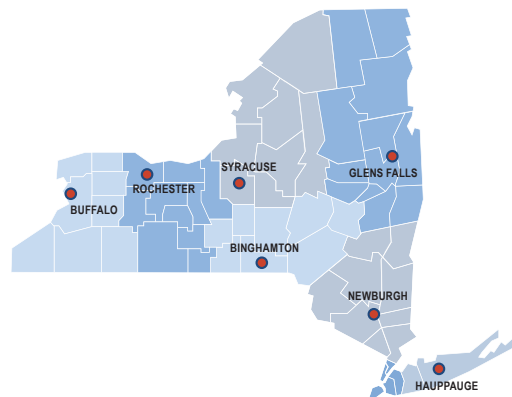
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Counties: Broome, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Schoharie, Tioga, Tompkins

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STATEWIDE AUDIT

Tel 315.793.2484

Contact

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