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New Yorkers for Active Transportation

January 7, 2013

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

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Communities across the state are eager to provide citizens of all ages and abilities with safe, healthy, and low-cost active transportation. For more than two decades the federal transportation bill has helped communities make that happen by providing funds to build pedestrian and bicycle paths, sidewalks, bike lanes, and other infrastructure that promotes complete streets and walking and bicycling. However, the current federal transportation bill has reduced funding by 30% for such programs.

New York State can still be a national leader in active transportation by establishing a dedicated line in the 2013-14 state budget that will assist communities with securing the resources to continue to invest in complete streets and pedestrian and bicycling projects.

Communities need additional state assistance because:

1. *Local governments have a difficult time with matches and upfront costs required by federal programs:* Recently, Yonkers struggled with the \$150k local match for a \$1M federal grant to extend the Bronx River Trailway. A loan fund or dedicated funding source that includes state grants for matches would help local governments avoid the costs of bonding and provide an incentive to invest in pedestrian and bicycle projects.

2. *Changed policies for the Marchiselli Program mean that ped/bike projects may no longer be competitive for state funds:* In the past, NYSDOT provided a crucial source of non-federal matching funds for local governments to undertake projects that included shared use paths, pedestrian bridges and pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Now, NYSDOT will provide dollars on a competitive basis to projects that support “asset management” preservation. As new pedestrian and bicycle facilities do not fit this definition, it is unlikely they will compete well for this funding.
3. *Competition with other state infrastructure needs:* Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is very popular and cost-effective. Each \$1 million of spending creates at least 9.6 jobs while road-only projects create just 7.8 jobs. Yet pedestrian and bicycle projects often get lost amidst the larger, more expensive transportation infrastructure needs of the state. Having a dedicated funding source will help assure that the level of funding for ped-bike infrastructure is, at least maintained, or, optimally, increased. In Delaware, the state budget now dedicates \$15 per capita for ped/bike infrastructure. By comparison, New York spends less than \$5 per capita.

Communities that invest in pedestrian and bicycle projects benefit from improved quality of life, a healthier population, greater local real estate values, more local travel choices, and reduced air pollution and, as was demonstrated in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, preserve the ability for people to safely get to work, school and shops when storms and other disasters interrupt motorized transportation. Ensuring a dedicated fund in the state budget will enable local governments to continue to participate in and reap the benefits of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure construction.

Thank you for giving this request your greatest consideration.

Sincerely,

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Legislative Director
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Majority Leader Jeffery Klein
Speaker Sheldon Silver
Majority Leader Dean Skelos