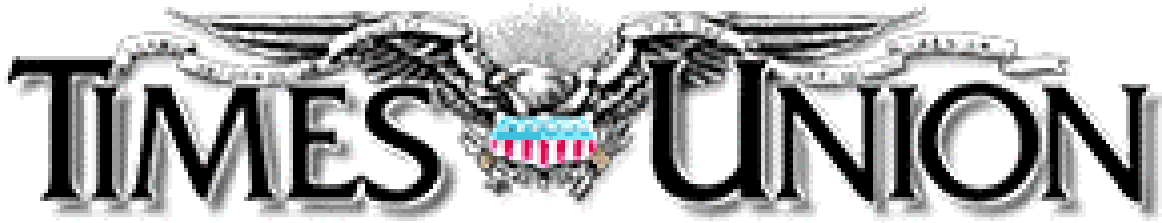


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Roads chief calls for expanding department's mission

Albany-- DOT faces \$100 million cut; leader says he can do more than build

By CATHY WOODRUFF, Staff writer
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State Transportation Commissioner Joseph Boardman downplayed the impact of a proposed \$100 million cut in project funding Tuesday, encouraging lawmakers to **expand their view** of his department's mission **beyond simple bridge and pavement construction.**

Boardman also said that 870 DOT employees have expressed interest in early retirement, signaling the agency can meet a goal of cutting 523 jobs with no layoffs.

Most of the job cuts proposed in Gov. George Pataki's budget would come from DOT's design and construction staff. They come at a time when funding for new projects also would decline and as the department embarks on a "transformation" to become a bigger player in the state's trade and economic development strategy.

Boardman urged legislators who asked about prospects for local road projects **to consider alternatives that can help move people and freight more efficiently** -- rail lines, ports and **"intelligent transportation" technology such as cameras, signs and sensors.**

"I'm here to say I can build, but that's not the only solution," Boardman said after Assemblyman Thomas Barraga, R-Suffolk County, pressed for another bridge linking Long Island with upstate.

"We've built a tremendous interstate highway system, but we're not using rail the way we should, and we're not using our entire system the way we should to deliver products now and in the future," Boardman told legislators.

The \$100 million cut won't kill projects already on the drawing board, but they may take longer to get done, Boardman said.

Construction industry representatives argued that the \$100 million project funding cut would save little money in the upcoming fiscal year because the project costs would be borrowed and paid back over several years. And, they said, because much of the bond payments would be supported by the dedicated highway fund, which is fed by gas tax and other revenues, there would be little or no savings in the state's general fund, which is supported by income tax.

The Associated General Contractors and the New York Roadway Improvement Coalition urged restoring the money and maintaining the current \$1.75 million annual allocation for capital projects.

While Boardman insisted that the number of roads and bridges rated in poor or fair condition throughout the state has declined over the last nine years, trade groups said New York remains far above the national average for deficient roads and bridges.

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