



# Gov. Andrew Cuomo's budget addresses key LI issues

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Brookhaven National Laboratory's National Synchrotron Light Source II is seen here in this photo from April 25, 2015.  
Photo Credit: Doug Kuntz / Doug Kuntz

This story was reported by **Mark Harrington, Ridgley Ochs, Alfonso Castillo, Emily C. Dooley, Candice Ferrette** and **James T. Madore**.

Following are key elements of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's \$154.5 billion spending plan for 2016-17. The State Legislature is expected to vote on the budget by April 1.

## TRANSPORTATION

Cuomo would provide billions of dollars in new funding to modernize the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and rebuild roads and bridges.

His budget would provide the MTA with about \$5 billion in state aid. That would include \$4.5 billion in operating assistance, an increase of \$202 million over this year. Other transit systems throughout the state, including Nassau's NICE Bus and Suffolk County Transit, would share \$497 million, \$22 million more than in this year's budget.

Cuomo also is proposing legislation to authorize the remaining \$7.3 billion of the state's \$8.3 billion commitment to the MTA's \$26 billion, five-year capital program, which includes major infrastructure projects such as completion of a second LIRR track between Ronkonkoma and Farmingdale.

Region/State



For roads and bridges, Cuomo wants to increase the state's contribution to the DOT's five-year, \$22 billion capital budget by \$1.1 billion. New initiatives would include \$2.5 billion for rebuilding bridges, repaving roads and protecting infrastructure from extreme weather.

Mitchell Moss, director of New York University's Rudin Center for Transportation, praised Cuomo's expanded commitment to transportation.

"We have a lot of infrastructure that needs to be modernized," Moss said. "I think the fact that he's doing upstate and downstate really means it's serious."

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Cuomo would provide \$50 million over five years for improvements to research facilities at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, where inventions are being turned into startup businesses.

Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association, the region's largest business group, said the lab and other research institutions are crucial to economic growth. "Any state funding ... will lead to a significant return on the investment," he said.

Law also said he hopes the Island "gets its fair share" of \$50.5 million that Cuomo wants to spend on "I Love NY" commercials and other tourism promotions, a 10 percent increase over this year. Law said some of the money should be spent on urging travelers to use Long Island MacArthur Airport.

Cuomo would cut taxes for small businesses by reducing the corporate tax rate from 6.5 percent to 4 percent next Jan. 1. Companies that pay taxes via the personal income tax would be able to exempt 15 percent of business income, up from the current 5 percent. More than 191,600 businesses in Nassau and Suffolk counties would be affected, he said.

Businesses owned by minorities and women would have greater access to government contracts under the Cuomo proposal. He would require

municipalities and school districts receiving state funds to award 30 percent of contracts to minorities and women.

Rob Basso, president of Freeport-based Advantage Payroll Services, which has 3,000 clients, said most small businesses would welcome Cuomo's proposed tax cuts but also oppose his plan to raise the state minimum wage to \$15 per hour by July 2021.

"They are getting help in one area and possibly being harmed in another," Basso said. "Some businesses are going to have trouble meeting payroll if the minimum wage is increased."

Cuomo also would set aside \$700 million from financial settlement money to avoid raising tolls on the New York State Thruway through 2020, and also to offer toll rebates to frequent users and farmers. The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles would see a decrease in funding of 1.1 percent, or \$3 million.

## **ENERGY**

Cuomo pointed to his prior directive to cut CO2 emissions by 40 percent and derive 50 percent of the state's energy from renewable sources by 2030, calling it "no longer a goal, it's a requirement." He proposed eliminating or repowering the three remaining coal-fired power plants in the state by 2020 — none are on Long Island — and pressed for green-energy programs and technologies to fill in.

Cuomo proposed funding of \$15 million for a "clean energy workforce opportunity program" to train workers in renewable energy technologies and installation. The money would go to state universities and community colleges to launch or bolster programs that provide workers for the green energy industry.

Marjaneh Issapour, director of Farmingdale State College's Renewable Energy Center, and professor of electrical and computer engineering technology, called the funding "good news. Budget has always been a problem for us."

The college already conducts basic-level solar electrical, thermal and small-wind energy classes. Additional funding would allow for advanced classes, a wider range of green-energy seminars and a bigger a commitment to existing classes, Issapour said.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Cuomo's budget would boost spending for the Department of Environmental Conservation by \$69 million, to \$1.3 billion, compared with this year.

The Environmental Protection Fund, which pays for programs including land acquisition and farmland protection, would receive \$300 million, up from \$177 million this year.

The spending plan would fund a new \$32.5 million climate change mitigation and adaptation program. Money also is earmarked for water quality programs, a nitrogen action plan and the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant in East Rockaway, said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Farmingdale-based Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

"There's a lot in the budget to help Long Island be greener and cleaner," Esposito said.

The proposed budget also includes \$100 million more for municipal drinking water and waste water infrastructure grants.

## **HEALTHCARE**

The spending plan for health care continues an effort to hold down Medicaid costs, which, including federal and state matching funds, is projected to be \$63 billion in 2017.

It also calls for reinstating New York City's "contribution toward financing the growth in Medicaid expenses" beginning Oct. 1. The city's contribution would rise by 3.6 percent in 2017 and 5.8 percent the following year.

Total spending for the state Health Department excluding Medicaid would be \$4.1 billion, a 3.2 percent increase.

The budget also includes \$484 million to fund the state's health insurance exchange, NY State of Health.

Cuomo said the state will save \$87.4 million in 2017 and \$106.6 million the next year by tapping additional federal funding through the Child Health Plus program, cutting medical malpractice funding and other initiatives.

Citing his girlfriend Sandra Lee's battle with breast cancer, Cuomo said he would allocate \$90 million to expand breast cancer screening. "These are our wives and daughters," he told the legislature.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Higher education spending in the general fund would drop by 2.2 percent to \$6.9 billion compared with this year, due to a decrease in funding to senior colleges in the City University of New York system.

State funding for community colleges, including Nassau Community College and Suffolk County Community College, would decline by .8 percent to \$729 million.

Cuomo would renew NYSUNY2020 and NYCUNY2020 for another five years. The program allows public colleges and universities — including Stony Brook University, Farmingdale State College and The College at Old Westbury — to raise tuition up to \$300 annually.

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