Long Island Regional Planning Council

LIRPC Meeting – May 14, 2025
Zoom Virtual Meeting Summary Minutes

LIPRC Members Present
John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair
Michael White, Vice Chair
Jeff Kraut, Treasurer
Elizabeth Custodio
Mayor Barbara Donno
Nancy Engelhardt
Jeff Guillot
Supervisor Ed Wehrheim

Staff and Guests Present
Richard V. Guardino, Jr., Executive Director
Elizabeth Cole, Deputy Executive Director
Missy Leder, Executive Assistant
Rachel Titus, Program Coordinator

Alan Belniak
Katherine Heaviside
Mark Smith

Meeting Commenced:
John D. Cameron, Jr., opened the meeting at approximately 10:30am.

At this time we will start with the Pledge of Allegiance. Supervisor Wehrheim, since you have a flag, could you please lead us in the Pledge.

Supervisor Wehrheim:
Pledge of Allegiance

Rich Guardino:
Good morning and welcome to the meeting of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. My name is Rich Guardino, and I'm the Executive Director of the Council. We have a very exciting presentation this morning, and we thank you all for joining us. And with that, I'd like to do a roll call of the Council members.

Roll Call
John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair
Michael White, Vice Chair
Jeff Kraut, Treasurer
Elizabeth Custodio
Mayor Barbara Donno
Nancy Engelhardt
Jeff Guillot

Supervisor Ed Wehrheim

Rich Guardino:
Next, I am going to turn it over to Alan to talk about procedure for the meeting.

Alan Belniak:
Thank you for joining us this morning. My name is Alan Belniak with VHB. I am here to help support this meeting today. After some opening remarks and some orders of business, we'll have a presentation. After that, the comment and question opportunities are given to members of the LIRPC. After the members of the LIRPC, we will turn to the public to ask questions and share comments in one of two ways. You can use the Q&A function below. If you move your mouse to the lower section of zoom, the Q&A button will pop up and you can type in your comment, and I will read it aloud. Alternatively, you can use the raise hand feature, which is also below. That sends a signal to us that you'd like to speak or comment. I'll call out your name, send a command for you to unmute your microphone, and you'll then have a couple of seconds to share your comment or question. Please note, this meeting is being recorded. With that, I'll turn it back over to John and Rich.

Adoption of the Minutes from the March 12, 2024 Meeting.
All in favor.
So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2025-109 authorizes an agreement to transfer $100,000 of Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan Funds (LINAP) to the Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District (NCSWCD) for administration and management of the Septic Environmental Program To Improve Cleanliness (S.E.P.T.I.C.). The Council has authorized support for the Program for the past three years. 10% of the population of Nassau County still utilizes individual cesspools and septic systems which were not designed to remove nitrogen and the discharge from these systems leads to significant ground and drinking water degradation. The Project Management Team for LINAP, including the LIRPC and the N.Y.S. Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) has identified the implementation of grant programs to replace cesspools and septic systems with Innovative Alternative systems as an early action item under LINAP.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2025-109: Supervisor Wehrheim
Seconded: Jeff Kraut
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2025-110 authorizes a Contract Amendment to the Contract Extension Agreement between Hofstra University and the LIRPC to include monitoring of acidification in the Water Quality Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting program in Hempstead Bay. The NYSDEC has requested that the monitoring program study the relationship between nutrient loading and acidification of the waters of Hempstead Bay. Hofstra University in partnership with the Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways has submitted a proposal to do the study. The additional cost would be paid by state grant funds in the amount of $60,784 through the current contract term ending September 30, 2025.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2025-110: Jeff Kraut
Seconded: Supervisor Wehrheim
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2025-111 authorizes grants totaling $10,000 to implement proposals submitted by schools in the 2025 Long Island Water Quality Challenge Program. Final project proposals were received from fourteen different schools. The selection committee chose four winning project proposals, and they will have the option to tap into this grant to implement some of the proposals.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2025-111: Mayor Barbara Donno
Seconded: Jeff Kraut
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
We're absolutely delighted to have the NYS Comptroller, Tom DiNapoli with us this morning. He needs no introduction. He has been serving as Comptroller since 2007. He has been elected to the office four times and is the second longest serving Comptroller in New York State history. He has served with independence, honesty, and integrity. His steadfast leadership has strengthened one of our nation's top public pension funds, and he has consistently spoken out against fiscal gimmicks, imprudent actions, and government inefficiency. He is always focused on making government more transparent and accountable to the people of New York State, and he has done a fantastic job. We're privileged to have Tom with us this morning. With that, I'll turn it over to you.

PRESENTATION

Thomas DiNapoli:
Thank you for that very generous introduction. I appreciate it. I also appreciate your leadership of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. You continue to do a great job as Executive Director, and I appreciated your partnership when you were a government official with the Town of Hempstead and appreciated all your work at Hofstra.

I have a very special place in my heart for Rich because my career was going to take a different path at one point. I said, "I've got to talk to one more person to get an opinion," and I talked to Rich Guardino. Based on that conversation, I chose not to take that other path. So Rich, I would not be State Comptroller today had I taken that other opportunity. You know, offline, I'd be happy to share that story with others. I also want to thank another good friend, John Cameron, your Chairman, as well as all the other Council members, and so many good friends I see here. We've worked together over the years, and I really value all your participation in the Long Island Regional Planning Council. The LIRPC is such an important vehicle for our Long Island community. You know, I have loved being a Long Islander all my life.

One of the challenges we have on Long Island is that we are really a collection of many small communities. How do you knit all of that together, given the fact that we are a major population center not only in the state but in the nation, with all the complexity that comes along with that kind of population density? How do you have a regional focus given all the different levels of government that we have? We don't have a unified structure like some other areas that have a big city dominating the region. So, the work you do on the Council is essential to knitting together concerns, amplifying them, and being a very important vehicle for convening community leaders, elected officials, and stakeholders from all different segments. I really thank you very much for the important work the Council does.

What I thought I would do is give a run through or a sense from the Comptroller's office about what we see as we navigate through these very uncertain times. I'll give a sense of the economic and fiscal landscape we are addressing. I'll cover some key points, and then I know we'll have time for questions and answers on items I cover, and perhaps some items I don't cover that you still want to discuss.

When I talk about where we are as a state and even as a region, it's always through the lens of the post-COVID experience. COVID was a very challenging time, as we all know, certainly from a public health perspective first and foremost. Thankfully, most of that is in the rearview mirror, but we still know some folks are coming down with COVID even now. From the Comptroller's office perspective, what we focus on more is the impact on the economy and, by extension, on revenues that come to government, as well as the impact on services. So, whenever we talk about where we are, we have to do so in terms of recovery. I still say we are in recovery mode coming out of COVID. The good news is that more of the numbers we see are increasingly positive. The unemployment rate has been reasonably steady—around 4.2% statewide. Long Island continues to do better than the rest of the state, which has always been the pattern. We're at about 3.3%. Looking at job loss during the depths of the COVID shutdown, we have now, as a state, grown back all the jobs that were lost and added about 130,000 jobs comparing data from February 2020 to today. Of course, when we look at statewide numbers, we have to keep in mind that we're a very big and diverse state. While statewide numbers are overall very positive, it's a bit of a mixed picture when you drill down regionally.

For months and even years coming out of COVID, New York State lagged the rest of the nation in job recovery, largely because New York City was lagging. Since New York City is still a very important part of the state's economy, its slower recovery dragged down the statewide numbers. However, New York City is now more than fully recovered and Long Island has also become one of the regions with more jobs today than pre-pandemic. When you include the downstate suburbs including the Lower Hudson Valley, Westchester, New York City, and Long Island, things are positive. Looking at regional areas like Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and the Capital Region, the job picture is generally at or slightly above pre-pandemic levels. However, regions like the North Country, the Southern Tier, and the Utica-Rome area are not yet back to pre-pandemic levels. So, I would say we still have a way to go to ensure the kind of growth we've seen, for instance here on Long Island, continues in other parts of the state.

The same is true for different sectors of the economy. No surprise and hats off to Northwell. Healthcare and social assistance has been the main growth area in employment statewide, including in our region. Government jobs have now come back after declining for a bit, but if you look at some other sectors like leisure, hospitality, retail, construction, and manufacturing there are some regional differences, not all sectors are fully back yet. Financial services seem to be doing well.

So again, just as I said for regions, it's not a complete picture of success. Some sectors of the economy are still lagging compared to pre-pandemic numbers. Hopefully, that informs our local and statewide thinking regarding economic development and what needs to be done to boost those lagging sectors.

When we look at different indicators of economic strength, one key item is sales tax collections which is the second most important revenue source for the state after personal income tax, and certainly very important for localities. For counties like Nassau and Suffolk, sales tax collections are even more significant than property tax. The news there is more positive than negative. We just put out a report showing about a 3.2% year-over-year increase for the first quarter compared to the same quarter last year. Every region of the state saw some year-over-year growth in the first quarter, which is good news. Long Island's increase was about 1.9%, a little less than the statewide numbers.

But when you look at it and break it down, starting in March, we began to see some slowdown in certain regions. I think it's fair to say that sales tax collection growth is still there, but at a more moderate level than what we saw coming out of COVID and the bounce-back that happened. So, we've been advising local governments to be more conservative in their sales tax revenue projections.

Again, because of all the uncertainty in the economy about the possibility of a recession and what tariff issues might mean, inflation is still not as controlled as we'd like it to be. Additionally, consumers are possibly starting to pull back. All of this impacts sales tax collections. We report on sales tax monthly, but the key numbers are quarterly. At least for now, the news is positive when you look at the state revenue picture. Personal income tax remains the biggest driver of state revenue. Going into the recently completed budget cycle, tax collections, largely driven by personal income tax, have consistently come in higher than projected.

Sometimes people say, "Oh, I know too many people moving to Florida, you must be losing all this tax revenue." Yes, there is some taxpayer migration to be concerned about, but any budget is based on certain revenue and spending projections. What we've seen is that revenue continues to come in higher than projected. Most recently, as the state budget process was underway, we released a report on Wall Street's strength, particularly on bonuses. It was a record year for bonuses, which significantly increased state revenue through taxes collected from Wall Street and the securities industry. This was the context for the governor's budget proposal. As you know, the governor proposed a budget of about $252 billion, the highest in state history. It was a somewhat protracted process, and the budget came in late but the final budget totaled $254 billion, about $2 billion over the governor's initial projection. The governor's priorities fell under an affordability agenda umbrella. While there were some changes, the legislature followed through on many of the governor's suggested priorities, including reductions in personal income tax rates for middle and lower income families in New York, expansion of the Child Tax Credit, which was an important priority for the governor, and a version of the inflation refund checks she proposed for a little less than her original proposal. The refunds will provide up to $400 for certain eligible households.

The Governor has several other initiatives and spending priorities. Now that the budget is complete, and since the Comptroller's office isn't directly involved in the budget process (which is the Legislature and Governor's responsibility), we are conducting a deep dive into the specifics of the enacted budget and will publish a more detailed analysis soon, but here are some overall highlights:

- Billions of dollars allocated to climate priorities, including more support for home electrification, thermal energy networks, zero-emission school buses, EV charging infrastructure, and renewable energy projects. Understanding New York has very ambitious climate goals, it is debatable we will meet them on time, but this budget aims to facilitate those goals.

- School aid is always a big issue, especially on Long Island. Statewide, school aid will increase by about 4.9% to approximately $37 billion which is a significant increase. Nassau County's school aid is up by about $123 million to nearly $2.2 billion, and Suffolk County's increased by $147.5 million to $3.1 billion. There were some changes to the foundation aid formula and tweaks in terms of school aid distribution, but keep in mind that school aid and Medicaid healthcare spending continue to be the biggest cost drivers of the budget.

- Local Aid for Municipalities (AIM), a revenue-sharing program with municipalities, and the temporary municipal assistance program were both held flat at prior year levels at $750 million for general AIM and $50 million for temporary municipal assistance. This program has been debated for years because unlike other parts of the budget that saw increases when times were flush, AIM funding has remained flat. Some would argue that the formula is somewhat outdated, so there's hope for reconsideration of how that money is distributed. Nonetheless, AIM is an important revenue source for many municipalities.

- Transportation aid remains very important at a local level. CHIPS funding increased by about $50 million to $648 million. Other transportation aids, like those for extreme winter recovery and state touring routes, were basically held flat year-over-year. We don't yet have local breakdowns for these funds, so specifics for Long Island are still pending.

- Suffolk County received a $50 million allocation to support infrastructure projects, including intermodal transportation projects. Nassau County saw changes on the healthcare front, specifically regarding Nassau University Medical Center with about $50 million more in funding and a restructuring of the board.

Again, a more detailed analysis will follow.

Overall, the challenge going forward is how we prepare for the future. People ask me, "Does this budget spend too much?" At the end of the day, it's up to the legislature and governor to set priorities and ensure there's revenue to back them up. There's no doubt the revenue is strong right now. The real question is: "What are the risks, and how do we address them?" I'll get to that shortly.

One quick update is on the MTA, since funding public transit is a key part of the region's economy. There's always a lot of debate about the MTA, especially regarding the capital program. The budget fully funds the 2025-2029 capital program by increasing the payroll mobility tax. Opinions are mixed on whether that's the best way to fund the MTA, but the tax will now fall more heavily on larger employers in the metropolitan commuting district. This is a significant funding source for the capital program. The MTA is also expected to come up with about $3 billion in efficiencies. We'll have to keep an eye on that to ensure they follow through. The capital program totals over $68 billion, with about $6 billion allocated for the Long Island Rail Road. The focus is generally on maintaining the system in a state of good repair and improving customer experience, including upgrading rolling stock, replacing old trains, and rehabbing train stations and subway stops. In the city, bridge rehab and waterproofing also receive significant investment from the state.

The capital plan anticipates $14 billion in federal funding, but it's unclear if federal priorities for public transit will change, so we need to keep an eye on that. The prior capital plan (2020–2024) is funded but does include expected revenue from congestion pricing.

Congestion pricing is a contentious topic. If we polled this group, we'd get different opinions. When asked whether I favored it, I said I'm agnostic. What I do know is that congestion pricing is expected to generate the revenue necessary to fund the program, and the bonding that follows. If you oppose congestion pricing, you have to find another way to pay for the program and no alternative has been proposed. The program has been implemented, and in the first three months, it collected $159 million, exceeding projections. It's on track to meet annual expectations.

The uncertainty lies in federal government efforts to stop congestion pricing, but so far, that hasn't changed anything. This will likely be resolved in the courts. Whether that's good or bad policy is another question. If congestion pricing is halted, the 2024 capital plan will need replacement funding. So, stay tuned.

These MTA comments segue into the broader question of the state-federal relationship and potential impacts of federal funding changes. One concern I had during the budget process was the lack of contingency planning for anticipated federal funding cutbacks to New York. This is a difficult question because the final federal budget outcome in Washington is still unknown. I don't have a specific number to suggest, but some contingency would have made sense, especially given our strong revenue picture. As you know, for many years, New York State has been a donor state, meaning we send more money to Washington than we get back. Some of you may remember Senator Moynihan's balance of payments reports. We've continued where he left off with about nine reports over the years. Coming out of the pandemic and all the associated federal aid, the trend reversed, and New York became a net gainer of federal dollars. In our last report, based on 2023 numbers, for every dollar New York sent to Washington, we received $1.06 back. However, that number is tightening. We projected that as pandemic relief funds are spent down, New York may return to being a net donor rather than a net gainer.

The concern now is not only the spending down of pandemic money but also possible changes in federal-state funding relationships. Such a reversal could accelerate quickly. Why is this important? Because 35-40% of the state budget each year consists of federal funds, much of which then flows to localities. This funding supports healthcare, social services, education, and more. Federal funding includes a combination of formula and discretionary grants. Some of the most important programs serve vulnerable populations, such as SNAP and Medicaid.

This is really the great uncertainty out there, especially when you're talking about Medicaid. There's a whole network involved in health care, including hospitals, not only for poor folks who need coverage but also for some not-so-poor individuals in our area who may have a parent or grandparent needing nursing home care.

We don't have a national long-term care program, so Medicaid, by default, becomes the provider of long-term care for many, including many middle-class families on Long Island. What happens with federal funding for these programs becomes very important to watch and so we're releasing an interactive online resource that outlines federal funding flowing through the state budget. It will also detail the state workforce and employees tied to specific federal funding grants and provide county-by-county details on enrollment in critical safety net programs traditionally funded by the federal government.

We have already seen some impacts. It's always a challenge because certain programs are announced to be cut or paused, then there's a change, sometimes a lawsuit, and the courts may intervene. However, we know that about $1.3 billion in funding for New York was cut. This included some federally funded healthcare programs, addiction services, and mental health supports. It included about $100 million for education and the Executive Order freezing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Many localities were expecting capital investments from those funds. Our state was expected to receive $13.6 billion from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and grants worth about $2 billion under the Inflation Reduction Act had been awarded. New Yorkers filed for tax credits totaling $374 million under that program.

So, we need to see how all this plays out. For example, the Town of Hempstead and the Town of Smithtown were each awarded million-dollar grants for environmental sustainability programs. What will be the final outcome of these freezes and potential funding changes? The deliberations happening in Washington right now are key. I have to say, our Long Island representatives will play a big role. I'm not necessarily a doomsday predictor. I believe that if cooler heads prevail, while there may be some pullback on certain programs, I am hopeful we won't see the deep cuts that some fear. Even reading today's papers, the SALT deduction remains a major issue. Our Long Island representatives, from both sides of the aisle, have been pressing hard on this. We'll see what impact it has on the overall budget coming out of Washington. The big question I raise is the sustainability of the state's fiscal plan. One piece missing from the state budget right now is an update of the state's financial plan. The budget is done, but the next key step is that update.

The Governor's initial proposal projected budget gaps to accumulate to about $27 billion, even with an extension of the surcharge on upper-income New Yorkers through 2029. What we need to watch is the impact of spending decisions made for the coming year on these future budget gaps. My concern is that those gaps could grow.

If federal funds are reduced, and budget gaps grow, while the economy still seems to be humming, we are more likely to head into a recession. While economists are often as reliable as weather forecasters, economic and federal funding vulnerability raises concern. To an extent, New York has been better prepared in recent years. I give the Governor and the Legislature credit for building up our reserve funds to a higher level than we've seen in a number of years. We have about $8.8 billion in statutory reserve funds and even more in what we call informal reserves. I prefer the statutory reserves because they are protected, with limits on when and how often they can be used. However, even when combining all reserves, in a worst-case scenario, these funds wouldn't fully backstop significant federal funding cuts.

The budget also addresses an important policy area. I don't debate the policy choice itself, but New York was one of a few states that did not use pandemic relief money to pay down our unemployment insurance trust fund debt. This has had an impact on small businesses. A decision was made to take about $8 billion from reserves to pay this down, though it's unclear which reserves they will tap into. From a policy perspective I think this made sense, but I worry that depleting the cushion we built up during a time of federal cutbacks and economic uncertainty. It raises a bit of concern.

The budget also provides the governor with the option to cut or withhold payments or programs up to $2 billion depending on what happens with federal budget cuts. We have seen this before and I am always concerned when programs might be cut just by executive action. There is a provision that the legislature can override the governor's decision and propose alternatives, but the concern is obvious. Mid-year program cuts would totally disrupt plans at the local level especially in school districts and with non-profits. Again, I'm not predicting doomsday, but there are warning signs. Some Albany leaders said they will assume the roughly $93 billion in federal aid we've traditionally received in recent years and if it doesn't come in, they'll revisit the issue in the fall. I get concerned about mid-year cuts and hopefully it can all be avoided.

We continue our annual assessment of the fiscal and budgetary strength of localities and school districts through our fiscal stress monitoring system. This system uses annual financial reports that each entity provides and then we use objective criteria to come up with a fiscal stress score.

Thanks to smart local decisions and federal COVID relief money, we've certainly seen fewer local governments and school districts under fiscal stress than in prior years. The most recent scores show only one Nassau village, Island Park, in significant fiscal stress, and one village in Suffolk County, Huntington Bay, listed as susceptible to fiscal stress. There are three levels of fiscal stress: susceptible, moderate, and significant. Long Island's numbers are obviously very good, with only two villages showing any stress. We will continue to monitor.

What we've warned about since the pandemic is that if local governments use pandemic relief money to fund new, ongoing programs, they need to identify recurring revenue sources to avoid a fiscal cliff once those funds run out. Moderation of growth and sales tax is also something to be very mindful of for local governments.

We have reports on federal aid and local governments available on our website, but the most important factor is local financial stewardship.

Briefly, I will cover the pension fund as I wrap up. We manage one of the largest public pension plans in the nation, and it's strong in terms of being well-funded. My priority as trustee is to keep us as close to 100% funded as possible.

We value the fund each March 31, so I don't have the final numbers for 2025 yet, but for 2024, we had an 11.5% positive return keeping in mind our long-term investment goal is 5.9%. We are more conservative compared to other public pension plans targeting 6-7% and I believe that being more conservative makes sense considering the uncertain landscape we are in. This year started to be challenging in March, and I am happy that we were able to value the fund on March 31 rather than on April 5.

I don't yet have final numbers on private market investments, like real estate and private equity but our public equity and fixed income investments are close to the 5.9% goal. We might hit the target or miss it by a small margin when the private markets come in and if we miss it will be by a shade. Last year, we were 93% funded, which is very strong for a public pension plan. My goal remains to keep us in the 90s, but as close to 100% as possible and that means I have to make a judgment on a contribution rate that we charge government employers. Last year, we had to raise rates slightly for several reasons. First, people are living longer (we now expect lifespans to about 95), leading to longer payouts and also more recent retirements come with higher salaries given increases. Another factor was the broad support for enhancing benefits in terms of Tier Six reform. Those of you who follow know that there have been a lot of discussions about Tier Six and changes to help with recruitment and retention. I am not saying that Tier Six reform was a bad idea, but it did come with a cost. There's still pressure this year for more benefit enhancements, including a possible cost-of-living adjustment increase for retirees. I'm not sure if the legislature and governor will entertain that in the post-budget session, which runs through mid-June. So, we will factor in investment returns, longevity, and any benefit changes to determine contribution rates. We try to keep rates as stable as possible, but my commitment has to be to the members of the system and making sure we stay funded.

This is important for all New Yorkers because states with significant unfunded pension liabilities often face downgraded credit ratings. That's not the case in New York, thanks to how we manage the plan. Under GASB requirements, now unfunded liabilities at the state level must be apportioned to all participating employers, which helps local governments maintain their fiscal health.

I know I've covered a lot, especially on the numbers front. The budget reflects a strong revenue picture but there are warning signs about the economy and potential federal funding changes. While we can't control federal decisions, we must be mindful and prepared to adapt. Spending priorities will focus on protecting vulnerable populations who rely on government services. This is where regional leaders like you come in to advocate for the appropriate priorities on Long Island for all stakeholders. I appreciate your leadership and the effective way that you help us better understand Long Island's current situation and long-term needs.

With that, I'll open it up for questions.

John Cameron:
Maybe I'll start off. Tom, we all know that you are the state's fiscal watchdog watching over the state budget and spending, as well as all municipalities throughout the state and your focus and concern is statewide. Our primary concern is Long Island, and I think you are very aware there are various distributions of the state budget regionally. We conducted an independent study done of the tax imbalance between Long Island and Albany as well as Long Island and Washington, DC. Frankly, Long Island is continuing to get the short stick. You're not a policy maker and I'm not blaming you at all, but I don't believe our legislature and the Governor is properly giving Long Island its due. We have a $14.8 billion imbalance, meaning we send $14.8 billion a year more to Albany than we get back. We can't continue to do this. Long Island can't continue to be, if you will, the piggy bank for the state of New York. I know your concern is your overall numbers but is there anything in the Controller's Office that can be done. We have our own challenges here and we're losing a lot of young people. We have an affordability crisis. We have a major tax challenge here on Long Island. We have housing issues with affordability. We have employment issues and we're losing a lot of our high wage earners. Is there anything you look at and can suggest to the Island, other than for us trying to, you know, speak truth to power?

Thomas DiNapoli:
I think your role is important and it is appropriate to speak truth to power. I think it probably plays out differently when we do the analysis of the federal state relationship. As I said, New York right now has been a net gainer, although that's a more recent trend and unclear as to how long it will hold up when you drill down on the numbers, and it varies depending on program. Even in the years when New York State was getting less from Washington than we sent, there were certain programs where we were actually scoring much higher in terms of what we receive compared to other states. Similar to Washington, because New York is a wealthier state, it is not a surprise that a state like New York over time probably gives more than Mississippi, just to pick on a different kind of state. I think the same would be true for regional breakdowns. As far as the state goes, we haven't done an analysis looking at each region in terms of what they send versus what they get back. It's perhaps something we could do.

We haven't done the study, so I could be way off on it, but my gut would be, if we did that for New York City, and compared it to Long Island, Long Island may not come out looking as shortchanged compared to other regions. New York City is still the big player as far as the economy. Consider all the activity that's generated, not only with income tax, but business tax and consider taxes paid by financial services, New York City is likely not a net gainer. I'm not sure that that would help your cause.

So again, from my perspective, I think it would be smarter to look at specific programs in terms of distribution. For example, I often hear from my friend Mark Herbst and from some of our union friends

in the construction trades that as far as transportation aid distribution is concerned, Nassau and Suffolk do not fare well. The numbers that Mark has shared support that. School aid is always a tough issue.

I have frequently told the story over the years. When I ran for Assembly, one of my main positions was my intention to fight for our fair share of school aid. When I went up to Albany, and I'm sitting through the first budget process in the caucus room prepared with my notes as to why we're not getting our fair share of state aid for our schools, everybody else stood up also. Nobody's getting their fair share of state aid. The people in the city think Long Island is getting it all; the people upstate think the city is getting it. Fairness is very much in the eyes of the person arguing for it.

Because it is such a big issue for us on Long Island, I still think looking at the changes in the Foundation Aid formula and how it affects us makes sense. I think that would be an area for you to look at and perhaps the same thing with healthcare dollars. I guess what I'm suggesting is that it is less useful to look at regional tax contribution, and more important to look at what comes back in terms of things like environmental programs and transportation programs. I think that's where you may show some of the imbalance or lack of parity. As an example, compare the population versus what we get back in terms of roads considering the road miles here versus other parts of the state. Look at the MTA, I think the most recent capital plan for the Long Island Rail Road is about 10% and we could argue whether that's the appropriate percentage.

So, the short answer, John, is we haven't done a regional comparison, and I don't know that it would be helpful.

John Cameron:
We have looked at it in different buckets, if you will. One thing to look at is that the $14.8 billion, which comes from an analysis done by PFM, is double what it was 10 years ago. That says something. We've advocated for Long Island to try to become its own transportation trust. We've been trying to get it through the legislature, but it hasn't happened. In fact, 15 years ago, when we did LI 2035, the Planning Council recommended that Long Island become its own transportation council because we used to receive 23% of the federal allocated funds for transportation going through the state and we're getting 7%. We passed the $4.2 billion Environmental Bond Act in 2022. Well over two years later, $215 million has been appropriated and of that, $55 million is coming to Long Island, of which $40 million is going to a state facility, Stony Brook, for an electric photovoltaic project.

That's less than half of what we contribute. We contribute 17.5% of the state tax revenues, and we're getting back woeful amounts on every program. So, the problem is not just the cumulative number, it's infrastructure, education, and the environment. There's no bigger, more environmentally sensitive region than Long Island. What's going to happen now, at the end of the year, is that we have the Brookhaven landfills slated to close. What are we going to do with the ash? We're going to have to truck it off Long Island. What other community in the state region has to do that? We're killing our roads. We have antiquated infrastructure, and we're not getting the funding to renovate it. We're not getting the money to sustain our economy. We're the second biggest economic engine in the state. We can't continue to do this if we're not fueling the engine. Frankly, we've done the analysis, and we've looked at it in different components. Frankly, it is very, very frustrating that we're not getting our due from the state.

Thomas DiNapoli:

I'm sure you are arming the state and federal representatives with this information. Ultimately, certainly the state budget, and I think to some extent the federal budget, is as much about carving up the pie as it is about policy choices. The majority senators and assembly members and minority members who can make noise, get the support. I'm not saying they're not doing their jobs. Don't get me wrong. I was in the legislature. It's not always easy to get the support, because every region is competing for something. We're not a unified entity in terms of having a voice. It's very different for some regions like in western New York near Buffalo for instance because it was one entity to deal really with it with. We don't have that on Long Island. We have our own local politics that sometimes cannibalize each other.

John, I think you need to keep doing exactly what you are doing. You're the ones that can do the regional analysis, arm the legislators with the information and support them as they fight. I know many of them. There are a lot of newer people there than when I was last there. The Long Island delegation is full of bright, very motivated people. Give them the ammo for each budget cycle to make a little bit more of an inroad. I think a number of them are going to point to money that they're bringing back home. That's a positive. When you accumulate it all, we'll see whether or not the balance on some of those programs is tipped a little more in in the direction that you'd like because of what your advocacy has been. You just have to keep it up. I know it's not an overnight solution for you, but I think you're on the right track. I think sticking to that category-by-category basis is more persuasive.

John Cameron:
I understand that. It's just very frustrating that it seems like every time you go down one road, it gets blocked. The bottom line is almost $15 billion a year is heading north and $27 billion to DC a year. We can't keep doing this. It's a challenge, and I know you don't make policy. We're major a generator here, and yet, we're not able to fuel the engines.

Alan Belniak:
The first comment ends with a question. It's from Steve who writes, "Gambling is a growing crisis. 30 years of research shows that casinos do not lift local economies. Meanwhile, there's not one reputable study showing that tax revenues from casinos benefit the host community. Professor Earl Grinols states that for every $1 in revenue, the social cost of a casino is between $3 and $7. We know so much more now in 2025 than we did in 2013 when the Andrew Cuomo administration changed the wording of the amendment to read like an ad proclaiming the benefits of commercial gambling. We were misled and we voted to legalize it. Can we stop this? Can we convince Governor Hochul not to award any gaming license downstate Nassau County? Residents like myself strongly oppose it. Why bring this predatory business to any downstate locations?"

Thomas DiNapoli:
For a moment, let me take my Comptroller hat off if I can. When I was in the legislature, I was very skeptical of casinos, and except for on one occasion, the proposal for Sullivan County, I was never supportive of them. I'm in a different role now, so I don't want to impose my personal concerns in that regard.

What we have done from the Comptroller's perspective is looked at revenue generated by the casinos that we have in the state and what we've tended to find is that the revenue that comes in is short of what had been projected. These reports are on our website. There's been some attempt to address the next point I'm going to make. I'm not sure it's completely where it should be, but we did point out that some of the revenue will be dedicated to addiction services, because I think your comments are absolutely on target. The number of families that are disrupted or destroyed by the issue of addiction to

gambling is significant and only increases when you have more gambling options, including casinos. So, there has been an attempt to put more money into dealing with addiction services related to gambling. When we initially did this study a couple years ago, we certainly found that funding for programs was woefully inadequate. I think the reality is, whatever your opinion, the state has obviously gone down the path to have casinos. I don't think at this point, the state is about to retreat from my perspective. It's up for three new licenses in the downstate region.

I know there are probably some folks on this call that have been involved with the issue, on perhaps both sides. I think the other problem we have is becoming sports betting. We've made it so easy for people to fall into this. I think that you know the issue of addiction to sports gambling and the disruption that it causes. It's even beyond the casinos at this point.

Look, from a policy choice a long time ago, coming from the legislature and a public vote, the decision was made to allow for casinos. I felt at the time, again, personally, whether you like it or not, New York was late to the game. Other states reaped the benefit financially sooner than we did. If you have too many casinos, they're competing against each other, and so then they're doing more marketing, and potentially more people fall to the trap of gaming addiction. It's potentially a very vicious cycle. I don't disregard that, but I think the issue is broader than just the casinos right now. This is probably not a satisfactory answer to what Steve has raised, but that's my view.

My biggest concern is we should make sure the state is putting in more resources to help those who fall into the trap of gaming addiction. That should be a priority.

Alan Belniak:
Thank you, excellent. Thank you for that. The next comment we have is from Steve who writes, “Empire Wind is a win for all of us. How can we help Governor Hochul and Attorney General Leticia James get the current administration to allow the work to continue?”

Thomas DiNapoli:
Look, this is one of the consequences of a change in the federal administration with different priorities. I think the governor is very committed to pressing it in any way that she can, but I think ultimately, this is going to have to be leveraged in Washington.

Leticia James is going to file lawsuits wherever she thinks she has a shot to reverse policy choices that she thinks are detrimental to the state, but I'm not sure how the courts are going to wade through all these different lawsuits that are coming, and I don't know what the outcome will be at the end of the day. The question is whether, at least for projects that have already been underway, there is an opportunity to negotiate something with the federal government where at least they'll let them go forward? I would hope so, because I agree. I think wind is an important part of our future. But ultimately, this is going to be driven by decisions at the federal level.

Alan Belniak:
Thank you for that. One more kind of call out to the audience members. You can use the raise hand button or the Q and A.

John Cameron:
Tom, if I could just make a comment on the Empire Wind. To me, that was somewhat emblematic of what happened with the pipeline and I'm not talking about the environmental benefits of Empire Wind.

As you all know, we're strong environmentalists here. The problem you have is when private industry is making major, major commitments, and then all of a sudden to have that totally undone. To be in the process, be selected, to be in design, permitted or even have started construction, and have that rug pulled out from under you sends a very bad message to the private sector. We now have an administration that's, you know, drill, baby, drill and pro natural gas. What happens in three and a half years, four years when the administration changes and they decide to reverse things again. I heard an interview with the CEO of the company doing the pipeline say something like, now you have the administration command. They're very strong for gas and oil. He said, I think we're done. We made too much of a commitment here. Now it's in the news, Empire Wind talking about how much they're losing a week.

You can't continue to do this and expect industry to be there to basically deliver to your whims when every three, four years with a change in administration, priorities shift. We're never going to get anything done. So, I agree with you. Once a project is in the pipeline, you can't change it. If you want to change it going forward, that's something else, but not where major money has already been invested. I think both of these are examples of government sort of hijacking the private sector. It disrupts thoughtful business planning and the number of jobs that would benefit the region.

From my point of view, I think the energy and environmental perspective is the main driver, but the ancillary benefit is job creation. We've moved away, unfortunately, from bipartisan consensus on many items. We're much more polarized now and are in this phase of going from one point of view to a very different point of view and you're right, it could start next year with the midterms. If you're a business, and you need multi-year planning, the real danger is they just pull back completely and say, "You know what? We're not going to play on this landscape because the system is too schizophrenic." I think that's a valid general concern, not a partisan expression. From a planning perspective, it makes it very, very hard if you're a businessperson and your capital is at risk. If the business community is not going to come in to provide the support, what happens? It doesn't get done. Can government pick up the slack? Probably not. We're in a very challenging time and I am somewhat concerned, because I don't think at the end of the day, the courts are going to be the best arbiter of these decisions. One would hope that the policymakers, both from the administration and legislative branches, could figure out how to work these things out, but so far, that doesn't seem to be happening.

Thomas DiNapoli:
John, I want you to know, I'm still very optimistic about us getting through all this. I really am. I don't think it'll be as bad as the naysayers think. I do think cooler heads will prevail over the long term. I do think for Long Island and this group, the LIRPC, we have tremendous talent and tremendous thought leaders in Nassau and Suffolk County. Great work is being done by the elected officials on both sides of the aisle and the nonprofit sector that we have on Long Island is incredible. I travel all across the state, we have programs and agencies that are providing such incredible support to so many people, especially people in great need. We have infrastructure on Long Island that's incredible. As I said, we are a bunch of small towns, and that's good in terms of living here, but the challenge is we sometimes get lost in the bigger debates, because we're not as unified as some other areas. That's where the unique role of the Long Island Regional Planning Council is so very important.

I wish you to all be optimistic like me. We're going to get through it. We'll figure out the best way to maximize opportunities for us on the island. Always feel free to reach out for any partnership that we could provide.

John Cameron:
That's great. Tom, thank you. As always, you've been a strong leader here on Long Island. If I could speak for the Council, you've always been one. We've always looked up to and admired you, and we'll get through this together. So, thanks again for 17 years and going strong.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
John Cameron:
Well, I've spoken enough, so I'll just give a brief summary. I was going to talk a lot about state issues, our tax imbalance, and so on, but I'll just finish by saying this. We all know how Long Island prides itself on its major assets, its excellent educational and healthcare systems, its prestigious natural environment, and its access to the greatest city in the world. All these assets contribute to the high quality of life we Long Islanders have enjoyed throughout our lives. However, if we fail to address the critical, existential challenges we face, which we just discussed here today, then that blessing will not be passed on to our children and grandchildren and that is not a legacy any of us want to leave behind.

So, I'm trying to leave you with a positive note, though it's a bit sobering. The numbers are what they are, but this Council continues to advocate for all things Long Island and as Long Island goes, so should the state. We'll keep working on that.

Thank you, Rich. I'll turn it back over to you.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT
Rich Guardino:
John, thank you. On a very positive note, we had another great year with the Long Island Water Quality Challenge. Thank you all for passing the resolution to fund the projects in the schools this morning. I want to highlight the schools involved. We had four winning teams selected from 14 project proposals, making this an especially successful year. The winners were William Floyd High School, The Stony Brook School (this was the first time a private school participated), Smithtown High School West, and Central Islip High School.

We've been running this program for several years now, and it continues to work really well. Again, thank you all for approving the funding so these school districts and students can move forward implementing the terrific projects we've received.

Lastly, on Nitrogen Smart Communities, which I've mentioned in the past. The Nitrogen Action Plan initiative encourages municipalities in Nassau and Suffolk counties to take action to reduce, prevent, and eliminate nitrogen pollution in our waters. The program helps identify unique sources of nitrogen at the local level and implement community-specific plans of action addressing these priorities. We're delighted to have two pilot municipalities involved with this. The Town of North Hempstead and the Town of Smithtown are both working very hard. There are different levels of certification. They are on their way to getting bronze level certification. We plan to expand this program in the near future and have more municipalities involved with it. We have a consulting firm, Anchor QEA, working with both municipalities, and we're preparing to roll out an island-wide launch.

That completes my report.

John Cameron:
Thank you, Rich.

New Business?

Alan, any comments or hands raised.

Alan Belniak:
No hands raised and there is nothing in the Q&A at the moment.

John Cameron:
With that, we will close the meeting for today. Thank you everyone.

Motion to adjourn. So moved. All in favor.