

NYS Thruway Authority Board of Director's Meeting
December 3, 2024

Joanne Mahoney: Good afternoon, I am Joanne Mahoney, Chair of the Thruway Board and welcome to the December 3rd meeting of the Thruway Authority Board Members. I am attending the meeting from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York. We have Board Members Norman Jones, Joan McDonald and Paul Tokasz attending virtually. The remaining Board Members, Robert Megna, Dr. Veras, Heather Briccetti-Mulligan, have joined the New York State Thruway Authority Staff at the Thruway headquarters in New York. And at this time, I would like to call to order Board Meeting No. 766 which has been duly noticed as required by the Open Meetings Law. May I have a motion to enter the Board Meeting please?

Bob Megna: So moved.

Jose Holguin-Veras: Second.

Joanne Mahoney: All in favor? Aye.

All: Aye.

Joanne Mahoney: We are now in the full meeting of the Board. And our first order of business is a public comment period for speakers to address items on today's agenda. Julie, do we have anybody?

Julie Greco: No, we do not.

Joanne Mahoney: Okay, that concludes the public comment period on today's agenda. And the next order of business is the consent agenda which includes one item and that is approval of the minutes of our last meeting, meeting No. 765. Do I have a motion to approve the minutes?

Bob Megna: So moved.

Heather Briccetti-Mulligan: Second.

Joanne Mahoney: All in favor?

All: Aye.

Joan McDonald: And I abstain because I wasn't at the meeting.

Joanne Mahoney: Okay, thank you Joan. We will now move onto the action item for today, and Dave Malone will present for us. Dave, the floor is yours, welcome.

Dave Malone: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon Board Members. This item seeks your authorization for the Executive Director to implement a recruitment and retention pay differential. In late 2022, the State of New York approved a geographic pay differential for civil service titles

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used primarily by the Department of Transportation for maintenance activities including snow and ice control. In March 2023, to remain competitive with the State's new compensation structure, the Board authorized the Executive Director to implement a geographic pay differential at the Thruway Authority for 16 maintenance titles that aligned with the titles that had been previously approved by the state. As a result of that 2023 Board action, approximately one-half of our workforce, roughly 840 employees received pay increases of \$7,000 and approximately 50 of those employees at downstate work locations received an additional \$7,000 for a total increase of \$14,000. While necessary to retain employees in critical maintenance titles, the 2023 action created an imbalance in our compensation structure, and a divide within our workforce. Maintenance staff responsible for our highway and bridges received the pay differential, but maintenance staff responsible for our building facilities and administrative staff including staff who worked directly within our division and maintenance sections do not. Mechanics who maintain our vehicles and highway equipment received the pay differential, but technicians who maintain the equipment on our toll gantries and other critical IT infrastructure that we rely on for revenue do not. Other examples of staff who did not receive the 2023 pay differential include radio dispatchers who operate our traffic operation center 24 hours a day 365 days a year, and engineers critical to the delivery of our capital program. The 2023 action impacted the traditional progression of compensation in our union contracts. The salary schedules in those union contract's structure compensation based on an employee's grade level and length of service, but with the geographic differential being approved for half of the workforce, we currently have employees in lower grade positions that have higher salaries than employees in higher graded positions that are not geo pay eligible. This has created a scenario that has eliminated the normal incentive for employees to seek a promotion to receive a higher salary. We also have recruitment challenges in some title series that were not included in the previously approved geo pay. Within our engineering and radio dispatch titles, we have a vacancy rate above 20%, and within our toll technician titles we have vacancy rate above 10%.

The item before you today would address these issues by authorizing the Executive Director to implement a recruitment and retention pay differential of up to \$7,000 to employees who do not receive the geographic differential that was previously approved by the Board in March of 2023. Executive staff would not receive this pay differential. If approved, approximately 875 employees would have their compensation increased by \$7,000 beginning in early 2025. The gross cost of this action is approximately \$7.6 million annually. I say the gross cost of this action because we plan to offset the cost by unfunding up to 50 positions. The positions to be unfunded are currently vacant and would not result in the lay off of any employees. Taken into account positions to be unfunded, sufficient funds are available in our recently approved 2025 budget. This item would also authorize the Executive Director to grant an additional \$6,500 pay differential to employees in select titles and work locations with significant recruitment and retention difficulties. We anticipate this additional authorization being used on a very limited basis, primarily at downstate work locations. This action is consistent with the Governor's efforts to recruit and retain employees with the New York State Government and aligns with actions under consideration for employees within state agencies. With that I'd be happy to answer any questions the Board may have.

Joanne Mahoney: I do but I'll give the floor to the fellow board members. Does anybody have any questions about this agenda item? Joan.

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Joan McDonald: I just have one question. The elimination of the 50 vacancies, do you still have sufficient vacancies to staff up if and when the need arises?

Dave Malone: Yes, we feel like the remaining funded positions will be able to maintain operations.

Joan McDonald: Good. Thank you.

Joanne Mahoney: Any other questions?

Bob Megna: You have a question, Chair so you should ask.

Joanne Mahoney: Thank you, Bob. Mine isn't really a question as much as a comment. And I know that Frank and staff have recognized that this has just caused terrible inequities, and in most of the specific examples that I've seen have affected our lowest paid employees, and it's really long overdue. I'm wondering, and I should know this right now, but is there any retro component to this? Because this really was not fair.

Dave Malone: The intention is that it will begin in early 2025, so there would not be a retro component.

Joanne Mahoney: Yeah, that's unfortunate. And I know I'm preaching to the choir. Frank has done a really good job of making the case over the last several months. I'm glad that we're able to finally move on it, I'm wholeheartedly in support, and I'm sorry that it took as long as it did to the Thruway staff that have endured this inequity. There's lots of good reasons to do it, but the most compelling for me is just a fairness argument. So, thank you for the tenacity to stick with this. I'm happy to make the motion to approve.

Bob Megna: Yeah, me too. Can I ask just one brief question? You know you did a great presentation on the budget at our last Board meeting. I'm assuming this is consistent with that presentation.

Dave Malone: Yes, it is. The funding that's necessary is consistent with the budget that was approved two weeks ago.

Bob Megna: Thank you.

Joanne Mahoney: Okay, hearing no other questions, I've made a motion to approve, can I have a second?

Bob Megna: Second.

Joanne Mahoney: All in favor?

All: Aye.

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Joanne Mahoney: Seeing no opposition, the motion is approved, and we can move onto the public comment period for the general Thruway Authority matters. Julie, do we have anybody who's signed up to speak.

Julie Greco: No, Chair, we do not.

Joanne Mahoney: Okay, that concludes the public comment period. Is there any other business that any of the Board members would like to bring before the Board?

Paul Tokasz: I would just like to say that on the topic itself, that we just passed on, I congratulate the members of the administrative team for getting this and maybe some side help from some Board Members for making sure that the Executive Chamber understood the importance of this and getting sidetracked on it at our last Board meeting. So, I congratulate all those people who worked on it very hard in this very short time.

Joanne Mahoney: Thank you, Paul. Alright, that concludes our agenda, and I would entertain a motion to adjourn today's very short Thruway Board Meeting.

Joan McDonald: So moved.

Joanne Mahoney: Yes, somebody has a question?

Frank Hoare: Chairs and the Executive Directors, so I just wanted to note for our employees, last weekend we went through our first winter storm of the season, and we had a tremendous again, as usual, tremendous response from our staff, their experience and professionalism. It's always a challenge to do it, but particularly over a holiday weekend. So, I just wanted to add our thanks here to them and to their families, the men and women of the Buffalo division led the way. Our new Chief of Maintenance and Operations was in Buffalo and provided great leadership along with Matt Latko, our Division Director, and of course, our other divisions were standing right there to support Buffalo. I just would like also to know our emergency management team, they're always on 24/7 but it becomes a particular challenge in weather like that, and they were out there safeguarding the public. And finally, to our communications and government relations team, they did a tremendous job again, through the weekend from Wednesday night through early Monday morning communicating, not only internally with our team but communicating with our governmental partners, but most importantly with the public and giving them real time updates on the weather and conditions out there in an effort to keep everybody safe. So, to all those folks, again, Kevin Wisely, Matt Latko, Barry Sheil, Mike Fariello, Jennifer Givner and Kelly Holland in particular, but to all the men and women of the Buffalo division that spent their holiday out there working and safeguarding the public. Thank you.

Joanne Mahoney: Hear, hear. Thank you, thank you to all of the folks you just named and those unnamed soldiers that were out there moving snow and keeping everybody safe. Thank you very much.

Paul Tokasz: Madam Chair, if I may, Frank, I appreciate you mentioning Buffalo several times. Most of the people in the City of Buffalo could have cut their grass if they choose to. But people

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in Orchard Park were very happy, to make sure Orchard Park was reachable particularly on Sunday evening. It was terrific, that was a great job in the community.

Heather Briccetti Mulligan: Go Bills.

Joanne Mahoney: So, we have a motion and a second, all in favor of adjourning our meeting today?

All: Aye.

Joanne Mahoney: Hearing no opposition, we are adjourned. Happy holidays to all of you and we will see you back here in January.