

# Local Government Snapshot



NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

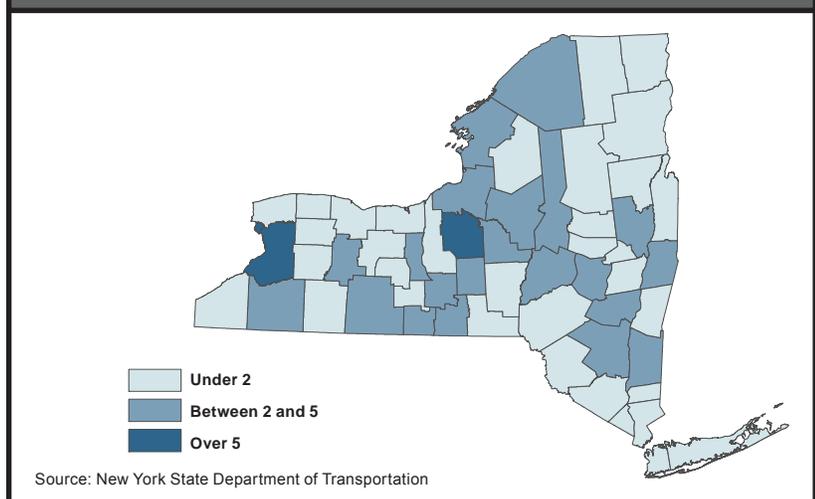
Thomas P. DiNapoli • State Comptroller

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## Chokepoints: New York's Deteriorating Bridges

- The recent closure of the Lake Champlain Bridge in Essex County (also known as the Crown Point Bridge) highlights the importance of New York's bridges to the regional economies in which they are located.
- This sudden closure points out a disturbing fact: bridges in New York State are deteriorating and the consequences of bridge failure can be disastrous.
- Currently, there are 93 bridges in use in New York State with a safety rating at or below that given to the Lake Champlain Bridge prior to its closure. In May 2009, the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) gave the Lake Champlain Bridge a rating of 3.375 on a scale of 0 to 7. A condition rating below 5.0\* indicates that there is serious deterioration or that the bridge is not functioning as originally designed.
- As highlighted in recent reports released by the Office of the State Comptroller, New York State and its local governments have been underfunding infrastructure needs, including bridges, over the last several decades. As a result, many of New York's bridges are either in deteriorating condition or functionally obsolete.<sup>1</sup> For example, three of New York's major bridges are in urgent need of improvements and if any one of them failed or was partially closed, the impact would be severe for the residents, businesses, and communities that depend on them.

Number of Bridges with a Condition Rating as Poor or Worse than the Crown Point Bridge (By County Excluding NYC)



### \*Scale Used by DOT for Bridge Inspections

- 1 – Totally deteriorated, or in failed condition
- 2 – Used to shade between ratings of 1 and 3
- 3 – Serious deterioration, or not functioning as originally designed
- 4 – Used to shade between ratings of 3 and 5
- 5 – Minor deterioration, but functioning as originally designed
- 6 – Used to shade between ratings of 5 and 7
- 7 – New condition

### The Peace Bridge

- The Peace Bridge connects Ontario, Canada, with the Buffalo, New York, metropolitan area. The bridge received a condition rating of 3.3 from DOT in 2009, indicating that it is in deficient condition.
- In 2008, the Buffalo-Niagara Falls port of entry was sixth busiest border crossing nationally when almost a million trucks and nearly six million personal vehicles passed over the bridge.

<sup>1</sup> *Cracks in the Foundation: Local Government Infrastructure and Capital Planning Needs*, (August 2009). *The Dedicated Highway and Bridge Trust Fund: Where Did the Money Go?*, (October 2009)

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- It is estimated that the value of international trade occurring at the Buffalo-Niagara Falls port of entry is \$32 billion per year.
- Recently, federal approval was received for five new designs for the Peace Bridge. This approval may enable the long-awaited reconstruction of this bridge to move forward.

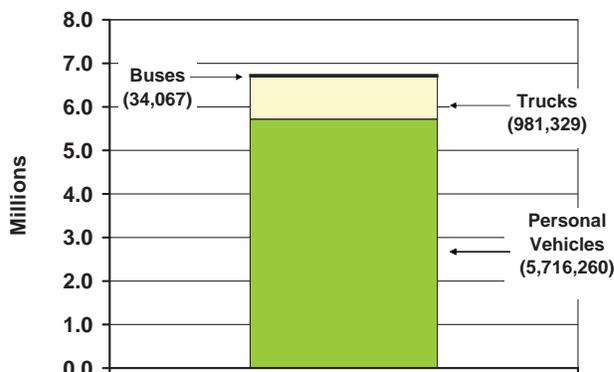
## The Tappan Zee Bridge

- In 2009, the 54-year-old Tappan Zee Bridge, which has surpassed its useful lifespan of 50 years, received a condition rating of 3.7 from DOT.
- The Tappan Zee Bridge is a major conduit for interstate commerce and regional traffic in the Hudson Valley. During the past 20 years, changing commuting patterns, population increases, and economic growth have caused traffic volume on the Tappan Zee Bridge to increase by 70 percent.
- It is estimated that between 140,000 and 170,000 vehicles cross the Tappan Zee on a daily basis. The number of daily trips across the span would potentially increase by more than 30,000 if the bridge were reconstructed.
- There are a number of replacement or rehabilitation alternatives under consideration for the Tappan Zee Bridge. However, a 2008 report estimated replacement costs could be as high as \$21.8 billion (in 2012 dollars).

## The Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge

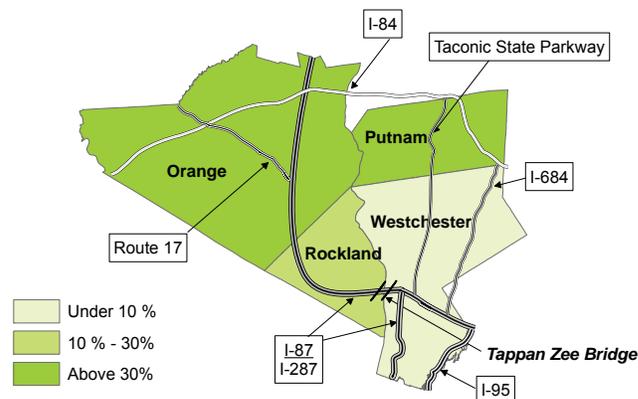
- The Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge is a vital economic corridor and route for tourism-related traffic between southern Ontario, Canada, and the North Country. Traffic and commercial activity related to tourism provide a key revenue source for many of the region's local governments. Tourism in the region generated an estimated \$27 million in local tax revenues in 2008.
- DOT has classified the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge as partially deficient with a rating of 4.3. Plans are underway for the Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority to invest \$20 million to rehabilitate the 50-year-old crossing.<sup>2</sup>

## Border Crossing at Buffalo-Niagara Port of Entry (2008)



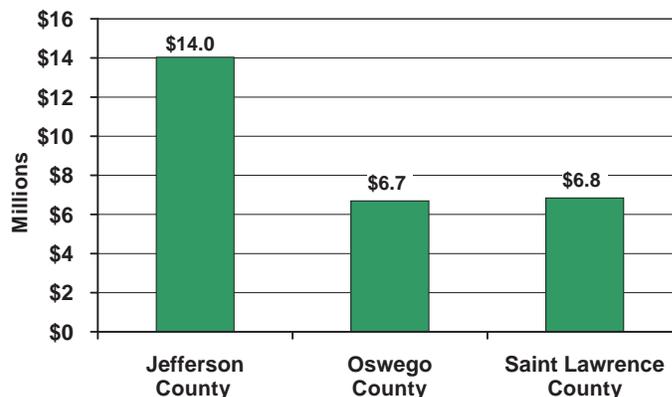
Source: U.S. Department of Transportation

## Percent Change in Total Population for the Lower Hudson Valley (1970-2007)



Source: U.S. Census

## Tourism Generated Local Taxes for the Thousand Islands Region (2008)



Source: Tourism Economics, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Watertown Daily Times, "Authorities Say Increased Oversight Won't Have Big Impact on Operations," December 18, 2009.