

Where are funds for Rte. 347?



POLITICS & POWER

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A bronze bust of former Republican Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno stands at the heart of Albany Airport for the millions of dollars in state funds he lavished on the project.

Nearby, a state-funded minor league stadium, simply known locally as "The Joe," also is named for the leonine-maned ex-leader.

Here on Long Island, the signs over the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway call it the "Ralph Marino-SOB," a not-so-intentional joke on Bruno's predecessor, the late Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino, a Republican who also made sure the local project got the needed funds for redesign

when community protests arose.

But last week, GOP Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan was nowhere in sight when a bulldozer, along with a coalition of construction workers and local officials demonstrated in a desperate attempt to jump-start funding that has inexplicably stalled for Route 347 — also known as Nesconset Highway.

Absence was unusual

What made his absence unusual is that highway is the main artery that runs from Hauppauge to Port Jefferson Station — literally the heart of Flanagan's North Shore district.

Marc Herbst, executive director of the Long Island Contractors Association, said Flanagan, of East Northport, was invited, but his staff said he had other commitments.



John Flanagan

Herbst said Flanagan met privately with the group's leaders earlier this year and was supportive. "He has higher responsibilities but we hope his heart is with his district," Herbst said. "We'll see if he can deliver for us."

A Flanagan spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Route 347 once was a vanguard piece of a county road network that spurred Suffolk's suburban growth, and development of Stony Brook University and its hospital. But the highway has not aged well. The 70,000 vehicles that use the road daily often crawl at half the posted 55 mph speed limit.

Only 4.3 miles of the 15-mile corridor have been widened to meet increased demands, leaving gaps where the road, at points, is three lanes in each di-

rection, and, in others, just two, creating bottlenecks.

While \$158.75 million has been spent on the roadway, another \$350 million to \$550 million is needed to complete the work, depending on how long it takes. Project backers would like to see \$60 million in new construction money for the next two to three years.

State says obligation met

State Department of Transportation spokesman Joseph Morrissey said the state has "fulfilled the Route 347 project commitments" laid out in the five-year capital plan that expires in 2020. Any further funding is subject to negotiation in the state budget due April 1.

But Desmond Ryan, a veteran Albany lobbyist, said, "I'm stunned the Department of Transportation would stop a project in the district of the Senate majority leader. They are either very naive, very coura-

geous or very stupid."

"Everyone's shaking their heads," said Assemb. Mike Fitzpatrick (R-St. James). "It begs the question why would it happen and why the majority leader is letting it happen. It's hard to believe this would ever happen in Joe Bruno's district. I'm sorry if it ruffles feathers, but so be it."

What has the construction industry, unions and those who drive the road particularly nervous is the budget might be the last hurrah for a Republican Senate majority that now survives only with the aid of a handful of Democratic dissidents.

Their hold will be determined by special elections April 24 and a fall campaign season that could be impacted by anti-Trump fervor.

"The time is now and . . . this budget," said Ryan. "It can't wait for the next five-year capital plan."

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