

# Highway Departments in Ulster County

Fact Sheet Prepared by the League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region

## Issues:

“Highway and road construction, operation and maintenance is a responsibility of all general purpose local governments in Ulster County, and is the largest area expenditure for most,” according to the Summary Report on Intergovernmental Collaboration in Ulster County, conducted by the SUNY New Paltz Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach (CRREO) in July 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Costs per mile for highway maintenance, snow removal and paving vary widely among municipalities and among counties. In the three year period 2005 to 2007, Ulster ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the state in total cost per mile.<sup>2</sup>

In July 2011, New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli predicted that taxpayers across New York State could save tens of millions of dollars a year if more local governments shared the administration of their highway operations.<sup>3</sup>

Ulster County and town highway departments cooperate extensively to informally share manpower, materials and equipment on a regular basis, e.g. sharing of bucket trucks for tree trimming or swapping the snowplowing of small segments of their road networks or sharing the storage of de-icing material, a study conducted by Binghamton University found.

Town highway superintendents are elected officials and have their own political constituencies.

## Recommendations:

- The Binghamton study suggests that the county standardize and streamline a county agreement in which all towns could participate in sharing services, something that Erie and Alleghany counties have done.
- Other options be examined to reduce the costs of road maintenance services while improving their quality or performance, such as the county contracting work on county roads to town highway departments (Monroe County), decentralizing county service delivery (Jefferson County) or the creation of a Highway Services Board to provide a mechanism for municipalities to explore and implement joint highway maintenance efforts (Chemung County)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Intergovernmental Collaboration in Ulster County, Summary Report, Pattern for Progress, page 69

<sup>2</sup> Identifying Opportunities for Highway Service Cooperation, Center for Local Government, Binghamton University, page 36

<sup>3</sup> Press Release from the Office of New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, July 13, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Binghamton study, pp 15-21