

A renewed call on L.I. for statehood

BY [GRANT PARPAN](#) |STAFF WRITER

Suffolk County lawmakers are not happy with the state's approval of a bailout plan for the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

And they're letting their colleagues in state government know it.

A two-thirds majority of the County Legislature approved a home rule message supporting an exploration of the creation of a new State of Long Island last Tuesday, the same day legislators called for the MTA to take over operation of the county's bus service. Legislators said both efforts are a direct response to approval of the bailout plan, which features a payroll tax that must be paid by local schools, businesses and governments.

"A lot of people lobbied real hard against [an MTA bailout] and [state lawmakers] still approved it," said Legis. Dan Losquadro (R-Shoreham).

Mr. Losquadro became a spokesperson in the fight for Long Island to secede last week, even gaining national attention with a spot on Fox Business News and an invitation to appear on an upcoming episode of "The Daily Show." He said he hopes that, if nothing more, his television appearances serve to educate Long Island residents on the gap in state spending on Long Island and the taxes and revenues paid to the state by Long Islanders.

"When you factor in the MTA payroll tax and several other things, we're now at about a \$4.3 billion [annual] net loss to the state," Mr. Losquadro said. "How do you sustain that? I'm now speaking up and telling people about this because I want them to be outraged."

The idea of Long Island becoming America's 51st state is not a new one -- proposals date as far back as 1919 -- although no plan has ever gained much traction in Albany. Suffolk County Comptroller Joseph Sawicki Jr. said he proposed secession legislation in Albany as an assemblyman from Southold more than 15 years ago. He told the News-Review last year that he remembered being laughed off.

Talk of Mr. Sawicki's plan was revived only last year when, speaking at a Dowling College Roundtable, he suggested it was time to revisit the plan.

Mr. Sawicki said last week that approval of the home rule message, which was proposed by the Legislature's presiding officer, Bill Lindsay, "is a signal to state leaders that an 'anti-Albany' groundswell has developed on Long Island."

"Long Islanders are New Yorkers at heart, but we can't be expected to bankroll the entire State," Mr. Sawicki said in a statement.

The "State of Long Island" plan has been met with a lot of support by local lawmakers over the years. But the probability of such a plan being approved has always been considered slim. The New York State Legislature would need to approve the creation of a new state and only 11 percent of the Legislature hails from Long Island. A ballot referendum would also need to be approved by voters in Suffolk and Nassau counties. Sen. Ken LaValle (R-Port Jefferson) has called the plan, which he supports, a "half-court shot."

But county lawmakers are demanding to be heard.

Legis. Ed Romaine (R-Center Moriches) helped Legis. Wayne Horsley (D-Babylon) rally the bipartisan coalition of legislators last week to call on the MTA to assume Suffolk Transit operations and establish Sunday service in the wake of the bailout. Currently, Suffolk subsidizes 40 percent of the operating costs of its bus services. Nassau subsidizes only 10 percent.

Factoring in bailout taxes, Mr. Horsley said Suffolk County residents pay about \$520 million in taxes and fees to the MTA, while receiving only about \$23 million in transit-related state aid.

Mr. Romaine called the numbers unacceptable for a county he said is underserved.

"Suffolk County is a stepchild and a cash cow for the MTA," Mr Romaine said.

Legislators are asking the commissioner of public works to determine the feasibility of Suffolk County entering into an agreement to have the MTA assume Suffolk County Transit bus service. The study would be intended to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of entering into such an agreement with the MTA, as well as the effect such an agreement would have on bus service in Suffolk, according to a press release from the County Legislature's press office.

"We're going to do our best to fight [in the wake of the bailout plan] and to get something out of the MTA," Mr. Romaine said.

gparpan@northshoresun.com