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CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS NOW ONLINE

Governor Paterson's \$2.94 million economic assistance program addresses needs of small businesses affected by Lake Champlain Bridge Closure

State transportation officials have fast-tracked construction of a temporary ferry

Bridge Road closed through ferry construction

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and Empire State Development (ESD) announced today that those business owners and industries affected by the Champlain Bridge closure can now apply online for Governor Paterson's \$2.94 million economic assistance program. The program, announced by the Governor in November, addresses the region's full range of economic industries by awarding grants to small businesses; making low-interest loans to assist small firms in paying employees and keeping their doors open; and helping farms and manufacturers offset increased travel costs.

"Together we are working around the clock to ensure that local businesses, farmers and families affected by the devastation receive the assistance they need," said Empire State Development Chairman & CEO designate Dennis M. Mullen. "The bridge closure has had a profound impact on the daily lives of the local residents; I saw this first-hand when I traveled to the North Country and Crown Point in November. Thanks to the strong support of Governor Paterson, we have made tremendous progress in the construction of the interim ferry, which will serve as a lifeline for our North Country businesses and our Regional Office is assisting those businesses in need. We pledge to continue to do whatever it takes to help the local economy recover."

"We have fast-tracked construction of a temporary ferry, requiring heavy machinery and trucks which present considerable danger to the public if they are permitted in the area," said NYSDOT's Acting Commissioner Stanley Gee. "During the course of construction, we must assure the safety of both the crew working on the job and the general public. Closing a portion of Bridge Road to facilitate construction of the temporary ferry landing shows the swift progress we are making towards enhancing mobility between New York and Vermont."

Bridge Road, where the outreach center is located, has been closed as heavy trucks and large pieces of equipment are now traveling Bridge Road daily and construction crews are working in

close proximity to the center. The entire site is considered part of a construction zone and, as such, is not considered safe for the public. The closure, in effect from December 2 through the duration of ferry construction, will begin just north of the Crown Point State historical site to allow access to the site.

The rapid progress in construction of a temporary ferry has also meant the closures of the Essex County Visitors Center and the Lake Champlain Bridge Closure Outreach Center. Those in need of temporary assistance or looking to submit applications in person can go to The Ticonderoga Town Hall or ESD's Plattsburgh Regional Office to meet with a state representative but should call ahead first.

Since the Lake Champlain Bridge was closed for safety reasons in October, Governor Paterson declared a State disaster emergency for the affected area and deployed his staff and State agency personnel to the region. Governor Paterson and Vermont Governor Jim Douglas announced the establishment of free ferry service between the states, as well as a free express commuter bus with service to three major employers. At the Governor's direction, State transportation officials are working closely with the federal government to expedite the demolition of the existing bridge and construction of a new bridge in Crown Point.

In November, Governor Paterson announced the creation of a \$2.94 million economic assistance program, administered by Empire State Development, to help North Country businesses affected by the Lake Champlain Bridge closure. Applications for the first two programs—Retail Assistance and Increased Travel Cost grants—can be found by going to <http://www.empire.state.ny.us/ChamplainBridge/default.asp>.

Economic Development Assistance Inquiries:

For more information about qualifying for the economic assistance program, please contact ESD at 1-800-STATE-NY (1-800-782-8369).

To meet with an economic development official or submit applications in person visit the Ticonderoga Town Hall (1-518-585-6934), located at 132 Montcalm Street or the Plattsburgh Regional Office (1-518-561-5642), located at 401 West Bay Plaza. The hall will be open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and staffed by Empire State Development officials until further notice. Please call ahead.

Transportation Related Inquires:

Questions from the public regarding progress on the Lake Champlain Bridge alternative crossings, or other issues may be directed to NYSDOT at 1-888-769-7243. For closure and temporary crossing issues the public may reference the Lake Champlain Bridge closure website at www.lcbclosure.org. Updates and information regarding the bridge replacement project may be found at www.nysdot.gov/lakechamplainbridge.

Empire State Development is New York's chief economic development agency. ESD also oversees the marketing of "I LOVE NY," the State's iconic tourism brand. For more information, visit <http://www.nylovesbiz.com/>.

In 1967 the NYSDOT was formed to manage the state's complex transportation system. The state and local highway system supports more than 100 billion vehicle miles annually. The total system encompasses more than 113,000 highway miles and more than 17,300 bridges. NYSDOT manages an extensive 4,600-mile rail network over which 42 million tons of equipment, raw materials, manufactured goods and produce are shipped each year, and 513 public and private aviation facilities through which more than 31 million people travel each year. The Department also has oversight of many of New York State's ports and more than 130 public transit operators, serving some 5.2 million passengers each day. General information about NYSDOT may be found at www.nysdot.gov.

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