



Mary S. Cooke, Supervisor
Town of Grand Island
2255 Baseline Road, Grand Island, NY 14072

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Contact: Liz Wilbert 716-773-9600 x. 658

GRAND ISLAND SUPERVISOR AND ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSS IMPACT OF REGIONAL E-ZPASS WALK-IN CENTER CLOSING

Grand Island Supervisor Mary Cooke, Erie County Clerk Chris Jacobs, Assemblyman John Ceretto (R, I-Lewiston) and State Senator Mark Grisanti (R, I-District 60) today held a press conference to urge the New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA) to **postpone its plan to close the Grand Island E-ZPass Walk-In Center until an alternative solution can be found** to address the region's unique transportation needs.

Grand Island's looming closure coincides with the closing of two other Upstate offices, leaving only four offices remaining, all located in the New York City area. **This will leave the entirety of Upstate New York without a location to use cash to reload their EZ Pass tags** and access to a representative for customer service questions and concerns.

All elected officials argue that the site's closure will impact local individuals who utilize cash or check payments to facilitate their usage of E-ZPass and has the potential to worsen traffic congestion in the region during the summer months.

"Grand Islanders need a functioning alternative for cash customers to renew their E-ZPass in person before the Grand Island center closes," said Supervisor Cooke. "The Thruway Authority's proposal is unacceptable and will result in serious inconveniences for Grand Island's residents as well as potential traffic congestion region wide."

"I urge you to reconsider this decision, or at a minimum, delay closure until you have the technology in place to electronically conduct all transactions currently conducted at EZ Pass Walk-In Centers, which is not the case at this point," said Jacobs. "Why not wait to close these locations until this technology is available, avoiding any hardship on residents on Grand Island and in Erie County."

"Grand Island's unique setting, coupled with a high volume of tourist traffic sharing the toll booths, make it imperative for the Thruway Authority to abandon plans to close the E-ZPass Walk-In Center," said Ceretto. "Millions of tourists pass through these toll booths every summer to visit Niagara Falls. I am deeply concerned **that closing this facility will have an adverse effect on the tourism industry and that the increase in traffic congestion** will negatively impact the quality of life for local residents."

“For the residents who use the E-ZPass Walk-In Center on Grand Island, which is the only one in Western New York, it is a disappointment that it is scheduled to close. **A loss in service is always frustrating, especially at a time when the Authority is again looking to raise its tolls. It is my hope that the Thruway Authority will examine all possible avenues before cutting this service,**” said Legislator Kevin Hardwick

In the month of February alone **more than 1.66 million vehicles crossed the north and south Grand Island bridges.** The Grand Island bridges reported a greater than 10 percent increase in automobile traffic since 2011, the largest such increase in the state. According to the NYSTA, **more than 68 percent of the cars on the Grand Island bridges utilized E-ZPass** to cross. With usage and revenue both on the rise, this is the wrong time to cut access to customer services.

“It is obvious that the bureaucrats at the Thruway Authority have failed to grasp the unique geographic and logistical characteristics affecting the residents of Grand Island,” said Senator Mark Grisanti. “While we would love if the NYSTA would remove the tolls all together, **Grand Island residents who must pay daily tolls at the very least deserve the convenience of having a readily available E-ZPass service center.**”

“Unfortunately, Grand Island residents and those using the Grand Island bridges continue to have to pay tolls, and so long as those tolls are in place, an E-ZPass Walk-In center should remain open,” said Assemblyman Sean Ryan. “**Grand Island residents should still continue to have an easily accessible location that accepts cash and checks for reloading E-ZPass, and unless that need is met through some other location on Grand Island, the Thruway Authority needs to rethink this decision.**”