

\$39 million federal grant set to reinforce South Grand Island Bridges

- [Jerry Zremski](#) 4/8/24

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer will announce a \$39 million federal grant to the New York State Thruway Authority today, which will be used to strengthen the South Grand Island Bridges against seismic activity, ground motion and soil failure.

WASHINGTON – Three days after an unexpected earthquake shook New York City, the federal government is announcing a \$39 million grant to strengthen the South Grand Island Bridges to protect against severe quakes.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck E. Schumer will officially announce the federal grant to the New York State Thruway Authority today. The money will be used to strengthen the bridges against seismic activity, ground motion and soil failure.

“Western New York’s South Grand Island Bridges are lifelines for Niagara Falls and Tonawanda, connecting communities to the mainland and carrying thousands of cars every day,” said Schumer, a New York Democrat. “But age and deterioration have taken a toll on many sections of the bridge, and recent events – from the earthquake we experienced downstate to the tragic bridge collapse in Baltimore – have brought the need to make repairs to this vital corridor for Western New York to the top of mind.”

The rehabilitation will also include other safety improvements, along with improved pedestrian and bicycle access on the bridges. The U.S. Department of Transportation will allocate the funds to the Thruway Authority under the Bipartisan Infrastructure and Jobs Act of 2021. “These funds are critical to improving resiliency on essential bridges to Western New York’s economy,” Gov. Kathy Hochul said.

The collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, after its support column was struck by a container ship, sent shockwaves through the United States. It also prompted a question: Could something like it happen in Western New York?

Parts of the film “A Quiet Place Part II” were filmed on the bridges in 2019. More importantly, the bridges carry 70,000 vehicle crossings a day, said State Sen. Tim Kennedy, a Democrat who lauded Schumer, Sen. Kirsten E. Gillibrand and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg for pushing for the grant. “With one of the Grand Island South Bridges dating back nearly 90 years to 1935, this significant level of maintenance and improvement will keep Western New Yorkers safe and on the move for decades to come,” Kennedy said.

While the Buffalo area is better-known for snow emergencies than seismic activity, earthquakes are not unknown to the region. A magnitude 3.8 earthquake centered in West Seneca rattled Western New Yorkers out of bed at about 6:15 a.m. on Feb. 6, 2023. The U.S. Geological Survey lists 25 [earthquakes in and around the region](#) since the 1850s, with the strongest – measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale – occurring on Dec. 11, 1924. That event was comparable to the magnitude 4.8 earthquake that hit the New York City area and other parts of the Northeast on Friday.

“Hardening bridge infrastructure to guard against potential disaster makes great sense, but is costly, and I thank Sen. Schumer for acting quickly to protect the very important Grand Island bridges, which are critical not only to Erie County, but to New York State and Canada, as well,” Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said. “These spans carry millions of vehicles annually and are vital to tourism and trade, as well as to local motorists. As we have seen recently in Baltimore, bridge catastrophes can happen in seconds, but have long-lasting impacts. This award is great news for everyone using these bridges.”

In addition to announcing the federal money for the South Grand Island Bridges, Schumer said the State Department of Transportation would receive \$1.65 million to develop and coordinate emergency response plans for snow emergencies in Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties.

“Buffalo and Western New York have experienced some of the worst blizzards in recent years from lake-effect snow, and robust planning for extreme weather before it happens is essential to keeping our residents and emergency responders safe,” Schumer said. “Today’s funding is about building a more resilient future for all of Western New York and ensuring we have the infrastructure and plans to help our region take on any emergency and continue to grow.”