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STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

June 25, 2014

Mr. Howard P. Milstein
Chairman
New York State Thruway Authority
200 Southern Boulevard
Albany, NY 12201

Re: Inspecting Highway Bridges and
Repairing Defects
Report 2014-F-9

Dear Mr. Milstein:

According to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article X, Section 5 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 2803 of the Public Authority Law, we have followed up on the actions taken by officials of the New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA) to implement the recommendations contained in our audit report, *Inspecting Highway Bridges and Repairing Defects* (Report 2012-S-33).

Background, Scope and Objective

According to Federal and State law, highway bridges generally have to be inspected at least once every 24 months unless special circumstances exist such as severe weather or inspector safety concerns. NYSTA is responsible for inspecting Thruway bridges and repairing any defects found during inspections. If a "red flag" condition (i.e., a serious structural defect) is identified during an inspection, NYSTA procedures require that a course of action must be decided within 24 hours to address the red flag defects. Up through February 7, 2014, NYSTA had to notify the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) within one week about any red flags identified during inspections. Subsequent to this date, NYSTA is only required to notify DOT within one week about any red flags that could potentially disrupt traffic on DOT or locally maintained highways.

As of May 2014, NYSTA records show it owns 792 bridges and has inspection responsibility for 810 bridges. Between January 2013 and May 2014, 114 flags were issued on NYSTA-owned bridges including 4 red flags.

Our initial audit report, which was issued on April 26, 2013, examined whether NYSTA inspects its highway bridges and repairs defects. We found that NYSTA repairs defects identified during inspections. However, highway bridges were not always inspected timely, including three with flagged conditions, and DOT was not always notified of red flags within one week, as required. Furthermore, the initial evaluations and plans of action were not documented for red-flagged bridges.

The objective of our follow-up was to assess, as of June 3, 2014, the implementation status of the three recommendations in our initial report.

Summary Conclusions and Status of Audit Recommendations

NYSTA implemented the three recommendations we made in our initial report.

Follow-Up Observations

Recommendation 1

Inspect all highway bridges on time and report the red flags to DOT within one week, as required.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - We found NYSTA inspects its highway bridges timely and meets red flag reporting requirements. Since our last audit, NYSTA started basing inspection due dates upon the actual days elapsed from the previous inspection. During our current review, NYSTA provided evidence showing that the 451 bridge inspections conducted and submitted to DOT between March 13, 2013 and May 26, 2014 were timely. In addition, NYSTA provided evidence showing it notified DOT about all identified red flags within one week.

Recommendation 2

Ensure the initial evaluation and plan of action is sufficiently documented for red flag bridges. Develop a tracking system to monitor future compliance.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - In September 2013, NYSTA began using a new version of its Inventory and Inspection Information System (IIIS) which added a "Red Flag Tracking" screen. In addition, NYSTA instructed responsible engineers to document their initial decisions about bridge safety and repair action plans within 24 hours for new flags. Also, the engineers were directed to document any repair and flag removal progress in IIIS. Based on our current review, NYSTA had followed these new procedures when appropriate.

Recommendation 3

Develop a procedure for monitoring the inspection of the three bridges owned by NYSTA but inspected by DOT.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - NYSTA officials now request that DOT provide them with the full inspection report for each NYSTA bridge inspected by DOT. Officials showed they had, in fact, received the latest inspection report for all such bridges.

Major contributors to this report were Mark Ren and Wayne Bolton.

We thank NYSTA's management and staff for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this follow-up review.

Truly yours,

Brian Reilly
Audit Manager

cc: H. Lennon, Acting Director, Audit & Management Services
Division of the Budget