

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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GOVERNORS PATERSON AND DOUGLAS ANNOUNCES FREE 24-HOUR FERRY ACROSS LAKE CHAMPLAIN

New York State Governor David A. Paterson and Vermont Governor Jim Douglas today announced that the new, temporary Lake Champlain ferry will be operational by the end of the month. The ferry will operate 24-hours a day, seven days a week, crossing just south of the former site of Lake Champlain Bridge. There will be no cost to ride the ferry, helping to restore commuter, tourist and commercial traffic in the former Lake Champlain Bridge corridor.

"Restoration of this critical link between New York and Vermont will allow residents to return to more normal routines and bring customers back to the businesses located along Bridge Road and in the surrounding communities," Governor Paterson said. "The next step is to focus on building a new bridge – one that uniquely compliments the historic and scenic setting, and incorporates the needs of the community with structural features that will keep motorists and pedestrians safe for many years to come."

This ferry crossing is expected to take approximately 15 minutes, drastically reducing commuting time and reestablishing commerce on both the New York and Vermont sides of the lake.

Reestablishing the Bridge Road corridor will allow easier access to employment and medical appointments for New Yorkers who need to travel to Vermont and reestablish the vital connections between communities and residents on either side of Lake Champlain. It also signals a return to more normal traffic patterns that will revive a more active and robust economic environment for businesses in communities surrounding the bridge.

Vermont Governor Jim Douglas said: "Residents in the area surrounding the Lake Champlain Bridge share family, friends and business relationships on both sides of the lake. Establishing this new, free ferry service will allow these relationships and commerce to resume more normally."

Design of the new temporary ferry began at the end of October, shortly after the Lake Champlain Bridge was closed. Construction started in November, and the first of two ferry slips will be operational by the end of January. The second slip will open within a few weeks thereafter. The ferry boats will accommodate approximately 40 to 50 cars, as well as pedestrians and other vehicles.

There will be a temporary weight restriction on use of the ferry of 15 tons per vehicle from both the Vermont and the New York sides for the first several weeks after the opening, which will not impact cars, smaller trucks, school buses, or most emergency response vehicles. Once the both ferry docks are fully operational, it is expected that this restriction will be lifted.

While the opening of the temporary ferry is a sign of the quick progress that is being made, work continues on the design of a new Lake Champlain Bridge. The Modified Network Tied Arch Bridge concept, favored by the public and the Public Advisory Committee, is the final choice as a replacement. Construction on the \$75 million structure is expected to begin this spring and should be completed by the end of summer in 2011.

New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Acting Commissioner Stanley Gee said: "All the workers involved in this project have labored long hours in extreme winter weather conditions in order to build the docks, ramps and other infrastructure necessary to support the new ferry service. The temporary ferry will serve a vital role in connecting Vermont and New York as we continue to work aggressively to build a unique new bridge across Lake Champlain."

Vermont Agency of Transportation Secretary David Dill said: "As much as we are pleased that this new ferry will allow life for many families and businesses to finally begin to return to something that should closely resemble normal, this good news will not make any of us lose sight of the true objective, which is to construct a new Champlain Bridge and have it open to traffic as quickly as possible."

In addition, Governor Paterson announced that as part of his \$2.94 million Lake Champlain Bridge Economic Assistance Program, the Essex County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) will manage a Community Loan Fund for businesses affected by the bridge closure. This \$635,000 fund was created to assist businesses with working capital, purchase of machinery and equipment and refinancing of collateralized debt. The Essex County IDA will offer and administer the loans to qualifying business owners and not-for-profit organizations and all repaid funds will stay in the community for future business investment and growth. Loan repayment may be deferred until bridge service is restored at the lender's discretion.

The Essex County Industrial Development Agency has accepted a \$50,000 grant offer from Empire State Development to develop and implement a marketing effort with goal of assisting businesses in the Towns of Moriah, Crown Point and Ticonderoga, and the Village of Port Henry, affected by the Lake Champlain Bridge closure. This will cover the expenses associated with a marketing program to address the unanticipated major loss of customers directly as a result of the bridge closure. This will also include technical assistance to individual businesses to assist in identifying new ways to operate, new products and new market opportunities, to attempt to stabilize and strengthen their current customer and market opportunities.

Area businesses affected by the bridge closure may also qualify for the Lake Champlain Bridge Economic Assistance Program, which was first announced in November. Applications for Phase 2 of the Retail Assistance Grant component are now available. At the Governor's direction, Empire State Development (ESD) has modified the program to help more small businesses qualify. When first announced, the Retail Assistance Grant program required applicants to demonstrate lost revenue of 20 percent or more to qualify. That requirement has been lowered to 15 percent or more. The deadline for application is March 31, 2010. The lower requirement is also retroactive for Phase 1 applicants. This deadline to apply under Phase 1 is January 30, 2010.

ESD Chairman and CEO designate Dennis M. Mullen said: "This Community Loan Fund portion of Governor Paterson's economic assistance package means additional real help for the businesses that are truly hurting as a result of the bridge closure. We have already seen business owners take advantage of the Retail Assistance Grant and turn to our regional office staff for support. ESD is committed to continuing this outreach as we work toward sustainable recovery in the region."

Business owners and industries affected by the Lake Champlain Bridge closure are urged to apply for Governor Paterson's economic assistance program. Applications for the Retail Assistance Grant and Increased Travel Cost Grant Transport Assistance Grant can be downloaded and printed from the website at: www.empire.state.ny.us/ChamplainBridge. Applications cannot be completed online. Businesses interested in the Community Loan Fund should contact the Essex County IDA at 518-873-9114.

For more information about qualifying for the economic assistance program, please contact ESD at 1-800-STATE-NY (1-800-782-8369) or by email at champlainbridge@empire.state.ny.us. For further assistance, call the Plattsburgh office at 518-561-5642 and arrangements will be made for an on-site visit.

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The following statements were provided in support of the ferry service:

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said: "This is great news for the North Country. This ferry service is critical to the health and economy of the region, connecting businesses, farms and vital

emergency services. I will continue to work with federal, state and local leaders to advance the reconstruction of the Crown Point Bridge."

Congressman Scott Murphy said: "This ferry is a step towards helping to ease the additional strain on the North Country community caused by the loss of the Crown Point Bridge. I am pleased to see this critical link to the North Country back up and running and look forward to working to build a new bridge for the continued development of our community and economy."

Congressman Bill Owens said: "Restoring this passage from New York to our neighbors in Vermont will be a critical tool to business development and continued economic recovery for us in the North Country. This route will allow Upstate New Yorkers to travel faster and more frequently, and the communities that have been affected since our bridge closure will hopefully see higher sales and increased business as a result of this move."

Senator Betty Little said: "The bridge closure has turned lives upside down. Things won't return to normal until the new bridge is built and opened, but today marks a significant step forward to help commuters, families, farmers, businesses and others who have been enduring a very difficult situation since October 16. Working with Governor Paterson, administration officials and state and local representatives, I look forward to seeing quick progress on building a new bridge. I do want to take this opportunity that recognize and thank the workers who have put in the long hours of tough work to make this ferry service possible."

Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward said: "I am very pleased with this ferry becoming operational, and thank Governor Paterson and the Department of Transportation, as well as Vermont Governor Jim Douglas and the Vermont Agency of Transportation, for their efforts on returning this vital inter-state lifeline. This is a huge step to alleviate the travel burdens for local communities in New York and Vermont, and I look forward to working with the Governor to ensure that a permanent bridge is in place as soon as possible."

Chairman of the Essex County Board of Supervisors Randall T. Douglas said: "I am grateful for Governors David A. Paterson and Jim Douglas for their initiative behind the funding and the opening of the Crown Point Ferry Transportation System. Providing commuters an alternative means of travel to their place of employment during the construction of the new bridge, will help many of our constituents who feared facing unemployment during these economic depressed times."

Town of Crown Point Supervisor Bethany Kosmider said: "I am so pleased that the Governor took time from his overwhelming schedule to travel to Crown Point and speak to the people about the upcoming ferry service. I know we appreciate all the work and dedication that has gone into this endeavor and we are hopeful to hear favorable news. Our time has come."

Town of Moriah Supervisor Thomas R. Scozzafava said: "On behalf of our Constituents I want to express our sincere thanks to Governor Paterson for the caring and compassion that he has shown during this very difficult period. The closure of the Lake Champlain Bridge has caused untold hardships for many, and the opening of the new Ferry Crossing will help provide much needed relief."

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