

Transportation always on the move

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By [Jolene Cleaver](#) from the Observer Dispatch

Despite a widely reported stagnation in some sectors of the state's economy, the transportation sector is growing.

In early February, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced \$25 million to fund rail and port improvement projects across New York, working to strengthen infrastructure and economic development vital to the movement of goods throughout the state.

The investments will support track rehabilitation, capacity expansion, railroad bridge repair, and economic development opportunities.

In the region, \$120,000 was granted to rehabilitate track between Cooperstown and Portlandville in Otsego County.

But, according to one local truck driving school, rail and port is not the only transportation that sees growth.

Despite Mohawk Valley-based state Department of Labor figures that show declining employment figures for trucking and warehousing industries, Beverly VanValkenburg, director of Sage Truck Driving School, a nationwide school with a location in Rome, said that conservatively, about 100 individuals graduate the five-to-six-week program every year.

This is supported by statewide Labor Department data that shows job gains of 2,900 in the trade, transportation and utilities sector for the period of September 2015 to 2016.

“That number continues to grow,” she said, “The need continues... especially in New York.”

“Trucking is 70 percent of how everything gets transported,” she said.

Looking nationwide, she has seen figures that indicate the need for 90,000 new drivers each year for the next decade.

According to the state Department of Labor, 3,894 were employed in transportation in 2016. That's 70 more than 2015. In the last 10 years, the highest number of those employed was 4,639 in 2008.

VanValkenburg noted that even with industries leaving New York over the last few decades, there always is a need for trucking whether it's in New York or regionally.

"Trucking is 70 percent of how everything gets transported," she said.

And the Mohawk Valley is no exception

"Truck driving schools are always full," said Marvin VanSlyke, general manager of R.B. Humphreys in Westmoreland, a trucking company that primarily hauls refrigerated goods. "There rarely is a lack of work."

VanSlyke said he sees the industry continuing to grow.

While there are plenty of dry storage warehouses in the area for shipped goods to be stored while they make their route to their final destination, there's "very little refrigerated warehouses in the area," VanSlyke said.

"That would be a good business opportunity for someone," he said

As the trucking sector continues to see growth, state officials say they are continuing to invest in supporting infrastructure.

"The Thruway Authority continuously reinvests toll dollars back into Mohawk Valley infrastructure to ensure that our roadway remains safe and up-to-date for motorists," said the Thruway Authority's Sydney Jenkins in a statement. "As part of the budget secured last year by Gov. Cuomo, Thruway tolls will remain frozen until at least 2020,"

According to information from the authority, roughly \$86 million will be invested in Mohawk Valley projects starting in 2017 and 2018.

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