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Westchester weighs \$1.7M savings plan for transportation department

WHITE PLAINS — The county could save close to \$1.7 million by cutting about a third of the [Department of Transportation](#) staff, officials said Monday.

Public Works Commissioner John Hsu, who also runs the transportation agency, told two Board of Legislators committees that he had proposed the cuts to be reflected in County Executive Rob Astorino's upcoming 2011 budget proposal.

The board committees were considering folding the transportation agency into the Department of Public Works to reduce staff and save money. "Basically, we're pretty much there," said Astorino's chief of staff, George Oros, accompanying Hsu as he made his presentation in the Michaelian Office Building.

The plans seem to put the legislators in step with the administration on the matter. "This is a situation where the county executive and the Board of Legislators are operating in tandem," Legislator John Nonna, D-Pleasantville, said after the meeting. Nonna heads the board's Legislation committee, which held the meeting with the Public Works, Parks, Labor and Transportation committees.

Hsu's plan cuts the staff to 36 from 55. If the cuts are made, five people would be laid off, Hsu said. Other positions were vacated when the county offered buyouts to employees this year. The 19 positions to be eliminated would save the county \$1,048,000 in salary, Hsu said. Counting benefits, the county would save about \$1.7 million, Oros said. Of the remaining employees, about 20 would be funded entirely or partially by state and federal grants, as they are now, Hsu said.

The department, running on a \$130 million budget this year, oversees contracts with companies that run the county's Bee-Line buses and the Westchester County Airport. **Most of the money — \$95.7 million goes to bus service operations.**

The airport pays for itself with fees and concessions and takes no tax money, officials said. The consolidation is not expected to affect bus riders or travelers using the airports. Legislator Bill Ryan, D-White Plains, said it would be up to the committee he chairs, covering public works and transportation, to make sure of that.

Hsu said the department could operate with fewer employees by "doing more with less" and sharing tasks with other departments. He said, for instance, that he did not plan to replace two employees in procurements who retired because the department would not need to make a major purchase until 2014.

At that time, Hsu said, he would hire a consultant for the job "as opposed to having someone on staff waiting for the procurement to happen." One savings comes from having one commissioner, Hsu, run both departments. He has been acting transportation commissioner since Larry Salley left the \$155,000-a-year job this year. Hsu told the legislators he gets no extra salary for taking on the second department. "I'm doing this for the love," he joked when Legislator **Bill Burton**, D-Ossining, asked. He is promoting two longtime officials in the **Transportation Department** to help with the work.

Director of Planning Patricia Chemka will become deputy commissioner, replacing Harry Stanton, who also left this year. Director of Surface Transportation Richard Stiller will become an assistant commissioner. Nonna said the legislation would likely be voted out of committee next week and put to a public hearing at the Nov. 22 Board of Legislators meeting.

The full board could vote on it that night, he said. One detail to be worked out is what to call the joined departments. **Rather than calling Transportation a bureau within the Public Works Department, Legislator Martin Rogowsky, D- Harrison, suggested calling it the Department of Public Works and Transportation. Nonna agreed. "I do think that calling it the Department of Public Works and Transportation is fine," Nonna said.**