Melville, NY (02/05/07)—On Monday, Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY), Babylon Town Supervisor Steve Bellone, Long Island Association President Matthew T. Crosson and Economist Pearl Kamer released a landmark study on transportation habits of Long Islanders and the staggering effects of a gas tax on Long Island's economy. While the report shows that due to lack of transportation alternatives and infrastructure, a gas tax would drain Long Island businesses and households, it also suggests that the transportation habits of Long Islanders favor further study and possible adoption of public transportation projects and the Long Island Railroad's third track project.

"The President has called for Americans to reduce gasoline consumption by 20% over ten years, and many have suggested that the best way to achieve this reduction is a gas tax that would disincentivize driving while creating a revenue stream for renewable energy," said Israel, a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee that funds energy programs. "Today, we've confirmed that a gas tax would be debilitating on Long Island's economy and would disproportionately affect working families, many of whom have higher gas costs because they live in lower-cost housing further away from central business hubs."

"In the Town of Babylon, we have been working on a transit oriented development plan centered around the reopening of the Republic Train Station on Route 110," said Town Supervisor Steve Bellone. "This study confirms that greater investment in public transportation can reap tremendous benefits for Long Island's economy by helping to take cars off the road and providing greater opportunities for reverse commuting."

"This study provides clear evidence that increasing gasoline taxes would be counterproductive," said Long Island Association President Matthew T. Crosson. "There are better ways to reduce auto usage."

The report sheds light on the transportation habits of Long Island workers who travel by car to work and suggests that alternatives such as minibuses or jitneys could siphon off some of these worktrips and reduce automobile travel and fuel consumption on Long Island. In 2005, only 26% of Long Islanders took public transportation or carpooled to work, with over 74% of Long Islanders driving alone. However, the report analyzes average work trips and finds that most Long Islanders live near their place of employment. 66% of Nassau County residents work on Long Island, with 58% of them working in Nassau County. Among Suffolk residents, 87% work on Long Island, with 73% working in Suffolk County.

Due to a significant number of Long Island workers that “reverse commute” to the Island from New York City, the report suggests that efforts to expand reverse commuting capacity, like the Long Island Railroad’s “third track” project, may be effective. In a case study of work trips into the 110 Business corridor in Melville-Farmingdale, over 2,100 originated in New York City.

Nassau and Suffolk counties have the highest levels of oil consumption in New York State. According to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), Suffolk and Nassau counties ranked first and second among all New York counties by estimated gasoline consumption in 2004. Long Islanders consumed an estimated $1.24 billion gallons of gasoline in 2004, with over 22% of all vehicles in New York registered in 2005 on Long Island. This resulted in Long Islanders paying over $206 million in state and local gas taxes between June 2005 and May 2006.

The study shows that using a gas tax to decrease consumption would severely harm Long Island’s economy because of a lack of transportation alternatives. If taxation was used to achieve the Administration’s goal of a 20% reduction in gasoline consumption over ten years, an additional 5.33% tax would need to be applied to gasoline. This increased tax would take an additional $140 million out of Long Island’s economy and would result in a loss of $176 million in output, $47 million in earnings and would cost Long Island 1,400 jobs.