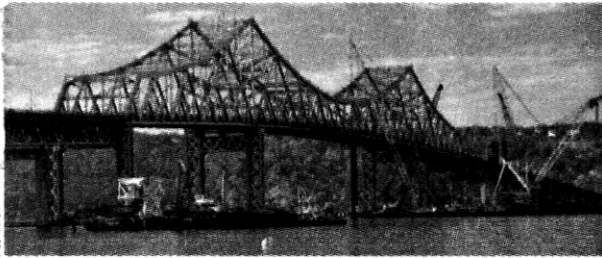


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Sluggish upstate market drags New York employment numbers down



The Tappan Zee Bridge replacement is the biggest public works project outside of NYC.

BY LINDA O'FLANAGAN

A sluggish upstate market has helped put New York on a list of losers in construction jobs.

The state shed more construction jobs than any other in the nation last month, according to new numbers from the Associated General Contractors of America.

New York lost 4,500 jobs, followed by Indiana (-4,400 jobs), Ohio (-2,300 jobs) and Connecticut (2,200 jobs).

Construction employment expanded in 37 states between July 2014 and July 2015 while only 28 states added jobs between June and July, according to an analysis of Labor Department data by the Association.

"Construction continues to grow overall but fewer states are participating in the expansion than was true a year ago," said Ken Simonson, the association's chief economist.

"The uneven growth reflects the cross-cutting trends in the overall economy, as tight government budgets, plunging commodity prices and weak overseas demand lead to project cancellations in some states even while activity accelerates elsewhere."

In New York State, the construction industry appears caught between divergent economic trends as the city itself experiences record building.

"There are two New Yorks — New York City and New York State — and it is clear the rest of the state is not doing as well as the city," said Richard Anderson, president of the New York Building Congress, which reported in April that construction employment in New York City reached 122,975 jobs in 2014, an increase of slightly more than 2,000 jobs from the prior year and the highest total since 2008, when the industry employed 132,625 workers.

"The residential sector that has been so strong in New York City has not spread through the rest of the state," said Anderson.

"Non-residential development is dependent on job growth and so the numbers are reflective of the lack of job growth in the upstate economy."

Anderson credited massive infrastructure projects, such as the Tappan Zee Bridge replacement, for propping up flagging state employment numbers, but added, "The lack of infrastructure work has contributed greatly to the decline in [construction] employment."

However, with initiatives such as Governor Andrew Cuomo's StartUp New York program promoting job creation, the Congress boss cautioned against over-reaction noting, "Total jobs in New York City alone are close to 130,000. If you add the rest of the state, you are talking 200,000-300,000 jobs, so the loss of 4,500 is not a huge percentage. "I think what the numbers reflect is that the economic engine to the State of New York is New York City, and this is true of construction as well as many other industries."