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**For Immediate Release: Monday, March 23, 2009**

## ***Transportation, environmental advocates warn fare hikes imminent Green Groups Advocate for 29-cent gas tax***

BOSTON – A new coalition of environmental and transportation organizations today cautioned that the Governor and Legislature must seek solutions beyond reforms and Turnpike bailouts to avoid disastrous MBTA fare increases and service cuts along with continued road and bridge decay.

Calling lawmakers’ recent efforts to forestall toll increases and push reforms “a step in the right direction,” coalition members said finding new revenue is still the most critical way of solving the state’s transportation crisis for good.

“Transit fare increases are imminent,” said George Bachrach, President of the Environmental League of Massachusetts. “While we understand that the Governor and Legislature are acting now to address toll hikes, transit funding must also be addressed to avoid disastrous fare increases and service cuts.”

The coalition is calling for a 29-cent gas tax increase as the centerpiece of a reform-and-revenue package. If action isn’t taken, group members warn, the economic and environmental consequences will be dire.

Massachusetts faces up to a \$19 billion shortfall over the next two decades just to maintain its transportation system, with even more funding needed to expand the network and provide transit service to underserved communities.

The MBTA alone is saddled with \$8 billion in debt, and faces a major deficit in the coming fiscal year – a deficit that will be filled through fare hikes and service cuts if the state doesn’t meet its funding needs.

“We cannot allow our transportation system to fail. If a gas tax increase doesn’t go into effect, Massachusetts residents will be paying far more – through exorbitant transit fares and tolls, as well as a system of trains, roads and bridges that doesn’t meet travelers’ needs,” said Carrie Russell, Staff Attorney for the Conservation Law Foundation.

And if fare hikes push more MBTA riders back into their cars, the toxic emissions from vehicles clogging state roadways will increase pollution across New England. The transportation sector is already the largest and fastest-growing source of greenhouse gas emissions.

“Our public transportation systems are essential in our fight against pollution and climate change, and essential to basic mobility for so many residents,” said Andre Leroux, Director of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance. “From Northampton to Worcester and Dorchester, public transportation is a lifeline for Massachusetts residents.”