



DeLeo: Let's decide transportation \$, then budget

By Marie Szaniszlo
Thursday, March 7, 2013

House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo this morning said he wants the Legislature to decide how much to earmark for transportation, including funding for the MBTA and regional transit authorities, before it tackles the state budget.

"It is my desire that we debate the transportation issue before we do the budget ... so that we can make sure we give the debate ample time," DeLeo told about 350 business leaders at a Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce breakfast.

Whatever amount the Legislature decides should be for transportation only, said DeLeo, adding that he hopes a draft of the bill will be completed by late March or early April.

"There is never any easy avenue when it comes to voting for taxes," he said. "The governor had the courage to come out and state he feels he needs to raise taxes. ... What I don't agree with is the amount."

Gov. Deval Patrick's proposed budget calls for \$1.9 billion in new taxes. It would raise the income tax from 5.25 percent to 6.25 percent, while lowering the sales tax from 6.25 percent to 4.5 percent. Patrick also wants to make regular increases in MBTA fares, RMV fees, highway tolls and the gas tax, and raise taxes on cigarettes, candy and soda.

Chamber President Paul Guzzi said the state has the fifth highest tax burden on employers.

But Kristina Egan of Transportation for Massachusetts said the state needs to raise taxes, and there should be a dedicated revenue source for transportation.

The state also needs to get transportation employees off the capital budget, so that the state no longer has to bond for MBTA employees' salaries, Egan said, and it should make sure regional transportation authorities are funded.