



Guest View: It's time to move ahead and build a better transportation system for Massachusetts

By Kristina Egan
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Good progress was made this year in meeting Massachusetts' critical transportation needs. The transportation finance bill, passed on Wednesday, will dedicate an average of \$600 million per year to close funding gaps, repair roads and bridges, put our regional transit agencies on solid financial footing, cap MBTA fare increases to 5 percent every two years, and make down payments on much-needed projects. While not a comprehensive solution to our transportation crisis, the law is a solid foundation that begins to address the chronic underfunding of our rails, roads, sidewalks and bikeways.

This is only the beginning. The job is not done. We don't see the passage of the transportation bill as a time to pause but instead as a time to move ahead. Now, we need to ensure that the new funding is spent fairly and wisely in every part of the state. And as we look to next year, the state needs to sustain its commitment to dedicating sufficient and stable funding so that all our residents have access to safe, reliable and affordable transportation choices.

Reform of our transportation agencies, which began in 2009, will continue under this new law. The Legislature included policy provisions that create more transparency for decisions about how to spend transportation funds. The law calls for a statewide plan that uses objective criteria, not politics, to prioritize needs and projects. Not every project will be able to be funded with the limited resources provided by the bill. Hard choices will have to be made. We should find the highest and best use for our funds, taking into account how well these new investments will protect our climate, provide mobility to low-income people, boost economic development, and support healthy and active living.

But this new law can usher in fresh, data-based, thoughtful and transparent decision-making. The Legislature should immediately appoint the project selection committee and MassDOT should develop the statewide plan. The law also calls for the regional transit authorities throughout the state to develop blueprints for providing better bus service to connect workers and employers and serve students and elders.

Over the last year, there was an unprecedented focus on funding transportation as residents, advocates and business groups all called for better transportation to boost our economy and improve the daily lives of every resident of the commonwealth. While there has been disagreement on how, and how much, to fund transportation, there has been much common ground. All of our leaders acknowledged that Massachusetts needs action now.

We thank the governor for laying out a bold vision and the many legislators who continued the work of reform and strengthened the bill. As we look to the work ahead, it is imperative that all sides work together for the sake of our transportation network and the economy of Massachusetts.

Kristina Egan is the director of the statewide coalition Transportation for Massachusetts.