



Major boost for Cape transit

By Patrick Cassidy
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Cape Cod is in line to get millions of dollars in new transportation funding as part of a 10-year, \$13 billion plan announced Monday by Gov. Deval Patrick's administration.

"The fact of the matter is Massachusetts has put a lot of major projects on a credit card," Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority Administrator Thomas Cahir said after attending an announcement of the proposed spending plan in Boston. "You have to pay the piper."

State transportation plan for Cape Cod

\$5.9 million in additional annual funding to the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority

\$20.8 million to upgrade rail, grade crossings, bridges and station accessibility to support summer weekend rail service between Boston and Hyannis

Additional money for median construction along Route 6 in Bourne and for resurfacing Route 6A in Brewster

Source: www.massdot.state.ma.us

The plan announced by Patrick on Monday includes a \$5.9 million increase — from \$3.3 million to \$9.2 million — in annual state funding for Cahir's agency, which provides bus service as well as other transit-oriented services on the Cape. The authority's total budget is \$16 million, which also includes money from federal and local governments.

The money would go to expanding bus service hours and routes as well as toward new technologies such as the "NextBus" automated route information service available at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, Cahir said.

"There will be an ability to do some things that heretofore we have been unable to do," he said.

Cahir, who is the state's former deputy secretary of rail and intermodal programs, has been a strong proponent of bringing passenger rail service to the Cape, an effort that would receive \$20.8 million in funding under Patrick's plan.

The money would go to upgrading rail, grade crossings, bridges and station accessibility for the summer weekend service scheduled to begin this year between Boston and Hyannis.

Investing that money would make sense if the tourism-focused service is successful, something that will be more clear after the first year of runs, Cahir said.

Other spending for Cape Cod included in the multiyear plan, which must still pass through the gantlet of the state's budgetary process, would go to median construction along Route 6 in Bourne and resurfacing Route 6A in Brewster, according to a press release from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

"It means investments in every region in the state," Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Timothy Murray said in a telephone interview about the transportation plan. "That has not always been the case when it comes to transportation investment."

The state must invest in projects around the state to help spur economic growth, Murray said.

Ridership at regional transit authorities and the MBTA has increased as roads have become more crowded and gas prices have increased, he said.

"Being able to move people and goods as quickly and efficiently as possible is critical to every part of our economy," Murray said.

Although Cahir and others have raised doubts about expanding rail service on the Cape to include full-blown commuter service, Murray said state transportation officials see a potential opportunity to run trains known as diesel multiple units that can be scaled based on the number of passengers they carry.

Paying for the administration's transportation plan is still a work in progress.

The Legislature would have to approve any new taxes to pay for transportation. The options presented in the report included:

- Raising the state's 21 cents per gallon gasoline tax, which has not changed since 1991. To raise \$1 billion a year, the tax would have to be raised by 30 cents per gallon to 51 cents per gallon, making it the highest gas tax in the nation.
- Raising the state sales tax. To generate \$1 billion for transportation, the rate would have to increase from the current 6.25 percent to 7.7 percent.
- Increasing the income tax. An 8 percent increase in the tax, from the current 5.25 percent to 5.66 percent, would generate \$1 billion.
- Imposing an annual 2.4 cents per mile "vehicle miles traveled tax." This tax would be collected from vehicle owners during the annual safety inspection, or by use of an onboard device that records the miles the vehicle travels in a year.
- Imposing a so-called green fee, based upon a vehicle's carbon emissions.
- Regular and frequent increases in public transit fares, tolls and other so-called user fees. For example, MBTA fares and Massachusetts Turnpike tolls would climb 5 percent every two years.

Murray, however, said Patrick does not envision an increase in the gas tax being a part of the revenue side of that equation.

"The governor has said he's not inclined to have that as part of our package given that it went down like a lead balloon last time," Murray said about past attempts to raise the tax on a gallon of gasoline.

Patrick's decision to roll out his plan first and deal with revenue proposals later may be good strategy, but it does little to explain how the governor plans to pay for it, state Rep. Randy Hunt, R-Sandwich, said.

There's a big difference between existing needs and the revenue to fund them, he said, adding that these details will really only be addressed when the Legislature gets involved in the budget process.

All sources of revenue should be on the table, said Kristina Egan, director of Transportation for Massachusetts, a statewide coalition of organizations that advocates for transportation improvements.

"We call on the Legislature to explore everything," Egan said.

Material from The Associated Press was used in this report.