

# The Republican.

## Massachusetts faces \$1 billion annual transportation funding gap, state report shows

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The elevated section of Interstate 91 in Springfield. The section needs needs \$360 million to \$400 million worth of reconstruction. The project was included in the state's 10-year transportation plan unveiled Monday.

**BOSTON-** Massachusetts needs an additional \$1.02 billion a year over the next 10 years to maintain and upgrade its transportation system, according to a plan released Monday by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Transportation Secretary Richard Davey unveiled the 10-year plan for the state's transportation system at an event at UMass Boston. "It is clear to us that what our customers are asking for is more," Davey said. "What they want is more reliability, they want more services. We have to find a way to do this."

The plan would require \$13 billion in additional revenue over the next decade, more than doubling the state's current \$12 billion transportation budget. That does not cover the entire cost of the proposed expansions, which will be funded over a 25-year period, Davey said.

Davey did not suggest how the state plans to raise the additional revenue. Gov. Deval Patrick will unveil his proposal on Wednesday, which will then go to the state legislature. Patrick said he accepts the department's plan. "The results confirm two things," Patrick said. "There is not sufficient funding to support the system we have today, and second, there is not sufficient funding for the system the public wants and the Commonwealth needs."

Patrick said any new revenue stream will have to be comprehensive enough to pay old bills and modernize the transportation system going forward; dedicated specifically to transportation; and done in a way that keeps Massachusetts competitive with other states. Patrick said while he anticipates broad public and legislative support for parts of the plan, "there's room for debate" regarding how to pay for it.

There are numerous possible revenue options that the department identified that could be used: increasing the gas tax, which has not been done since 1991; instituting a payroll tax; raising the sales or income tax; assessing cars a fee based on their carbon emissions; instituting a fee for vehicle miles traveled; increasing registry fees, transit fares or raising tolls; and maintaining the tolls on the western part of the turnpike, which are scheduled to end in 2017.

State Sen. Brian Joyce, a Milton Democrat and chairman of the Senate Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures and State Assets, said he believes there is support for investing in the state's "crumbling transportation infrastructure." "The devil's in the details of course on how we're going to pay for it, and I think we'll have a very spirited and open debate on the best means to pay for it," Joyce said.

Joyce said possible ideas that could enjoy public support include applying the sales tax to gas and selling air rights for development at South Station. "I'm a fiscally moderate legislator who has supported just one tax increase in 16 years and yet, and I see the need for some new revenues to support our transportation infrastructure," he said.

The Department of Transportation has already identified some reforms that will save money, including moving to electronic tolling and modernizing the Registry of Motor Vehicles to include more self-service and internet service.

But Davey said that the state does not even have enough money to maintain the current system. Without expansions, the state has an unfunded liability of around \$684 million a year for the next 10 years – including annual operating costs, which are now paid for with borrowed money,

and costs for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MTA) and the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs).

The report also proposes infrastructure improvements – including \$5.2 billion for roads and bridges; \$3.8 billion for subway and bus repairs; and \$275 million in the Registry of Motor Vehicles and local airports.

Several of those projects would help Western Massachusetts. Included in the road repair budget is a \$350-million to \$400-million multi-year rehabilitation of the Interstate 91 viaduct through downtown Springfield.

Opened in 1968, I-91 carries more than 100,000 cars a day and is the region's north-south spinal column hauling people and freight. The two-mile stretch of elevated highway has become a crazy quilt of temporary patches over the years, and a major rehabilitation is necessary, according to state officials.

“These are transportation systems that not only move people but also move the economy,” said Timothy Brennan, executive director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

Brennan said design work could take a year and a half. Subsequent construction would take about that long.

The report proposes a \$100-million a year increase to state road funding for cities and towns.

The transportation plan also provides “forward funding” to transit bus providers like the Pioneer Valley Transit authority. Now, the PVTA must borrow money for bus service then wait for the state to reimburse the expense – so money is paying for interest rather than bus service.

Mary L. MacInnes, administrator at the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, said the governor's plan would increase funding overall and divvy it up by ridership. State funding for her agency would go from \$17 million to \$50.5 million a year.

That is enough money to increase the frequency of bus service, cut wait times, add more weekend service and run buses later at night. MacInnes said now, most PVTA service shuts down by 6 or 7 p.m., causing problems for second shift workers.

“I believe if we could increase our frequency of service, we would get more choice riders,” Macinnes said. “People who chose to ride either to save money for the environment.”

In addition, the state plan proposes going forward with six expansion projects throughout the state, including two in western Massachusetts – the extension of rail service between Springfield and Boston and between Pittsfield and New York.

The Springfield-Boston project, which includes a rail stop in Worcester, is estimated to cost \$362.4 million, which covers the cost of track construction, station rehabilitation and equipment for a rail line. The project is expected to support economic development along the route.

The route would complement improvements now underway to the north-south rail line from New Haven, Conn., through Springfield, Holyoke and Northampton and into Vermont. Work has already begun on a \$73-million federally-funded project to improve the north-south line in Massachusetts. In Vermont, work on a \$54 million stimulus-funded rail project was delayed by Hurricane Irene. Connecticut has \$121 million in federal money for work on the north-south line.

“All those projects will be a boon to Springfield and to Union Station,” Brennan said.

The Pittsfield rail project would cost \$113.8 million, which includes rehabilitating track signals and stations between Pittsfield and the Connecticut state line, which would then connect with rail service that continues to New York City. The Department of Transportation projects that this would increase the tourist economy in the Berkshires and create more potential for development in Western Massachusetts.

Other projects include expanding the South Coast Rail, which would provide commuter rail service to six municipalities including Fall River and New Bedford; extending the Green Line T to Somerville and Medford; expanding Boston’s South Station to add seven new tracks and more rush hour service; and adding summer weekend rail service between Boston and Hyannis.

Pittsfield State Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, a Democrat, said currently, Western Massachusetts residents pay more for transportation than they get in benefits. Farley-Bouvier said she appreciates that Patrick wants to invest in the regional transportation authorities and in the Western Massachusetts rail projects. “To have him understand these two pieces is great,” she said.

Davey told MassLive.com that that proposal will direct significant new resources to Western Massachusetts, through money to the Pioneer Valley Transit Authorities, the viaduct project and the new rail service. “We believe this is a very equitable and regionally based program unlike what’s been done in the past,” he said.

Several transportation advocates said they hope legislators and voters understand that the price of inaction is greater than the cost of funding additional improvements.

“You can’t sit on your hands when it comes to transportation funding, or you end up adversely impacting the economy,” said Richard Dimino, president and CEO of the transportation advocacy group A Better City.

The next step will be determining where to find the revenue. Kristina Egan, director of the Transportation for Massachusetts coalition, a group of around 30 organizations working to improve the state’s transportation system, said the group believes all revenue streams should be kept on the table. “Everything needs to be on the table and fully explored,” she said.

On Tuesday, the Campaign for Our Communities – a group of unions, progressive community organizing groups and others – is holding a State House press conference to announce its proposals for new revenue. The group said previously that it wants to raise the income tax rate in a way that affects primarily upper income individuals.

At the same time, the conservative Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance said the state must focus on spending, not revenue. “Our elected leaders need to realize that taking more money from taxpayers seldom is a viable solution for fixing the state’s spending problems,” said Paul Craney, executive director of the Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance. “Taxpayers don’t need another revenue plan, they need a plan from our elected leaders for how to spend our money more effectively and efficiently.”