



Pols counter with \$500M transport plan

But gov seeks \$1B overhaul

By Chris Cassidy
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House and Senate leaders yesterday fired the loudest shots so far in a brewing Beacon Hill battle over taxes, tossing aside Gov. Deval Patrick's \$1 billion transportation punch list and floating their own scaled back \$500 million plan — even as MBTA brass refused to rule out fare hikes if the lawmakers' proposal passes.

“A billion is a billion, and 500 million is 500 million, and that's half of what was the original request. Certainly, that has its own consequences — what they will be, God only knows,” said MBTA General Manager Beverly Scott.

House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo and Senate President Therese Murray unveiled a plan that would hike the gas tax by 3 cents, increase the tobacco tax and alter the tax code on computer software as part of a plan to generate more than \$300 million to invest in transportation by 2018.

It's far less than Patrick's \$1 billion plan that would raise the income tax and lower the sales tax to subsidize new rail lines, among other projects.

“We cannot and don't believe that we can further squeeze the middle class,” Murray said.

Secretary of Transportation Richard Davey said it's unclear how their strategy would address replacing the nearly 40-year-old subway cars or fixing dozens of closed bridges.

“We weren't kidding when we said there was a \$1 billion problem,” Davey said.

Meanwhile, House Minority Leader Brad Jones warned that DeLeo and Murray are trying to pull a fast one on taxpayers.

“They may be saying, ‘Thanks, Governor,’ because you asked for \$2 billion and we look extremely reasonable going for \$500 million,” said House Minority Leader Brad Jones. “If the people of the commonwealth accept that logic, they should fear for their wallets.”

Advocacy groups that had pushed lawmakers for months to put more money into transportation were disappointed.

“They basically chopped the governor’s package in half,” said Kristina Egan of Transportation for Massachusetts. “Overall, the package is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of our future.”

But DeLeo described the plan as being “more palatable to the public at large” at a time when the state is still facing economic problems.

“This not only translates into folks getting from one place to another, it also translates into a better Massachusetts economy,” DeLeo said.

Still, leaders will have to close a canyon-sized gap between the two proposals, with the clock ticking.

See video coverage [here](#).