THE NEXT MASSDOT

A Transportation Vision for the Baker Administration

Massachusetts is at a pivotal moment with regard to transportation. In recent years, the Commonwealth has taken the first steps toward reversing the transportation system’s long slide into debt and decay. Long-awaited reforms to transportation agencies are under way. Long-deferred projects to repair and modernize our transportation system are finally moving forward.

Over the next four years, the Baker Administration will make important decisions that will shape the future of transportation in Massachusetts, as well as our economy as a whole. By addressing the Commonwealth’s transportation challenges and taking advantage of emerging opportunities, Gov. Baker can lay a foundation for economic growth and improved quality of life that can yield benefits for years to come.

Transportation: Moving Massachusetts’ Economy

- Massachusetts’ economic success is increasingly built on our ability to attract and retain skilled workers in knowledge-based industries – workers who are increasingly drawn to walkable neighborhoods with good public transportation. Transportation investments open up new areas for development, help our Gateway Cities make the most of their natural advantages, and expand the number of people with access to quality jobs.

- A healthy Massachusetts is a productive Massachusetts. Smart investments can expand access to healthy transportation choices such as biking and walking, while reducing health-threatening pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

- Maintaining our roads, bridges and transit systems reduces congestion, delays and breakdowns today and saves money in the long run. Investing in maintenance now is a smart fiscal move for Massachusetts and one that keeps our transportation system running smoothly.

Photos (top to bottom): Assembly Row, MassDOT, Worcester Regional Transit Authority, Boston Transportation Department
THREE TRANSPORTATION POLICY PRIORITIES

By making smart transportation policy choices, the Baker Administration can continue moving Massachusetts along the path of reinvestment and reform.

1) Continue reforms by making every dollar count.

Massachusetts must direct limited taxpayer dollars to investments that improve economic competitiveness, enhance public health and safety, and reduce climate pollution. States across the country, led by governors of both political parties, have moved away from subjective, politically driven transportation planning to rigorous, data-driven systems that prioritize transportation projects based on the benefits they can deliver.

In 2013, the Legislature took a key step on the path to reform by creating the Project Selection Advisory Council, which will recommend a transparent, data-driven system for prioritizing transportation projects by mid-2015. The Baker Administration should adopt project selection criteria that align Massachusetts’ transportation investments with the Commonwealth’s top economic, environmental, social equity, and health priorities.

2) Expand transportation choices for Massachusetts residents.

People increasingly want to live in places with a variety of transportation choices. If Massachusetts is to position itself well for economic success in the 21st century, expanding access to transit, bicycling and walking must be a top priority. In 2012, MassDOT adopted the goal of tripling the amount of travel taking place by transit, bicycling and walking by 2030. This “mode shift goal” provides a strategic vision and direction for the Commonwealth’s transportation policies and investments, ensuring that transit and non-motorized transportation are considered in every transportation decision.

With other cities and states making bold moves to attract knowledge-based industries and expand economic opportunity through transportation investments, the Baker Administration should commit to an ambitious goal for expanding the number of Massachusetts residents with the ability to take transit, bike or walk. Reaffirming the goal of tripling transit, bicycling and walking in the Commonwealth—and putting in place the policies and practices to achieve that goal—would be a solid step in the right direction.

3) Close the transportation funding gap.

Even with the infusion of about $600 million per year in new funding from the 2013 Transportation Finance Act, Massachusetts is still struggling just to emerge from a legacy of infrastructure neglect and mounting debt, never mind make the new investments that can unlock economic opportunity in Massachusetts in the years to come. Making those investments, while at the same time putting Massachusetts’ transportation system on a sound fiscal footing, will require new revenue.

Experts indicate that Massachusetts will need roughly an additional $500 million to $600 million per year to return our transportation system to a state of good repair while making high-leverage investments in new transportation infrastructure. The Baker Administration should prioritize working with the Legislature to identify new sources of transportation revenue to close that gap.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Next MassDOT, a new publication from Transportation for Massachusetts, provides a series of recommendations for the Baker Administration on transportation policy. To obtain The Next MassDOT, or to obtain Moving Massachusetts Forward, the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance/Transportation for Massachusetts briefing book on transportation and land-use policy, please visit www.t4ma.org.

Executive Committee
Alternatives for Community and Environment • Conservation Law Foundation • Environmental League of Massachusetts LISC • Massachusetts Public Health Association • Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance • MASSPIRG Metropolitan Area Planning Council • Neighbor to Neighbor • On the Move • WalkBoston