



Some hard travelin': Transit neglect can take highest toll

Opinion Editorial By **Philip Warburg and Richard A. Dimino**
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The state's Transportation Finance Commission recently revealed that the commonwealth's transit agencies face a \$15 billion to \$19 billion shortfall in funding over the next 20 years.

This report - the result of a careful and robust analysis - illuminates a serious challenge we can no longer afford to ignore. It should be greeted as a call to reinvest in the infrastructure we need to make Massachusetts an affordable, healthy, safe and prosperous place to live and work.

The commonwealth's economic competitiveness depends on our transportation system. Businesses rely on an efficient transit network and safe, well-maintained roads to bring their employees to work. Across the state, communities are crying out for new investment in transportation to attract investment and connect jobs with affordable housing for employees.

For example, Worcester's downtown revival around the rail station would enjoy even greater success if the MBTA could increase commuter rail service frequency to the city.

In and around Boston, rebuilding our decaying bridges and roadways is essential. Investing in public transit along high-density corridors is equally important. Somerville is rezoning Union Square in anticipation of a surge of investment that is likely to occur as a result of the planned Green Line Extension. The growing Longwood Medical Area needs stepped-up transit service to keep that major job center nationally competitive. And along the South Boston Waterfront, 33 million square feet of development depend on improved rapid transit service connecting this area to the rest of the city. We can't afford not to make these investments.

We also must invest in transportation to meet environmental goals and to improve the health of Massachusetts residents. The transportation sector accounts for almost a third of the commonwealth's greenhouse gas emissions. To address climate change effectively, we need to invest in transit and improve the flow of freight rail to and through our major cities.

These investments will help reduce the highway-generated air pollution that has contributed to Massachusetts communities' asthma rates - among the highest in the nation.

Investing in transportation within our towns and cities can also help counter the sprawl that drives up car usage and consumes our dwindling open spaces. Repairing urban roads and bridges while strengthening public transit can help maintain the mix of vibrant cities, towns and unique natural and rural areas that make Massachusetts an appealing place to live.

Finally, we need to invest in transportation to assure the safety of Massachusetts residents. Years of deferred maintenance have resulted in bridge closures around the state, and a number of bridges are open but with weight restrictions. With these restrictions, the bridges can no longer support the vehicles they were designed to carry, including large vehicles such as fire engines. More than 500 bridges maintained by MassHighway across the state are classified as structurally deficient or have major flaws that need continuous monitoring. We must invest in the maintenance of our transit system to ensure that our roads, bridges, and other infrastructure remain safe and viable.

Every dollar spent on preventive maintenance for transportation saves up to \$10 in future rehabilitation costs. Adequate funding for transportation now will actually save us future dollars. Massachusetts should act now to maintain our existing system and advance targeted expansion and enhancement projects to strengthen the region's economy, improve our environment and ensure public safety.

The Transportation Finance Commission's report clearly illuminates the financial challenges our transportation system faces. It is imperative that we work together to define ambitious solutions to these challenges. Our future is at stake.

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