

After the tunnel collapse: The important next steps

A Better City, formerly known as the Artery Business Committee, has been actively involved with the Central Artery/Tunnel Project for the past 17 years. We have provided leadership on behalf of over 90 businesses and institutions in Greater Boston on matters that pertain to the project and have focused on keeping the city of Boston "open for business" during its construction. We are deeply saddened and disappointed by the ceiling collapse in the I-90 connector.

Since July 10, there have been many important efforts to help manage the traffic implications of the tunnel closure and a multitude of ideas offered as to ensuring the future safety of the tunnels and the entire metropolitan highway system. In a letter ABC recently sent to Gov. Romney, we urged him to take the below necessary actions.

- An independent panel of nationally renowned experts — with no prior political or technical relationship to the project — should be formed to confirm that the repair made in the I-90 connector adequately addresses the problem for both the short and long term. This panel must also be assigned the responsibility for conducting a full safety review of the entire metropolitan highway system and developing a comprehensive operations, maintenance and safety plan and program for the system. The products of the panel should include a report that outlines such a program, the estimated annual costs and a timetable for implementing the panel's recommendations.

- It is critical that the entire transportation system operate efficiently and effectively in and around the city of Boston and Logan International Airport on an on-going basis. The laudable increase in service provided by the MBTA and the traffic management efforts of the Boston Transportation Department have been critical to keeping the city of Boston accessible and open for business. However, we believe that a comprehensive, coordinated evaluation of the entire transportation network within Route 128 is needed to ensure that we are doing everything we can to improve access to and around the affected areas. A metrowide mitigation strategy, and incident management program, is needed.

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- An ongoing effort to restore public confidence in the project is also desperately needed. Recent efforts by officials to transparently communicate the issues associated with the ceiling collapse have helped — but efforts still need to be made regarding the methods of repair, efforts to improve tunnel safety generally, and also what Massachusetts residents can expect in terms of future traffic changes.

We thank the public sector leaders for their efforts over the past several weeks. However, it's clear much more work is still to be done.

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