



Hearing Before the Joint Committee on Transportation

January 22, 2008

Testimony relative to: House No. 4409

Thank you Chairmen and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill No. 4409 this morning. My name is Rick Dimino, and I am President & CEO of A Better City. Comprised of over 100 leaders from business and major institutions, A Better City advances infrastructure investments that are vital to sustaining and growing the Boston area's economy and ensuring that we remain one of the most dynamic and unique regions in the world. The transportation bond bill you consider today is vitally important to our constituency, and I wish to express A Better City's steadfast support for the speedy passage of the bill.

First and foremost, as you may know, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) rejected the Commonwealth's 2008-2011 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). This rejection has severe consequences. For those not aware, the STIP is a compilation of the thirteen Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) prepared annually by regional Metropolitan Planning Organizations across the state, and is a listing of priority projects to be funded with a federal contribution. An approved STIP is required by the FHWA and the FTA to receive federal funding for the Commonwealth's road and bridge program and transit across the state.

The rejection letter sent by these agencies cites that the STIP is not "fiscally constrained" – indicating that the state level funding needed to support the program was not committed. Essentially, the state has not authorized enough funding to match federal dollars. This rejection only underscores the severity of the state's transportation finance challenges.

The passage of HB 4409 was specifically cited by the authors of the STIP rejection letter as a key way to address the issues raised. Without passage of the bond bill, federal agencies will not approve the STIP and, without federal approval, the state cannot advance these projects – projects that are planned in virtually every corner of the Commonwealth. We cannot afford to turn away over \$1.8 billion in federal dollars due to inaction on this bill.

The repairs these funds would advance are urgently needed for safety and economic development reasons. The recent bridge collapse on I-35 in Minnesota serves to remind us of the kind of calamity that might occur in the Commonwealth if we continue to under-invest in our transportation system. Already we are seeing major, critical assets affected, such as the recent weight restrictions on the left lanes of the Longfellow Bridge – this bridge will need a complete rehabilitation.

Addressing the tremendous maintenance backlog that currently exists will help ensure the safety of the Commonwealth's residents and the on-going economic activity that depends on our transportation network. Moreover, we are already in danger of missing the advertising

cycle for the 2008 construction season, as it pertains to the use of these funds. Failure to take action would put in jeopardy the economic activity and jobs generated by this construction. Again, I urge speedy action on this bill to secure vital federal funds for transportation.

On a slightly different note, while grappling with the Commonwealth's on-going transportation finance challenges, it is equally critical that we continue to invest incrementally in strategic expansion and enhancement projects that are imperative to the state's future economic development. Boston's population doubles everyday, with thousands of commuters accessing the City's jobs and services. These trips count on a safe, efficient and reliable means of access. A Better City, a membership driven organization comprised of over 100 major businesses and institutions throughout the Greater Boston area, has prioritized the Urban Ring as a key investment that will realize considerable future return for the Commonwealth in the form of economic development and growth.

The Urban Ring links a series of vital and growing residential and commercial areas in metropolitan Boston and encompasses many of the region's fastest-growing clusters of jobs and economic development. Demand is growing for better linkages between these areas, including for better connections between the institutions and businesses concentrated there. Transit infrastructure is a much-needed lifeline for the region's growing life sciences industry, much of which is concentrated in a "life sciences necklace" – an area essentially concurrent with portions of the Urban Ring corridor. Collaboration among institutions is an increasingly important criteria used in determining National Institutes of Health and other federal funding awards, and thus better connectivity and improved transit linkages between institutions within the corridor better enable this collaboration and improve our competitive position for these grants.

Moreover, with the MBTA's current radial configuration, users of both existing and new services, such as commuter rail expansion projects, end up in one of a handful of downtown stations and have to transfer if their destination lies elsewhere. Urban Ring stations would allow critical connections to the Urban Ring corridor from every MBTA commuter rail line, all four rapid transit lines, every major highway coming into Boston and more than half of the MBTA's local bus routes. Enabling a circumferential move within the Urban Ring corridor would eliminate the need to travel downtown and transfer - and would help unclog overcrowded rapid transit lines, especially in the system's downtown core, by making travel to the high demand areas within the Urban Ring corridor more direct.

The Urban Ring, implemented incrementally through phased investments, including the construction of early action items and minimum operating segments, can significantly add to the economic potential of the Greater Boston area and the Commonwealth by creating connectivity within our state-wide transportation system.

The Governor included funding for the planning, design, permitting and engineering for the Urban Ring in line 6001-0804, together with the Blue Line to Lynn and the South Coast Rail project. I urge you to help ensure the passage of this line. Creating momentum and laying the groundwork for critical future expansion, and readying Massachusetts priorities for future federal investment through the New Starts program, etc., is essential if we are to adequately meet future transportation demand. It is critical that we look to the future while taking care of the challenges we face today.

Lastly, there are funds authorized in the bill (line 6001-0812) to advance the State Implementation Program (SIP) commitments. These projects are legally mandated as important environmental mitigation measures related to the Central/Artery Tunnel Project. While we know that there is the potential for future federal funds for these projects, we support the intention to advance these commitments. We also support line 6001-0803, enabling funds for intermodal transportation centers. There is great opportunity for such centers to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing transportation infrastructure and improve connectivity.

Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership.