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† Former Chairman

Friday, June 6, 2008

The Honorable Mark C. Montigny, Chairman
Joint Committee on Bonding, Capital
Expenditures, & State Assets
State House, Room 511-A
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable David L. Flynn, Chairman
Joint Committee on Bonding, Capital
Expenditures, & State Assets
State House, Room 466
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Montigny and Chairman Flynn:

I write today in support of H. 4743, An Act Relative to Financing an Accelerated Structurally-Deficient Bridge Improvement Program. Governor Patrick filed this bill on May 13, 2008 to provide \$3 billion to repair and replace over 250 Massachusetts bridges that are in serious disrepair.

A Better City (ABC) is a nonprofit transportation, infrastructure and economic development organization. We work on behalf of more than 100 area businesses and institutions to advance a set of transportation and city building projects specifically chosen for their ability to foster economic growth and add vibrancy to our community.

As a leading member of the Massachusetts Transportation Investment Coalition, ABC has been part of the effort to help support reform and new funding for transportation infrastructure because of the significant impact that adequate infrastructure has upon economic growth. We are pleased to see our elected leaders keeping this issue in the forefront of public debate and taking steps to address the situation. This bill is crucial to that effort because it ensures the long-term connectivity of workers and jobs, as well as the movement of goods and services. I urge speedy approval of this bill to address the need to enhance the safety and mobility of our transportation infrastructure.

As a complement to the two transportation bond bills that the Legislature has passed and is currently considering, the funding provided by this legislation would partially fill the gap in the state's aging transportation bridge inventory. Last summer, the Massachusetts Transportation Finance Commission placed the investment need for the state's transportation assets at approximately \$15 to \$19 billion over the next 20 years. Simultaneously, the Massachusetts Highway Department conducted an assessment of the state's bridges, with 543 eventually rated "structurally deficient," recommending action to ensure the structures' safety.

While the bill makes substantial progress in addressing the state's structurally deficient bridges, we remain concerned about the exclusion of bridges owned and maintained by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority (MassPike), as many of these bridges are also in dire need of structural repair. In the most extreme cases, full use of some bridges has been limited by reduced speed limits or imposition of weight restrictions. Given the extraordinary costs before both agencies, particularly the MBTA's significant debt service, the source of funding for the future repair of bridges under these agencies' care and oversight is unclear. We urge the Committee to reconsider this exclusion in the final legislation.





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We believe this bill also needs to encourage EOT to take the necessary steps with the agencies responsible for bridge repair and construction such that they have the professional capacity to implement this ambitious program as well as ensure quality. EOT should be asked to establish a Bridge Improvement Project Management Unit. This team and its leaders should be state employees compensated at a private sector scale, as in the MWRA model. This will help to ensure a high level of owner (government) oversight of this project. Second, EOT should be requested to submit an annual report to the Legislature outlining progress, budget updates, etc. Third, because this is an eight year program, annual or bi-annual independent audits should also be requested.

Another reason to consider using these funds for MBTA and Massachusetts Turnpike Authority bridges is that these agencies have engineering resources that can help get the job done.

Also, depending on the number of bridges that can be repaired in this bill's eight year period, it may be prudent to set aside some flexibility of funding to be used toward MBTA/MTA debt service relief. If this issue cannot be addressed in this bill, it will have to be considered by the Legislature in the immediate future.

Finally, there is heavy reliance on Grant Anticipation Notes (GANs) to finance this program; we urge the Committee to consider earlier proposals offered by the Governor's office regarding debt restructuring, etcetera, and even the possibility of identifying additional revenues as alternatives to GANs. The GANs program as identified in the bill, combined with Central Artery / Tunnel Project GANs, may place too heavy a financial burden on our future transportation needs.

A Better City would like to reiterate our support for this proposal, and we commend our elected leaders for taking the steps necessary to address the transportation infrastructure needs of the Commonwealth. We hope this puts the state closer to beginning the process of examining the additional revenue generation ideas that will inevitably need to be considered to close the transportation funding gap and advance the transportation expansion and enhancement projects that will allow the Commonwealth to remain economically competitive.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if I may be of assistance during your consideration of this legislation. I can be reached directly at (617) 502-6241.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard A. Dimino', written in a cursive style.

Richard A. Dimino
President & CEO

cc. Michael E. Mooney, Nutter McClennen & Fish
Chairman Steven A. Baddour, Joint Committee on Transportation
Chairman Joseph F. Wagner, Joint Committee on Transportation
Secretary Bernard Cohen, Executive Office of Transportation
Jay Gonzalez, Executive Office of Administration & Finance

