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Joint Committee on Transportation
Virtual Public Hearing

Thank you to Chairman Straus members of the Committee. I am very happy to be speaking with you today supporting the committees work to create a smarter, more efficient, greener, and more equitable transportation system.

Some of these solutions cannot be implemented overnight, so this can be the time to lay the groundwork of well-designed plans that overcome our looming transportation and climate challenges.

There are many bills before the committee that deserve support and enacted into law this year, including:

- Rep. Ciccolo's HB3427: An Act relative to a resilient transportation system
- Rep Miranda's HB3545: Efforts To Bring Electrification for the Fairmount corridor
- Chairman Straus's HB3604: An Act to analyze merging the MBTA Retirement System with the state employee retirement system

But today I will testify on two bills that should be recommended by the Committee, because they address the major issues related to capital infrastructure at the MBTA and the future of roadway pricing:

SB 2269: An Act Preparing Rail Opportunities and Jumpstarting Efforts Concerning Transportation Stimulus (PROJECTS)

SB 2294: An Act Relative To Tolls On The Roadways Of The Commonwealth

The PROJECTS Bill would ensure the MBTA is prepared to maximize federal infrastructure funds in the upcoming competitive grant programs.

This bill asks the MBTA to dedicate some existing funding - that is currently being held in reserve – to advance capital projects related to decarbonization, regional rail electrification, increasing transit capacity, and improving equity in the system.

The MBTA will be better positioned for success if they are actively getting capital projects ready. In the next year, the federal government will be deciding how to distribute billions of infrastructure dollars for projects, and this federal infrastructure bill is heavily weighted towards competitive grant programs. There is now a nationwide competition for money, which means it is possible this entire region misses out, if MBTA infrastructure projects are not ready to go.

The PROJECTS Bill will help make sure MBTA projects are ready.

The bill would reallocate no more than 10% of the federal transit relief previously received in the past two years, and require this money be used to expedite the planning, design, and engineering of infrastructure projects that can take advantage of federal infrastructure funding. Right now, the MBTA's current plans is to use all federal transit relief money to support the operating budget.



The PROJECTS Bill would a better way to use the money already in hand.

The federal funds that are already at the T can support the operating budget and also help improve our infrastructure needs. Thanks to three different COVID-Relief bills, the MBTA operating budget is stable, and will be for the next three years. The MBTA can afford to dedicate some of these funds to advance capital projects, without harming the operating budget, and this forward-thinking strategy can lead to additional grants that are worth hundreds of millions of dollars that address our infrastructure needs.

Let's be proactive. If this bill passes, the MBTA and Massachusetts would be viewed as one of the best places to invest just before the Biden Administration awards competitive grants. The PROJECTS bill would get MBTA capital projects ready for being construction faster than projects in other states.

Right now, the state and MBTA do not have the money to complete infrastructure projects related to Regional Rail, rail electrification, the Red-Blue connector, and other major projects that are unfunded. These ideas are supported by the FMCB and would benefit the Commonwealth for generations and federal grants can be an essential component to making these transformational projects a reality.

The PROJECTS bill can help in a big way, and we ask the legislature to move it forward, with urgency.

We also support SB 2294: Sen. Crighton's Act Relative To Tolls On The Roadways Of The Commonwealth.

Massachusetts needs to improve our current policy related to tolling. We must evolve beyond the inconsistent, inequitable road pricing system that has existed for the last 70 years and instead develop a regionally equitable road pricing network that works for all people in the Commonwealth.

A modern approach to tolling is necessary, and the Commonwealth should be using some of the revenue from tolling for public transit and other strategies that reduce GHG emissions. Roadway congestion is a chronic problem on many highways in Massachusetts, especially in the Metropolitan Highway System in Greater Boston. The chronic and worsening traffic congestion can only be reduced through the dual strategy of road pricing and investment in alternative options, like a better regional rail system and expanded bus network. This bill will help move the Commonwealth forward towards a real solution.

There are real opportunities in partnership with the federal government to examine interstate or regional agreements along the borders, and this bill helps to start these conversations.

Changing the way the Commonwealth uses highway tolls will take some time and collaboration, but this work should not be delayed any longer. This bill can help create an effective policy for reaching the Commonwealth's decarbonization goals and help prepare for a future where electric vehicles are traveling on our roads, but without paying our gasoline taxes. In anticipation of this not-to-distant-future, the Commonwealth should establish a fair policy that more accurately prices the use of roads and bridges, while at the same time provides exemptions and/or rebates for low-income families, especially for drivers who travel on roads where tolls are in place today.

We hope the committee supports these two bills that take steps towards a stronger, more equitable transportation system. Thank you for hearing this testimony and I look forward to collaborating with you on these important bills in the months ahead.

Tom Ryan
Senior Advisor on Policy, Government and Community Affairs