

Investing in transportation is investing in our future

By Senator Patricia Jehlen and Kristina Egan
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Transportation is key to Massachusetts' economic future, but it is currently at risk.

Public transportation's power to grow our economy and create great communities can be seen in the growth of places like Davis Square, which flourished with the extension of the Red Line in 1985. Today, with development at Assembly Square and construction on the Green Line extension, we are creating jobs in Somerville and making it one of the most well-connected regions of the commonwealth.

Unfortunately, the MBTA, and the rest of our transportation system, is falling further into debt and disrepair. Red Line service is regularly disrupted and delayed by breakdowns because it is operating 43-year-old train cars, cars that should have been retired 15 years ago. Our roads are riddled with potholes and haven't been upgraded. The McCarthy overpass is just one example of the hundreds of bridges across the commonwealth that need urgent repairs to avoid collapse.

In a 2007 report, the Transportation Finance Commission stated that Massachusetts is facing a funding gap of \$15 billion to \$19 billion over the next 20 years to properly maintain our roads, bridges, and public transit infrastructure. The disrepair of our transportation infrastructure is endangering future economic growth. Every year CNBC ranks "America's Top States for Business." From 2011 to 2012, Massachusetts fell from 6th overall to 28th. While we remain among the top ranked states in many categories, our ranking in the category of Infrastructure & Transportation fell from 29th to a dismal 45th. This trend cannot continue, and substantial new revenue is needed to mend the gap.

It is important that we create a final plan that will generate adequate revenue to meet basic operating, maintenance, debt service and capital needs along with service expansions that spur economic growth. The Governor's budget proposal aims to raise necessary transportation revenue in a way that will not disproportionately affect low and middle income families and individuals. As we move forward on creating long-term, comprehensive funding solutions to meet all of our statewide transportation needs, we should consider the Governor's budget proposal among many of the other revenue options that are on the table.

Transportation funding is at a crisis point. For decades, Massachusetts has underfunded repairs of our transit, roads, and bridges. Report after report has shown the need for major investment in repairs to our entire transportation infrastructure. We now have a unique opportunity to restore our transportation system and we must not let it pass. With crumbling roads and bridges, severely outdated MBTA vehicles, and the specter of further cuts to transit service, addressing the transportation funding gap can't wait. When we invest in transportation, we invest in those things we all care about: jobs, the economy, education, a better quality of life, and our environment. Following World War II, our nation invested in highways and public transportation, spurring a period of growth, but recently we have postponed maintenance and avoided needed improvements. The time has come to invest in a 21st century transportation system for ourselves and future generations.

As a part of the statewide conversation we have planned a community forum about the importance of transportation to residents and businesses alike, along with proposed solutions for how to raise the needed revenue. The forum, co-hosted by the Somerville delegation, other area legislators, the Somerville, Medford and Winchester Chambers of Commerce, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, will be held on March 6th from 5:30-7:30pm at Century Bank (400 Mystic Ave Medford 02155). Please join us to hear from MassDOT Secretary Richard Davey, Mayor Joseph Curtatone, Thomas Bent (Somerville representative to the Metropolitan Planning Organization) and others, and to share your thoughts for the future.

Senator Pat Jehlen represents Somerville and is co-chair of the MBTA caucus. Kristina Egan is the director of the Transportation for Massachusetts coalition.