



## **Our View: Don't let up on South coast Rail**

June 28, 2013

Hopes for South Coast Rail are a good deal lower today than they were when Gov. Deval Patrick first offered his proposal for the coming fiscal year's budget.

He asked for taxes to be raised at a much higher level than found in the budget now being sent from the Legislature back to him for his approval.

Our local delegation now has thrust upon it the herculean task of convincing two chambers full of colleagues that bringing commuter rail to Southeastern Mass. is no more than what the region deserves, but we aren't forgetting that this is a political process. Support for South Coast Rail will only come with reciprocal support for this or that project in Central or Western Mass., or the North Shore or the Hub. And that will dilute the dollars needed for a rail connection to the important Gateway Cities in the southeast.

Herculean or not, this will test our delegation's mettle. Patrick has another swipe at the budget next year, but with a year and a half to go, he's a lame duck. SouthCoast legislators have a year to build support for an expensive program in a budget proposed by a governor who will have no idea who'll be executing it come January 2015.

We consider there to be some hope for support from Washington, as Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Sen.-elect Ed Markey are both staunch believers in commuter rail as an economic tool. Their prodding of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers as they grudgingly handle the environmental aspects of the project will be vital; ditto for their colleagues in the House of Representatives.

We also look to them for creative ways to bring federal funding to the project.

Kristina Egan, the former manager of South Coast Rail and now the director of rail advocates Transportation for Massachusetts, said by phone on Thursday that her organization doesn't consider this stunted budget the end of the line for transportation funding, but that the coming years will require redoubled efforts.

Let's not wait till the next budget. When the governor sends this back to the Legislature, don't override the veto. Don't stand pat with a clause here and a bone thrown to SouthCoast there.

Raise the gas tax more than 3 cents per gallon, which would amount to less than 50 cents a week for almost everyone. Isn't it worth more than half a buck a week for you who buy gasoline to get

our roads and bridges repaired before they become a hazard? Isn't it worth it to keep CO<sub>2</sub> out of the air so you and your children can breathe? Isn't it worth it to build a 21st century system?

Pay now for the justifiable deserts of a needy region and reap the benefits statewide, rather than putting it off indefinitely. The taxes today will be less than the hidden, deferred social burdens of tomorrow if SouthCoast remains left behind.