

02.20.09 - Governor's Message on Transportation and Economic Security Plan

Dear Citizens:

Today, we announced a plan to end the culture of systemic neglect, and build a long-term, sustainable transportation system to support job growth and economic opportunity in Massachusetts.

Our Transportation and Economic Security Plan reforms and radically simplifies our transportation bureaucracy by:

- abolishing the Turnpike Authority;

- ending special perks in the MBTA pension system;

- increasing transparency and accountability throughout the system;

- making our transportation system more environmentally-friendly; and

- putting our transportation network back on responsible, long-term footing by finally paying down the Big Dig debt and funding regional transportation needs.

You can read my remarks, see the plan and engage on this reform at the You Move Massachusetts site: www.mass.gov/youmovemassachusetts.

The mismanagement and shell games of the past 16 years have shattered the public's trust in their transportation system, and left us with a \$15-\$19 billion backlog. The situation in which we find ourselves is dire.

If we fail to act, tens of thousands of people in Western Mass, the Cape, and Worcester County will see reduced service on already inadequate Regional Transit systems; commuters from the North Shore, East Boston, and MetroWest will see toll increases, including 7 dollars to use the tunnels; the rail connection between Fall River and New Bedford will remain on a slow track; and MBTA riders will face reduced service and a 20-25 percent fare increase. As important, the lack of a safe and reliable transportation network will jeopardize our ability to grow jobs and secure our economic future.

That's where we are. It really doesn't matter that we got here under somebody else's watch or because of somebody else's bad judgments. It is where we are. And we are all here together.

Today we mark the end of that era by being straight with you about the challenges we face, and the choices ahead.

We have already begun to reform the system. From using civilian flaggers on state road and bridge projects, to streamlining MassHighway project delivery, cutting costs and staff at the MBTA and the Turnpike, and launching the Accelerated Bridge Repair Program to address the enormous backlog of bridge maintenance and repair projects. These reforms saved the state over \$80 million and moved us in the right direction.

This plan goes further. We will finally consolidate the scattered state agencies under one roof, bring Turnpike and MBTA employees into the state health care system, and take crucial steps towards restoring the public's trust in this process by modernizing the bidding process and creating a Private Project Ombudsman to improve transparency and accountability.

Taken together, these reforms and cost-savings save an estimated \$2.5 billion over the next 20 years.

But, given the severity of the challenge we face, we cannot secure the economic future of the Commonwealth and provide safe roads, bridges, and rails with reforms alone. The gas tax has not been increased since 1991, and in that time has declined in real value by over 33%.

That's why our Transportation and Economic Security Plan includes a 19 cent increase in the gas tax, indexed to the Consumer Price Index (an essential component that the state failed to do last time). At a cost of less than \$8 per month for an average driver, we can move to secure our economic future while finally paying down debt left by previous administrations.

For some, 19 cents will seem too steep. For others, it will seem too low. We had to make choices. Ours were as follows:

- 4 cents to roll back the toll increase on the Turnpike and Tunnels;

- 6 cents to maintain existing MBTA services, and avoid fare increases over the next few years;

- 1.5 cents to Regional Transit Authorities;

- 1.5 cents to targeted regional road projects;

- 3 cents to southern, western and northern rail projects;

- 1 cent for innovative gas and toll solutions;

And 2 cents to begin to stop the costly practice of paying for transportation personnel from capital funds;

Trust me, no Governor runs for office to raise the gas tax. But I did run to change the status quo, and changing the status quo means ending the pattern of neglect and deferral. We literally cannot afford to kick this can down the road any longer.

Our long-term job growth and economic security, along with the safety of our roads and bridges, depend upon both major reforms and new revenue now. Without the gas tax, our economy will suffer.

I know there will be robust debate on these proposals, and I welcome it. I am counting on you for your input and ideas.

It took two decades to get us into this situation, and it won't be solved overnight. But over the long-term, this plan will give Massachusetts the kind of cost efficient, environmentally responsible, and fiscally sustainable transportation network that we need to thrive in a 21 st century economy.

Sincerely,

Deval L. Patrick

Governor