

Murray: Transportation debts a top priority

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NORTHBOROUGH —

MetroWest residents concerned with transportation issues took them up last night with Lt. Gov. Tim Murray, who answered questions on topics ranging from commuter rail service to the feasibility of a monorail.

Murray answered the questions at the Northborough Democratic Committee's forum on transportation, speaking to residents from towns including Southborough, Shrewsbury, Northbridge and Westborough.

The lieutenant governor spoke about the Turnpike Authority's \$3 billion and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) \$8 billion debt, calling it off one of the largest transportation problems facing the commonwealth.

"One thing is clear - we're not going to be able to cut our way around this," Murray said. "There has got to be a revenue source to pay off the debt."

Murray said solving that debt would allow the state to focus on aging infrastructure, though a gas tax may be a more equitable way to do so than raising tolls on the Pike.

"MetroWest bears the brunt of that," he said. "Is there a more equitable way? The governor says he's open to talk about it."

Murray delved into economic issues, talking about the federal stimulus package and the state task forces that reached out to local leaders to inventory "shovel ready" projects.

"We received thousands of project submittals equaling billions of dollars," Murray said. "We think it's imperative we get these projects out as soon as possible."

Getting into specifics about the local commuter rail, Murray spoke of the state's talks with CSX Corp. to buy a stretch of track between Worcester and Framingham, saying doing so would lessen delays.

Audience members spoke of frustrations with the rail service, including 40-minute delays and not having enough mid-day trains.

Others looked to the future, questioning the feasibility of high-speed rail transportation and double-decker trains while applauding WiFi on the trains - though one Southborough resident called service spotty.

Murray talked about working with neighboring states to increase rail transportation opportunities, but said work was needed on the existing tracks before new trains or lines could be added.

"We need a plan to allow us in a major way to begin a comprehensive modernization of infrastructure," he said. "More regional cooperation and money for infrastructure."

Murray pointed to the Downeaster rail service between Portland, Maine and Boston, as a good example.

At the end of the forum, he thanked the audience members for sharing their issues and concerns, and urged residents to stay in touch with local leaders.

"We also need you to lobby your reps as well," he said.