

## SouthCoast Today

### **YOUR VIEW: Transportation must be a priority despite the cost**

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It seems that every corner we turn, every season, there is a growing problem with our transportation system. Last year, the Transportation Finance Commission issued a scathing report that scared many lawmakers with the dollar signs that were attached to it. And just last month, a new report from the nonprofit Washington, D.C., group, TRIP, found that our problems will only worsen and cost taxpayers more for each delay. Few were surprised by this finding, but how they will be handled is yet to be known.

In the aftermath of the Big Dig, our political leaders have an even more daunting task of convincing bond issuers and taxpayers — i.e. voters — that we must undertake the type of construction that is required to tackle the problems identified. But just as we must look at the lessons learned from our own mega-construction projects, it's important to also look at the cost of neglect. Drivers shouldn't have to look above when they travel under an overpass to ensure concrete isn't falling. But because this is just one reality of a neglected infrastructure, we understand that the need to deal with the problems we have now is indeed urgent.

The latest report on the condition of our transportation system details not only the additional costs for individual drivers associated with poor road conditions — \$718 million annually — but where the neglect has been the worst. No corner of the state is exempt from this problem.

According to the TRIP report, more than half of the state's bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete; more than one-third of the state's major roads and highways in poor or fair condition; and roughly 38 percent of Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) buses are in poor or marginal condition and 82 percent of rapid transit rail cars are in poor or marginal condition. With problems extending this far, it becomes not only a public safety issue, but an economic development problem, as well.

The ability, and right, to travel on roads that are deemed safe by all measures is expected by the average citizen, and rightly so. Accessibility and the ability to transfer goods stems to the very core of what employers consider fundamental in a business location.

But these problems have not surfaced overnight. We've built hundreds of miles of roads and bridges in Massachusetts with the vision that led to the construction of the interstate highway system under the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. It was sheer genius, and it worked, and it made the U.S. the economic powerhouse it is today. The cost is in the lack of vision toward a plan to maintain that system that was built. Fixing a bridge is

not as exciting as building one, but these times require the same leadership that led to what we have today.

We will applaud the leaders who are able to sit in a room in the coming months and years and demand that we have a quality transportation system that takes us from yesterday to today, despite the cost. The lack of resources to fix the problem is one we must all face together, but it must be a priority.