

Time For Roadway Investment Is Now

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It often takes a tragic incident to prompt action. Too often it is not until lives are lost that major public policy or public safety issues are uncovered. Most recently here at home, the proposed toll increases on the Massachusetts Turnpike have driven elected leaders to look more critically at the decades-long neglect of our transportation system.

It is true that those toll increases would be tragic for many residents of Central Massachusetts, but it is even more tragic that we have neglected our transportation system for as long as we have.

Major Arteries

The efficiency of our transportation system in Massachusetts is as critical a component of the state's economy as life sciences and clean energy. Our economy can only grow if we can efficiently transport materials and goods, and if our employers can easily provide access to customers, markets and workers.

Just last week, we learned from members of the Transportation Finance Commission — a non-partisan group appointed to study the transportation bureaucracy and the financing supporting the system — that the \$15 to \$19 billion gap they found in 2007 needed to bring our current transportation system to a “state of good repair,” had only grown since then.

It is a problem the state does not have the ability to fix within the current budget structure, but somehow, over the next several years, it must be addressed if we are to avoid a catastrophe like the Minneapolis bridge collapse that shook the nation last year.

The ability, and right, to travel on roads that are deemed safe by all measures is expected by the average citizen, and rightly so. However, the lack of resources to fix the problem is one we must all face together.

Legislative leaders are right to look at all possible reforms before turning to the taxpayers for more money. Nevertheless, reform alone will neither generate enough funds to put the system into a “state of good repair,” nor will they allow for improvements and expansion projects to put people to work and strengthen the state's economy. A significant amount of new revenue is also needed to meet the needs of the Commonwealth.

Central to any plan put forward by our elected officials must be an increase to the gas tax. It is an essential part, but only one part. This is a more equitable plan than increasing turnpike tolls for only select drivers. An increase in the gas tax is not an easy solution, but it is a road we must travel.

We will applaud leaders who are able to come together quickly to support a broad, comprehensive package of reforms, efficiencies, and new revenue. It must be a priority, and the economic future of the Commonwealth is dependent upon it.

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