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**Contact:**

**John Stout**, MASSPIRG Education Fund Transportation Advocate, [jstout@masspirg.org](mailto:jstout@masspirg.org) 857 285-3605

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## **New report provides recommendations for advancing regional transit across Massachusetts**

***Builds on 2019 state report; Looks to new legislation to protect service and economic recovery***

**BOSTON** – A new report released today outlines the challenges facing regional public transit riders all across Massachusetts, and recommends specific actions for the State Legislature and Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) to ensure that public transportation helps the Bay State recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This timely report, *Increasing Regional Transit Accessibility Across the Commonwealth*, was published by MASSPIRG Education Fund, Transportation For Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Public Health Association, and Conservation Law Foundation, and is available to download [here](#).

“The RTAs can be mobility managers for their regions and help us increase economic opportunity, alleviate traffic congestion and protect our climate, air quality and our health,” said MASSPIRG Education Fund Transportation Advocate and report co-author John Stout. “But to get there, we need to adopt a vision for the future and provide the RTAs with the resources necessary to achieve that vision.”

In 2019, the legislatively-established Task Force on Regional Transit Authority Performance and Funding produced a landmark report, *A Vision for the Future of the Regional Transit Authorities*, that included 24 recommendations for improving the RTAs. The recommendations addressed funding, governance, service and sustainability, and created a roadmap towards a better transportation future for Massachusetts. According to the report released today, there has been progress on a number of the Task Force’s recommendations, while a number of others have yet to be acted on in any substantive way.

To help achieve these unmet goals, Senator Harriette L. Chandler (D-Worcester) and Representative Natalie Blais (D-Franklin) recently filed legislation, entitled *An Act to Increase Regional Transit Accessibility in the Commonwealth* (SD.2232 & HD.3312), which pairs with the new report's recommendations and directly addresses the need for increased and predictable funding for RTA operations and capital investments.

"Our RTAs provide public transportation service to tens of millions of Bay Staters," said Rep. Blais. "They help people get to where they need to go. They are our connections to work, school, healthcare, grocery stores, socials, substance use treatment and family support networks. In large part, however, the service is either not far enough reaching, not frequent enough and not convenient enough to provide the level and quality of service we need in Massachusetts. It's time for the Commonwealth to improve and expand RTA service to better meet the needs of our communities."

Legislative leaders believe that MassDOT, the legislature and the RTAs must all be held accountable to the 2019 report and recommendations in order to serve transit-dependent riders.

"The idea of reliable, accessible and well-funded regional transit authorities isn't a hypothetical policy debate for the folks who rely on RTAs across the Commonwealth – it's a necessity," said Sen. Chandler. "My constituents in Central Massachusetts need to get from point A to point B. They don't have the MBTA, they may not have a car, and sometimes walking isn't an option. But they have the WRTA to shuttle them from work, to doctor's appointments, and to visit family and friends. I want to ensure that their regional authority provides the most accessible and reliable service possible. But to do so we must give RTAs their fair slice of transportation funding, because our constituents deserve nothing less."

Among the recommendations that have not yet been fully adopted, the newly released report recommends the following be prioritized:

- **Adopt an automatic annual CPI increase in the base RTA operating budget, setting a baseline benchmark of \$94 million in FY22;**
- **End the use of the farebox recovery ratio as a performance metric for the RTAs;**
- **Continue to develop and improve the "reinvigorated RTA Council," using it as a forum to tackle the big picture issues identified in the RTA Task Force report;**
- **Begin to pilot and implement more cross-RTA services and better coordination and connection between agencies, including with the MBTA;**

- **Complete an electric bus feasibility study so that all RTAs can begin wide-scale pilots of electric bus implementation as soon as possible.**

“Across Massachusetts, Regional Transit Authorities keep people moving in Gateway Cities, suburbs and small towns,” said Chris Dempsey, Director of the Transportation for Massachusetts advocacy coalition. “With consistent funding and support from Beacon Hill, these vital public services have the chance to do so much more.”

The 2019 RTA Task Force was a productive and hardworking body of dedicated individuals, advocates have noted. Improvements are underway, but continued progress requires real accountability given the RTAs role in connecting Bay Staters with jobs, food and health resources.

“A disproportionate number of low income residents, older adults and residents with disabilities rely on RTAs to access basic needs,” said Alexis Walls, Assistant Campaign Director for Massachusetts Public Health Association and co-chair of the RTA Advocates coalition.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, RTAs have been crucial to preserving the health and wealth of over 250 cities and towns outside of the MBTA service area. The state can no longer ignore the role RTAs play in advancing regional equity. An investment in RTAs is an investment in the future of transportation.”

Advocates have also stressed how RTA riders frequently have no alternatives to the bus, especially during the evening and on weekends.

“Regional transit authorities provide a necessary lifeline to communities across the state who do not have alternate transportation options,” said Staci Rubin, Senior Attorney at Conservation Law Foundation. “Millions of people depend on local buses to reach school, work, and medical appointments, and it’s time the Commonwealth gives the authorities the funding they need. Predictable funds will help authorities expand service hours and buy electric buses so our communities see less pollution, less traffic, and greater opportunity.”

“Transit for me means access,” said Sabrina Davis, Lead Organizer for the Coalition for Social Justice. “Access to work, access to education, access food and so much more. Here on the south coast we don’t have access to a comprehensive transit system. Evening service stops at 9pm and only certain routes run at that time. Also we have limited weekend service with no buses on Sunday. Lack of access to transportation means lack of access to opportunities and that is crippling for our communities.”

*Read the full report at this [link](#). Advocates and legislators are available for comment.*

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**Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA)** is a diverse coalition of more than 100 member and partner organizations with a stake in improving transportation across the Commonwealth. Our coalition advocates at the state, federal, and local levels for transportation policies that are innovative, sustainable, and environmentally friendly. We want a transportation system that strengthens our economy and our communities, while also being safer, healthier, more affordable and reliable.

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The **Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA)** is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth.