

June 29, 2022

Senator Michael Rodrigues, Chair
Senator Cindy Friedman, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA, 02133

Re: S.2277 - *An Act to Improve and Expand Regional Transit Accessibility in the Commonwealth*

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Vice Chair Friedman, and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

We are municipal leaders across 21 cities and towns in Massachusetts, whose constituents are served by Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs). Our communities are each distinct - varying in population size, demographics, geography and resources. What we have in common is a shared understanding of the importance of improved regional public transportation to the health of our friends, neighbors and constituents. As the 2021 - 2022 formal legislative session comes to a close, we ask that you act now to pass ***S.2277 - An Act to Improve and Expand Regional Transit Accessibility in the Commonwealth***, which was filed by Senator Chandler and Representative Blais and was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Transportation in February.

The Commonwealth's 15 RTAs and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) are the backbone of the state transportation system. Our communities rely upon transit services to live, work, learn and play. These agencies are vital assets, and have the potential to expand our residents' access to basic needs, increase social and economic mobility and advance state climate goals. However, they are often hampered by policies that put cars at the center of transportation networks, rather than people. This is especially the case for the state's 15 RTAs.

RTAs connect riders in over 250 cities and towns beyond the reach of the MBTA with access to essential resources like jobs, health care, food and education. These services are especially critical for low-income families, older adults, and people with disabilities, who disproportionately rely on transit services to carry out day to day activities. However, as it stands, too many in our communities are unable to access reliable regional transit due to underinvestment. Although 55% of Massachusetts residents live within an RTA service area, less than 7% of state transit funds to support operations go to RTAs. Without meaningful funding and technical support, RTAs are unable to make sustainable improvements to service and capital projects that get people where they need to go and make transit convenient enough to attract car drivers.

The RTAs in many of our districts are unable to offer service 7 days a week, and have limited daytime hours. Buses are infrequent and routes are limited, which make it inconvenient for residents to rely upon transit to complete day-to-day activities like commuting, grocery shopping or attending ESOL classes. Our constituents are also missing connections between service areas, which limits travel to neighboring cities and towns for opportunities like work and school.

We cannot allow the status quo for transportation in Massachusetts to stand any longer. Our constituents are overwhelmed by record inflation, skyrocketing gas prices, a global pandemic, wealth disparities, and climate change. We need policies in place that will efficiently and equitably support our communities in managing the effects of these crises. With the right support, RTAs can more effectively connect residents to living wage jobs, increase access to basic needs that build resilience to COVID-19, and reduce carbon emissions by electrifying fleets and getting more people out of their cars.

Inequities in regional transit affect the well-being of the state as a whole. Without the advancement of the state's regional transportation system, we will not succeed in bolstering the state economy, recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, or meeting the Commonwealth's climate goals. The legislature must invest in RTAs to give the majority of people in the state meaningful options to get where they need to go outside of polluting passenger vehicles, which come at a steep financial and environmental cost.

Fortunately, solutions are at hand. The state legislature has an opportunity to take a step towards fulfilling its responsibility to communities by passing **S.2277**, which would stabilize RTA funding and pave the way for better, cleaner, more affordable service.

All Massachusetts residents deserve access to high quality transportation services that meet their needs. We urge you to support constituents and communities across the state by advancing and enacting **S.2277** this session.

Thank you,

Paul Coogan, *Mayor of Fall River*
Brian A. De Peña, *Mayor of Lawrence*
Stephen L. DiNatale, *Mayor of Fitchburg*
Joshua A. Garcia, *Mayor of Holyoke*
Michael A. McCabe, *Mayor of Westfield*
Jon Mitchell, *Mayor of New Bedford*
Shaunna O'Connell, *Mayor of Taunton*
Joseph M. Petty, *Mayor of Worcester*
Gina-Louise Sciarra, *Mayor of Northampton*
Charlie Sisitsky, *Mayor of Framingham*
Robert F. Sullivan, *Mayor of Brockton*

Linda M. Tyer, *Mayor of Pittsfield*
Greg Verga, *Mayor of Gloucester*
Roxann D. Wedegartner, *Mayor of Greenfield*
Audrey LaBrie, *Select Board Chair of Winchendon*
Ruth Pereen, *Select Board Chair of Essex*
James Errickson, *Natick Town Administrator*
James Hagerty, *Edgartown Town Manager*
John S. Mangiaratti, *Acton Town Manager*
Alex Morse, *Provincetown Town Manager*
Elizabeth C. Gibson, *Nantucket Town Manager*