



January 24, 2024

Representative William M. Straus, Co-Chair
Senator Brendan Crighton, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA, 02133

Re: H.3272/S.2277 - An Act to Improve and Expand Regional Transit Accessibility in the Commonwealth

Dear Chairs Straus and Crighton, and members of the Committee on Transportation,

On behalf of Gateway municipalities served by Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs), we write to urge you to report the "RTA Advancement Bill" (H.3272/S.2277) filed by Rep. Blais and Sen. Moran favorably out of committee as you did last session. We thank you for your work on the budget this year which is already enabling weekend and evening service to come online in many locations; this bill will ensure that those gains are encoded in the future, creating predictability for transit agencies to plan ahead and staff accordingly.

The Commonwealth's 15 RTAs connect riders in over 250 cities and towns representing half of the state's population. For our Gateway communities, which act as regional hubs, transit is critical. Many of our families, especially seniors and essential workers, do not own private vehicles and depend on frequent and affordable public transportation.

Yet our communities have often lacked the kind of high-quality service that residents require. For too many years, many of our RTAs struggle to offer service 7 days a week, and have limited daytime and evening

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, attending medical appointments, or taking classes. Our constituents also lack inter-regional connections between service areas, which presents barriers to travel to neighboring cities and towns for work and school.

Establishing operating support for RTAs at \$150 million in this year's budget represents a huge step forward. Yet with our transit agencies dealing with inflationary costs, the need to raise wages and attract drivers, while at the same time making necessary investments to become more climate-resilient and modernize to carbon-neutral fleets and facilities, this is a baseline we need to preserve through the RTA Advancement Bill.

If passed into law, H.3272/S.2277 would:

- Raise the statutory floor for RTA state contract assistance to \$150 million, in line with the FY24 budget allocation;
- Provide annual inflation-adjusted increases, in line with the MBTA annual inflator;
- Establish an RTA Fund in statute, mirroring the MBTA Fund, for investments in regional transit including fees from Transportation Network Companies like Uber and Lyft;
- Increase collaboration between RTAs, community stakeholders and state policymakers; and
- End the use of the "farebox recovery ratio," an outdated performance metric that incentivizes inequitable fare policies.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to further discussion on this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us or André Leroux at aleroux@massinc.org for more information.

Thank you,

Cathleen DeSimone, Mayor of Attleboro
Felicia Penn, Barnstable Town Council President
Robert F. Sullivan, Mayor of Brockton
John L. Vieau, Mayor of Chicopee
Paul Coogan, Mayor of Fall River
Samantha M. Squailia, Mayor of Fitchburg
Joshua A. Garcia, Mayor of Holyoke
Brian DePeña, Mayor of Lawrence
Dean Mazarella, Mayor of Leominster
Daniel P. Rourke, Mayor of Lowell
Neil Perry, Mayor of Methuen
Jon Mitchell, Mayor of New Bedford
Peter Marchetti, Mayor of Pittsfield
Domenic J. Sarno, Mayor of Springfield
Shaunna O'Connell, Mayor of Taunton
Eric D. Batista, City Manager of Worcester
Joseph M. Petty, Mayor of Worcester