



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
**MASSACHUSETTS SENATE**  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

Senator Stan Rosenberg, President Pro Tem  
Hampshire and Franklin District  
Room 320  
617.722.1532  
Fax: 617.722.1062  
413.582.0113

District Office  
1 Prince St.  
Northampton, MA 01060  
413.584.1649  
Fax:

[Stan.Rosenberg@state.ma.us](mailto:Stan.Rosenberg@state.ma.us)

---

“Remember the Regional Transportation Authorities!”

Admittedly, as rallying cries go, that one is somewhat less inspiring than, say, “Remember the Alamo” or “Remember the Maine.” But in the coming months, as Beacon Hill begins to address the needs of our transportation system, the members of the Legislature’s Regional Transportation Caucus will be sounding that message relentlessly, although we might abbreviate it to “Remember the RTAs!”

And why the concern about RTAs? Consider these facts: There are 15 of them in the state. They serve 231 of the state’s 351 communities. And they provide approximately 25 million rides a year. Yet during the past few weeks, as various ideas about reorganizing our transportation systems and addressing our transportation needs have been floated, there has been very little spoken about RTAs. There’s been talk of potentially increasing some tolls and raising the gas tax, but that’s been done only in the context of how it might benefit the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority, the Big Dig and other transportation needs of the urban center inside I-95.

That’s fine. No one is disputing the importance of the MBTA, an organization that received \$768 million in taxpayer support last year, compared to the \$58 million for

RTAs, or the need to finish paying off the Big Dig. Those issues must be addressed, absolutely. But so must the public transportation needs of areas outside of the metropolitan Boston area. What we need, what we must have, is a comprehensive plan that not only helps the urban professional get to her job in Boston, but also helps the elderly rural Massachusetts resident get to his doctor's appointment as safely and efficiently as possible. It's no exaggeration to say that the lives and livelihoods of a lot of people, especially in rural and suburban areas, depend on safe, reliable public transportation, the very service that RTAs provide.

As part of this comprehensive plan, the Regional Transportation Caucus will, in the upcoming legislative session, propose doubling operating funding for RTAs, over a 5-7 year period, in order to expand services, improve reliability and create more flexibility in routes. In addition, we will also call for increased capital funding to modernize the RTA fleet and facilities, and we will insist on management reforms to improve the administration of the 15 RTAs.

The inclusion of these elements in a comprehensive transportation plan would build on the success the Regional Transportation Caucus enjoyed last year when the Patrick administration, much to its credit, moved aggressively on a proposal in the Transportation Bond Bill to place RTAs on a "forward funding" system. Forward funding eliminates the borrowing required by the so-called "lag funding" system and will save state taxpayers an estimated \$2-\$5 million in interest payments each year.

In the coming months, the issue of transportation policy will very likely take center stage in Washington D.C., and in state houses across the country, as the Obama administration prepares a major economic stimulus package, with tens of billions

potentially being earmarked for transportation infrastructure nationwide. What will make the coming discussions especially important is the fact that transportation policies will have direct impacts on two other great issues of our time, namely the economy and the environment. All the more reason to remember the RTAs.

For example, in rural areas, more often than not, a car is a necessity. And although gasoline prices are currently at a five-year low, it is unreasonable to believe that they will stay that way as oil reserves dwindle. Plus, it seems to make good sense to give rural residents public transportation options so that they can leave their cars at home whenever possible, thereby saving money and gas and protecting the environment. Again, adequately funded RTAs can play a key role in this environmental/economic dynamic by providing quality mass transit services now and by helping to lay the groundwork for more commuter rail systems in the future, a development that would have enormous economic impact outside the metropolitan Boston area.

The bottom line is simply this: We need to rethink the ways we get around. We need new ideas and a comprehensive plan that includes everyone in this state, from the daily MBTA rider to the person who has never been to Boston and relies on a bus in Fall River or Chatham.

We need to remember the RTAs.

*State Senator Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst), President Pro Tem of the Massachusetts Senate, and State Representative Daniel Bosley (D-North Adams), Chair of the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies, are co-chairs of the Legislature's Regional Transportation Caucus.*