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Testimony of Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce Senior Vice President of Policy & Research Carolyn Ryan to the Senate Committee on Reimagining Massachusetts Post-Pandemic Resiliency

Senator Hinds, members of the Senate Committee on Reimagining Massachusetts Post-Pandemic Resiliency, thank you for inviting the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce to participate in this hearing. My name is Carolyn Ryan, and I'm the Senior Vice President for Policy & Research at the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber has long held that transportation is an underpinning of our economy and it can help to thrust it forward or drag it down. In late 2019, we released an agenda that we titled "Future Ready Transportation" because, even before the pandemic, we recognized the need to prepare and adapt to changing transportation demands. We defined a future ready system as one that is prepared for shifts in climate, the economy and commerce, and technology. Despite the generational change that occurred over the last year many of the fundamental principles still apply.

One of the most significant changes in the last 18 months is the shift to remote work, but the Chamber does not believe that remote work will solve our transportation and commuting challenges. One reason for this is that there are hundreds of thousands of workers around the state who simply cannot work from home permanently. Hospitals, restaurants, manufacturers, and construction sites all need to operate with in-person teams. Other industries will not rely on remote work as a long-term option. Courts, colleges and universities, cultural institutions, and sports and entertainment venues will return to largely in person activities.

And while remote work may provide modest relief on some days, traffic counts are already creeping up to pre-pandemic levels. Traffic and public transit ridership will only increase further in the coming months when more employers return to workplaces. So, many of the challenges that existed pre-pandemic will still be there come September, October, and beyond.

However, federal COVID relief funds, and the potential for additional funds through a federal infrastructure bill, are creating a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in transportation, both public transit and roads and bridges. These funds should be deployed to improve reliability and access, reduce emissions, reduce congestion, and improve road conditions.

Roadway Pricing

First and foremost, we need a 21st century pricing plan. Last year, both the House and Senate voted to create a 21st Century Roadway Pricing Commission, which the Chamber initially proposed in 2019. This commission would identify the physical, technological, and legal requirements for statewide tolling and study scenarios. The Governor vetoed the Commission so it did not move forward. We believe this commission and thinking about how we price mobility is still important.

Public transit

Second, one very clear way to infuse equity into a transportation plan is to invest in public transit, both MBTA and the RTAs. These investments have the added benefit of helping to reduce emissions and congestion.

- Do not raise MBTA fares. Over the last two decades, MBTA fares increased by more than 180%. The gas tax increase by 14%.
- The MBTA can also accelerate project completion to improve service, reliability, and achieve cost benefits. Projects include:
 - The red, orange, and green line transformations to upgrade signals and add new cars. These efforts will reduce headways allowing for more capacity and faster trips.
 - The better bus project to improve bus access and performance. This project will redesign our bus routes to match the needs of our residents.
 - Automated fare collection, which will modernize the system, speed up bus boarding, and help with fare recovery.
 - The Rail Vision plan which will create a commuter rail system that has lower emissions and provide more frequent regional service.

Regional Transit Authorities

The Chamber also recognizes that public transit isn't just in Boston. RTAs will play a crucial role in ensuring that everyone in Massachusetts has access to public transportation.

The Chamber continues to support increasing TNC fees and dedicating a portion of fee revenue to RTAs. This will raise needed revenue while also incentivizing the use of shared or public transportation options, which can in turn reduce congestion.

Additionally, many recommendations from the 2019 RTA Task Force have yet to be formally adopted. This report serves as a good starting point for the Legislature as it thinks about improvements to the state's 15 RTAs. In particular, the Chamber supports:

- Using performance-based funding to encourage RTAs to move the highest number of passengers possible. It is important that funding formulas prioritize the number of passengers over other less important measures like the total number of bus trips.
- Expanding representation on RTA advisory boards to include large employers. This will ensure that service meets the needs of the region's workers.
- In deploying federal pandemic-relief funds and potential additional federal funds, the RTAs should work closely with MassDOT. RTAs, like the MBTA, have a large capital challenge in converting buses to zero-emission vehicles in order to meet the state's climate goals. The state can provide guidance, as well as economies of scale.



Roads and Bridges

There are other transportation investments that can have a tangible impact on Massachusetts residents. Major and necessary transportation projects around the state total in the billions. Federal funding can move these forward to reduce congestion, support the movement of goods, and improve road conditions. These projects include 495/Mass Pike interchange; Route 91 reconstruction in Springfield; the Cape Cod bridges; and pavement all over the state. Statewide, we have hundreds of bridges in need of repair. The state can renew its accelerated bridge program to make rapid repairs with minimal disruption.

Lastly, the Chamber encourages the committee to think about transportation as strategic driver in our state's economy. Instead of the lack of reliable transportation and long commutes being part of the housing problem, make transportation part of the solution. Instead of relying on work from home to reduce demand, create a system that is prepared for growth. Take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to give Massachusetts a 21st century transportation system.