



# 495/METROWEST

## PARTNERSHIP

*Leaders for Regional Prosperity*

January 26, 2016

Secretary & CEO Stephanie Pollack  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160  
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) Triennial Review of the Western Turnpike

Dear Secretary Pollack:

On behalf of the 495/MetroWest Partnership, we would like to commend MassDOT for the transparent public engagement process relative to the Triennial Review of the Western Turnpike. In particular, we appreciate the addition of a public meeting in the 495/MetroWest region, namely Framingham, on this topic which is of great interest to our region's employers, residents, and commuters.

Additionally, we welcome the renewed commitment by MassDOT to appoint a Tollpayer Advocate, a long outstanding item on the punch list of reforms from the 2009 Legislation. The Partnership advocated for the creation of this position during the debates on transportation reform and we were pleased by its inclusion in the law, but have been subsequently concerned by its vacancy over the last 7 years. We truly appreciate MassDOT recognizing the importance of this role for the only interstate drivers in the Commonwealth who bear the burden of tolling.

The issues of transportation reform and investment have been priorities of the 495/MetroWest Partnership since our founding as a non-profit regional advocacy organization over a decade ago. As a public/private organization focused on economic development, the Partnership serves thirty-five communities, over half a million residents, and an employment base of over \$21 billion per year. The Partnership focuses on helping to alleviate regional constraints and limitations, and conducts numerous initiatives on transportation, workforce housing, brownfields, and water resources.

The Partnership has long advocated for a variety of transportation and transit infrastructure needs on behalf of the 495/MetroWest region, as well as calling for additional revenue and resources for MassDOT. Another consistent theme in our transportation advocacy work has been the challenges related to toll equity. As an organization, we have maintained strong opposition to the current inequities of tolling only one major interstate in the entire Commonwealth. Our residents, commuters, and employers have been burdened with this additional cost for far too long. Nevertheless, we understand the need for transportation revenue is real and we further recognize that tolling is likely to stay in place given the investment made by MassDOT into the All Electronic Tolling System (AETS).

While the Partnership encouraged and now applauds the move to AET as a more innovative, cost effective revenue collection option, the Partnership's 2013 *Fairly Funding Transportation* position paper, endorsed by our diverse Board of Directors, explicitly states that the Partnership will continue to strongly oppose the current turnpike toll system unless similar and equivalent tolling systems are put in place along the other major highways throughout the state. This position has not wavered and in fact, the introduction of AET presents an opportunity to address this inequity by tolling other roadways. And while we oppose continued tolling of only one interstate in the

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Commonwealth, we do appreciate the MassDOT recommendation to freeze the toll rates, at least until the next Triennial Review of the Western Turnpike.

Based on the presentation from the Worcester meeting on January 7, 2016, an expected benefit of AET is reduced operations and maintenance costs. Given the fact that drivers on the Turnpike are tolled, they have a reasonable expectation for a very well maintained roadway. Since the transition from the Turnpike Authority to MassDOT, we have noted a deterioration in the maintenance of the Interstate. Once considered the best plowed road in the state during a snowstorm, I-90 can no longer hold this title and yet, drivers are still paying the same level of tolls for a decreased level of service. We understand that the amount of personnel dedicated to the Interstate's maintenance has been reduced since the Turnpike Authority's control and would therefore suggest providing additional resources to ensure the proper maintenance of the roadway particularly in light of the O&M savings achieved through AET.

Regarding the findings of the Review, while disappointing that I-90 is "not in good repair (and has been trending downward in recent years)", the value presented by the inventory of assets, the detailed inspection and summary of findings, the overview of the current state of repair and accompanying action plan, as well as the projected future expenditures cannot be overstated. The Partnership's *Fairly Funding Transportation* paper, called for fact-based asset management similar to what has been presented in this Triennial Review. The Review also presents a clear picture of the expenses related to maintaining a roadway, which would seemingly highlight the need for similar toll revenue on the other major interstates in the Commonwealth.

We appreciate that the Report includes a State of Good Repair (SGR) Action Plan for the next 20 years and that it goes a step further in projecting Future Expenditures, with projects related to modernization and capacity. In particular, the Partnership is extremely pleased to see the I-90/I-495 Interchange mentioned as "the most significant" of the major capital projects in need of attention on the Western Turnpike. We would also note the importance of two additional exits within our region from I-90, Exits 12 and 13 in Framingham and Natick given their connection to major Massachusetts employers such as TJX, Mathworks, Staples, Bose Corporation and Sanofi Genzyme. We urge appropriate attention and consideration be given to these tollbooths in the transition to AET.

Finally, as was noted at the public meeting in Worcester, it may be time to rebrand the Western Turnpike given the public perception that this includes only the portion of I-90 west of Worcester.

The Partnership would like to thank MassDOT for the work that has gone into the Triennial Review of the Western Turnpike as well as the public outreach and the addition of a public meeting in the 495/MetroWest Region. Nevertheless, our concerns related to toll equity remain. We appreciate your consideration of our comments and welcome any questions related to this letter, which should be directed to the Partnership's Deputy Director, Jessica Strunkin at 774-760-0495 x101 or [jessica@495partnership.org](mailto:jessica@495partnership.org).

Sincerely,



Paul F. Matthews  
Executive Director



Jessica Strunkin  
Deputy Director

Cc: MassDOT Highway Administrator Thomas Tinlin