



495/MetroWest Region's Top Ten Transportation Nightmares: The Next Decade

The first "Top 10 Transportation Nightmares" list was compiled in the spring of 2004 when the 495/MetroWest Partnership asked residents and travelers into, within and through the 495/MetroWest region to identify what transportation nightmares they faced on a daily basis. This effort was prompted in part by the significant growth that occurred in the region over the previous decade and the transportation challenges that this growth was creating.

Transportation "nightmares" were submitted by the general public through an open nomination process coordinated by the Partnership and *MetroWest Daily News*, which ran a series of articles over an eight-week period, focused on various transportation issues. At the close of the nomination period, a committee of diverse transportation professionals including planners and engineers from both the public and private sectors came together to establish a Top Ten List representing the critical issues facing the Partnership's service area. The goal of this initiative, both in 2004 and today, is to identify the transportation challenges in our region. The Partnership's objective is to ultimately bring resources to these challenges and as such, our next phase of work will be advocating for solutions on behalf of our public and private sector stakeholders.

Given the merger of transportation agencies into MassDOT and additional transportation resources (Transportation Reform in 2009 and Transportation Financing Act in 2013), and considering the significant advances made on the region's 2004 Transportation Nightmare List, the Partnership believes that now is the time to take a fresh look at the transportation environment and compile a new list of transportation priorities to highlight the 495/MetroWest region's needs across modes, town lines, planning jurisdictions, and legislative districts. Recognizing that transportation infrastructure is inexorably linked to the region's economic success and quality of life, the Partnership is focused on advancing the conversation and advocating for solutions to our transportation and transit challenges. As part of the Partnership's mission we will continue our focus on strengthening the region's transportation networks over the next ten years - and well into the future.

2014 Top Ten Transportation Nightmares

#10: Routes 135 and 126 in Framingham (previously #4 on the 2004 nightmares list)

The Route 135/126 Intersection and Grade Crossing in the heart of Downtown Framingham continues to be recognized by the public as a major traffic bottleneck for the region, incorporating a rotary, several traffic lights and two active railroad tracks used by both commuter and freight trains. While the increased commuter rail service is a welcome solution to addressing transit needs in the region, it also exacerbates the congestion already experienced at this intersection. These well-known traffic challenges stifle both economic and revitalization efforts for Framingham's Downtown, and limit the regional north-south connectivity for many of the communities in this area during the critical morning and evening peak commuting hours.

Between the release of the previous nightmares list and now, a project has been filed, #606109, for intersection improvements to address the concerns highlighted above. At the time of this report, the project

is in the early environmental review stages and its full construction cost has been estimated at \$110,000,000. Additionally, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council is conducting a study looking at opportunities and challenges to new development in the downtown area, a portion of which is focused on transportation planning and engineering services in Downtown Framingham.

#9: Route 16 Corridor, particularly in Milford and Wellesley

Route 16 is a secondary arterial roadway that crisscrosses east to west, providing an alternative means of traversing the region instead of relying on one of the few major roadways (such as Route 1, Route 9 and/or the interstate highway system). The 495/MetroWest region includes three interstate highways and many arterial/feeder roads like Route 16, which are increasingly burdened as highway congestion increases. However, Route 16 was never envisioned to withstand the number of vehicles that travel on it today. While the communities of Milford and Wellesley are separated by three towns, Route 16 functions, or in this case does not function, similarly in both towns. Route 16 provides local access for residents and acts as their “Main Street” corridor, providing many of the commercial services that these community’s residents rely on for their day-to-day lives. There are numerous concerns about this corridor, including in the communities of Sherborn and Natick, but a few intersections in Milford and Wellesley stand out as considerably problematic from a capacity and safety perspective.

In Milford, Route 16 is intersected by Route 109 (near Hannaford supermarket) and Route 140 (at Milford Regional Medical Center); both intersections have experienced increased congestion during the evening commute which puts a strain on not just commuters but residents trying to access both sites. Meanwhile in Wellesley, Route 9 intersects Route 16 at a very disorganized ramp and bridge exchange. The intersection is constantly congested during peak hours and the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) has expressed concerns about this intersection in relation to its fixed routes that traverse the intersection. It should be noted that while Wellesley is outside of the 495/MetroWest Partnership’s service area, the impact of congestion on Route 16 in Wellesley affects the town of Natick and other Partnership communities along the Corridor.

Similar to the concerns raised later in this document on Route 9, Route 16 should be treated as a corridor rather than as a town by town nightmare.

#8: I-495 and the 1’s

Routes 1 and 1A are two major thoroughfares in the southern portion of the 495/MetroWest region, providing access to several large developments including Gillette Stadium and Patriot Place, the Wrentham Outlets, and Plainridge Racecourse, which is slated to host the state’s only slots parlor.

I-495 & Rt. 1 (Foxborough/Plainville):

The congestion challenges along Route 1 from the I-495 Interchange to the I-95 Interchange are well known, particularly during special events in Foxborough at Gillette Stadium. Given the nature of the Route 1 corridor, there are a number of potential economic development opportunities that are limited due to the safety and capacity constraints along the corridor. With the Plainridge Park Casino slated to open in April 2015, traffic challenges at I-495 and Route 1 will only increase.

I-495 & 1A (Wrentham):

Over 13 million people visit the Wrentham Premium Outlet Mall each year and as a result, the interchange of I-495 and Route 1A is well beyond its intended capacity. A 130,000 square foot shopping center is about to open across from the outlets. There are also 200 acres of prime commercial property adjacent to the Outlet Mall, but economic development opportunities in this region have stalled due to these traffic constraints. Additionally, at the time of this report, there is no public transit to the Outlet Mall or to this area in general. Given planned and desired growth in Wrentham and the surrounding communities and the additional traffic expected at the nearby Plainridge Park Casino, the existing constraints will worsen and development opportunities will be limited.

#7: I-495 and Route 9 in Westborough (previously #10 on the 2004 nightmares list)

Ten years later and this interchange has moved from the #10 Nightmare in the region to the #7 Nightmare. However, significant progress has been made towards addressing the long-term needs of the interchange. In 2009, Congressman James McGovern secured federal funding to carry out an analysis of needed improvements to Route 9, the I-495/Route 9 interchange, and the I-495/I-90 interchange. The funds were then used by MassDOT to commission the *I-495/Route 9 Interchange Improvement Study*, which resulted in a comprehensive report of potential improvements that was released in November 2013. Given its centralized location in 495/MetroWest, the area surrounding the intersection within the communities of Southborough and Westborough continues to be an attractive location for commercial and residential development. Unfortunately, the interchange cannot support the capacity demands being placed upon it today and with expected continued development, into the future. Acceleration and deceleration lanes on both roads are indeed a nightmare, the sight lines are regarded as a hazard and the interchange is heavily congested during rush hours.

The study recommended several improvements to address both safety and capacity at the I-495/Route 9 and I-495/I-90 interchanges. One of those recommendations, Project #60770, is in the preliminary stage of design and will make improvements along Route 9 surrounding the interchange with I-495. The current cost estimate for those improvements is \$12,500,000.

#6: I-495 /I-90 Interchange (previously #3 on the 2004 nightmares list)

The interchange where I-495 and the Turnpike meet was included in the previous Nightmares list where it was regarded as a congestion choke point, forcing commuters to search out other routes resulting in traffic flow concerns on local roadways. As a result, in 2006, the Partnership was asked by the Executive Office of Transportation (precursor to MassDOT) to convene a series of meetings with state agencies to discuss potential improvements to the interchange, which resulted in the widening of the ramps to double lanes from the tollbooth to I-90.

Despite this improvement, the inability for traffic to smoothly move through this interchange continues to represent a serious transportation challenge for the 495/MetroWest region. As described by numerous public nominations, traffic has only worsened at this interchange as it is not uncommon for traffic backups to extend from this interchange all the way to the Route 9 interchange to the north, almost 2 miles away.

There has been progress addressing the deteriorating traffic flow problem at the intersection of these two major thoroughfares. In November 2013, MassDOT released a final report on the I-495/Rt. 9 Interchange Improvement Study, the scope of which included the I-495/I-90 Interchange. The study includes a proposed project for the I-495/I-90 interchange to address sub-standard ramps and geometry. Additionally, MassDOT is undertaking a replacement of the existing Turnpike tollbooths with an All-Electronic Tolling (AET) system. This work will start in 2014 and continue through 2016.

#5: I-495/I-290 Interchange (previously #2 on the 2004 nightmares list)

The interchange at I-495 and I-290 is a critical access point to the region as commuters use this exchange to travel between Worcester and 495/MetroWest communities, while leisure travelers and employees use this intersection to travel to or from New Hampshire, Maine, Cape Cod, and southern New England. The exchange is congested and has a high level of vehicular collisions and truck turnovers, prompting concerns of safety and traffic flow. During weekend periods, it is not uncommon for southbound and eastbound traffic approaching this interchange to be backed up for miles during the peak commuting periods as commuter and recreational traffic mingle.

In 2006, following the original nightmares list, then-Secretary of Transportation John Cogliano announced at the Partnership's annual conference that the state would proceed with permitting the planned improvements to the interchange. Since that initial state permitting review, a project has been filed, #603345, for reconstruction and a bridge replacement at the intersection. At the time of this report, this project is in the environmental notification form (ENF) stage. The current construction cost estimate is \$100,000,000.

#4: Commuter Rail

The 495/MetroWest region is home to three commuter rail lines: Fitchburg Line, Franklin Line and the Framingham/Worcester Line. These three lines account for approximately one third of the average daily ridership of the entire commuter rail network. Major employers within the 495/MetroWest region have cited on numerous occasions how the lack of a reliable and convenient reverse commute limits their ability to hire qualified employees. While there have been numerous investments in improving the network over the past 10 years, such as the Fitchburg Line Improvement Project, the increased service on the Framingham/Worcester Line, and the selection of a new commuter rail operator, there are still common regional concerns that need attention. These include matters of performance, parking supply/availability, and the ability for individuals to reverse commute from the metropolitan Boston area to the many employers in the 495/MetroWest region. If addressed, ridership will continue to increase on each of these lines. It is again worth noting that we recognize the unintended consequences of increased commuter rail service relative to congestion at the at-grade crossings in our region. However, this does not diminish the demand for increased service. Commuter Rail is also greatly dependent upon the next “Nightmare”, as riders need reliable options for getting to and from the stations.

#3: Suburban Mobility Challenges: First Mile, Last Mile & a Few in Between

Data shows that the majority of employees who work in the 495/MetroWest region, commute to jobs within the region rather than from suburban communities to the urban core. Given the proportion of residents who live and work in the region, combined with existing transit gaps, it has come as no surprise that suburban mobility challenges have made the top three on our Transportation Nightmares List.

On the 2004 List, the number one Nightmare was the lack of public transportation in the region. As a result, the Partnership formed the 495/MetroWest Alliance for Transit Services, which was a collaborative effort to provide technical assistance to municipalities considering potential transit initiatives and in 2006, our legislative delegation secured statutory changes to allow communities to join or establish a new Regional Transit Authority. With this reform, and thanks to the support of legislators, businesses, and communities within the region, the need for public transportation was partially addressed with the formation of the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) in 2006. However, the need for additional service hours in the evening and on weekends, as well as the decrease in headways is crucial to the growth of the system.

The MWRTA has established a transit network for several member communities in the region and is constantly growing new routes and services. They operate several fixed route bus services as well as shuttle services to area train stations and local hospitals. The Worcester RTA (WRTA) has also provided new services in the region, most recently in the form of a Westborough Shuttle from the train station to area businesses and employers.

The region also hosts two Transportation Management Associations (TMA); the MetroWest/495 TMA serves businesses in Framingham, Marlborough, Natick, Southborough, and Westborough, and the CrossTown Connect TMA, currently serving the towns of Acton, Boxborough, Littleton & Maynard as well as businesses in Littleton, Maynard, and Westford. CrossTown Connect is a newer model of TMA as a public private partnership open to both business and community membership.

Given these developments, the area now has a working foundation of regional public and private transit services, but additional challenges still remain. These include connections between different RTAs, last mile access from commuter rail to employers in the region as well as first mile access for residents to access commuter rail stations, the need for more Public/Private Partnerships like Crosstown Connect, and the promotion of other multi-modal means of transport. Several nominations included pedestrian needs in the region, particularly as they link to transit services. And for many employers in the region, until a reverse commute is in place, the last mile challenge is more like the last 20 miles, with some businesses currently shuttling workers from distant stations for timing and other reasons.

Suburban mobility challenges are being considered and addressed in a more consistent manner with initiatives like GreenDOT and Complete Streets, but there is clearly a long road, bike path, and sidewalk ahead to meet the demands of the 495/MetroWest region.

#2: Turnpike: Why Do We Need to Pay for this Nightmare?

Congestion continues to plague the Turnpike in our region, exacerbating existing problems at various interchanges, particularly at I-495 and with Route 9. The congestion impacts employers in the region as well as employees who commute to and from the 495/MetroWest region. While MassDOT has invested in message boards and is moving to an All Electronic Tolling (AET) option that is expected to improve the efficiency of toll collection efforts, the congestion concerns remain. One of the resounding themes for nominating the Turnpike, was the fact that users pay for this “Nightmare” on a daily basis. Users often sited on and off-ramps as a major bottleneck due to current designs and constraints. In referencing tolling equity, users are demanding a greater return on investment for their daily travels on the Turnpike.

#1: Route 9 Corridor: Main Street MetroWest or Thruway to Boston?

The Route 9 Corridor, a 27-mile segment crossing through six 495/MetroWest communities, namely Shrewsbury, Northborough, Westborough, Southborough, Framingham, and Natick, is the thoroughfare for the entire region. Route 9 connects with several major roadways and arteries, providing drivers access to major retail centers, commercial office spaces, industrial facilities, housing, higher education, tourist attractions, and employment. This route has experienced rush hour congestion on both the eastbound and westbound lanes for as long as there has been a cohesive 495/MetroWest region. While in years past, congestion was mostly confined to rush hours, problems now persist at all hours of the day. The challenges along Route 9 range in their scope, magnitude and location but no doubt several interchanges are affected daily:

- 9 and Route 20 (Shrewsbury/Northborough)
- 9 and Lyman St. (Westborough)
- 9 and Crystal Pond (Southborough)
- 9 and Oak Hill (Southborough)
- *Tech Park/9-90/9-30* (Framingham)
- 9 and Temple (Framingham)
- 9 and Edgell-Main St. (Framingham)
- 9/126 (Framingham)
- Golden Triangle (Framingham/Natick)
- 9/27 (Natick)
- 9/Oak (Natick)
- 9/128 (extends the Route 9 Corridor into Wellesley which is outside of the 495/MetroWest region but is a significant enough challenge to warrant mention on this list)

Route 9 has risen to the top of the Nightmares List because of its complexity as a Corridor, with the current challenges and congestion points all being interconnected. While no one solution will solve this nightmare, all solutions should be mindful of the corridor as a whole to allow Route 9 to continue to serve the region.

The 495/MetroWest Partnership, along with the *MetroWest Daily News*, would like to thank readers, employers, residents, and employees for submitting their regional transportation nightmares. This public nomination process plays a critical role in the Partnership’s transportation advocacy. We have heard your concerns and are ready to work with both public and private stakeholders at the local, state, and federal level towards addressing these challenges and ensuring a prosperous future for the 495/MetroWest region.

2004 List
495/METROWEST REGION'S
TOP TEN TRANSPORTATION NIGHTMARES

1. Lack of Public Transportation
2. I-290 and I-495
3. I-495 and Rt. 90 / Massachusetts Turnpike
4. Rt. 135 and Rt. 126 in Framingham
5. Rt. 9 and Lyman Street in Westborough
6. Rt. 9 at Central St. and Oakhill Rd. in Southborough
7. Rt. 20 Corridor
8. System-wide maintenance / Improved signal systems and roadways
9. 'The Bookends'-
 - Littleton's I-495 & Rt. 119
 - Franklin's I-495 & Rt. 140
10. I-495 and Rt. 9