



## REGIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

*Many services routinely performed by Massachusetts' regional planning agencies fall outside the major functional planning categories of transportation, land use and growth management, economic development, housing, community development, and environmental quality—yet, often, these are the services that fuel and support larger planning efforts for municipalities and regions. RPAs are positioned to provide these services, forming a critical link between regional planning efforts and the actual implementation of those plans at the local level.*

### **Data Research and Analysis:**

Massachusetts' regional planning agencies are vital sources of local and regional data for the public and private sectors, providing employment and income figures, demographics, U.S. census data, zoning information, population and employment projections, market trends, and many more kinds of data services, often available via the World Wide Web. The RPAs work closely with the Massachusetts State Data Center and the U.S. Census Bureau.

*The Metropolitan Area Planning Council* was a founding partner in the Massachusetts Electronic Atlas, an Internet-based mapping and demographic site.

### **Mapping and Graphic Design:**

From bus route mapping to designing brochures for member municipalities, Massachusetts' RPAs give tangible form to planning issues and services. Documents produced by RPAs are used by citizens in their everyday lives, legislators crafting bills, private-sector businesses contemplating relocation, state and federal agencies proposing major infrastructure improvements, and many others.

*The Martha's Vineyard Commission* created a map detailing terrain features and environmental conditions of Martha's Vineyard bicycling routes, distributing it through hotels, airlines, the steamship authority, and area bicycle shops.

### **Geographic Information Systems (GIS):**

This important technology allows RPAs to present complex data relationships in map form, leading to enhanced services for member cities and towns as well as their entire regions. Many of Massachusetts' RPAs are using or are in the process of acquiring GIS capabilities.

*The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission* has used GIS to identify specific parking imbalances in downtown Pittsfield, a crucial step in improving access and aiding downtown revitalization efforts.

### **Grant Proposal Writing and Grants Administration:**

Without grant assistance funds, a staggering number of important projects and programs simply would never materialize. Massachusetts' RPAs actively pursue and administer a wide array of grant awards from the state and federal governments to achieve vital transportation, historic preservation, community development, land use, and environmental quality objectives for their member communities and their regions.

*The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission* has routinely helped eligible communities prepare and submit Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Community Development Fund, Ready Resource, and related applications for urgently needed housing, social services, economic development, accessibility, neighborhood improvement, and infrastructure projects. Typically, a high percentage of these applications are successful in a highly competitive statewide solicitation.

### **Technical Assistance for Member Communities:**

Case-by-case help with member municipalities' individual needs is a cornerstone of the RPAs' work. Generally, annual assessments help underwrite an established number of free or low-cost person hours provided by professional RPA staff who are skilled in numerous planning areas such as traffic analysis, historic preservation, and economic development.

*The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission* has offered a financial incentive for planning projects that require more than three days of work: the Town Planning Grant program, entitling communities to receive a percentage of matching funds and to use some or all of their technical assistance time to reduce project costs.