



TRANSPORTATION

Since the mid-1960s, transportation planning—especially highway and transit planning—has been a major focus of Massachusetts’ regional planning agencies. Transportation planning is unquestionably a regional issue, since the movement of people and goods constantly crosses municipal and other political boundaries. That focus has only grown sharper. The transportation challenges confronting the commonwealth in the 1990s are more complicated and controversial than ever. Increased levels of traffic congestion threaten the quality of life residents have enjoyed for decades. More vehicles, more travel, and little investment in transportation needs are overwhelming the state’s systems and facilities. Moreover, achieving federally mandated national air quality standards depends on our ability to significantly reduce vehicle exhaust emissions—a prime cause of air pollution problems in Massachusetts and many other states. Consequently, sound transportation planning and decision-making, conducted on a regional scale, help ensure superior levels of mobility and safety as well as prospects for the commonwealth’s RPAs to play a pivotal role in helping to bring about economic prosperity, to enhance public health and regional communication, and to compete successfully in today’s global marketplace.

Regional Planning Agencies Are Cost-Effective

Today, with increased federal, state, and local budget constraints, the value of a regional approach to transportation planning has never been greater. Massachusetts’ RPAs help the commonwealth and their member municipalities save money and make smart transportation investments in a number of areas:

Highway Corridor Studies: RPAs conduct highway corridor traffic studies, leading to cost-conscious short- and long-term solutions to serious traffic capacity and safety problems of important state highways.

Pavement Management Systems: RPAs inventory local street systems and pavement deficiencies to determine the most urgently needed and fiscally prudent transportation investments.

Transit Service Planning: RPAs perform day-to-day transit services and special study projects for their regional transit authorities.

Transportation Management Innovations: RPAs organize innovative initiatives such as transportation management organizations that solicit private sector input to solve transportation corridor problems.

Local Technical Assistance: RPAs routinely provide their member communities with inexpensive or free technical assistance—analyzing problematic intersections, counting traffic and turning movements, assessing the traffic impact of large-scale developments, developing truck routes, and other services.

A Regional Approach Makes Sense

For more than three decades, the RPAs of Massachusetts have brought together all levels of government, the private business sector, and civic organizations to achieve a regional approach to transportation planning and decision-making. Why has this regional approach worked so well?

The regional approach is comprehensive, ensuring that transportation planning is fully and correctly integrated with other areas of regional concern—housing, land use, environmental quality, and economic development.

The regional approach is environmentally sensitive, fostering a planning process that recognizes the environmental effects of transportation systems, facilities, and services.

The regional approach saves money, taking advantage of state and federal funding assistance for regional transportation programs and projects, thereby realizing cost savings and economies of scale not possible with an incremental or fragmented approach.

The regional approach relies heavily on the involvement of local elected officials, who initiate highway and transit programs, projects, and services, ultimately bringing regional plans to successful implementation.

The regional approach is effective, with a proven performance record of addressing the numerous transportation needs, problems, and opportunities in the commonwealth’s different regions.

Regional Planning Agencies: A Sampler of Transportation Planning

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments led the development of a 33-mile bikeway connecting eight towns with bikepaths and shared road infrastructure and signage.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council helped to create the Metropolitan Highway System Advisory Board, which provides local input into decisions about the Central Artery construction project in Boston.