

Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies

WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE



In 1955, Massachusetts became one of the first states in the nation to create enabling legislation—Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B—to pave the way for regional planning agencies.



Massachusetts' RPAs are “wall-to-wall,” covering the length and breadth of the commonwealth—in fact, fewer than five of the state's 351 total municipalities are not presently RPA members.



Massachusetts' RPAs are comprehensive public planning agencies rather than special purpose entities such as transit authorities, economic development districts, or private watershed councils.



Massachusetts' RPAs largely must work through New England town meetings to implement planning recommendations and projects.



Except for the island regions of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, all Massachusetts RPAs have Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) designation and lead responsibility for transportation planning and programming in their planning districts.



Special pieces of legislation enacted by the state Legislature in the 1970s and 1980s gave two Massachusetts RPAs—the Martha's Vineyard Commission and the Cape Cod Commission—special land use regulatory powers not afforded elsewhere in the commonwealth.



Massachusetts' RPAs have helped spearhead some of the country's first successful examples of regional implementation and service delivery—Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, Metropolitan District Commission, the Quabbin Reservoir, the Massachusetts regional transit authorities, the Appalachian Trail, and the National Seashore on Cape Cod, among others.



The Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission incorporate two of New England's five largest metropolitan regions: the greater Boston and Springfield metropolitan areas. (In descending order, the five largest regions are Boston, Hartford, Providence, Springfield, and New Haven.)



The Massachusetts RPAs were tapped by the commonwealth to help implement Executive Order 418, a measure introduced by the governor in January 2000 to help communities plan for new and affordable housing opportunities while balancing economic development, transportation infrastructure improvements, and open space preservation. The RPAs acted as program administrators for the cities and towns in their planning districts, and most provided eligible planning services to municipalities on a contract basis.