

Regional Leadership Honored at PVPC's 53rd Annual Meeting

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission honored three individuals for their contributions to the betterment of the region and the commonwealth at large at its 53rd Annual Meeting Thursday, June 11 at the Hadley Farms Meeting House in Hadley.



Natalie M. Blais, District Communications Director Emeritus for U.S. Congressman James McGovern, for her work to realize several important transportation initiatives in the Pioneer Valley and beyond. As a congressional aide to Congressman John Olver and later to Congressman McGovern, Ms. Blais worked collaboratively behind the scenes with local and state partners to advance transportation and infrastructure priorities of the region, including the Knowledge Corridor rail project, the Norwottuck Rail Trail, the Holyoke transportation center, I-91 Intelligent Transportation System project, Nashawannuck Pond clean-up, the Holyoke Canalwalk, and many others.



Brooks Fitch, Coordinating Council Board Member of the Pioneer Valley Plan for Progress, for his active involvement in the Plan for Progress and economic development in the region. Since becoming a member of the Coordinating Council in 2007, Mr. Fitch has been a tireless advocate for the Plan for Progress, conducting a business outreach initiative in 2008 that involved interviewing 40 CEOs and other business leaders, serving as a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) reviewer for the last six years, taking a lead role in developing the new 2015 Plan for Progress, and presenting the Plan for Progress and its implementation efforts to a variety of audiences.

Al Stegemann, District 2 Highway Director Emeritus, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, for helping to advance numerous transportation projects in the Pioneer Valley. During his tenure, Mr. Stegemann was instrumental in the implementation of major infrastructure projects, including the reconstruction of Route 9 in Hadley, the expansion of the Great River Bridge in Westfield, and numerous bicycle and pedestrian projects throughout the region. He also initiated the I-91 viaduct project in Springfield and worked with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to secure the \$250 million necessary to complete the project.

[Click here](#) to see the awards presentation.



The meeting's keynote speaker was Bryan Reimer, Ph.D., a Research Scientist in the MIT AgeLab and the Associate Director of The New England University Transportation Center at MIT. His research seeks to develop new models and methodologies to measure and understand human behavior in dynamic environments utilizing physiological signals, visual behavior monitoring, and overall performance measures. Dr. Reimer leads a multidisciplinary team of researchers and students focused on understanding how drivers respond to the increasing complexity of the operating environment and on finding solutions to the next generation of human factors challenges associated with distracted driving, automation, and other in-vehicle technologies.