CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager *Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager*

November 29, 2012

Richard Davey
Secretary of Transportation
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Secretary Davey:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on MassDOT's "Your Vision, Our Future: A Transportation Conversation" series of public information sessions.

The legislature enacted and the Governor signed an important set of transportation reforms in 2009, "An Act Modernizing the Transportation Systems of the Commonwealth," along with new revenues from an increase in the sales tax. Reform has realized cost savings, improved public confidence in transportation spending, and addressed some immediate shortfalls through cost cutting and efficiency measures.

But we are now at a crossroad and facing a future where inadequate resources are being provided to transportation. The Commonwealth is neither able to maintain our existing crumbling infrastructure nor provide additional transit capacity to meet goals for future economic growth and Greenhouse Gas Reduction. Regional projections for mobility needs by the year 2035 indicate that there will be a 7% increase in demand for our roadways and a 30% increase in demand for transit service— levels of demand that will require creating increased transit capacity in the future. Additional actions are needed to create a long-term sustainable transportation system.

The past decade of development in Kendall Square has shown that smart growth is attainable, with a significant increase in jobs and housing with minimal traffic impacts. Cambridge's Parking and Transportation Demand Management ordinance contains stringent and enforceable mode-share requirements that have successfully limited the number of single-occupancy-vehicle trips. Business leaders in Cambridge are loudly voicing that transit and streets that encourage walking and biking are at the core of this success, and that additional investment to improve reliability of our existing system and increase the available transit capacity is critical to the future of economic growth in Cambridge and the region. A $7 billion investment is currently planned for transit-

795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Voice: 617.349.4300 Fax: 617.349.4307 TTY: 617.349.4242 Web: www.cambridgema.gov

connected areas in Greater Boston's urban core, $2 billion of which is planned for NorthPoint. Economic development in our region is being constrained by traffic congestion and inadequate transit access. In general, $100 million invested in public transit creates and supports roughly 4,000 jobs. Businesses often realize a gain in sales revenue that is three times the public sector investment in transit capital.

Over 73% of the Massachusetts population lives within the MBTA service district, with over 1.3 million trips taken each day. According to the 2010 US Census, 27% of those who live in Cambridge or come to work in Cambridge rely on transit. Many more use transit as a secondary means to get to work and use it regularly for non-commuting purposes. The MBTA Red Line carries 250,000 riders per typical weekday. There are 26 bus routes that are in or pass through Cambridge carrying about 85,000 riders per typical weekday. Of the 10 highest ridership bus routes in the entire MBTA system, four of them are in Cambridge (#66, #1, #77, and #70).

The continued increase in transit ridership is certainly desired, but is putting increased strain on the existing system. Because of the chronic underfunding of the MBTA over the past several decades, there has been a consistent failure to fund the ongoing maintenance necessary just to keep our existing system working reliably and safely. This results in the Agency's inability to operate the existing infrastructure to the maximum extent possible. All of the Red Line and Orange Line trains have exceeded their useful lifespan and are being cobbled together on a daily basis, sometimes not able to provide full capacity of cars available each morning for the peak hour commute. In addition to delays caused by regular vehicle breakdowns, track switching systems in need of upgrade regularly fail, causing more delays. An additional 10% capacity could be added to the Red Line during peak hours if the power system was replaced along the line and additional vehicles were available.

Four of the bus routes operating in Cambridge (#1, #47, #66, and #71), fail the MBTA's "vehicle load standard," meaning there is excessive crowding during peak times. The "vehicle load standard," which is expressed as the ratio of passengers to the number of seats on the bus, is exceeded when more than 28% of passengers on a bus are standing without a seat.

While difficult to think about adding additional transit capacity at this time, it is critical to recognize that this is needed to maintain a healthy economy into the future, and to continue forward with the planning process for changes which take years to bring to fruition. Funding for the Green Line Extension project must be provided to get the project operating as quickly as possible, in the face of increasingly painful delays. Given existing fiscal constraint, the Urban Ring Phase 2 project is not included in the MPO's long-range plan. This highlights the extent of the transportation crisis that we are pushing off to the next generation. It is essential to get the Urban Ring project back on the list of planned

projects, to add transit capacity to serve the corridor between Sullivan, Lechmere, Kendall, and Longwood Medical Area.

Given the current fiscal reality, MassDOT and municipalities must consider low-cost transit improvements that increase capacity in the short term. Extending existing bus routes, such as from Harvard Square to Kendall Square, can relieve congestion on the Red Line at relatively low cost. Prioritization of buses can be achieved by strategically adding queue-jump priority lanes, such as is planned for the approaches to the Anderson Bridge during construction. Providing "enhanced bus service" by strategically reallocating roadway space for buses, or implementing new Bus Rapid Transit lines on existing infrastructure, is a low-cost solution that will yield positive mode-shift results.

Public transit benefits riders and non-riders alike both by increasing regional economic potential and reducing the number of cars on our congested roadways. Drastic service cuts and fare increases, like those proposed earlier this year, would disproportionately harm our most vulnerable citizens who depend on public transit as their major or sole means of transportation: the young, the old, people with disabilities, and families of modest means.

The transportation financing problem is equally problematic on the highway side. MassDOT's Highway Division borrows $145 million a year to cover operating costs, a clearly unsustainable practice. It also has an unfunded backlog of about $4 billion for state of good repair for our roads and bridges throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, the issue of an underfunded Chapter 90 program must be addressed, along with the need to better support regional transit authorities across the Commonwealth.

Bicycling in Cambridge has been on the rise, tripling in the last ten years. And the launch of Hubway in the Boston area has already had a profound impact on the way people view bicycling as a natural companion to transit and the most cost effective way to increase mobility in our cities and reduce reliance on automobiles. This highlights the poor condition of our region's bicycle pathway network, such as the Paul Dudley White path along both sides of the Charles River, including the Memorial Drive Phase II project that is fully designed but has been left unfunded for years. Additional investment is needed to expand this network, filling in missing links and adding new capacity through projects such as the proposed Somerville Community Path extension to NorthPoint, Grand Junction path, and the Inlet Pedestrian Bridge at the Museum of Science.

There are very strong public policies in place to support smart investment in transportation. MassDOT announced a new goal of tripling the number of trips taken by walking, bicycling, and transit over the next 18 years. The 2012 Boston Regional Transportation Plan includes the goal of increasing the public transportation mode share and reducing reliance on automobiles. Cambridge's policies amplify these policies: Cambridge's Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance, adopted by the City Council in 1992,

and the City of Cambridge Growth Policy supports regional improvements that would allow more people to use transit instead of driving.

MassDOT and municipalities should also focus on low cost opportunities to increase the desirability, capacity, and safety of walking and biking by, for example, reprioritizing roadway space, retiming signals to prioritize pedestrians and adding bicycle facilities to roadways during routine repaving projects. As part of the Boston University and Anderson Bridge reconstruction projects, MassDOT is introducing bicycle lanes at no additional incremental cost and minimal impact on drivers.

In 2013, the conversation about how to adequately fund a long-term sustainable transportation system in the Commonwealth will begin in earnest. The City of Cambridge appreciates MassDOT's effort to honestly present to the public the extent of the current problem and supports the Agency's recommendation for funding that supports a world-class transportation system worthy of the 21st century. It is absolutely essential that new revenue sources be identified and a comprehensive plan developed.

Please contact Jeff Rosenblum in our Community Development Department with any questions you might have at (617) 349-4615. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager