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**Senate Passes Bill to Invest in Massachusetts Transportation**

*Legislation authorizes more than \$16 billion to accelerate transportation projects statewide*

BOSTON (07/17/2020) -- The Massachusetts State Senate on Thursday, July 16, 2020, passed legislation to jumpstart investment in transportation infrastructure and make the Commonwealth's transportation system more reliable and accessible to residents.

When asked about the bill's passage, Senator Gobi had this to say, "Our Main Street businesses cannot be successful if customers can't get to them safely, commerce can't be conducted on unmaintained roads, and emergency vehicles need to be able to travel over our roads and bridges. This bond bill helps to make the necessary investments in our infrastructure, while also assisting our towns on some of their critical projects."

The bill, *An Act Authorizing and Accelerating Transportation Investment*, authorizes more than \$16 billion in bonds for a wide variety of infrastructure projects, including both upkeep and maintenance, as well as modernization. In addition to addressing issues such as construction, regional initiatives, traffic congestion, and transportation network company data sharing, this legislation addresses equity in the transportation system by requiring a low-income fare program which will provide discounted transit fares to qualifying riders on MBTA transportation and commuter rail, starting on Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

Senator Gobi was successful in securing five separate amendments to the bill, amounting to \$5.25 million in bond authorizations for the district. The projects advocated for are listed here:

- \$500,000 for costs associated with repairs of the Old Belchertown Road bridge in the town of Ware
- \$1,000,000 for costs associated with the survey, engineered design and construction of roadway and infrastructure improvements along Gay Road in the town of Brookfield
- \$750,000 for costs associated with repair of the Mad Brook Road and Horse Pond Brook Bridge in the town of North Brookfield
- \$1,000,000 for costs associated with the replacement of corrugated metal pipes along Old Ashby Road Bridge in the town of Ashburnham
- \$2,000,000 for costs associated with the replacement of the Pinedale Avenue Bridge in the towns of Athol and Orange

The full breakdown of the over \$17B billion dollars in bond authorizations included in the bill is as follows:

- \$5.6B for federally aided highways
- \$2B for non-federally aided highways
- \$150M for the pavement improvement program
- \$90M for the municipal bridge program
- \$50M for the local bottleneck reduction program
- \$100M for the municipal pavement program
- \$50M for the complete streets program
- \$50M for the bus transit infrastructure partnership
- \$1.25B for the next generation bridge program
- \$400M for the rail and transit access program
- \$330M for regional transit authorities
- \$60M for the transit mobility assistance program
- \$3.43B for the MBTA
- \$300M for a direct capital transfer to the MBTA
- \$250M for rail improvements
- \$89M for aeronautics safety and modernization
- \$475M for multi-modal transportation planning and implementation
- \$250M for the Allston multi-modal project
- \$50M for transportation information technology
- \$20M for a public realm improvement program in response to COVID-19
- \$75M for electric vehicle grants for municipalities and regional transit authorities
- \$574M for local and regional transportation projects
- \$30M for water ferry grants

The bill represents an important step in reducing traffic congestion, and tasks the Department of Transportation with collecting new information and creating expert-driven plans to respond to the issue. These include seeking federal approval to join the Value Pricing Pilot Program, which provides state agencies with options to manage congestion.

To further aid the Department in reducing congestion, the bill establishes a special commission on roadway and congestion pricing, which would also investigate and recommend options for regionally equitable roadway pricing mechanisms. Additionally, the bill allows public authorities to more clearly include time as a factor in evaluating private bids for construction projects. The Department is required to conduct a study examining the potential of mileage-based revenue-collection as an alternative to the current system of toll roads.

In a move that will give regions better control over their transportation infrastructure, the bill allows cities and towns, upon local acceptance by local government and local voters at the ballot, to utilize certain revenue sources for transportation-related projects within the municipality or region. These regional ballot initiatives are utilized across the county to allow cities and towns to raise money locally to invest in local transportation projects.

At the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, two new offices are created by the bill: An Office of Bus Transformation and an Office of Rail Enhancement. Each office would be dedicated to improving the productivity, equity and environmental sustainability of its respective system. The Department is given new authorities in establishing speed limits in construction zones and in using blue lights to mark construction activities, where permitted by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles. Furthermore, the Department would be authorized to enter fixed-price job order contracts with a contractor for the contractor's performance of a specific construction project.

The bill addresses the growth of transportation network companies, and the public's need to be informed. It requires that such companies submit monthly reports to the Transportation Network Companies Division of the Department of Public Utilities. That division is then required to make an annual report, publicly available on its website, posting the total number of rides provided by all transportation network companies, as well as the cities and town in which those rides originated and terminated, and average miles and minutes of rides which terminated in a different town than they originated. The bill would also establish regulations for scooters and e-bikes.

The bill also defines and regulates the amounts of fines for a several transportation-related activities. Penalties are defined for improper use of a designated bus lane, for railroads who fail to provide timely and sufficient flaggers, speeding in an active construction zone, nonpayment of citations, and failure to move a vehicle involved in a crash from a travel lane on a public way. Passengers who fail to pay or prepay fares would be subject to less punitive punishment and arrest for fare evasion on the MBTA transit system would be prohibited.

The bill must now be reconciled with legislation previously passed the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

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