



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 14, 2024

Media Contact:

Greg Turner, Ball Consulting Group, LLC

Phone: 617-243-9950; Email: greg@ballcg.com

Report Calls for Increased and More Equitable State Investment in Regional Transportation

Analysis of Funding Landscape Finds Communities Outside Greater Boston Contribute Higher Percentage to Transit, and Rural Areas Are Underserved

WORCESTER, Mass. – Regional public transit plays a vital role in communities across Massachusetts, but the current funding approach is fragmented, unfair to those living in rural areas, and unable to fully meet the needs of residents statewide, according to a [report](#) released today by [The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts](#) and the [Quaboag Connector](#).

Research support was provided by the [Center for State Policy Analysis at Tufts University](#), which examined the operational funding landscape for regional transportation providers, including the “patchwork” of 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) that offer fixed-route and on-demand bus and shuttle service to millions of residents living outside of Greater Boston, which is served by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA).

Regional public transit connects people to jobs, health care, education and many other daily activities and is a lifeline to those who cannot afford a car, choose not to own one, or cannot drive.

The report found that the funding mechanism for RTAs lacks transparency, is overly reliant on local contributions relative to the MBTA, and does not adequately account for issues of regional, rural or economic equity. A sustainable funding model is necessary to improve the efficacy and fairness of the transit system as a whole and to fill gaps in the current system.

“We must do more to eliminate transportation deserts and to ensure that urban and rural regions alike have access to public transit, not only within each region but across a more connected system across the state,” said Dr. Amie Shei, President and CEO of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. “Transportation is a public good, and we must invest in it today so we can achieve the Commonwealth’s climate, economic development, health and housing goals of tomorrow.”

RTAs are more reliant on local contributions from the communities they serve than the MBTA system – about 20 percent versus just 8 percent to cover operating expenses. Setting aside any federal dollars, the gap is even wider, with 32 percent of the RTA system funded by local contributions versus 12 percent of the MBTA. In rural parts of the state, where the tax base is limited, these contributions amount to a significant financial burden for local municipalities and taxpayers.

The study was commissioned by the Quaboag Connector, a micro-transit initiative serving 10 rural communities west of Worcester and funded through a Synergy Initiative grant from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. The Quaboag Connector is led by the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation and the Town of Ware, and it has provided over 66,000 rides over the past several years, serving as a lifeline for local residents.

“Where residents live in Massachusetts should not determine their mobility or access to opportunity,” said Melissa Fales, Executive Director of the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation. “This report underscores the critical need to incentivize connectivity across RTA service areas, particularly in rural areas, and to identify dedicated funding streams to support independent micro-transit efforts that are working to fill gaps across the Commonwealth.”

Advocates for transportation equity have called for increased state funding to support RTA operating expenses. “Providing accessible, affordable transportation to rural communities can have transformative impacts on community health, but there is currently no funding mechanism that incentivizes large scale development of these programs or supports them sustainably in the long run,” said Jen Healy, Quaboag Connector Program Manager.

The report noted that in addition to more funding, which should be based on publicly shared principles and stable funding over time, the distribution of funding across the RTA network should be reassessed, along with the incentives to expand service by RTAs or independent transit providers to underserved populations.

“Given how important regional transit is for mobility and economic opportunity around the state, there’s tremendous value in thinking about how best to support RTAs and other innovative players,” said Evan Horowitz, Executive Director of the Center for State Policy Analysis. “The funding-by-inertia process we’ve got really isn’t up to the task.”

“This report highlights the need for sustainable funding for regional transit and robust coordinated planning to better provide transportation options for residents, particularly in rural areas,” said Pete Wilson, Senior Policy Director, Transportation for Massachusetts, a statewide coalition focused on improving Massachusetts’ transportation systems. “Implementing the recommendations of this report will increase regional equity and sustainability for access to public transportation for all residents.”

The report, titled “Regional Transit in Massachusetts: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go,” is available online at www.RideConnector.org/report.

About The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts

The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts is dedicated to improving the health of those who live or work in Central Massachusetts, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations and unmet needs. Through its unique and impactful approach to grantmaking, the Health

Foundation supports community-identified health issues, with health defined broadly to include social determinants of health and with a focus on promoting health equity. As a health conversion foundation launched in 1999 following the sale of the not-for-profit HMO Central Massachusetts Health Care Inc., the Health Foundation's grants have totaled over \$56 million to more than 230 unique organizations over its history. For more information, visit www.thfcm.org.

About the Quaboag Connector

Established in 2017, the Quaboag Connector is an affordable, demand-response shuttle service operated by the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation in partnership with the Town of Ware. The Quaboag Connector serves 10 towns in the Quaboag Valley of Central and Western Massachusetts. Since its inception, the Quaboag Connector has been informed by ongoing community input, and it has grown and evolved to meet community needs and bridge gaps in public transportation options, expanding mobility for seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, and people in need of rides to jobs and medical appointments through partnerships with local municipalities, RTAs, health care providers, and employers. For more information, visit www.rideconnector.org.

###