



The Baker-Polito Watch (formerly The Baker Dossier)

Documenting the Baker-Polito Administration's Leadership and Management Failures

September 10, 2019

Transportation: No Vision and No Plan for Remediating Traffic Congestion or Unreliable Public Transportation

The Massachusetts transportation system, including roads, bridges, subways, trains, buses, and ferries, is deteriorating rapidly and is already inadequate to serve our growing economy. Perhaps most notably, **traffic congestion is growing and public transportation is failing in greater Boston.** Boston's transportation system is so strained and close to capacity that if any one of its delicate threads breaks, the repercussions are felt throughout the system, particularly by commuters. **The Baker-Polito Administration's response has lacked any sense of urgency and it continues to insist that no new revenue is needed to address transportation issues.** Although it has developed some grand plans to deal with various issues, it has no plan for how to fund those changes. Overall, **the Baker-Polito Administration has no serious plan for remediating traffic congestion or significantly improving public transportation.** (Singh, A. 8/16/19, "Dukakis: Baker has no 'serious plan for dealing with congestion'," Boston Public Radio; Abraham, Y., 6/15/19, "Seeing red over transit," The Boston Globe; Widmer, M., 6/12/19, "Where's Bakers' sense of urgency on the T?" Commonwealth Magazine)

A. Traffic Congestion in Greater Boston harms the Commonwealth's economy

- 1. The INRIX 2018 Global Traffic Scorecard rated Boston as having the worst congestion in the U.S.** (and the eighth worst among over 200 cities in the world). On average, Boston drivers lost 164 hours to traffic congestion over the year, which costs the Massachusetts economy over a billion dollars. For example, during a typical commute into Boston from the south on Interstate 93, the average speed is 10.3 miles per hour. Because the roads and mass transit are operating near or above capacity, if just 100 more cars join the morning commute into Boston from the south (e.g., if there's a known problem on the Red Line), the average speed would drop to 8.8 miles per hour, increasing commute time by 15%. (INRIX, retrieved from the Internet on 6/23/19, INRIX 2018 Global Traffic Scorecard; Leung, S., 6/14/19, "Attention, I-93 drivers: T's troubles could snarl commute," The Boston Globe; Teitell, B., 5/21/19, "Bumper-to-out-of-nowhere-bumper," The Boston Globe)
- 2. Massachusetts commuters are paying an economic and emotional price for traffic congestion and unreliable public transportation, according to a poll by the MassINC Polling Group.** The unpredictability of commuting times is causing stress for commuters,

forcing them to change their daily routines and schedules, thereby wasting their time both when the commute is slow and when it's not. The statewide poll of registered voters finds that two-thirds feel a need for urgent action, including raising new funds to pay for transportation infrastructure. Two-thirds of respondents said they were altering their travel schedules to try to avoid the worst traffic and 63% said they have felt stressed, angry, or frustrated by their commutes. Over half of full-time employees reported that they had been late to work in the past few months due to commuting issues, including 63% of public transit commuters. Thirty percent of full-time employees said they were considering changing jobs to improve their commute and 23% said they were considering moving out of the area. Many businesses are changing their scheduling practices due to the unpredictability of commuting times. **All of this is causing business leaders to view major transportation policy initiatives as a top priority because transportation challenges are hurting economic competitiveness.** (MassINC Polling Group, 4/24/19, "Poll: Massachusetts voters feeling strain from transportation challenges, support policy changes including new funding"; Teitell, B., 5/21/19, "Bumper-to-out-of-nowhere-bumper," The Boston Globe)

3. **In August 2019, the Baker-Polito Administration released a long-awaited, 157-page report on traffic congestion in the Boston area.** Its findings surprised no one: congestion is bad and getting worse and a small disruption can lead to major delays because the roads are operating so close to capacity. **The highlighted solution, among others, was to add tolled lanes to congested highways for commuters who are willing and able to pay (some call them "Lexus lanes").** These lanes could be used by buses and van pools too. A business-backed group **criticized the plans as making insufficient use of public transportation** and a transportation coalition **criticized them for proposing building new lanes on congested highways, which will increase driving and air pollution.** The report spent a whole chapter refuting the use of congestion pricing, which transportation experts identify as a key solution. **Transportation experts also noted that it's time to stop talking and planning and to execute projects that will make a real difference.** (Keith, D., 8/12/19, "Mass. needs congestion pricing now," The Boston Globe; Abraham, Y., 8/10/19, "Charlie Baker's traffic report offers hope to North Shore commuters," The Boston Globe; Browning, K., 8/9/19, "Baker pitches solutions for easing traffic," The Boston Globe; Metzger, A., 8/8/19, "For complex traffic problem, Baker offers smorgasbord," Commonwealth Magazine)
4. **Congestion pricing is viewed by urban planners, academics, and mass transit advocates as one of the best ways to tackle congestion. Nonetheless, although Boston has the worst traffic congestion in the country, Governor Baker last year vetoed a pilot congestion pricing program and has continued to reject congestion pricing, despite the growing and broad frustration with the serious transportation problems in greater Boston.** The Baker-Polito Administration continues to oppose congestion pricing (i.e., "smart tolling") despite support for it by a great majority of voters. And the revenue generated could be used to improve mass transit, furthering the goal of getting cars off the roads. Of the 10 largest cities in the U.S., Boston is the only one that doesn't have some sort of time-of-day or traffic-load toll pricing. London implemented congestion pricing in 2003 and has seen very positive results. New York City appears poised to implement congestion pricing. Business and environmental groups in Massachusetts have come together to form the Transportation and Climate Initiative and one of its recommendations is smart tolling. In New York City, a coalition of over 100 business associations, labor groups, and developers, as well as environmental justice, social justice, and anti-poverty organizations,

have come together to call for congestion pricing. (Keith, D., 8/12/19, “Mass. needs congestion pricing now,” The Boston Globe; Chesto, J., 6/22/19, “Environmental, business groups on same page,” The Boston Globe; Sifuentes, N., 4/9/19, “How New York got congestion pricing, and why Boston should be next,” The Boston Globe; The Associated Press, 4/3/19, “New York City drivers will soon have to pay for the privilege of sitting in traffic,” USA Today; Salzberg, A., 11/28/18, “Congestion pricing is the best way out of our transit mess,” The Boston Globe)

B. Public Transportation: The MBTA’s Subways, Buses, and Commuter Rail are unreliable and service capacity and frequency are insufficient

1. **The Baker-Polito Administration insists that public transportation does not need new funding, other than a 6% fare increase that occurred on July 1, 2019.** Baker asserted in June 2019 that “we’re headed in the right direction” on fixing the MBTA, despite multiple recent derailments and shutdowns due to electrical, bridge, and other problems. **Our public transit system has an acknowledged backlog of repairs of at least \$10 billion, but the Baker-Polito Administration’s plan doesn’t eliminate this backlog until 2032!** Perhaps no other single statistic indicates as clearly the dreadful state of repair of the MBTA and the danger that this represents, not just to commute times but to passengers’ safety, as the fact that **there have been over 45 derailments since the Baker-Polito Administration took office 5 years ago.** This is the second highest number for any metropolitan mass transit system in the country!

a) **The chorus of voices calling on the Baker-Polito Administration to show some leadership and acknowledge the need for new revenue for our public transportation system is growing.** The \$50 million of emergency funding the Baker-Polito Administration announced in late June 2019 is only another band-aid and a public relations stunt. **Once again, this Administration throws a little money at the MBTA and, to great fanfare, claims it’s solved a problem that everyone knows is much larger.** Business leaders (e.g., the CEOs of Kendall Square businesses, the business group A Better City, and the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce), political leaders (e.g., House Speaker DeLeo and Boston Mayor Walsh), transportation advocates and experts (e.g., Chris Dempsey of Transportation for Massachusetts and Jim Aloisi, a former MA Secretary of Transportation), and even two MBTA Board members appointed by Governor Baker (Monica Tibbits-Nutt and Brian Lang) are all saying new revenue is needed to have a reliable, safe transit system. **In addition to asserting that new revenue is not needed, the Baker-Polito Administration has opposed specific proposals to provide new revenue such as indexing the gasoline tax to inflation, implementing congestion pricing (“smart tolls”) on highways, and imposing a sales tax on Uber and Lyft rides.** (Editorial, 7/8/19, “The T has to get better faster,” The Boston Globe; Leung, S., 7/3/19, “For employers, T means trouble,” The Boston Globe; Stout, M., 6/26/19, “Baker calls for a \$50m boost to T,” The Boston Globe; Jonas, M., 6/26/19, “Will Baker get on the T revenue train?” CommonWealth Magazine; Chesto, J., 6/25/19, “End T’s ‘state of emergency,’ business group says,” The Boston Globe; Metzger, A., 6/25/19, “DeLeo ups T ante, pledges long-term fix,”

CommonWealth Magazine; Aloisi, J., 6/22/19, “Baker must step up on transportation crisis,” CommonWealth Magazine; Hilliard, J., Kilgannon, M., & Browning, K., 6/17/19, “Calls grow for major upgrades of MBTA,” The Boston Globe; Vaccaro, A., 3/18/19, “As T fares go up, so does pressure on Beacon Hill,” The Boston Globe; Vaccaro, A., 3/10/19, “Report: Funding is the T’s long-term challenge,” The Boston Globe)

b) **Realistically, public transportation users are years away from seeing any meaningful improvement in the frequency or reliability of service.** The new revenue needed to make a transformative investment in mass transit is not yet on the horizon. **The Baker-Polito Administration acknowledges that even its insufficient plan to eliminate the MBTA’s repair backlog by 2032 is behind schedule and that the MBTA lacks the capacity to move quickly to catch up.** It claims the target date for completion will nonetheless be met, despite its failure to identify funding for the increased spending needed. To add insult to injury, **Governor Baker refuses to ride on our public transportation system and refused to postpone the July 1, 2019, fare increase, despite on-going problems with MBTA service.** (Editorial, 7/8/19, “The T has to get better faster,” The Boston Globe; Vennoch, J., 6/18/19, “Wanted for the T: more urgency and empathy from Baker,” The Boston Globe; Leung, S., 6/14/19, “Attention, I-93 drivers: T’s troubles could snarl commute,” The Boston Globe; Editorial, 6/13/19, “Going off the rails on Charlie Baker’s train,” The Boston Globe; Stout, M., 6/13/19, “Baker says T making progress; critics not so sure,” The Boston Globe; Vaccaro, A., 5/7/19, “T’s spending on repairs lags, but goal seen reachable,” The Boston Globe)

2. **Despite the Baker-Polito Administration’s insistence that public transportation is improving and that it has been a good steward of the system for the past 5 years, major problems continue to occur on a routine basis.** In August, for example, a fire on the Orange Line tracks caused a service suspension, a problem on the Green Line required buses to be used between North Station and Lechmere, a Green Line trolley derailed on the Riverside branch (the fourth Green Line derailment this year), and three of four commuter train lines out of North Station experienced cancellations and severe delays during the evening commute on the same day due to two separate problems. Perhaps the most serious problem in July was the power outage on the Blue Line that shut it down during the morning commute. The most notorious of all the recent problems is the June 11 derailment on the Red Line that badly damaged the signaling system and is expected to result in four months of delays as the antiquated system is painstakingly repaired. **The MBTA’s own chief engineer noted that the lesson to be learned from all of this is that the state needs to stop deferring maintenance** on the MBTA’s infrastructure. The Baker-Polito Administration identified the need to replace the aging signaling system in 2015, but it took three years to award a contract and then it is expected to take another three years for the system to be installed for the Red Line in 2021. (McDonald, D., & Lovato, M., 8/30/19, “T trains halted by drill, bridge,” The Boston Globe; Leung, S., 8/13/19, “No easy way to get

Red Line's signals straight," The Boston Globe)

- C. **The Baker-Polito Administration created a commission to develop a blueprint for addressing transportation issues.** It recommended the four steps below to tackle growing congestion, pollution, and decrepit infrastructure. However, it **appears to have no implementation plan or sense of urgency in working toward these goals** developed by its own commission. Notably, it **HAS NOT IDENTIFIED THE FUNDING NEEDED FOR THE FOLLOWING PLANS:**
1. **Improve public transportation with the explicit goal of reducing the number of cars on the roads.** However, the lack of frequent service and poor reliability make it extremely hard to get people to give up their cars and take public transportation. (See Section B on public transportation below for more information.)
 2. **Phase out the use of gas-powered personal vehicles by 2040.**
 3. **Implement congestion pricing or tolls on traffic headed into Boston** during peak times of day. (See item 7 below on congestion pricing for more information.)
 4. **Implement a cap and trade system for carbon pollution**, where multiple states would cap the amount of carbon that could be released by transportation sources and auction off the right to release carbon. The revenue generated would be used to invest in further carbon release reduction. (Governor Baker reports he has held very positive discussions with other Governors about a regional cap and trade system.) (Vaccaro, A., 12/15/18, "A vision to get around future traffic," The Boston Globe; Vaccaro, A., 2/22/19, "Report cites lack in transportation funds," The Boston Globe)
- D. **The Baker-Polito Administration's [2019-2023 Capital Investment Plan for transportation](#) will spend only \$17.3 billion over the next 5 years.** About half of that will go to repair existing aged infrastructure, about 30% for roadway reconstruction and upgrades to the MBTA's Red and Orange lines, roughly 10% for the extension of the Green line to Somerville and Medford, and only about 4% for transportation improvement projects statewide. **This funding is simply insufficient, as exemplified by a LACK OF FUNDING FOR THE FOLLOWING STATED GOALS:**
1. **Reducing the number of structurally deficient bridges from 462 to 300.**
 2. **Making over 100 rail and subway stations and thousands of bus stops handicapped accessible** (estimated cost of \$2 billion).
 3. **Obtaining new cars for the Green Line** (estimated cost of \$1.3 billion).
 4. **Addressing the bottleneck that South Station in Boston presents to thousands of daily commuters.** (Dempsey, C., & Baxandall, P., 10/28/18, "Coming up short on transportation," The MetroWest Daily News)
- E. **The Baker-Polito Administration announced in July 2019 an \$18 billion, 10-year bond-funded plan to address a wide range of transportation issues.** It includes \$10.1 billion for road and bridge projects, \$5.7 billion for the MBTA, \$330 million for Regional Transit Authorities, and \$50 million to help municipalities improve traffic bottlenecks. **Although**

acknowledged as an important step forward, the plan was criticized for leaving many significant transportation issues unaddressed and for failing to identify the revenue to pay for important needs. Using borrowed money to address transportation needs limits what can be done and just pushes the funding issue off to the future. **This is another example of the Baker-Polito Administration taking a timid step instead of exercising leadership to address a significant challenge facing our Commonwealth.** (Leung, S., 7/30/19, “Is Baker’s \$18 billion bond bill a game changer for commuters?” The Boston Globe; Schoenberg, S., 7/25/19, “Gov. Baker proposes \$18 billion transportation bill; here’s what it would do,” MassLive; Ryan, A., 7/25/19, “Governor Baker calls for \$18b boost in transit, road funding,” The Boston Globe)

1. The bond bill adds \$2.7 billion to the money already included in MBTA’s five-year capital budget. At the press conference announcing the plan, Baker, clearly sensitive to criticism due to the problems with the MBTA, underscored the work that has already been done to upgrade the system and that buying new vehicles will add almost 100,000 seats to the system. However, 85,000 of those seats are from new Orange and Red line cars ordered several years ago, but that will not be fully in service until 2023.
2. The bond bill is, of course, funded by borrowing, which means future tax revenue will have to pay off the bonds and the interest on them. The bill does envision a new funding stream based on a regional cap-and-trade carbon pricing program that is under discussion and is expected to be finalized in 2020. It would add a carbon price to gasoline and the bond bill proposes dedicating up to half of the expected revenue to capital investments in public transportation. Baker has estimated that the revenue would be between \$150 and \$500 million, with drivers paying \$2 to \$7 per month. Given this limited funding source and Baker’s continuing refusal to implement congestion pricing (both to generate revenue for transportation and to reduce traffic congestion), the Baker-Polito Administration continued to receive criticism for its refusal to consider a tax increase or other, significant, new revenue to pay for transportation improvements.