



# Inclusive Growth and Mobility

Where and how we grow as a region and how we get around are critical choices we face. The decisions we make will result in long-term implications on travel patterns, greenhouse gas emissions, and overall quality of life. These decisions will also impact economic opportunity and the ease of making social connections and physical activity. Where we build new housing and where we locate new jobs will also impact municipal tax revenues. And who benefits from how we grow? We believe the answer is to focus growth in suitable locations, connected by reliable and affordable public transportation, while ensuring that people can stay in the neighborhoods they choose to live in. Suitable locations include city and town centers, neighborhoods served or that could be served by transportation, and in underutilized sites already served with water and wastewater. As we focus development to these locations, we must also preserve our cultural and historic assets, as well as our natural resources that provide habitat, farms, wetlands, and stormwater infiltration. This is the definition of smart growth. There must be a strong equity commitment to this growth to ensure that people can afford to live in the neighborhoods they prefer and that all feel welcome throughout our region.

## Vision

- ▶ **In 2050**, the ways we get around are reliable, adequately funded, and well maintained. Travel is safe, efficient, pleasant, and affordable to all households regardless of income. New transportation technologies and services operate on our roads, underground, and on the water. These new travel options help to alleviate congestion and pollution, rather than adding to it. Public transit and shared trips are often more convenient and affordable than solo trips. Auto congestion still exists, but it is predictable and avoidable. People with mobility limitations and those without a car can get around easily and can afford to do so. Low-income residents and residents of color enjoy high quality transit to more parts of the region, improving access to opportunity. People –of all ages walk or bike more frequently for short trips, because conditions make that option safe and enjoyable. The transportation system has a minimal impact on the local and global environment, with reduced pollution and runoff, and less land set aside for roadways and parking.
- ▶ **In 2050**, our air is pure, indoors and out. Our cities and towns are healthy, with beautiful parks and natural areas accessible to all. And our cities are quieter, with less polluting and more efficient transportation technologies. Contaminated sites are cleaned up and turned to new uses. There is less waste. Unavoidable waste produces energy, fertilizes soil, or is reprocessed. We have enough fresh water from our wells, streams, and reservoirs to meet

the needs of people and wildlife. Our farms and fisheries produce plentiful and healthy yields, and sustainable. Habitats, forest, wetlands, and other natural resources are protected and enhanced.

- **In 2050**, residents and visitors of all backgrounds enjoy a wide variety of historical, cultural, recreational, and artistic experiences. Public art, cultural institutions, and social activities reflect our region's diversity. Residents of all ages, abilities, and incomes have opportunities for creative expression and art education. Public and private funding makes art more accessible to a broader audience. Public programming and urban design encourage opportunities for social and cultural experiences and walkability, building social connections and cohesion. New development complements and enhances existing city and town centers. Historic buildings and cultural landscapes that are important for understanding our region's people and cultures are protected or adapted to contemporary needs.

### How we got here

From our earliest cow paths to the streetcar suburbs of the 19th century, Greater Boston's urbanization radiated out from the core cities in the hub and spoke pattern, now so readily recognizable as our transit and road maps show. With the advent of the automobile and the post-war boom in the mid 20th century, Metropolitan Boston rapidly suburbanized creating the development pattern that defines us to this day. Part of the post-war boom was driven by White flight from the central cities, facilitated by the construction of highways and federal policies that opened up access to suburban homeownership to many, but not all. Richard Rothstein and others have demonstrated the racist bias of many of the federal and local housing policies that intentionally excluded Black and other ethnic minorities from benefiting from these programs. We are living today with the results of this intentional exclusion, demonstrated by disparities in wealth and homeownership between Black and White households and the highly segregated regional distribution by race.

Our transportation system developed in response to the demands driven by land use location decisions. In the early 20th century, Boston launched the nation's first subway (barely beating New York City). Public transportation consisted of subways, trolleys, and regional rail. And many walked to jobs and other nearby destinations. During the suburbanization of the past century, private vehicle ownership skyrocketed to serve the dispersed homes across the region. Highways were built, parking lots expanded, and the slow disinvestment in public transportation began. Ring development along Route 128, then 495, and the construction of the Turnpike and I-93 facilitated the movement away from the Inner Core cities. While the personal auto provided convenience and privacy, it also fueled air pollution, congestion, and the need to convert thousands of acres to roads, parking lots, and other infrastructure needed to support this travel preference. Road and bridge construction and maintenance took precedence over investments in public transportation.

Our development patterns have also converted thousands of acres of habitat, farm, and wetlands to building sites, roads, and parking. In addition to the ecosystem disruption and environmental degradation, we've built some neighborhoods with no publicly accessible open- or recreational space. Historic and cultural spaces and buildings have been lost or encroached on by new, incompatible development.

In the last couple decades, Metro Boston's downtowns have experienced a rediscovery. People returned to the city seeking the benefits of urban living, reversing decades of population loss. The cities in the Inner Core, particularly, experienced strong population and employment growth. This growth has led to a construction boom, especially in multifamily residential developments, that in recent years has spread to suburbs beyond the central cities. This urban renaissance has stabilized city finances and reinvigorated neighborhoods and business districts, but the benefits have not been evenly shared nor have the burdens. Once affordable neighborhoods and towns have become out of reach for even the middle class. As rents and home prices reach historic highs, existing residents and artists are increasingly no longer able to afford to stay in their communities. This is hitting low-income and many BIPOC communities especially hard. Senior on fixed incomes are also increasingly vulnerable to housing instability. And for many renters, homeownership in a growing number of communities is simply impossible.

### Challenges

This is a uniquely challenging time to assess the state of our transportation system as we come out of a devastating pandemic that bottomed out ridership (and fares) on public transportation, saw huge numbers of employees and students working from home. Recent and emerging innovations in technology such as hybrid and electric vehicles, transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft, and micromobility offerings such as bike and scooter share also continue to shape the future of transportation. Building back our public transportation system, aligning land use decisions with transportation investments, and planning on how to incorporate new transportation technologies into our region are the major challenges ahead.

We know that relying on fossil fuels to power our trains, cars, and trucks will not allow us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the state-mandated levels. We also know that relying on personal vehicles cannot be the long-term solution as there is simply not room on our roadways for everyone to drive. The vast majority of growth over the past ½ century has been auto-oriented as called for by local zoning requirements such as large minimum lot sizes, off-street parking requirements, and other regulations reinforcing the centrality of the personal auto. Free and convenient parking, public subsidies in road construction and maintenance, and low fuel prices and taxes facilitate the choice to drive for many of our residents and workers.

While our public transportation system has “good bones” and in recent years has focused on improving the management practices and “state of good repair” of the fleets, the current operations of the MBTA and the regional transit agencies are insufficient to meeting the goals of a reliable, affordable, and equitable transportation system. Infrequent service, limited hours of operation, service disruptions, and steady fare hikes are common challenges to creating a more robust and appealing public transportation system. The “hub and spoke” model serves those commuting into Boston, but makes for long or impossible journeys to destinations between the “spokes”. Some neighborhoods are underserved by transit options, especially some of those home to BIPOC communities. We have found that Black bus riders spend 64 more hours per year commuting than White riders (MAPC Regional Indicators, 2014). And good public options in lower density suburban locations, and more frequent and affordable

service for seniors and those with mobility issues. These shortcomings also contribute to people deciding to drive when that is a viable option.

With limited exceptions, land use planning and regulation is divorced from transportation planning and investments in Metro Boston. Transit agencies do transit and municipalities oversee zoning and the other regulations that govern land use policy. This disconnect results in new development being located in places that cannot be served by public transportation and, in some cases, new development located next to transit service that is either already at capacity or too infrequent to support ridership. The type and design of development located close to transit also determines if the new residents or workers will be transit riders. We have found that residents of higher-price apartments and condos with ample parking are more likely to drive than to take transit. Over the past decade, we have seen many more developments built close to transit station, known as transit-oriented development. The new Housing Choice provision in state law that requires multifamily housing districts close to station areas for more than ½ the municipalities in Massachusetts should provide an opportunity to better integrate land use and transportation planning, but all stakeholders need to be part of that conversation in order to deliver on the promise of more integrated and successful development.

How can we raise the funds necessary to invest in the public amenities and goods that our region needs to thrive? Public transportation and art, affordable housing, and open space all have significant funding needs, but exactions on private developments can only be asked up to a certain level before a development proposal no longer makes financial sense. On the public revenue side, tax increases are rarely popular. Each of the identified needs for greater investment has its own constituents and movement behind it. Is it possible to forge competing interests into a broad-based coalition, similar to the cooperation of open space, housing, and historic preservation allies in passing the Community Preservation Act?

Where and how we grow and travel will, in large part, determine if we can meet our goals for climate, public health, and equity. The challenges we confront are many and include political, financial, legal, and cultural obstacles that have to be overcome.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations focus on investing and expanding our public and active transportation systems, in order to support more affordable, reliable, and safer connections to jobs and homes. Reinforcing this direction, is the need for new development to be steered to places with access to public transportation and the infrastructure to support new growth. And away from critical natural and cultural resources that can be replaced. In new and existing neighborhoods, greater attention to the public realm is called for. This includes better access to parks and open space, support for public art, artists, and historic preservation, and human-scaled design.