

August 5, 2011

The Honorable Scott P. Brown  
United States Senator  
2400 JFK Federal Building  
Boston MA 02203

Dear Senator Brown:

As concerned Massachusetts citizens and taxpayers, we write in response to your letter to Governor Patrick yesterday, which expressed “serious concern” about the possibility that the Commonwealth would raise the “gas tax as part of a combination of proposals to address transportation funding.” Massachusetts faces a transportation funding crisis – the Commonwealth is falling behind by hundreds of millions of dollars every year in investments we should be making to maintain, preserve and upgrade our roads, bridges and transit systems. We applaud Governor Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Murray for their courage in raising the issue and urge you – and other elected officials – to remain open-minded about the best way to ensure that Massachusetts has the resources needed to invest in our transportation infrastructure, an essential engine of the state’s economy.

Your statement that “Massachusetts motorists already pay a higher gas tax than the national average” is simply incorrect. Massachusetts currently levies a 21 cents/gallon (cpg) tax on gasoline, which was last increased on January 1, 1991. When other state taxes applicable to Massachusetts and the federal gasoline tax of 18.4 cents/gallon are included, Massachusetts motorists pay 41.9 cents/gallon in combined local, state and federal taxes. A report produced by Ernst and Young for the Urban Land Institute<sup>1</sup> and issued in May surveyed all local and state gasoline taxes nationwide and found that the national average is 48.1 cents/gallon, about 15% above the Massachusetts rates. Gas taxes are much higher in neighboring states such as Rhode Island (51.4 cpg), New York (65.6 cpg) and Connecticut (63.6 cpg). Our gas taxes are closer to those in states like Louisiana, West Virginia and Missouri than those in states such as California and Illinois, which are our economic competitors for both talent and jobs and which have chosen to levy higher gas taxes in order invest in their transportation infrastructure and economy.

We do not endorse the gasoline tax or any particular revenue option at this time but we do believe that the time is long since past for a serious policy conversation on how Massachusetts can find the revenue needed to invest in our aging transportation infrastructure.

We are also disappointed that your letter failed to demonstrate equal concern for transit users as for motorists. The owner of a car driven 12,000 miles per year which gets 25 miles/gallon and therefore uses 480 gallons of gas per year would pay \$72 annually if the gas tax were increased 15 cents/gallon. But MBTA riders are facing what may end up being steep fare hikes – an increase of 25 cents per bus or subway ride or \$10 for the monthly bus and subway pass would cost each transit user more than \$100 annually. If Massachusetts is to have the transportation system that we all want and need, all users and taxpayers are going to have to make at least a modest financial contribution toward preserving, maintaining and improving that system.

Indeed, one of the best ways to moderate the financial impact of new transportation revenue sources on Massachusetts taxpayers would be to ensure that the federal government remains an important partner in supporting investment in roads, bridges and transit. If you share our concern with investing in the transportation system in order to help grow Massachusetts’ economy, you can help by supporting

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<sup>1</sup> *Infrastructure 2001: A Strategic Priority*, available at [http://www.uli.org/sitecore/content/ULI2Home/ResearchAndPublications/PolicyPracticePriorityAreas/Infrastructure/~/\\_media/Documents/ResearchAndPublications/Reports/Infrastructure/Infrastructure2011.ashx](http://www.uli.org/sitecore/content/ULI2Home/ResearchAndPublications/PolicyPracticePriorityAreas/Infrastructure/~/_media/Documents/ResearchAndPublications/Reports/Infrastructure/Infrastructure2011.ashx)

reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program at current levels. As you undoubtedly know, the House of Representatives has proposed a plan that would slash federal transportation money to states by as much as 30 percent, possibly reducing Massachusetts' share of highway funds by as much as \$170 million.

In conclusion, we hope that you share our belief in the importance of state and federal investment in the transportation infrastructure that is so vital to the Commonwealth and will keep an open mind about all potential revenue sources that can help to address decades of underinvestment in Massachusetts' transportation system.

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