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Mobility: The forgotten link in Mass.'s economic DNA

The Legislature is reviewing the proposed \$1 billion life sciences incentive program. In addition, Gov. Deval Patrick has placed "permit streamlining" at the top of his agenda, moving various development projects through an expedited review process. Both of these efforts are commendable and enjoy broad support. No doubt they will have a measure of the intended effect of encouraging new investment and job creation in Massachusetts.

But a critical piece of the puzzle is missing. We have not yet addressed the estimated \$16 billion to \$19 billion backlog of serious deficiencies in our existing transportation infrastructure. Driving on our regional highways shows that roadway capacity is at its limit. We are already overstressing our long-neglected "mobility" system before any new economic expansion arrives. If the investment incentives and permit streamlining measures are indeed successful, Massachusetts may well be headed toward

a permanent state of gridlock.

Many major developments are progressing without new investment in the transportation infrastructure. State environmental reviews focus only on impacts to their immediate surroundings. Regional resource impacts from new development, especially impacts on regional transportation, are largely ignored. The result: More and more segments of our regional roadway system are being reduced to a state of "stall and crawl." Ignoring these impacts makes the problem worse.



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There are many structural problems plaguing our transportation system in Massachusetts that must be addressed. The Patrick administration has taken important steps toward integrating the historically siloed system operating our trains, planes and highways with the adoption of the Mass Mobility Compact. Finally, the array of independent authorities — established at a time when they could build and operate indepen-

dently — are now all meeting and discussing a common transportation agenda under the direction of Transportation Secretary Bernard Cohen.

But much more needs to be done integrating the management and finances of these authorities if our economy is to continue expanding at the desired pace supported by the essential transportation infrastructure.

Regional transportation infrastructure impacts must become a more important consideration in our streamlined environmental review process. Regional transportation impacts from development must be assessed up front in the MEPA process, their impact to the regional roadway system identified and fair contributions to protect and enhance roadway capacity must be identified and shared. Despite limitations imposed by municipal jurisdictions, the burdens and benefits of regional developments must be addressed collectively.

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