



1 INTRODUCTION

There are 15 regional transit authorities (RTAs) operating in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, not including the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). These agencies serve a total of 262 communities and provide over 29 million trips annually. RTAs are funded through a combination of federal grants, state funds, passenger fares and other locally-raised non-fare revenues, such as advertisements. The combined operating costs of the 15 agencies are estimated at more than \$150 million annually. Funding for the RTAs, while stable, has not increased substantially over the past several years, despite increasing costs.

The environments in which RTAs operate continue to change and evolve. With each year, the population of Massachusetts and its local communities is becoming more diverse demographically and economically. The Commonwealth's population is also becoming older and there are more persons living with disabilities. These and other factors are changing the demand for public transportation systems and the types of services needed.

The combination of a constrained fiscal environment and an evolving market for transit service means that it has become increasingly important that limited resources available for public transportation are used as effectively as possible. Despite ongoing challenges, the RTAs have been diligent in their efforts to maintain existing transit services in their local communities and regions, at the same time that they work to develop new public transportation services and markets. The objective of the Beyond Boston study, therefore, was to inventory the strengths and weaknesses of the way the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and RTAs deliver public transportation services in Massachusetts and identify efficiencies and other opportunities that will support a more robust transit network that better meets the needs of the Commonwealth's residents, workers and visitors.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The Beyond Boston study followed an extensive and iterative research process that included a combination of qualitative and quantitative steps. The study was also guided by the involvement of an Advisory Committee comprised of RTA representatives as well as individuals representing a range of stakeholder groups. The Advisory Committee met eight times over the course of the nine-month project and played an active role throughout the study by providing feedback at every step of the process, reviewing study products, and shaping study findings and recommendations. The Advisory Committee also developed a statewide transit vision as part of one of its earlier meetings.

The initial research steps involved collecting and reviewing a variety of published information about the transit services operated and managed by each RTA and compiling this information into an "RTA Profile". The documents reported on a wide range of information about the RTAs including productivity statistics, funding data, capital and operating plans, service plans and contracts, agency budgets, and public information systems. The profiles were shared with the RTAs and stakeholders for comment and published on the MassDOT website so they could be reviewed by a wider audience.

Another one of the early steps in the study process was holding interviews with each of the 15 RTA administrators to collect perspectives on opportunities and challenges as well as priorities for the future of



RTA services. Non-RTA stakeholders were also interviewed as part of this effort; these interviews included individuals and organization representatives with a clear stake in public transportation services, such as transit labor unions, rider groups, senior centers, environmental advocacy groups, and human service agencies (among others). The study team also met with other state agencies to glean their perspectives on RTA services and operations. One of the key products emerging from this research was development of a series of major issues facing both the RTAs and MassDOT and the management and operation of public transportation in Massachusetts.

The RTA and stakeholder interviews, RTA profiles and Advisory Committee input eventually guided the study team to identify a series of ten initiatives that offered potential to address the major issues constraining the advancement of public transportation services in Massachusetts. These ten initiatives were researched extensively by the study team and presented to the Advisory Committee, where they were further debated and evaluated. The Advisory Committee discussion combined with detailed review by MassDOT leadership and staff ultimately led to articulating the initiatives more specifically and translating them into a series of action and implementation plans. The implementation plans lay out a framework for taking the next steps to address the main challenges and opportunities facing the RTAs and MassDOT as they seek to improve and strengthen the regional public transportation network.