



Governor Mitt Romney (center), Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey (left), and Douglas Foy, secretary of the Office of Commonwealth Development, at a transit press conference yesterday. (Globe Staff Photo / Bill Greene)

## Governor issues \$31b transit plan

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### Initiative sets blueprint for next 20 years

By Mac Daniel, Globe Staff | March 11, 2005

Governor Mitt Romney yesterday issued his transportation to-do list for the next 20 years, a \$31 billion plan that promises to spend \$1.2 billion to repair 600 of the state's worst bridges over the next five years and, for the first time, commits state money to help the MBTA expand its commuter rail and transit system.

Those expansions include a long-sought \$670 million commuter rail link between Boston, New Bedford, and Fall River and improvements to the commuter rail tracks between Boston and Worcester. The blueprint also includes \$12 billion to fix chokepoints and dangerous roads, such as the merge of Interstate 95 and Route 128 in Canton, the Interstate 93, Route 128, and I-95 interchange in Woburn, and to widen two-lane Route 2 through much of Western Massachusetts.

Romney said the plan, the most comprehensive in 30 years, is intended to move the state forward after focusing too much attention and money on the \$14.6 billion Big Dig, which buried I-93 tunnels underneath downtown Boston and connected the Massachusetts Turnpike to Logan International Airport.

"There's been a huge sucking sound coming from the tunnels in Boston," Romney said at the MBTA Silver Line's new Courthouse station in South Boston. "And that means we have to go back and maintain and repair what has long been neglected."

The plan requires no legislative approval, but the Legislature will get its say on spending any state money on additional road or transit projects within the plan. Romney is also counting on more than half of the \$31 billion coming from the federal government, though that isn't guaranteed.

Romney also conceded that the plan could be forgotten the moment he leaves office. "If some other governor follows me down the road, then so be it," he said. "But they then have a plan in place."

The largest immediate commitment by Romney is to double the state's spending on bridge repairs to \$200 million a year, with the goal of reducing the number of structurally deficient bridges in the next five years. The 403-page report (which can be viewed at [www.mass.gov/eot](http://www.mass.gov/eot)) says 214 of those to be fixed are in metropolitan Boston.

While the plan falls in line with Romney's philosophy of maintaining the existing transportation network, instead of undertaking megaprojects such as the Big Dig, state officials say the pledge to help the MBTA expand is a significant change. It's the first time since the T's current funding formula was created six years ago that the state officially recognized that the authority can't pay for expansions and still pay off its mounting debts.

Under Romney's plan, the state is promising to fund all expansion projects with federal and local help while the T

concentrates on repairing and maintaining its existing system, which the plan says will cost \$9 billion over the next two decades. Those T expansion projects include \$756 million for the third phase of the Silver Line bus service and \$314 million to extend the Blue Line to Lynn.

While some state officials said the proposal will allow the T to gain its financial footing after three consecutive budget shortfalls, others said it could mean tighter state control. State Transportation Secretary Daniel Grabauskas said the T's financing "will continue to be a collaborative process" between the state and T.

Romney said the overall \$31 billion plan would be paid for, in part, with nearly \$16 billion in federal funding. The US House passed a \$284 billion transportation bill yesterday that includes \$3.7 billion for Massachusetts in the next six years. The rest of the money would come from various state sources, including \$4.5 billion from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. He said it would create 30,000 construction jobs a year without putting the state deeper into debt.

"There will be no new massive borrowings," said Romney, who held news conferences to promote the plan in Worcester, Springfield, New Bedford, Bourne, Lowell, and South Boston.

The blueprint is the first of its kind since former governor Francis W. Sargent created a transportation plan for eastern Massachusetts nearly 30 years ago. The plan comes as Massachusetts drivers are spending more and more time stuck in traffic, as the number of vehicles on the road has jumped by 1 million to 5.4 million over the last decade, and as winter weather eats away at roads and rails, making those commutes even longer.

"No one has ever done this before," said Douglas Foy, secretary of the state Office of Commonwealth Development, who helped create the plan.

But it drew immediate skepticism from some quarters.

Senator Mark C. Montigny, a New Bedford Democrat leading the push to bring commuter rail service to New Bedford and Fall River, said the plan is unrealistic in the current political and economic environment.

"A 20-year plan sounds wonderful, and normally it is," he said. "I'm a fan of thinking long term. The problem is . . . governors often look long-term, claim due diligence, and then they move on to Neverland, and the thing never gets implemented."

Montigny said he had a past legislative commitment from former governor Jane Swift to build the New Bedford-Fall River line, a pledge scrapped when Romney took office in 2003.

"We have seen this plan before, over and over and over," Montigny said. "Most of us have been waiting for commuter rail projects . . . and we are no closer to getting it done today than we were in 1992."

Other transit advocates, however, were more hopeful.

Hathaway Fiocchi, transportation associate for the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, said the plan was the biggest pledge yet by the state to fund transit, including the three remaining projects promised to offset the environmental impact of the Big Dig. The three projects are connecting the T's Red and Blue subway lines, bringing trolley service to Jamaica Plain, and extending the Green Line to Somerville and Medford.

"The thing now is to see the plan become action," Fiocchi said.

State Senator Steven A. Baddour, chairman of the Joint Committee on Transportation, agreed.

"We need to move beyond the plan and begin to construct and repair a lot of these projects. If anything, it at least begins a dialogue on a lot of these projects."

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