

Governing Greater Boston

The Politics and Policy of Place

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1. *Where is Greater Boston?* *Framing Regional Issues*

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IN THE SPRING OF 1956, the governor of Massachusetts asked the dean of Boston College's business school to represent him at a national conference of educators in Michigan and offered to provide an airplane for the trip. The Reverend W. Seavey Joyce was not accustomed to air travel, and he experienced a revelation about the City of Boston on his return home.

As the plane neared Boston and banked lazily to begin its approach to Logan Airport, the priest overcame his aversion to heights long enough to look out the window at the scene below, which he saw from a distance and a perspective he had never before experienced. As he gazed down on the low-lying protuberance of land beneath him, which was completely undistinguished, had no distinctive skyline, and not a single identifiable structure except the old Custom House tower, he exclaimed in a startled voice: *Where's Boston?*¹

Father Joyce's question stemmed from the city's amorphous physical form. Boston did not cut as sharp a figure as cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. It was difficult to distinguish between Boston and nearby communities like Chelsea, Somerville, and even Milton. If a big city's identity stems at least partly from the face that it shows to the rest of the world, then Boston's identity lacked certainty and confidence. Father Joyce's question could just as well apply to the city's economic makeup, its educational future, its shifting ethnic makeup, and its ambiguous cultural face.

Passengers flying into today's Logan Airport would not struggle to know the contours of Boston. Boston is a teeming city of skyscrapers and tight-knit urban communities and town centers, bounded by great waterfronts and park systems and highways. But the visible strengths of the region—which would have astonished even the most optimistic civic leaders of a generation ago—have given way to a new set of questions about where Boston is going in the new century.

In the years since Father Joyce's exclamation, Boston has transformed itself from an urban disaster case to one of the greatest economic and cultural attractions in the nation and even the world. After decades of losing population and jobs, after a long neglect of its waterfront and parks, after years of cultural stagnation, Boston is a city and region transformed. The economic boom that produced the lowest unemployment rate in history and the cultural cachet that made Boston an international attraction resulted from the region's extraordinary diversity and balance. It is not enough that the region's economy is strong; it is also diverse. It is not enough that the region boasts some of the nation's greatest cultural and historic treasures; it is also developing a range of institutions and activities that cater to every interest and taste. It is not enough that the population is invigorated by hundreds of thousands of students every year, or that refugees and transplants from all over the world are making the region their home; it is that the region is mixing and disburdening its people previous in bastions of segregation and isolation.

The challenges of the new Boston owe their existence to the region's transformation in the last generation. Those challenges can be stated almost as simply as Father Joyce's query almost a half-century ago:

Where are Greater Boston's boundaries as a region? How should people who live and work in the region think about their common problems?

Where is Greater Boston's environment? How does the environment—the quality of air and water, the brownfields, the systems for disposing of wastes—shape the region's possibilities and perils?

Where is Greater Boston's transportation network—and where does it need to be to serve the evolving need to get people around the region?

Where are Greater Boston's homes? How can the region assure that everyone who needs a home can get one?

Where is Greater Boston's capacity to plan for the future? What tools does the region possess to coordinate sensible growth that meets the needs of all of its people?

The answers to these questions are complex—and contradictory. The image and primary economic engine of Greater Boston still lies in its "hub," the City of Boston, but over the past generation the region's people and businesses have extended ever outward, creating new corridors along Route 128 and Interstate 495 and on Cape Cod as well. Greater Boston's natural environment remains one its most attractive features, but at the same time the region loses dozens of acres of its "greenscape" daily to the "grayscale" of

development. The region's transportation network offers more real choices to get around than virtually any metropolis in the nation, but it is also old, congested, and expensive to maintain and operate, much less expand. Greater Boston has one of the most diverse systems of housing nationally, with the iconic three-deckers mixing in with a rich collection of single-family homes, apartments, and condominiums—but at the same time, the housing stock has become so expensive and new construction so burdensome that it threatens to lose its accessibility to people of all income levels. As Greater Boston struggles with regional issues, it boasts an impressive array of regional authorities but no clear strategy for encouraging communities to develop in ways that enhance the whole region.

The Sprawling of Greater Boston

Where people live defines any region's identity. A region's homes, neighborhoods, and communities are the building blocks of everyday life and set the possibilities and limitations for individual, family, business and community life. Boston has experienced a slow-motion spatial revolution in the last generation. More than 70 percent of the region's job growth took place in the suburbs, and the population went with it.² The state's population for the most part held steady in established urban areas over the 1990 to 2000 period, but exploded in "greenfields," the relatively open areas on Cape Cod and the islands and the rim along the Interstate 495. Greater Bostonians migrated away from established communities—often leaving behind society's most vulnerable people—and developed land more intensely the state's diminishing open spaces.

Take a look at some of the communities that have gained the most population over the past decade. The two fastest growing counties—Nantucket and Dukes (Martha's Vineyard)—grew at the stunning rates of 58 and 28 percent, respectively. These traditionally remote counties added almost 7,000 residents to a base of 24,000. In raw numbers, that might not seem like much, but the change heralds a national movement toward areas with high levels of recreational and natural amenities. Echoing the growth on the Cape and the Islands, growth on the outdoor amenity-rich South Shore is large both in percent and in numbers of new residents. Barnstable and Plymouth counties, in the southeast corner of the state, combined to add 73,000 residents.

Most of the rest of the growth occurred along the I-495 corridor. Essex, Worcester, Bristol, Norfolk, and Middlesex counties all grew at a rate between 5 and 9 percent over the last decade. Cities like Worcester and Lawrence added a few thousand residents, but most new population took root in suburban communities outside urban cores such as Hopkinton and

Boxboro that boast both access to the Interstates and strong ties to their traditional rural character.

The state's 15 biggest cities accounted for just 10 percent of total population growth. Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, and Revere all gained population, but not at a very fast rate and only because of new influxes of foreign immigrants. You could say that the 1965 immigration reform law, which opened the U.S. to non-Europeans after decades of exclusion, has saved Massachusetts's cities. But at the same time, domestic immigrants settled overwhelmingly in suburbs.

That trend toward sprawl is troubling for a number of reasons. First, it means that the state is gobbling up undeveloped land at an alarming rate. As documented in the Massachusetts Audubon Society's recently revised report, "Losing Ground," the Commonwealth loses 44 acres of woods, fields or farmland to residential, commercial or industrial development each day—about 16,000 acres each year. The loss of open space matters because it imperils a complex set of assets of great value to the state. As the inventory of undeveloped land diminishes, the state and region lose scenic vistas and recreational opportunities so highly valued by potential in-migrants. Also lost are habitats critical to wildlife, from uplands to coastal zones, which are attracting increasing numbers of nature-oriented visitors. The watersheds and estuaries that are essential to water supplies, and on which life on earth ultimately depends, also suffer damage.

Beyond the damage done to the region's ecosystem, sprawl also undermines the environmental character of older cities and towns. Rather than tending to the quality of old urban areas like Lawrence and Lowell, residents and developers look for a new life in a new land. Those left behind must struggle to maintain a healthy and vibrant urban life.

Behind the Dispersal

The dispersal of Greater Boston has occurred for three primary reasons—money, taste, and technology. The money factor—the increasing affluence of the new economy—has allowed more people to trade up for bigger homes in leafy, low-density communities. Real-estate agents report that affluent families are looking for larger homes away from the hustle and bustle—read: congestion—of the region's urban core.

The taste factor feeds off the money factor. So-called BoBo's ("bourgeois bohemians") and the first wave of the retiring baby-boom generation are seeking out communities where they can have access to a full range of recreational and cultural amenities. That means everything from beach houses and ski slopes to hiking trails.

The technology factor lends a particular shape to emerging settlement patterns. The automobile is the most pervasive technology shaping the region. The number of vehicle miles traveled in Greater Boston has increased at an annual rate of 1.2 percent, about 15 percent over a decade. The Boston region actually has more freeway miles per capita than Los Angeles. Like other parts of the country, Greater Boston has reached a point where planners and developers are designing cities and towns to accommodate cars. “Carcaecture” includes a wide range of settlements accessible only by car—housing developments, office parks, shopping malls, and recreational spaces. But technology goes far beyond the car. High-tech industries are the regional economy’s most powerful engine, and companies like EMC, Cisco, and Oracle seek out larger building footprints than can be developed easily in urban areas. To direct this development to urban areas would require more state and local incentives than are now in place. Furthermore, while high-tech employment does increase the number of telecommuters who can live in far-flung locations, there is no good evidence that those telecommuters drive fewer miles than ordinary workers.

Money, taste, and technology have combined to give Greater Boston a new look that can be illustrated with the experience of Cape Cod. As a coastal area, the Cape is attractive to affluent families, young couples, retirees, and people seeking second homes. A recent report about growth along coastal communities nationwide captures the phenomenon on Cape Cod:

In just the past five years, the year-round population has increased 12 percent to 225,000. The Cape and the islands also have eight of the state’s 12 fastest-growing school districts. Mashpee’s enrollment has tripled in the past 20 years. Cape Cod Hospital has 50 percent more doctors than in 1990, and the Cape Cod Mall has just increased its retail space by 25 percent. The number of radio stations on the Cape has risen from four in 1985 to 13. There is a fledging high-tech industry, with hopeful talk of a “Silicon Sandbar.” There are even the once unthinkable: wintertime traffic jams in Hyannis. And with a third of the Cape’s land still available for development, the boom is unlikely to slow anytime soon. The Cape’s development is the result of a self-perpetuating cycle: more people move to the area, so more businesses stay open year-round, so more tourists visit all year, so new businesses open, so more jobs are created, so more people live there. . . . To keep up with the affluent newcomers, the Cape Cod Mall has brought in higher-end stores. Thirty years ago, almost all the non-anchor stores were locally owned. Today, there is only one, Holiday’s Hallmark. Cape Cod

Hospital in Hyannis is changing its marketing strategy as well, expanding cardiology and cancer services so patients won't have to go back to Boston. Emergency angioplasty is offered seven days a week, and the hospital is trying to start an open-heart surgery program.³

Even with a respected regional planning body, the Cape has become the embodiment of the kind of sprawl that occurs across the nation.

Still anchoring Greater Boston, amidst the Cape-style development, is the City of Boston, called the "hub" because of its concentration of businesses, universities, medical centers, cultural attractions, and natural and historic places. But the character of the city is changing dramatically. The City of Boston now has two-thirds the population it had in 1950, with a density of about 12,200 people per square mile. Other cities with the kind of vibrancy that Boston seeks to develop have higher densities; San Francisco, for example, has 15,000 people per square mile. Density provides one important measure of a city's ability to support thriving local industries.⁴

Overall, Greater Boston is now about half as dense as Los Angeles, the symbol of dispersed development; metropolitan Boston has 2,700 people per square mile, while L.A. has 5,400 people per square mile.⁵ Even though some inner-core communities like Boston, Cambridge, Brookline, and Milton have thrived, even gaining population, they are doing so at a slower rate than the outer communities.

Exacerbating the sprawling development of the region is a phenomenon that might be called "household sprawl." Not only is population dispersing to broader reaches of the region, but people are spread out among more and more households as well. The average household in the 101 cities and towns of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council had 2.47 persons in 2000, compared with 3.2 persons in 1970.⁶ In practical terms, every 1,000 homes had 730 fewer people—meaning that many fewer customers in the area for local business, public transportation, public schools, cultural facilities, and the like.

Socially, smaller households mean greater strains on many families. A single parent, usually a mother, heads some 39 percent of all households in Boston. Such families need a strong support network, with close access to their own jobs, their children's schools and recreational activities, shopping, health care, and other elements of everyday life. The "multi-tasking" that is central to a single-parent household is easier in communities with strong support structures—day care, schools, shopping, libraries and playgrounds.

The impact of smaller households extends to a wide range of other issues. Advocates of affordable housing, for example, typically assume that new affordable housing units must be 1,000 to 1,200 square feet. But more

than three-quarters of all households with less than \$50,000 annual income have one or two persons, in which units with 500 to 800 square feet will provide more than adequate space. Smaller homes could lead to greater density, which means more support for local businesses and transit services. But the trend is going the other way, toward larger homes with fewer people, spread out over more space.

The Region's New Diversity

The Greater Boston area—and the communities within the region—have become so much more diverse demographically that they would be unrecognizable just a generation ago.

As Paul Grogan points out in *Comeback Cities*, the most important urban policy of the last generation was the 1965 reform of the nation's immigration laws to open the gates of the U.S. a new wave of newcomers.⁷ The Hart-Celler Act opened the nation to a new wave of immigrants, which is smaller than the pre-World War I immigration but significant for its greater diversity. In the order of their magnitude, immigrants came to Greater Boston from Haiti, China, Ireland, the Dominican Republic, Italy, Jamaica, Vietnam, Cape Verde, and Russia. One in ten Massachusetts residents were born in a foreign country.

More than 370,000 immigrants, comprising 11.5 percent of the total population, lived in Greater Boston (which includes Middlesex, Suffolk and Bristol counties), the largest foreign-born concentration in the state.⁸ According to the 2000 Census, Boston's population increased by 14,800 people, from 574,000 to 589,000 (2.6 percent). The white population in the 1990s actually fell by 47,000, while the Hispanic and black populations increased by 23,134 and 3,148 respectively. "While the foreign-born population was increasing rapidly, the native-born population was decreasing by over 16,000," said the Federation for American Immigration. "The impact of immigration on Boston's population is understated to the extent that it does not take into account the children born to the immigrant population, because those children are part of the native-born population rather than the immigrant population."⁹

Mary Waters, a Harvard sociologist, notes that immigrants play an important role in revitalizing cities. Because they are self-selected—they must take costly steps to move to a new country—they tend to offer some of the most energetic and creative people in cities. Their drive not only heightens the competitive character of the community, but also offers new role models for long-time residents of urban communities.¹⁰ Peggy Levitt of Wellesley College has shown how Dominican immigrants to Boston's Jamaica Plain

community have created rich networks that both energize their adopted community and foster ties with the old country.¹¹

Historically, Boston has been one of the most segregated regions in the nation. The tradition of small cities and towns and the lack of regional systems for housing and education resulted in a checkerboard of ethnic enclaves, each with its own cultural identity and exclusivity. Boston neighborhoods like Roxbury (blacks), South Boston (Irish), East Boston (Italians), sections of Dorchester (blacks, Italians, Irish), and the North End (Italians) all developed a strong racial or ethnic makeup due to exclusion from other communities and intense connections to their own people. The ethnic and racial exclusivity extended to many suburban communities. Affluent communities like Brookline, Newton, and Wellesley became almost exclusively white, while working-class communities like Chelsea, Lawrence, and Medford had other ethnic compositions.

Patterns of segregation are evolving in Greater Boston. As minorities improved their economic status in the last decade, they have become homeowners in greater numbers than ever before, joining the suburban exodus of other groups. Still, almost half of all minority home purchases in 126 communities surrounding the City of Boston were concentrated in seven cities and towns: Chelsea (where blacks and Hispanics comprise 43.6 percent of all home buyers between 1993 and 1997), Randolph (32.3 percent), Everett (15.9 percent), Lynn (15.5 percent), Somerville (14.3 percent), Milton (14 percent), and Malden (13 percent). To achieve racial and ethnic integration with white homebuyers, about half of all minority homebuyers would have had to buy a home in a different community during that period.¹²

At the same time that segregated patterns of development persist throughout the region, there are important new blendings of racial and ethnic populations. In recent years, Greater Boston has seen new levels of integration that would have been unimaginable just one generation ago. Once solid ethnic enclaves like Chelsea, East Boston, South Boston, Lawrence, and Lynn, have welcomed newcomers of all backgrounds. While black population has remained mostly stable throughout the region, Hispanic and Asian populations have increased dramatically.

Reviving Urban Centers

As Greater Boston moves into the new century, one of its great challenges will be to revive old urban centers. Greater Boston's equivalent of the struggling rust belt lies in the communities located in the Near North Shore (Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, Revere, and Saugus) and the Near South Shore (Braintree, Quincy, and several other bedroom communities). Other cities,

like Lowell, Lawrence, New Bedford, and Brockton, have also lost their traditional economic base and lack the resources to compete for social and economic activity. These communities are home to some of the region's poorest populations, who have access only to inadequate education, housing, health care and bear the brunt of average social problems like drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and crime.

Many of these communities serve as "dumping grounds" for public facilities and highways and other infrastructure. In recent years, policymakers have become more aware about the unfairness in the location in inner-city communities of facilities with negative impacts on the community. Negative impacts can be found with the location of garbage and waste treatment facilities, bus sheds, parking facilities, public housing, prisons, storage facilities, as well as the routing of automobile traffic and airline flight paths. These cities also suffer more than other communities on issues of air and water pollution, brownfields, asbestos and "sick building" syndrome, and dilapidated buildings, parks, and other sites.

But at the same time, many of these communities possess pieces of a strong urban fabric—good parks, public facilities, housing stock—as well as growing immigrant populations that can serve as a foundation for future creativity and development. Greater Boston's challenge is to identify the assets that are strewn throughout the region and make strategic investments to protect, enhance, and build on those assets. Where there is an attractive waterfront or downtown area, provide the connections to the rest of the community that makes it an attractive destination for residents and visitors. Where there is a growing immigrant population, provide the strong public schools that provide young people with basic skills. Where there is a strong transit connection, foster the kind of mixed-use development that makes it an attractive place for people of all backgrounds to live and work.

One model for redevelopment of these struggling communities might be found in the inner-city communities of Boston. In recent years, Boston has learned just how economically dynamic even its struggling neighborhoods might become. Through a joint initiative of the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City and the Boston Consulting Group, policymakers have begun to see neighborhoods like Roxbury and Dorchester as new frontiers for development. Boston's inner city—an area marked by low income, few jobs per resident, high unemployment, and high poverty rates—actually presents extraordinary business opportunities. Even though they lag behind the rest of the city on these measures, sections of Roxbury, Dorchester, South Boston, Jamaica Plain, and the South End still offer strong advantages for business activity. Strategic location, a large and loyal labor pool, and significant col-

lective disposable income make the inner city an important place for economic development. According to a 2001 report by ICIC and BCG, the area's 6,000 businesses generate \$8 billion in revenues and employ 130,000 people. The area's 240,000 residents have \$1.3 billion in spending power, of which 30 percent is directed outside the area.¹³

Inner-city development depends on exploiting market opportunities made possible by the area's labor market and its location near downtown, medical institutions, universities, and transportation networks. The ICIC study recommended building on previous success in health care, commercial services, and education and training, while aggressively playing "catch-up" in financial services, hospitality and tourism, retail, information and technology services, and manufacturing. The inner city boasts an unusually stable labor pool that should serve growing businesses well. It also boasts a per-square-mile buying power that exceeds affluent suburbs like Wellesley. The trick is to provide strategic services and connections to reduce the gap between potential and reality.

The same kind of analysis might be conducted for the Near North and South Shores of Boston. Although not as densely populated as Boston's inner city, these communities offer large labor pools and strategic location near transit and highways. A successful urban revitalization program in those communities—as in Boston—will depend on three ingredients. First, there must be good economic and social data. Second, there must be a thorough evaluation of community assets. Third, there must be good working relationships with public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

Improving the Environment

In an acclaimed study of the environment in urban areas, Ann Whiston Spirn of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology writes: "Nature is a continuum with wilderness at one pole and the city at the other. The same natural processes operate in the wilderness and in the city."¹⁴ To make the city and its neighborhoods whole requires tending to the environment that is alive in every nook and cranny of the city.

As Spirn suggests, Greater Boston's environment provides the framework for everything that happens in the region. Building and redesigning parks helps to revive neighborhoods just as much as new and rehabilitated housing. Community parks, playgrounds, and gardens also improve the health of residents by getting people outdoors; obesity has become a major health problem in neighborhoods where children have few recreational opportunities outdoors. Cleaning the harbor and rivers not only draws people out of their homes, but provides new identity for neighborhoods and districts and offers a

focal point for new development. Reducing air pollution helps children, especially in poor neighborhoods, avoid health problems like asthma.

Comprehensive Approaches

Policymakers agree that integrating environmental, transportation, housing, and other investments is critical to the longterm health of the region. The state's environmental-review director, Jay Wickersham, sees a strong connection between transportation projects like the Urban Ring transit system and the efforts to clean up polluted waterfronts and brownfields. Creation of the circumferential transit line would catalyze development, reduce congestion in the Downtown, and leverage the resources needed to invest in environmentally degraded areas.

In the past three years, the Boston Redevelopment Authority has released comprehensive plans for waterfront areas in East Boston and South Boston. But those two areas account for less than half of the waterfront in Greater Boston. The Boston Harbor area actually begins in the Chelsea area at the convergence of the Mystic and Chelsea Rivers and extends down to the Neponset river and points south. The Charles River extends 80 miles from the mouth of Boston Harbor through 23 cities and towns with a watershed population of 900,000 people. The Neponset River extends from the harbor through 13 cities and towns with a population of 300,000. The Mystic River Watershed encompasses 76 square miles, half a million people and 21 communities. These waterfronts offer a priceless opportunity not only to restore damaged natural spaces, but also to connect urban neighborhoods with the resources of the whole region.

A number of major planning initiatives could have a dramatic impact on the environment of Greater Boston for years to come. The South Boston Waterfront, once a dilapidated railyard dominated by surface parking, has the potential to become Boston's new financial and business district—and its new gateway to the waterfront. With billions in public investment to clean the Boston Harbor, create a tunnel to Logan Airport, establish a new public transit line, and build a new courthouse and new convention center, the 1,000-acre area is poised for a major wave of hotel, office, and residential development. City and state officials, activists, and residents have haggled for years over the design of the new district. Environmentalists and parks advocates have been in the middle of that debate, hoping that it can serve as a model of sustainable development.

Targeting Specific Ills

Not all environmental problems require a comprehensive community approach. A number of environmental problems can be addressed separately.

Air quality can be enhanced by improving automobile traffic, encouraging alternative forms of transportation, and forcing power plants to adopt cleaner systems. Water systems can be cleaned by improving sewerage systems, building water-treatment plants, dredging and cleaning clogged waterways, and reducing impermeable surfaces to reduce runoff. Brownfields can be cleaned or capped to make them usable as industry, recreational, or residential spaces. Massachusetts has made some progress on these issues in the last two decades—most remarkably with the cleanup of the Boston Harbor—but ultimately the state needs to think of these separate systems as part of a single ecological system.

The federal and state governments have made enormous investments in the environment of eastern Massachusetts. A U.S. District Court in 1986 ordered state officials to embark on a \$3.8-billion cleanup of the Boston Harbor, which has dramatically improved the water quality of the 50-square-mile area bounded by 180 miles of shoreline. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority in 1997 began operations of its state-of-the-art sewage treatment plant. The City of Boston is modernizing its sewer pipes to prevent dumping of raw wastes into the Boston Harbor and Charles River during major rainstorms. The Commonwealth has also initiated projects to improve the state's 28 watersheds, overhaul cesspool systems, clean up brownfields, reduce fumes from public transit vehicles, and reduce the generation of hazardous wastes. But the remaining challenges are formidable.

Community-building and the Environment

Parks, playgrounds, and other natural spaces offer a central element of community identity. Green spaces provide places for people of all ages to gather. Greater Boston has made three great contributions to the open-space movement. The region's earliest public open spaces were actually cemeteries—most notably, Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge and Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston—which offered not only great resting places but also places to get away from the urban bustle. The creation of Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace created a new ideal of open space, with carefully sculpted landscapes that evoke the countryside. Finally, community-based groups gave rise to a network of gardens, playgrounds, and wilds that integrated nature into the fabric of neighborhoods.

Greenspace advocates regularly call for increasing the acreage of parks in urban areas, pointing out that many neighborhoods lack adequate outdoor places for young people to play. In debates over the development of the South Boston Waterfront and the 27-acre area opened by the depression of the Central Artery, those advocates have lobbied for the creation of new

parks for residents, tourists, and business people. Cities and towns all over the region have moved to adopt the Community Preservation Act, which gives localities the power to levy a 3-percent surcharge on property taxes to pay for open space, historic preservation, and housing. Most communities plan to dedicate the bulk of that money to acquisition of open space for ecological and recreation purposes. Such a grassroots movement for open-space development could change the shape of the region, not only by knitting together the frayed pieces of the environment, but also by tightening the squeeze on housing.

But many urban designers say that a more critical need is for existing parks to be improved and maintained so that they are more attractive and usable. Boston Parks Commissioner Justine M. Liff has stated that one of the city's greatest needs is development of a comprehensive maintenance plan. In recent years, the Commonwealth, City of Boston, and Town of Brookline have made major investments to restore the Emerald Necklace, which had fallen into disrepair for decades. The Boston Parks Department's 2001 Five-Year Plan documents that major efforts are required to repair and improve the city's smaller parks, playgrounds, gardens, urban wilds, cemeteries, and walkways. Boston's neighborhood parks—Mission Hill's McLaughlin Park, Mattapan's Almont Street Playground, and Allston's Ringer Park, to name three—need design and basic maintenance improvements that will attract more users and a sense of community loyalty.

Under the leadership of Parks Commissioner Liff, the City of Boston has expanded its open-space network by 25 percent. The overall parks system includes 4,400 acres of open space, with the ownership and management split almost evenly between the city and the state's Metropolitan District Commission. The greatest addition to the city's open-space inventory is Millennium Park in West Roxbury, a 100-acre park created out of landfill and located by West Roxbury High School and the Charles River. The park—larger than the Boston Common and Public Garden combined—offers picnic areas, play structures, an outdoor classroom and amphitheater, six miles of walking and bike trails, and access to canoeing and fishing. The city has also been part of the consortium to create the new Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, with 30 islands open for camping, and educational and recreation programming. When the Central Artery is finally moved underground, the city will have a 27-acre swath of real estate for parks and other development.

The crown jewel of the regional park system is the 20,000 acres of woodlands, wetlands, and urban parklands owned and managed by the Metropolitan District Commission. In recent years, the MDC has come under

fire for its hiring and management practices. But the system operates more parks, pools, rinks, parkways, and hiking trails than any other entity in the state.

Parks advocates throughout the nation have discovered that the “broken windows” theory of community policing applies to parks and open spaces as well.¹⁵ With improvements in their most visible elements—entryways, fencing, benches, trash cans, signage—parks would invite a broader range of users and develop strong local support and stewardship. Such efforts require major public investments, particularly in neighborhoods where community groups and businesses do not have the clout or resources enjoyed by Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Harvard Square, and other affluent areas.

Because of fiscal constraints, state and local agencies have been moved to create partnerships with corporations and nonprofit organizations. The most frequently cited model is Post Office Square in Boston, where a desolate parking garage was transformed into a park by putting the garage underground and using the proceeds for park design, construction, and maintenance. The park, managed by a nonprofit group, Friends of Post Office Square, cost \$80 million to build. Once the construction is paid off, all the proceeds from the garage go to the City of Boston. The public-private approach failed at nearby City Hall Plaza, where public opposition stopped a proposal to redesign the barren and wind-swept area with revenues from a hotel and garage. Critics question whether open spaces can maintain their public character if they are operated by private or nonprofit entities, and also point out that less affluent neighborhoods do not have access to the revenues of a Post Office Square.¹⁶

Maintenance for a Better Environment

No matter what their economic condition, the state and its localities will invest hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure over the course of several years. From 1990 to 2000, the Commonwealth alone expended more than \$10 billion on infrastructure in bond-financed projects and many more billions on projects funded by grants. Although the state’s capacity for capital projects is inadequate to its tasks, it is still big enough to change the face of the state.

As the urban historian and environmentalist Sam Bass Warner, Jr., has argued, setting clear standards for maintaining streets, sewers, utilities, and parks could yield dramatic improvements in the utility and ecological value of the built environment. When repaving a street, cities and towns might incorporate environmental design into their projects—for example, building more permeable surfaces that allow rainwater to seep into the ground rather

than runoff into nearby bodies of water. When fixing basic elements of parks and schoolyards, cities and towns might develop design improvements that allow greater access and use of open spaces. When doing repair work on sewers and other underground infrastructure, municipalities might coordinate the improvement of other underground systems.

Maintenance of urban infrastructure—roads, parks, sewers, septic tanks, garbage facilities—often gets less priority than development of new infrastructure. Bond payments for financing new projects can be spread over many years. In addition, the politics of ribbon-cutting gives an incentive to politicians to undertake new projects. Yet the maintenance of old systems can produce positive impacts on local communities and economies. Policymakers in Greater Boston might explore new strategies for maintaining existing infrastructure. One model is offered by Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, which collects tolls and enters into leases with commercial franchises to raise funds for maintenance (a model which is faulty in other ways, as noted below). Another model is offered by the affordable housing industry, which builds monthly maintenance costs into the long-term debt service of new units. Older cities like Boston might lobby on Beacon Hill and in Washington for bonding authority to insure that existing infrastructure has the maintenance that it needs.

Getting Around the Region

In an ever-decentralizing metropolitan framework, transportation is critical in connecting the many pieces of the region's economy and community life. People and communities with rich transportation connections—access to autos, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian networks, and air travel—are best positioned to take advantage of economic and social resources. People who have limited transportation choice cannot enjoy the region's many advantages.

Transportation does not matter solely because of its ability to move people around the region, but also because of its capacity for binding the economic and social resources of communities. Neighborhoods that lie at transportation crossroads have the opportunity to create more economic value and to capture the economic value of people passing through. Neighborhoods like Davis Square in Somerville, Central Square in Cambridge, and Kenmore Square in Boston—to name just three—have built vital economic and social engines around revitalized transit nodes. South Bay, Newmarket, Kendall Square, and the Interstate 128 ring have created powerful economic engines around highway access. But Greater Boston also contains numerous transportation crossroads with unrealized economic

potential. Transportation centers like Forest Hills and Melnea Cass Boulevard offer great potential for development, but require coherent strategies and investments to realize that potential.

Any investment in transportation infrastructure involves difficult trade-offs. A blue-ribbon committee headed by former state Senator Patricia McGovern recommended that 70 percent of all capital funding for transit be allocated to maintenance of the existing system. Meanwhile, numerous worthy new infrastructure projects—from the Urban Ring, the North-South Rail Link, extensions of existing transit lines, new commuter lines, upgrades of airports—gain more urgency as the region struggles with traffic congestion and overload on its existing transit system.

New Corridors, New Challenges

The Boston metropolitan area is defined by highways. Virtually all of the cities and towns that gained 5,000 new residents are located near one of the new highways in the region. After an initial burst of growth along Route 128/Interstate 95, the development boom shifted further out to communities along Interstate 495, Interstate 93 North, and Route 3 South. In the 1970s, the communities along Route 128 actually experienced a decline in growth. The communities with a range of housing prices seemed to be the most volatile; more affluent communities like Lincoln and Westwood neither grew nor shrunk significantly.¹⁷

The patterns of development along the highways suggest cyclical change. A new transportation corridor makes new land attractive for location of office parks, manufacturing and storage facilities, and malls and other retail outlets. As that corridor is developed, it becomes less attractive for businesses that do not fit into its physical and social constraints. New corridors beckon, and the old corridor loses some of its original attractiveness. The development near Route 128 is not as intense as the new development around Interstate 495, for example.

The expansion of the regional airport network could further decentralize economic development toward facilities in Worcester and Bedford, Mass., Manchester, N.H., and Providence, R.I. Such a decentralization might produce a “recentering” of populations. Compact communities with thick economic and social networks could develop, reducing some of the worst characteristics of sprawl. But such a recentering would require strong planning efforts to foster the necessary densities of sustainable communities.

Congestion is a major problem for Greater Boston. Between 1970 and 2000, the total number of vehicle miles traveled in Massachusetts increased by 75 percent, while the total population increased by 10 percent. Even

though Boston boasts one of the nation's best transit systems, only 9 percent of all journey-to-work trips are on subways, trolleys, buses, and commuter trains. The region's greatest congestion spots suggest not only development patterns but also inadequate transportation and regional planning.

There is no reason to think that cars will play any lesser role in the next generation. Even in the event of a new energy crisis—which experts have predicted since the early 1980s, but which has not occurred—cars are likely to remain the overwhelming choice of transportation. Hybrid cars have proven successful ways to reduce gas usage and can be expected to flood the market in the coming years. The major question concerning cars is how traffic will be managed. Highway design and new technologies—such as bus transponders that regulate traffic signals and automatic toll-collection systems—can improve the overall flow of traffic. But they will not change the basic fact that more and more people will rely on cars for the foreseeable future.

Unequal Transportation Options

The Greater Boston area has three types of community transportation challenges. In what might be called the “connected core,” residents and businesses enjoy a rich mix of transportation options. In addition to the automobile, people can take the subway, bus, and commuter train to almost every important destination. They can also take advantage of bicycle trails, water taxis, and taxicab service for many trips, and they are located close to planes, trains, and buses for inter-city travel. Even though this part of the region is served well, there are numerous problems—the main one being inadequate connections between nodes located away from Boston's Downtown. Boston's transit system is designed like spokes on a wheel, and the outer parts of the spokes do not have a rim that connects them; the result is that lateral trips often require going into the hub along one spoke and out to the destination along another spoke.

Parts of the urban core, what might be called the “isolated core,” are not so well connected. Many communities lack access to subway and trolley service and have only irregular bus service, and commuter lines travel through the neighborhoods without stopping. Going even a few miles on public transportation can require one or two transfers, which add unacceptable time to simple trips.

The third area of the region might be called “Car-ville.” In this area, travelers have little choice but to drive where they are going. The communities that have developed along major highways—first Route 128, then Interstate 495—have this character. Virtually all of the region's business parks are located in Car-ville, as are many residential enclaves where middle-

class families choose to live to escape the inadequate schools, crime, and other problems of the city. Car-ville mostly works for families who can maintain one or two good cars, but also involves many inefficiencies. Because Car-ville is spread out, making simple trips to work, day care, school, sporting and cultural events, shopping centers, and friends and family involve hopscotching all over the region, sometimes spending hours in a car on a given day.

The Limits of Transit

Public transportation in Greater Boston poses a dilemma. On the one hand, the region offers a strong network of rapid transit, trolleys, buses, and commuter rail that offers inexpensive service to people in 51 cities and towns. Public transit offers an anchor for community development that allows the development of dense, mixed-use development that is critical to the fight against sprawl. Furthermore, transit ridership is expected to increase by 50 percent in the next 25 years.

On the other hand, transit is expensive. A system that primarily serves the eastern third of the state is financed by a one-fifth of all sales-tax revenues generated by the whole state. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's \$660-million budget for fiscal-year 2000 includes \$570 million in state funding. The new "forward funding" system for the MBTA is designed to impose fiscal discipline on the MBTA, but includes no mechanism for developing a business plan that will reduce state subsidies or increase operating efficiency or service levels.

The MBTA faces what might be called the "Amazon.com problem," in which more business creates financial strains. Heavier transit ridership requires new investments in trains and other equipment as demand exceeds capacity. Investments in "clean" fuel buses with handicapped access are more expensive than previous generations of vehicles. Commuter trains are also expensive. An analysis by Kim Norman and David Luberoff found that the new commuter lines to Fall River and New Bedford would cost more than \$12,000 a rider per year—about \$45 a rider daily—in public subsidies.¹⁸

Public transit will not do much to address the transportation needs of the growing suburban population. Commuting within suburbs and between suburbs—which has a limited capacity for public transit—accounted for 70 percent of all journey-to-work trips in 1990. Development patterns are relentlessly suburban, a fact that is likely to increase the reliance on cars for commuting. Contributing to the journey-to-work problem are new patterns of employment. Even with a minimal increase in population between 1970 and 1990, the number of jobs in the region increased 44 percent as more women,

young people, and old people participated in the labor market and more people held more than one job.¹⁹ Two-earner households and multi-jobbing make it more difficult for people to get around by transit because they require traveling at odd hours and making more connections.

Mass transit—even buses—is expensive to operate. The MBTA estimates that a pilot program for late-night bus service would attract between 500 and 1,500 new riders a day. If the MBTA gets just 500 riders, the cost of the new service will be \$50 per rider; if the T gets 1,500 new riders, the cost falls to \$14.50 per rider. Because of state subsidies, the MBTA considers \$1.15 to \$4.50 to be an acceptable per-rider cost of operation. Unless ridership expands dramatically—with thousands of people leaving their cars for infrequent night-time service—it would be cheaper to pay people for cab fare than provide increased bus service.²⁰

Despite its legacy as a transit-rich region, Greater Boston actually has more freeway miles per capita than Los Angeles, and 43 percent of all vehicle miles are traveled on freeways. The Central Transportation Planning Staff, the region's leading policy analysis office for transportation, concludes: "In order for transit to succeed, it requires a concentration of households and a concentration of destinations, whether they be work, shopping, or schools. Dispersed development patterns cost more for roadway construction, increases driving costs, creates additional air pollution and results in a conversion of open space to developed land. As this concentration of people and destinations disperses, the ability to serve people decreases."²¹

The Key to Transit: Nodes and Density

Greater Boston is fortunate to have one of the most extensive public transit networks in the nation and the region is rebuilding the Old Colony commuter lines that were disassembled in the post-World War II years. The problem is that many of these lines have not been integrated into the larger fabric of the community. Many transit stations are in disrepair, and many areas surrounding transit lines and stations are filled with vacant lots and poorly scaled and designed buildings and roads.

The power of transit-oriented development is apparent in the revitalization of areas like Davis Square in Somerville and Central Square in Cambridge, where new and revitalized stations have produced a boom in economic activity. The Alewife station area of Cambridge offers great potential for new development. Planners have discussed new transit stops for Somerville's Assembly Square and the Medford-Malden-Everett Telecom City project. Meanwhile, the Boston Redevelopment Authority's Boston 400 planning process has undertaken a major study of "activity cen-

ters” that could serve as centerpieces of transit-oriented development throughout the city.

For transit-oriented development to succeed, state and municipal government have to make dense, pedestrian-oriented design an essential part of development within a half-mile or mile radius of transit stations. Enactment of special “transit overlay districts” would give priority to mixing business and residential activities, limit parking and automobile access, and cluster community services. Local government also might identify current areas with minimal transit service—like commuter rail lines—and encourage more intense and mixed development in the area. Boston’s Yawkey Station and Somerville’s Assembly Square sites are two good candidates for this kind of investment.

As the region expands its commuter rail service to suburbs, transportation and community planners need to work to assure that the new service produces the greatest opportunities for local development. New transit and commuter stations need to be located near existing business districts whenever possible—or be used as an anchor for new development. When stations are located away from existing hubs, communities should consider enacting development rules that encourage dense development and pedestrian-friendly design. Stations that are located on highways apart from the community, like the Plymouth commuter rail depot, exacerbate traffic congestion rather than relieving it.

Transportation of all kinds—planes, trains, and automobiles—requires tough choices, with real winners and losers. It also affects every other issue in the region, from the environment to housing.

Housing All Bostonians

Housing in Greater Boston poses a great paradox. On the one hand, the region has prospered in the last decade because of its ability to attract newcomers to Boston, Cambridge, and suburban communities throughout eastern Massachusetts. Universities, hospitals, and mutual fund and other financial services companies all attract high-salaried workers, as well as entry-level service workers. The region’s success is reflected in neighborhoods throughout the region. Once decaying neighborhoods have returned to life, as new homeowners repair front porches, tend to gardens, and undertake gut rehabs of crumbling buildings.

At the same time, the region’s economic success has fueled a desperate housing crisis. Rents in the Boston Primary Statistical Area increased by 25.7 percent from 1995 and 2000. Neighborhoods that have long offered reasonable rents for poor and working class residents—like Boston’s Roxbury,

Dorchester, and Jamaica Plain—have seen even more impressive increases in real estate values. The median monthly rents for two-bedroom apartments in Roxbury increased by 38 percent from 1999 to 2000. Many families have undertaken a trek from booming real-estate markets to less vibrant markets. Blacks who once dominated Boston's South End have migrated to Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and outside communities like Brockton.

Housing experts generally state that households should not spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing so that they will have adequate resources for other needs like food, clothing, transportation, education, and the like. But in Greater Boston, almost half of all renters—240,000 households—pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. Almost one-quarter of the region's households, or 118,000 households, pay more than half of their income on housing. Even homeowners experience difficulty paying for housing. About 23 percent of all households that own their own units pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing and 11 percent pay more than 50 percent of their income on housing.²²

The housing crisis ripples throughout the region. Educators report difficulties with children who are forced to move from year to year and experience difficulty getting settled in the classroom. Workers experience longer commutes and often must spend more time on transit to get to a job. Two-earner families experience greater difficulty juggling everyday chores from shopping to dropping the kids off at school. Business leaders have expressed alarm at the impact of the housing crisis on their activities, with some reporting that they have put expansion plans on hold because of concerns about their workers' ability to pay the rent. A commission headed by the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology reported difficulty recruiting faculty and researchers because of the housing crisis.

Not Enough Money, Too Many Regulations

Part of the explanation for low building rates is the withdrawal of both federal and state governments from financing new construction. Since the Reagan Administration, the federal government has played little role in building new housing. Section 8 program, which once had both construction and voucher components, now focuses on providing rent subsidies for existing units. When the federal government commits money to construction, it is to rehabilitate housing—and, often, to reduce the overall supply. The HOPE VI program, for example, will result in a reduction of hundreds of units from the public housing stock in Boston. The state government, meanwhile, has shifted its resources toward shoring up existing units that are in financial or physical jeopardy. The state has been especially intent on “preserving”

affordable units that might be converted to market rate units after their owners pay off their mortgages.

State and local regulations pose more formidable barriers to new housing construction. The state building code—which establishes the basic construction standards for buildings of all kinds—is dispersed among several boards, which often create conflicting building requirements. The state code is implemented at the local level, but many local agencies lack the resources to implement them consistently or efficiently. Local officials sometimes overstep their authority and impose requirements that go beyond state regulations, and developers eager to cultivate good relations with local officials are not inclined to fight local officials.

Meanwhile, local zoning regulations often create new barriers to housing construction. Most communities do not offer any opportunity to build multi-family housing and set high standards—read: expensive regulations—for new housing development. The classic housing type of New England, the three-decker, has been all but banned from new development by zoning regulations. Historically, the three-decker has provided an opportunity for people of modest means to buy homes and rent out extra units to family and friends at reasonable prices. But community resistance to multifamily housing of all kinds—even in neighborhoods that are filled with good multifamily construction—has become written into the zoning codes of cities and towns around the region.

Community Resistance to Housing

The biggest barrier to housing might be the state's long tradition of home rule and the NIMBY attitude—"Not In My Back Yard"—that arises when developers propose new housing. Because housing imposes new costs on communities for education, infrastructure, police and fire service, and other local services, most communities are loathe to embrace large-scale housing developments. The tax benefits of retail and other commercial development offers a much better financial reward, so communities fight proposals to build housing of all kinds.

The state gives developers one powerful tool when they confront opposition in suburban communities. Chapter 40B, a state law adopted in 1969, requires that 10 percent of all housing in the Massachusetts cities and towns be "affordable."²³ As of 2001, 23 of the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts met that standard. Developers in communities not in compliance with 40B can override local zoning ordinances if they build affordable housing. Over the years, 40B has played a part in the development of 25,000 units of housing, or about 800 a year.

But 40B has become a contentious issue. Residents argue that the law encourages developers to create projects that undermine the character of the community and add excessive tax and service burdens. Other critics say that developers use the 40B tool to blackmail cities and towns into approving other kinds of development, such as large-scale retail, by threatening to build affordable housing if they do not get approval for their other projects. Developers, on the other hand, complain that the law does not give them enough authority to override local resistance to housing. Even when there is a compelling need for affordable units, developers must fight residents in town meetings and in hearings with state officials. Affordable housing advocates complain that the law has been so watered-down that it does not provide an effective tool for new housing development.

Overcoming the intense local battles over housing requires both a determination from the state government and flexible tools at the local level. What might that combination of centralization and decentralization look like?

Planning a Fragmented Region

In a provocative study of the nature of organization, Steven Johnson argues that human and natural forms share the capacity to create order out of countless separate processes. In a process that he calls “emergence,” Johnson says that ants, brains, software, and cities all share this potential. Comparing ant colonies and cities is not just a metaphorical exercise, Johnson says. It is not just that ant colonies are “like” cities, but that they share the same basic dynamics of growth and development. If Johnson is right, then he offers some important lessons for Greater Boston at the dawn of the new millennium.

The argument is simple: The “intelligence” of any complex system cannot be developed whole or imposed from the top down, but must emerge from countless separate “dumb” decisions and actions. When ants move about their colony, moving trash and carrying carcasses, it is not because of a ruler’s edicts or a master plan’s mandates. Johnson writes:

Call it swarm logic: ten thousand ants—each limited to a meager vocabulary of pheromones and minimal cognitive skills—collectively engage in nuanced and improvisational problem-solving. A harvester ant colony in the field will not only ascertain the shortest route to a food source, it will also prioritize food sources, based on their distance and ease of access. In response to changing external conditions, worker ants switch from nest-building to foraging to raising ant pupae. Their knack for engineering and social coordination can be

downright spooky—particularly because none of the individual ants is actually “in charge” of the overall operation.²⁴

Ant colonies can achieve amazingly complex operations not by imposing a pre-set rational order on behavior, but by providing an environment where the numerous separate actions can develop a logic of their own and take on a larger form.

The Complexity of Cities and Regions

Human settlements are, of course, more complex than ant colonies, but they share the basic truth: Order comes from numerous separate actions in a system that allows those actions to come together in complex and subtle ways. The marketplace is the most familiar human system of order arising from the disparate actions of the many. Producers, suppliers, shippers, sellers, and buyers all act independently, with no conscious concern for creating a harmonious order, and yet order emerges if the many actors operate in a context that provides a few simple rules. Adam Smith famously attributed the order of the marketplace to the “invisible hand,” a phrase that suggests some kind of guidance behind the order but acknowledges that such guidance cannot be pointed to.

Neighborhoods are another system of separate actions creating a larger order, as noted by the “human ecology” school of the University of Chicago. Sociologists at Chicago—Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth, and others—show that the infinite variety of the city sorts itself out when individuals and groups act according to influences of ethnicity, race, class, taste, age, and education.²⁵ No one could design a neighborhood as intricate, durable, or adaptive as Boston’s North End or Jamaica Plain. These places are products of the decisions of the individuals who live, work, visit, or pass through, as well as the decisions of people outside the neighborhood. At times—when the factors noted above combine in dangerous ways—these neighborhoods have been unhealthy places for people to live. At many other times, these neighborhoods have been great places to live.

As Greater Boston moves into a new century, the central question of public policy is what kind of order the region needs to address its many challenges. The choices available to the region fall along a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum lies the strategy of centralized policymaking. At the other end of the spectrum lies a *laissez faire* approach. Somewhere in the middle is the strategy of setting a few strong rules or goals for all communities but allowing the intelligence of separate actors to create their own regional order.

The Appeal of Comprehensive Planning

At first glance, the centralized approach seems to make the most sense. Many problems do not seem solvable at the local level. Housing is a classic example. The cost of housing has escalated across the region, causing families of modest means to hopscotch from one community to the next in search of units that are affordable. Part of the problem is that some communities take explicit steps to block production of new housing, especially for low-income families. Cities like Boston and Cambridge bear a disproportionate burden for building housing because other cities and towns avoid the problem altogether. How can the housing problem be solved without a state or regional policy that dictates the creation of affordable housing in all communities?

Transportation is another problem that appears solvable only at the state or regional level. The problem, after all, is that systems for moving people across the region are inadequate. Because the population has spread out from the “hub” of Boston to the “periphery” of MetroWest and the South Shore, people need new ways to get to jobs, schools, shopping, and various community and family events. If getting from Hingham to Framingham is the problem, should not an entity that embraces the two places be responsible?

The environment is yet another problem that invites a statewide or regional intervention. Pollution knows not the boundaries of cities and towns. Dirty air and water move throughout the region according to the climatic conditions of many separate communities and the flows of rivers and harbors that touch several communities. Even place-specific environmental problems, like brownfields, can be traced to the actions of entities larger than any city or town. How can the problems of the environment be addressed absent a regional strategy?

Regional problems often require some kind of regional strategy. But the question is what kinds of regional solutions offer the best strategy to confront the problems—and encourage creative approaches and avoid unwelcome side effects.

One approach to regionalism, which might be called command-and-control, would establish strong central authority at the state or regional level. This central authority would mandate particular kinds of behavior and proscribe other kinds of behavior. The central authority would also provide resources rather than requiring local communities to raise their own fiscal resources.

Some advocates of central planning would recreate the State Office of Planning, which directed local planning efforts under the first Dukakis Administration. Others would give real authority over land use, transportation, and the environment to a regional planning body like the Metropolitan

Area Planning Council. The planning body presumably would have the power to adjust local zoning, direct housing to favored sites, develop regional transportation systems, and manage parks and natural spaces. It could also have the power to coordinate regional policies for other issues, such as public education, recreational facilities, and culture and the arts. However the central planning body were constituted, it would have the capacity to override local preferences in support of broader regional goals. It could override the NIMBY actions of localities in the siting of schools, housing, hospitals, train lines, bus sheds, parking garages, and the like. It could also pool resources and broker creative land swaps to encourage desirable development or preservation projects.

In imagining what a regional planning body might look like, it might make sense to look at existing regional authorities and projects. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority played a critical role in the cleanup of the Boston Harbor and the creation of a network of sewered communities. Massport runs Logan Airport and the Port of Boston and coordinates a number of development deals in East Boston and beyond; more recently, it has overseen planning efforts to coordinate air travel in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority not only runs Interstate 90 but also oversees the construction of the Big Dig. A newer regional body, Telecom City, has coordinated the development of a 200-acre site as a new high-technology community on land provided by Malden, Medford, and Everett.

These regional bodies have proved successful in promoting their distinct agendas, but critics wonder if they offer the kind of latitude and creativity that might be desirable for a region in flux.

The MWRA, for example, operates a massive sewage treatment plant on Deer Island that serves 43 communities. The plant is an engineering and operational marvel, but critics say that its comprehensive approach to water management undermines important environmental goals. Water experts say that water and sewage should be managed on the local level to foster more environmentally sound practices, but the MWRA's regional approach undermines such localism. The MWRA system also acts as a *de facto* land-use planning system. Communities that are not part of the system cannot offer enough water service to accommodate large-scale development; the greatest impact of the MWRA might be to direct development from non-MWRA communities to MWRA member communities. This steering of development to MWRA communities might be desirable from a regional planning perspective, but it might not as well. It is an unintended consequence of comprehensive planning in water and sewer management.²⁶

Take the Mass Pike as a second example. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority was created in 1952 to build the highway that would become part of the Interstate Highway System. Long after the construction of the highway has been paid off, the authority continues to charge tolls for use of the highway. Those tolls not only pay for upkeep of the highway (which critics say would be amply supported by the revenues from rest stops) but also helps to pay for the multi-billion-dollar Big Dig project. Critics say the uses of toll revenues distort the authority's fundamental purpose. The subsidization of the Big Dig is especially troubling from a policy perspective; drivers on the east-west Mass Pike should not have to subsidize the completion of an expensive north-south Interstate 93, while I-93 drivers glide in and out of the city without getting nicked. The availability of funds from the authority seems a god-send to managers of the Big Dig who must cover billions in cost overruns. But the arrangement is unfair and undermines efforts to impose fiscal discipline on the project.

Finally, consider Telecom City. This joint venture of three cities appears to operate on the best intentions of regionalism. Malden, Medford, and Everett share an interest in leveraging their assets to foster economic development. By creating a new development entity to recruit high-technology firms to the area, the cities hoped to bring good jobs to the area and strengthen the property values and character of their residents. The communities successfully lobbied for federal funds and began to develop plans not only for an office park but also open space, transit connections, and housing. But the master-planning approach has faltered. Residents of the three cities resisted the idea of building new housing, and then the high-tech industry suffered a downturn. Telecom City officials are now considering whether they should accept other kinds of development. Critics say the Telecom City experience shows the difficulties of large-scale planning. Rather than laying a strong foundation for whatever kinds of development the marketplace found desirable, the Telecom City effort tried to take a hands-on approach to development.

If Greater Boston created a regional planning body with real authority over land use, transportation, and the environment, that body might experience the same kinds of opportunities—and problems—as these three smaller-scale bodies. Large-scale planning might undermine incentives to behave responsibly at the local level, as critics say has happened with the MWRA. It might undermine fiscal responsibility, as critics say has occurred with the Mass Pike and the Big Dig. It might also encourage the tendency to “pick winners,” as critics say has characterized Telecom City's unsuccessful efforts to create a new high-tech center north of Boston.

‘Emergence Regionalism’

What, then, might a sensible approach to regionalism look like? For a hint, return to the notion of “emergence.”

A system of “emergence regionalism” would establish a relative handful of simple but strong rules to guide the innumerable decisions of individual actors—and then back off and let those individuals create their own order and rich networks rather than trying to impose a single order. The state would establish clear rules and processes for highways, transit, housing, open-space protection, economic development. Those rules and processes would establish the parameters of policy for local governments, but otherwise leave local governments alone. Those rules and processes would establish the parameters of economic decision making, but otherwise leave developers and businesses alone.

To attack the region’s housing crisis, for example, emergence regionalism would streamline the state’s far-flung building codes into one consistent, legible code. It would establish simple zoning mandates that allow multi-family housing to be built in communities all over the state. The state also would identify publicly owned parcels of land and dispose of them quickly for housing development. A simple swap could be offered: free land to developers willing to commit one-third of their units on any site for below-market rents.

Emergence regionalism would seek to understand how the state’s capital budgeting process could give priority to projects that foster connections among cities and towns. Right now, the legislature authorizes projects that far exceed the state’s annual \$1.1 billion debt ceiling. The result is that the state’s Executive Office of Administration and Finance decides which projects actually get financing, while many local projects languish. By establishing clear standards for which projects get approval, including joint projects involving several localities, the Office of Administration and Finance’s process could be more coherent—and less political—while encouraging localities to develop regionally smart projects.

On transportation, the state could also establish simple principles that provide a broad context for decisions by local government and private firms. Rather than using a state authority to create expensive, fixed-rail transit that serves a limited number of people, the state could offer resources for localities to develop their own regional transit network. Following the model of Curitiba, Brazil, a consortium of localities might get together to provide frequent and inexpensive bus service along a densely populated corridor.²⁷ A regional transportation network might involve “smart” vehicle systems. It might involve jitney connections to existing public transportation corridors. It might involve ride-sharing incentives at critical gateways or portals. It might

involve peak-period pricing and high-occupancy vehicle incentives for highways. It might involve incentives for dense housing and retail development near existing transit nodes. It might involve incentives for four-day work weeks and commuting/telecommuting arrangements. It might involve such creative parking and transit packages as pioneered by King County, Washington.²⁸

The point is not to impose any one system for relieving traffic congestion and associated ills of automobile-dependency. Only by laying a clear set of parameters for transportation management—and then allowing a wide range of public and private agents to adopt their own approaches that fit inside those broad parameters—can Greater Boston develop creative and affordable alternatives to top-down, command-and-control approaches to public policy.

Information technologies offer powerful new means to drive policy that achieves regional results locally. Traditionally, environmentalists have attacked water pollution and other challenges by going after the “big pipes,” that is, sources of pollution that are easy to identify such as wastewater treatment plants and factories. But pollution comes from many sources, and cleaning up rivers requires close monitoring of pollution throughout a watershed. In recent years the Charles River Watershed Association has developed a comprehensive monitoring system for water quality that has enabled government agencies and others to attack the problem at multiple sources. “The ability to measure environmental conditions in ‘real time’ and at frequent enough geographic intervals to trace an impact to a particular source makes the information ‘actionable,’” writes Fara Courtney.²⁹ When the information is shared widely, everyone is put on notice—the public, private and nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. As Baltimore has discovered with its use of CitiStat, such real-time information can drive good policy and management at all levels.³⁰

Some policy areas require strong regulation, but can be enhanced by encouraging local initiative. Standards for clean air and water are set by the federal government, and Massachusetts sometimes sets even higher standards. But the state can enhance federal policy by encouraging strong local and private action. Brownfields offers one good example. Brownfields are usually expensive to clean, and require considerable incentives to make them acceptable for reuse. But the state can provide incentives to make cleanup easier, by combining dirty properties with clean properties in development deals, by reducing legal liability for owners of property contaminated by previous owners, and by allowing new forms of containment. The state’s best policy for brownfields might be to establish a complete menu of possibilities for reuse of land rather than mandating a single remediation strategy.

On some issues, state and regional entities might acknowledge that the best policy is no policy. Recycling offers the greatest potential for local action. Cities like Worcester have transformed themselves from worst to best by adopting unit-price systems for garbage pickup. Other cities and towns have adopted less successful approaches. Rather than mandating the Worcester approach, the state's best approach might be to continue to offer real rewards for performance and provide technical assistance.³¹ Or perhaps the state should simply sit back and let cities and towns sort through their own garbage-disposal issues. Some critics have found sorting refuse from recyclables offers limited environmental benefits; those skeptical voices at least should be considered.³² Even if recycling makes sense, it might come of its own accord, without top-down pressures. As the cost of landfill and carting increases, cities might have enough incentive to adopt local policies that cut back on household garbage production.

At the center of emergence regionalism is the simple imperative to "do no harm." A regional body would lack essential knowledge of local conditions and longterm consequences of comprehensive policies. Better to ruthlessly eliminate the policies and regulations that impede positive solutions than to pile on new policies that make implementing policy more difficult. The do-no-harm imperative of emergence regionalism is not a passive approach, but rather a demand that the creativity of the many be given a chance over the heavy hand of the few.