Part 4: Our Transportation Spending Principles

We must invest in transportation systems throughout the state, with an emphasis on improving public transit through the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and the state’s fifteen Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs). As we rebuild our transportation systems, we must make sure that we are spending money in ways that benefit the public good.

The Green Justice Coalition and Raise Up Massachusetts propose five principles for transportation spending:

**Transportation should be sustainable**
New transportation investment should help reduce the state’s greenhouse gas emissions and increase the climate resiliency of our communities.

Improving and expanding transit systems will encourage people to leave their cars at home, reducing pollution that drives climate change. We can make public transit even more environmentally sustainable by investing in alternatives to fossil fuels, such as electrifying transit fleets and building better bicycle infrastructure.

We have a responsibility to care for our public transit resources over the long term and adequately fund repair and expansion and ensure good jobs to retain employees over the long term.

**Transportation investments should be statewide**
Transportation spending should address the unique needs of residents in every region of the Commonwealth. That means giving more Massachusetts residents the option to travel by high-quality public transportation, walking, or biking, while still supporting car-dependent communities by investing in roads and bridges, and by ensuring universal access to broadband internet to enable telecommuting.

**Public transit should be public**
Public ownership, operation, and management should form the baseline of our transit systems, in order to:
- Make sure the public interest—not the profit motive—drives decision-making
- Allow democratic debate on funding and expenditures
- Strengthen opportunities for community oversight and input
- Provide good jobs with livable wages and a voice at work
Outsourcing operation and management through contracting, public private partnerships, or outright privatization can drive up costs, lower quality of service, and drive down job standards. Transit, a key public good in Massachusetts, should not be exempt from the protections of the Taxpayer Protection Act (Pacheco Law).

**Public transit should be affordable**

Public transportation in Massachusetts is increasingly unaffordable for lower-income people, who are more likely to depend on public transit as their primary means of transportation. A discounted fare would make it more affordable for people to get to work, school, the doctor, or wherever else they need to go.

A pilot project at MIT found that low-income people with access to a half-price fare took 30 percent more trips overall, and took more trips to access healthcare and social services. People with incomes at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level—equal to $37,370 for a single person—should have access to discounted fares set at 50% of the regular fare.

**Public transit should be equitable and accessible**

Transit systems in Massachusetts today do not provide the same level of service to all people, with people of color spending more time and money to get where they need to go.

We must build an equitable and accessible transit system by ensuring that:

- New investment prioritizes service to those historically left out of the full benefits of public transportation: people of color and working-class communities.
- Paratransit services for people with disabilities is easily accessible and affordable, even for people living outside of urban centers.
- Cash payment is an option at all points of entry for the transit system, so there are no added barriers for people without mobile phones, credit or debit cards, or bank accounts. If cash payment is an obstacle to high-quality transit service in certain settings, such as on buses, then free service should be considered in those settings.
- Public transit systems should provide good jobs and ensure that:
  - All the workers involved in our transit systems earn at least a living wage and have a voice on the job.
  - The MBTA and RTAs train and hire people from communities that depend on them.