

It's time to take action to address traffic congestion

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By Robert Buckley

A sign of the rise of economic well-being in the Commonwealth comes at us daily with the upswing in congestion on many of the major arteries in eastern Massachusetts. However, unless the state aggressively works with the business community as well as municipalities to lessen congestion, frustration is likely to grow with long-term implications adversely impacting economic prospects for the Commonwealth.

In recent years, many transportation initiatives have originated from business working with local communities on a regional basis. One group born out of this transportation concern is the Middlesex 3 Coalition. The impetus for Middlesex 3 was the recognition of major business, municipalities, as well as the state, of the need to cooperatively address economic issues and infrastructure concerns along the Route 3 corridor from Burlington to the New Hampshire border. While many new ideas are beginning to emerge from the cooperation of these communities and the businesses, it is imperative that the state exercise leadership at this juncture through a willingness to participate as an equal player and provide needed resources.

The time is now for the state to act.

For example, the state could help with:

- Targeted alternative transportation strategies like special bus shuttle services helping employees in the suburbs get directly to their business campuses, and
- Tax incentives to private business that implement transportation alternatives

The need for action is becoming more apparent as new technology is producing unexpected, and sometimes undesirable, results. While technology has made rapid advances in providing navigation systems for automobiles, reducing the amount of time that people are lost and thus reducing air pollution and fuel consumption, there is a surprising negative side that comes with these technological advances that may impact future decision making. These navigation solutions now often result in vehicular traffic being redirected through residential neighborhoods. Residents in these neighborhoods are becoming increasingly frustrated by this surge in traffic generation. Their voices will not be quiet for long. As they clamor for solutions, the pressure on lawmakers to act will increase dramatically. The political pressure will be ratcheted to a crescendo that may result in bad decisions.

Therefore, there is a need for the Commonwealth to become more active participants in these regional compacts of public/private partnerships. Innovative solutions need to be explored and implemented. While the resources of the state are limited, the direction of these resources to transportation infrastructure improvements will yield returns that justify the expenditures. The failure to act now will cause those feeling the impacts to drown out practical solutions in favor of short-term “band aid” responses.

As noted above, there is involvement on the part of the business community as well as local governments to try to grapple with these issues. While in many instances state agencies and representatives have recognized and articulated their concerns and voice support, the time to act with the implementation of long term, responsive solutions is now.

This call to action is particularly timely as the state considers the Olympics in 2024. The opportunity is there for the Olympics to help us make needed improvements to our aging infrastructure. This opportunity should not be missed and all parties should participate in the discussions. Whether or not the Olympics become a reality the discussion will lead to the identification of potential solutions to already existing problems.

The state needs to exhibit the commitment being shown from the general business community and local governments to work hand in hand to implement solutions. The time for studies and

reports that collect dust in various repositories is over. What has to be done now is the implementation of solutions that have both short terms impacts and long-term flexibility.

In the age of technology, people and business can relocate more quickly given the strong telecommunications that have been developed over the last few decades. As worker frustration increases, businesses will start to pursue alternatives. These alternatives may not be in the best interest of the Commonwealth. Let's call an infrastructure summit with the first agenda item being transportation.

By Robert Buckley is a Senior Partner at Riemer & Braunstein