

LONG-TERM PUBLIC TRANSIT PLANNING

By, John DeVillars

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Medford Mayor Michael McGlynn, Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone and the Conservation Law Foundation deserve applause for their efforts to bring public attention to the Commonwealth's remaining transit obligations under the Big Dig's environmental approvals. And the Globe is right on the note in its Jan. 13 editorial, "A Map For Transportation," that this attention is a timely opportunity for sound, long-term public transit planning.

The Artery transit investments – a critical part of the environmental rationale for the project – were not intended to lag a generation behind the highway improvements, but rather to keep pace with them.

It is more than regrettable, and quite possibly a violation of the law, that they have not. Nevertheless as forces coalesce to finish the job, it provides an opportunity to review decisions made in 1990 and, based on new facts and realities and the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, to improve upon those decisions.

An example: in 1990 the Urban Ring and commuter rail to Fall River and New Bedford were concepts; today they are ready to proceed to full design, engineering and permitting. They represent high return investment opportunities for many of the Commonwealth's most important objectives – economic and community development, housing production, and environment quality.

The time to advance these or other alternatives – and to commit resources to finance them is now. With the enormous capability of the Commonwealth's transportation policy cabinet, and with the help of CLF and the mayors and a little luck, our chances of doing so are promising.