

Executive Order 530 Initial Meeting

Massachusetts State House

August 25th, 2011

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Secretary Mullan:

Good afternoon. I would like to welcome everybody to the Community, Social Service, and Paratransit Transportation Commission's first meeting.

My name is Jeff Mullan. I am the Transportation Secretary for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Co-Chair, along with the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, JudyAnnBigby, of today's kick-off meeting announcing the creation and establishment of the Commission. Let me first thank my boss, Governor Deval Patrick, for signing the Executive Order that created this Commission, and for bringing to the public's attention this critically important issue.

Transportation plays a critical role in providing access to employment, health care, education, community services, and activities necessary for daily living. The importance of this role is underscored by programs and services provided in the Commonwealth, including fixed-route buses and commuter rail, demand responsive transportation services, paratransit services, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ("ADA") complementary paratransit service, and social service transportation. Furthermore, the vital role of these transportation services is demonstrated by the significant Federal and State financial

investment in accessible public transportation systems and service providers throughout the Commonwealth.

Executive Order 530, signed this past April by Governor Patrick, establishes a statewide commission to study opportunities for improved service and cost savings for all health-related transportation services, including paratransit services.

As people's transportation needs change, so do their expectations of their public transportation system. As a result, the demand for services keeps growing, costs continue to rise, and resources remain limited.

The goal of this Commission, particularly in light of our recent accomplishments related to transportation reform, is to develop detailed recommendations for enhanced service delivery and maximize efficiencies in the provision of these critical transit options utilized by persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, persons with limited English proficiency, and seniors and visitors to the Commonwealth.

Through a more coordinated statewide effort, we believe we can maintain and enhance transportation service while moderating cost.

Starting today, Secretary Bigby and I, along with you the appointed Commission members, will share all our thoughts and expertise on transportation options and proposals on how to deliver services more efficiently and cost effectively. There will be six listening sessions across the Commonwealth when our citizens can share their opinions and concerns regarding their experiences. We will be listening hard and taking their comments seriously. Once the listening sessions are complete, we are tasked with drafting a report to the Governor to offer recommendations for changes that could possibly be implemented in the short term and going forward. We need to focus on our obligation to provide a quality service for our customers, and to develop a strategy to identify the financial resources necessary to implement that appropriate level of service. It is our responsibility to find permanent solutions to longstanding mobility issues.

With those introductory remarks, I would like to turn the microphone over to my Co-Chair, Secretary Bigby.

Secretary Bigby:

I would like to thank Secretary Mullan for introducing this Commission. I am really happy to have time to get this initiative off the ground. I want to thank all the Commissioners who are here at the table with us. I am also delighted to see so many people out in the audience, some of whom I know are not State employees, who came because this must be a really important issue to them. But, I also want to thank all the people in the audience who do represent Commonwealth agencies who also believe that this is an important issue.

As Jeff pointed out, this Commission was established by Governor Patrick through Executive Order 530. And I too want to thank the Governor for his leadership. As Secretary of Health and Human Services, I know how important comprehensive, accessible, well-coordinated, and efficient transportation systems are; and the role that they play in the infrastructure that sustains employment opportunity, public health, and public welfare.

In Massachusetts we made a very significant investment to establish a robust transportation system and we are fortunate to have Governor Patrick's leadership. The services offered by State and quasi-state agencies include demand-response transportation, paratransit services, ADA complementary, and fixed-route.

Within the Executive office of Health and Human Services, we invest more than \$111 million a year in a statewide coordinated human service transportation brokerage system with select regional transit authorities that provide more than 5.5 million trips a year.

This single point of management for nearly all transportation services, purchased by human services agencies, enable some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable citizens to pursue employment, medical appointments, and access community-based support services. In addition to this transportation system, we provide more than 400,000 Commonwealth veterans with transportation services annually and the statewide elder network locally, through the access points, 23 area agencies on aging and 349 Councils on Aging and senior citizen centers. Many senior centers in Massachusetts also provide transportation.

Secretary Mullan:

In keeping with their membership and anticipated participation in developing objectives, the Commission members will set the framework for carrying out the Commission's responsibility in accordance with Governor Patrick's executive order.

Let me now turn the microphone over to the current Rail and Transit Administrator of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and General Manager of the MBTA and the incoming Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Transportation – Richard Davey.

General Manager Richard Davey:

Good afternoon. My name is Richard Davey. I am the current General Manager of the MBTA and Rail and Transit Administrator for MassDOT. I am delighted to be part of this undertaking and thank Governor Patrick for his initiative on this issue.

We have been tasked to recommend reforms and efficiencies in community, paratransit, and social service transportation. As General Manager of the MBTA and Administrator of the Rail and Transit Division, my job is to assure that all residents of the Commonwealth have access to the most efficient, effective, and accessible mass transportation service available.

As Secretary Mullan noted, we are in an unfortunate situation – our need grows and financial resources remain the same, or worse yet, decrease. Our recent experience with The RIDE, MBTA paratransit services, is a good example of this. Last year the MBTA provided 2.1 million ADA paratransit trips. In the past 10 years, ridership has grown an average of 10 percent per year. Meanwhile, cost to provide the service has increased an average of 16 percent per year and is expected to cost the MBTA over \$100 million in fiscal year 2012. The RIDE has already spent \$650,000 over budget for the month of July – one month into the fiscal year. It is among the highest costs in our budget.

At the same time, 15 regional transit authorities (RTAs) provided approximately 2 million paratransit trips combined last year. Six of the RTAs brokered five and a half million trips on behalf of human service agencies. This does not include similar trips provided by councils on aging, private nonprofit transit agencies, private for profit transit agencies, and multipurpose agencies with a transit component.

We, as a Commission, have a very short period of time to look hard at the current paratransit delivery system, to listen to you, the riding public, to determine where we are hitting the mark and where we are falling short, and then to formulate recommendations for both long- and short-term solutions to ensure our limited resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. We need to find ways to contain costs while maintaining quality transportation services throughout Massachusetts.

Some community transportation services are fragmented and difficult to navigate – or they are not always available to meet certain needs. The lack of basic services can be profound for people who face challenges accessing traditional transportation services. This is one of the reasons that this Commission is going forward. The Patrick/Murray Administration, as many of you know, remains deeply committed to providing people with supports they need to continue to live in their own communities. This means we need a strong transportation infrastructure.

We need to be responsive to changing needs and expectations. We also must meet the demand for services as they continue to grow in spite of the fact that at this time our resources remain limited. This means we need to be smarter and more efficient about the way we provide services; we must look for ways to improve access to quality by reasonably containing costs. Although this will be difficult, it's possible. For example, last year, services provided through EOHHS human services transportation network continued to grow. Consumer trips increased on a statewide basis by almost seven percent last year, while the average cost per trip decreased by over two percent from the previous year.

Our goal is to identify actual opportunities to improve both access and quality transportation services for all residents in the most efficient manner possible. I look forward to working with all of you on the Commission and hearing from all of the critical stakeholders through the six public listening sessions that will be scheduled across the Commonwealth over the next several weeks. We need to hear from you to better understand your transportation needs and ideas for improvement.

Massachusetts has long been a leader in providing services and in many cases far exceeds minimal service levels. We need to go further and develop a network of ADA and non-ADA paratransit services that is not only sustainable for today, but for years to come. We need to pull out all the stops -- to better coordinate services, maximize trip sharing, and promote travel training in order to utilize the most appropriate type of transportation. That is how we will remain a leader. I am looking forward to the challenge. We fully understand that for many people, transportation is a lifeline which eliminates isolation and allows freedom to travel.

One of the Governor's and Lt. Governor's goals is for the complementary paratransit quality of service to be consistent and excellent throughout the Commonwealth. I think that would be a great place to start. I look forward to working with all of you in the next several months.

Secretary Mullan:

Thank you. Let me remind the audience, inform the audience – this is Jeffrey Mullan – that we will not be taking testimony at this meeting of the Commission. There will be six listening sessions following this introductory meeting. This meeting is to introduce the concept to the public and members of the Commission and to hear some of the Commission's introductory comments, observations, and perspectives regarding improving service levels while keeping in mind all of this must be done while we remain in strict compliance with our obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

There are 16 Commission members seated at this table. They were selected based upon recommendations of the peers in State government and advocacy community for their levels of expertise and experience. We, as a group, are going to rely on them and they on you, to issue and prepare initial recommendations for the Governor. I would like to ask each of the Commission members to introduce themselves to the audience and to each other – to state name and affiliation.

Francis Gay: Hi. My name is Francis Gay. I am Administrator of the Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority in Southeastern Massachusetts, representing 26 member communities in that area.

Linda Guiod: I am Linda Guiod. I am a policy advocate for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society Greater New England Chapter. We serve about 11,000 people in Massachusetts.

Judith O'Connor: I am Judith O'Connor and I am the Executive Director of the Millbury Council on Aging, and we provide daily rides to both paratransit and the elderly. We travel one town out in every direction, and are looking to expand.

Rebecca Deusser: Hi. I am Rebecca Deusser and I am representing Secretary Jay Gonzalez.

Tom Cahir: I am Tom Cahir, Administrator of the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority, representing 15 member communities on the Cape.

Ann Hartstein: Hello. I am Ann Hartstein, Secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

Jeffrey Mullan: I am Jeff Mullan, Secretary of Transportation. I would like to introduce my designee and the person who will be the designee of incoming Secretary Davey and will have day-to-day participation on the Commission – Clinton Bench.

JudyAnnBigby: I am JudyAnnBigby and I will follow suit and introduce my designee, Catherine Mick – our Chief Administrative Officer, and Jim Flanagan.

Coleman Nee: I am Coleman Nee and I would like to introduce my designee for the Commission, Deputy Secretary Cheryl Lussier-Poppe.

Richard Davey: Again, my name is Richard Davey. I am the current General Manager of the MBTA and Administrator of the Rail and Transit Division of MassDOT. I would like to introduce the incoming Acting General Manager of the MBTA, Jonathan Davis.

Ron Marlow: I am Ron Marlow. I am charged with trying to ensure non-discrimination and diversity in all State services, programs and activities.

Mohammed Khan: My name is Mohammed Khan. I am Administrator of the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority located in Fitchburg. My agency is a human services transportation broker under EOHHS.

Will Rodman: Hi. I am Will Rodman. I am up here on a volunteer basis. I have worked with paratransit and coordinated human services transportation and problems for over 33 years. I have worked with 25 States and their Commissions and hope that I can lend my expertise to this Commission.

Jini Fairley: Hi. I am Jini Fairley and one of the two consumers on this Commission. I am an ADA complementary paratransit user and Director of Services at the MetroWest Center for Independent Living in Framingham, MA.

Denise Karuth: Hi. My name is Denise Karuth, and I am the second consumer on the panel. I am the former Chairperson of the Governor’s Commission on Accessible Transportation under Governor Dukakis back in the 80’s. So nice to be back here exploring transportation options again.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you.

Thank you very much. I will address some of the administrative, important administrative and important matters and open up the floor to members of the Commission for discussion about what each of us believes should be the Commission’s priorities. Let me start – I am sorry. This is Jeff Mullan again. You should be used to me by now. The accent is from Central Massachusetts.

First of all, the Commission has established a website which is [www.mbta.com/executiveorder 530](http://www.mbta.com/executiveorder530). The reason I wanted to introduce that first is all of the materials that I am about to introduce to the Commission are either on or will be on that website for the public to take a look at. Secondly, the Commission has an e-mail address as follows: execorder530@mbta.com. The phone, for comments only, is (617) 222-6260. That line is for comments on the Commission’s work only.

That is preliminary information. The support staff, will introduce themselves in a minute, have put together a work binder for each member of the Commission. I will not go through the entire binder, but I will tell you that there is a tremendous amount of information in there. I urge you all to read that. Let me highlight a couple of important pieces of the material. And, as I said earlier, all of this will be on the website.

First is a schedule for your commitment on the Commission. That is at Tab 2.

Secondly, there is a contact list of members at Tab 4 and Tab 6 has overviews of the programs that provided by MassDOT and EOHHS.

At Tab 7 there is a description of each agency's program; and at Tab 8, suggestions for potential issues for the Commission to consider. That list has been culled from years of work by members of the Commission, the general public, and people who are involved in this program. So, I thank everybody for that. We proposed this list not as an exclusive list of issues for the Commission to consider, but rather guidelines to guide and to steer the conversation and the report writing for the Governor.

No effort this large, this involved, this comprehensive gets done without tremendous support staff. I can see them sitting in the front. I would like to ask the support staff of the agencies involved in putting this together to just stand up and recognize yourself, introduce yourself and let people know where you are coming from.

I am Heather Hume with the MBTA Service Planning Department. As Jeff pointed out, I am the point of contact so e-mails, contact, scheduling, everything goes through me. So feel free to call or e-mail me.

Secretary Mullan: That is Heather H-U-M-E. She is terrific. Thank you Heather.

I am Carol Joyce Harrington from the MBTA Office of Transportation Access, The RIDE Program.

I am Catherine Lynds, Chief of Staff of the MBTA and the MassDOT Rail and Transit Division. Thank you for coming today.

Paula George, Assistant Administrator of the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority.

Joanne Champa, MassDOT Rail and Transit Division.

Jim Flanagan, Executive Director, Human Services Transportation Office, EOHHS.

Catherine Mick, Chief Administrative Officer of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. I would also like to introduce two other folks from EOHHS who are sitting here in the second row – Christine Newhall, Deputy Director for Human Services Transportation and Sandy Mulcahy who is the Director of Brokerage.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you members of the staff. A couple of preliminary matters – there will be six listening sessions around the Commonwealth to listen and to solicit public input on the Commission’s work. Those meetings are scheduled as follows:

- September 13 there will be a meeting at the Lawrence Public Library.
- On September 21, there will be a meeting at the Cape Cod Community College.
- October 4 there will be a meeting in Union Station, Worcester.
- October 27 there will be a meeting at the Berkshire Intermodal Center

I would now like to open up the discussion to members of the Commission and I would like to ask Secretary Nee to make some comments. I’ll then ask the Commission members for new ideas, priorities, what the Commission should be focused on, and to kick the conversation off to get other people thinking about the scope of the Commission and the direction that the Commission must take and to see if there are individual thoughts about our task. Secretary Nee . . .

Thank you Secretary and thank you Secretary Bigby for making this issue a priority.

We here in the Commonwealth are proud of the fact that we lead the nation in providing benefits and services for Veterans and we have many, many benefits and many, many resources across the Commonwealth providing those services and making themselves available at the Federal, State, local and nonprofit level. But we also recognize that those services don’t meet the needs of people that have trouble accessing them. So the issue of transportation is critical for Veterans, particularly in the areas of health care delivery and/or employment.

There is a range of issues that we see across the spectrum in our population – a population that is approximately 390,000 right now, the vast majority of whom are the age of 65. We are trying to work with Veterans of all ages – seniors with limited mobility, Veterans with service-connected wounds or medical conditions, Veterans who reside outside the Greater Boston area or outside of major cities which have public transportation, Veterans who are indigent, who do not have vehicles. We are seeing increasing numbers of Veterans troubled with post traumatic stress syndrome for whom public transportation is a real struggle, and in some cases almost impossible. As I mentioned earlier, Cheryl Poppe is my designee. She has done extensive work, along with Jim Flanagan and Sandy Mulcahy, on trying to figure out how we coordinate resources to help to get these folks where they need to be. The Governor’s Advisory Council on Veteran Services has made that a priority as well. So we are excited about this Commission and excited by the collaborative effort. Cheryl will be bringing in additional information from our Veteran Services Organizations, such as the Disabled American Veterans as well as the VA and other Federal and State agencies that we may contract with or with to provide transportation. We will continue to make this a top priority. We do feel that with the amount of resources and benefits available here in the Commonwealth, that no one should be denied simply because they cannot access the services. Thank you Secretaries Bigby and Mullan for making this a priority.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you Secretary. I would like to ask Secretary Ann Hartstein to make some remarks.

Secretary Hartstein: It's a pleasure to be here. I have been working with senior citizens for many, many years. In all the listening sessions in which I have taken part, there is always one issue that comes up no matter where I am what, what I am doing, or what I am asking for – that is that transportation is a problem. Having been part of many working groups to try to solve the problem of transportation, I know how difficult it can be and I am really pleased to have this opportunity to work on some of the things that we perhaps have not been able to do before.

When I think about transportation, I think about transportation as a picture puzzle. You have the pieces that fit, pieces are there that actually need to be removed, and other pieces that then tie other pieces together. So, in the end, we have a full picture that will have pieces that fit together. We have been working on some of those pieces over the last 20 years. And, we will be working on them probably for the next 20 years, but we are making progress. And, to me, that's what this Commission is all about. It's really looking at some of the pieces that we have been working on through the years, seeing what works, what doesn't, and making sure that we make the recommendations that move the pieces forward that work for all of us. Transportation is about access to community. It's not about necessarily getting to work – although that's an important piece, but it's really about access to community. We need to make sure that we don't limit transportation to just medical appointments or work or some other things. We have to do those as well.

So, I am excited to be a part of this. I am happy to have Undersecretary Sandra Albright on this Commission. She has been involved with these issues throughout her working life, and probably before that as well. So again, I would like to thank Secretary Mullan and the Governor for setting up this Commission. I am looking forward to working with all of you. The only other piece I would like to say, I would like to encourage all of you to come to the listening sessions, even if you think we've heard it all before, even if you think you have told each of us on the Commission before, it's important to say it again. Speak up and tell us what you think and help us come up with solutions that work. That is really what we would ask you to do to help us to make sure that this Commission report is what needs to be said. So again, thank you so much for being here. I look forward to seeing you all at the listening sessions.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you Secretary and thank you for recognizing publicly the importance of this issue being part of our overall transportation puzzle. I think it's an excellent observation and I think very helpful for the Commission in carrying out its work. I wonder if maybe for the ease of the audience – maybe I start at my left hand side and ask anybody to the left if they would want to add some preliminary observations regarding the Commission's work, before I put one of you on the spot – which I am happy to do.

Ron Marlow: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Again, this is Ron Marlow. Let me say that my observations are as follows:

In going through the information in the binder, I am not unmindful of the incredible challenges that face not only our transportation agencies, but also the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The numbers paint a stark picture and so let me pledge up front that I will be an active participant in our quest for efficiencies; in our mandate for quality delivery of transportation services, but also, the requirement that we achieve both of those objectives will not in any way sacrifice principles of equity. To paraphrase a statement that I use typically when I am talking about procurement, “equity of accessibility is not and should not, nor can it be, the enemy of efficiency.” It is the promise that is embedded in Federal and State Civil Rights law and it is the principle embedded in Executive Order 526, also signed by this Governor, Governor Patrick, in which the principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunity are principles to be embedded in the delivery of State services, programs, and activities. And, so as we go forward, there are a couple of questions that I think we should be mindful of and put on the table: one of those questions is, “What is your equity baseline today?” “How do we define it?” “Are we at it?” “Are we at it in a uniform manner?” “What does it take to get there?”

And, as we start to introduce questions of efficiencies and economies, we should also seek to balance our answers to those questions with whatever solutions we put forward, so that we know every solution that we ultimately make to the Governor or to the Legislature will indeed have been created from a balance between our goals and objectives and our mandate for equity. If we can do that, I think we will have a process that will serve not only the Commonwealth well, but more importantly, it will serve each and every one of the populations that many of us represent and that are here in the audience. We will create a sustainable but accessible transportation future. I will stop there.

Secretary Mullan: Tom.

Thomas Cahir: I am excited to participate in this process. I have been working in transportation during my adult life, and I would like to commend the Patrick/Murray Administration and Secretaries Mullan and Bigby for recognizing this as a priority. I feel strongly it’s good for government, at any time, to do a comprehensive review of things, particularly in this economic climate. It makes a lot of sense to look for efficiencies. But, one thing I am trying to do on the Cape is obviously look for efficiencies across the board without reducing service that folks expect and deserve. I think that’s an essential part of what we must do here today.

On the Cape we have invested, I think wisely, recently in creating more efficient software to try to get folks to where they need to go in a more timely fashion. I listened to the Secretary and others talk about multicollaboration –an opportunity for other transportation partners to incorporate the same kinds of ideas and thoughts so that we can make the system work better. I had an opportunity to work here at the State in recent years, and I observed the implementation of the EOHHS brokerage service. The folks involved with that did a very, very good job. I would be remiss if I did not mention Jim Flanagan. Jim has been a real leader, in my opinion, for many years. He has educated me and assisted me in helping to make the system work. I would also like to recognize my old colleague, Joanne Champa.

So, I don't want to suggest that the system is totally broken, but is certainly appropriate to review, create efficiencies, and increase access to all our transportation services. We are doing very neat things on the Cape. There are really good folks on this Commission, many of whom I have had the pleasure of working with over the years. They people that really know how to make things work and work better. The staff is outstanding. I am anxious to attend all of the hearings too and participate actively and listen closely to the folks that are impacted on a daily basis. We have a very large senior population on the Cape, more so than any other county on the east coast, and we have a significant amount of disabled folks as well. Paula and I are cognizant of their needs and are trying to create the very best system, not only in the Commonwealth, but throughout the country

Thank you Secretary for allowing me to sit on this Commission. I look forward to the testimony and input as we go forward.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you Tom. For those of you, and maybe all of you who know, execution of the Executive Order by Governor Patrick ended a decade-long odyssey of Tom Cahir and Joanne Champa, who worked on it tirelessly for many, many years. Many congratulations for your sticking with it. We thought about that the day it was signed. Thank you for your years of service.

Mohammed Khan: Thank you very much. Our operation in Fitchburg is working with Secretary Bigby, Secretary Mullan, and the MBTA in a coordinated fashion. We have enough equipment – our problem is in integrating the vehicles, utilizing them more fully. We must share ridership in order to create cost efficiencies. The more people you can put into the vehicle, the lower the cost of operation. We have been working on that. Our ridership costs in general, and our ADA ridership cost particularly, has come down over the last few years. We are also working with EOHHS on brokered services and by including the private sector have been successful in reducing costs. So there are a lot of possibilities on which we can work together to create accessibility for all. Thank you.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you Mohammed. Frank or Linda – would you like to share some observations?

Francis Gay: I am Francis Gay from the Greater Attleboro- Transit Authority (GATRA). Last December we had a two-day conference to talk about coordination. I think I would like to go back and look at some of the recommendations that came out of that meeting. GATRA currently has a New Freedom grant which facilitates integration with The RIDE for the people in the Sharon area so that there is a connection with The RIDE coming out the Walpole/Share area. There are a number of individuals who need to get to the medical complex at Patriot Place who were unable to do so before this transfer was implemented. So there are good examples of agency coordination that I think could be more fully developed. Other issues that came up at the December meeting included the whole ADA certification process – the concept of having a single-Statewide process so that individuals can travel easily between the MBTA and RTAs – or even on private transportation systems.

Secretary Mullan: Linda?

Linda Guiod: I have to tell you, before I came here today, I received probably at last 10 calls that I can remember from people with MS who were so pleased that this Commission has been put together. As

you can imagine, people with Multiple Sclerosis, as people with other disabilities, have some challenges that tend to be unique. The issues of employment and access to health care are certainly right up there at the top.

The other issue of primary importance is that people with disabilities tend to be very, very isolated in their homes if they don't have some means of public transportation to become an active member of their community. So we certainly have a lot of information from people that indicates what their challenges are. I look forward to sharing that with the Commission and to looking at ways that we can – our numbers are increasing as far as people who are going to require any kind of paratransit service. If you look at people with disabilities such as MS, they are living longer as well. I think we will be faced with this issue as far as having to serve larger numbers as we move forward and we really have to look at how to coordinate our services better and how to become more efficient at serving more people. So I am happy to be here and looking forward to hearing the information that is shared from around the Commonwealth.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you, Linda. There is a time check. This meeting is scheduled to end at 10 minutes of five. I will ask Secretary Bigby to wrap up for us shortly. Judith?

Judith O'Connor: I am Judith O'Connor from the Millbury Council on Aging. I was very pleased to be asked to serve on this Commission because one of my pet problems is to get paratransit individuals scheduled at the same time we take elderly people. The van should not be going out half empty. They should be going out pretty much full. I would like to see more Councils on Aging doing more paratransit during the day, whether ADA clients or not. I will take anybody – give anybody a ride during our regular hours. During the off-hours, the Council on Aging in Millbury provides the ADA service for the Worcester Regional Transit Authority. Councils on Aging need to be more helpful in trying to get paratransit customers where they need to go – and not just medical appointments. There are social things, shopping, visits to the Social Security office, visiting friends, to meet priorities for individuals to live a wonderful life in their community and have the services that everybody else has.

So, I am looking forward to hearing what people have to say, how they think that Councils on Aging can help them. It can't just happen in a little community in Central Massachusetts. I want more Councils on Aging involved. I am very pleased to be here.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you, Judy. Rebecca?

Rebecca Deusser: This is Rebecca. I am happy to be here and to learn. I am looking forward to the listening sessions in the coming weeks. From a fiscal perspective, I am hoping that we can look at how we deliver and continue the critical services like so many other critical state services with the limited resources that we have. I am hoping that we can also look at how we can improve the collaboration and communication among all the agencies that are affected and that work on these paratransit system issues. I just want to echo what others have said here, that I think we can find a good deal of savings and efficiencies, but it shouldn't impact the quality of services that we deliver and, hopefully, we can even improve those services. I am excited to be here. Thanks.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you, Rebecca.

General Manager Davey: I have a couple of comments on specific issues from the Mata's and perhaps from the RTAs' perspective. One is that we need to consider opportunities for Federal financial participation in order to seek reimbursement for eligible paratransit expenses. As Tom (Cahir) mentioned, the population that needs specialized transportation continues to rise. We can't continue to fill this need alone. I also want to echo what Judy (O'Connor) said a few minutes ago regarding Council on Aging vehicles. We see some of those vehicles sitting idle for many hours a day. There are ways we can use that infrastructure, that equipment, in a better coordinated fashion, whether it be for paratransit services or non-ADA related services, or even optional trips. There are opportunities for MassDOT and others to collaborate – and for EOHHS to collaborate. The last thing that I would like to mention specifically is what Frank (Gay) spoke to – a more coordinated paratransit eligibility process throughout the Commonwealth. We need to focus on how we can improve the customer's experience when it comes to seeking eligibility for various programs. That, in and of itself, would not only streamline what we do, but it will drive down the costs and improve how customers experience transportation in the Commonwealth.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you, Rich. Will (Rodman), I know you are volunteering and we appreciate your time serving on the Commission. In your role as a national consultant, I would like you to share with us how Massachusetts rates nationally and we are, nationally, on this issue that I know other transportation organizations and service providers face. So with that, I don't mean to put you on the spot like I just did, but you can handle it.

Will Rodman: My name is Will Rodman. To answer that question . . . I think Massachusetts – in terms of level and quality of service – is doing better than most states. If you look at the accomplishments of the Human Services Transportation Office in coordinating various transportation programs over the last 15 years, I think we have been doing a great job. The individual efforts of the MBTA and RTAs have been quite positive, and in some cases, remarkable.

There is a way to go, however. And I think that the challenge of this Commission, and why I am personally so glad to be on it, is to really sift through what efficiencies remain to be added through coordination, not to decrease budgets, but to stretch the funding we do have and to leverage additional funding to expand and improve access to services and information. In other words, we need to translate those into more and better services to help meet the gaps that do exist. So that's the long-winded answer. The short answer is, "better than most but a ways to go."

Secretary Mullan: Thank you very much. Jini or Denise, comments?

Jini Fairley: Yes. Thank you. I am, as I said in my introduction, a paratransit/ADA user for the past 10 years. I see inefficiencies on a pretty regular basis in a personal way. I take The RIDE and connect/transfer to another RTA service Monday through Friday. How many trips is that? Four a day, because there are two separate vehicles times two, 20 trips per week.

I am really happy that the consumer voice is recognized here. I also wanted to just mention my professional work at the Independent Living Center. I help people apply for transportation services – both paratransit and elderly services. We attempt to identify any possible transportation, including transportation to work or to look for work. We act as an advocate when an application is denied. I am involved on a day-to-day basis as a person with a disability, particularly with elders trying to find more transportation or to get someplace – religious services, grocery stores so that their refrigerators are not empty, and many other places like that. I want you to know that I am concerned. I have already received many phone calls and e-mails requesting that we do not reduce the number of eligible riders or eliminate services. I see our population growing as other mentioned – the aging population, individuals with chronic diseases, individuals with adult onset disabilities, baby boomers, etc. The demand for services for these populations is increasing. It's not decreasing. And, so, I just want to say that I am very well aware of this on a personal and professional basis. We need to work closely to make transportation more efficient but not to eliminate people from The RIDE or transportation services. In fact, we need to strive to improve the quality and the accessibility of transportation.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you.

Denise Karuth: I am grabbing the microphone because I can't reach, my wheelchair won't fit. I lived for 18 years in the Boston area. I lived in Jamaica Plain and downtown Boston, in Brighton, in Springfield – as I often said when I was the Chair of another Governor's Commission on Accessible Transportation, reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation makes the difference between living in the community and being in prison there. I am greatly concerned about the future of accessible transportation in this Commonwealth. I was even more concerned as I was reading through the information in the binder. We need efficiencies in transportation, and God knows we only have so much money and we have more demand all the time, but also has been said, we need to ensure equity of accessibility -- and one of the big questions I have is how do we define equity?

As an example, one of the standards required by law is that trip times cannot exceed on paratransit services one and a half times the trip time that would take place if you were using the bus. Now, that doesn't make sense to me because people with disabilities and people who are elderly do not have one and half times the energy of people who are able to take buses and transportation and I know I don't and I can't think of many people who do. Most of us have less energy, and that's why we are on these services. So, I think we have to recognize the elderly, the folks using the services, and the reality of the law.

The binder speaks to using the three-quarters of a mile limit that ADA requires. If you live within three-quarters of a mile of a bus stop, you are eligible; if you live outside that, you are not. The three-quarters of a mile limit set refers to the minimum distance identified in the ADA. When the regulation was promulgated, there was a suggestion that the limit could be a mile and a half, particularly in areas where there is more limited bus service and individuals without a disability would travel a mile and a half of more to reach their local bus. So, again, you need to not only think about the minimum, but think about what the need is and how far people are able to go. I know I oftentimes go further than three quarters of a mile to take a bus.

I also noticed that one of the areas identified for the Commission's consideration is in-person assessments. I think that could be good. I think oftentimes people did not know what to write on the forms, that people fail to apply for paratransit services. So some people did not get services who really should get them, but on the other hand, I am very concerned that there are going to be people with conditions like MS or chronic fatigue dysfunction syndrome, people that have variable disabilities. How do you assess a person who looks like he/she can leap tall buildings in a single bound, but he/she really can't. How is that person evaluated?

I know people who are excluded from service. I knew one woman who had a bus stop by her house. She was told she could take the bus right near her house, but she had a manual wheelchair that she couldn't push to the bus stop. So, she was excluded. I knew another woman who had uncontrolled seizures. She had had three grand mal seizures, yet she was allowed to use paratransit services. So, there are lots of questions when assessing people with disabilities. I also wonder about other suggestions I see in the binder – changing the hours of operation in terms of reflecting the peaks in service. My question is, "What does that do to the people who work, or to those individuals who drive us around?" These folks work very hard. They generally get paid a whole lot less than fixed-route transit drivers and work as hard -- they are on the ground and helping us down – it's not an easy job and I am concerned about things like computer scheduling. I think all of us can remember computerized scheduling, particularly the need to look carefully when we use new technology. I am excited about travel training. I taught travel training. I started a travel training program in the Boston Health Center in the early 1990s.

It's great to give people with disabilities a free pass to use – I think that would be an incentive. Individuals with disabilities who have low incomes could truly benefit from such an incentive. I worry about forcing people to use fixed route services, however. I had had terrible experiences on Medicaid transit. I am sure other people have as well. I can remember calling the provider once and explaining what happened and explaining that somebody at Mass. General told me, "Oh, you are traveling with so and so, these people always screw up every single day." When I called the transit provider I was assured that I would never have to use that vendor again. I said I would make sure nobody ever takes them again. This is like a level of hell, Dante's Inferno.

I have had lifts collapse – I have been stranded on a Peter Pan intercity bus. I will give you a quick illustration. I live in Northampton. This morning I got on a van at 10:40 to catch a 12:15 bus in Springfield that got me here at 2:45 PM. The next bus departs Boston at 5:15 PM, which is too early for this meeting. The bus after that departs at 8:00 PM. It gets me into Northampton at 10:00 PM. I have a friend picking me up. But, to be here for an hour and a half meeting, I will be on the road more than 12 hours. If we cut costs, we can't cut quality and eligible people.

As I said earlier, affordable, accessible transportation makes the difference between living in the community and being imprisoned there. I like the idea of stretching funds and developing efficiencies to do better. I will do my best to represent the concerns of consumers as I serve on the Commission. I will work to meet the goals and developed reasoned solutions. Thank you.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you, Denise. We saved the best for last. Did everyone get a chance to speak?
Secretary Bigby . . .

Secretary Bigby: Thank you, Secretary Mullan. I would like to thank all the Commission members who spoke about what this means to them. I just wanted to take a few seconds to reflect on some of the themes that I heard across the range of the Commissioners who spoke and just hope that we can keep these things in mind as we go about doing the work of the Commission. Ann Hartstein said that this is not about transportation, it's about connecting people to community or to social situations. I think it's absolutely right, but I would say this isn't just about transportation as Jini and other have pointed out, this is about people. This is about how we collectively see the society, making sure that everyone, as Ron Marlow point out, this is also about how to make sure everyone has the same opportunities for living, working, getting to the services that they need in their community.

We have a lot to be proud of in Massachusetts, but one of the things that I talk about as Secretary is the fact that many of the challenges we face, we face because we have had decades, maybe even longer, of times where we dealt with silo funding. We pushed people off one way and defined people another way. We are going to be living with the results of that type of putting people in different groups for a very long time. I was very happy to hear Judy talk about how she would like to be able to offer a ride to anyone and that is part of the problem we have. We are funded in silos and restricted to offering services to people, sometimes according to the money that is attached to the service. I think it's going to be very important for us to look, as a Commission, at whether or not we can do anything to address some of these issues.

Last, as you know, Secretary Nee talked about Veterans and Secretary Hartstein talked about elders and others talked about different populations. In truth, we are all talking about people and all of us in the various agencies, or units that we represent, interact with all of those people and sometimes, it's helpful to characterize people, but sometimes it is not.

So that is one of the challenges we face.

I am going to point out that one of the things that I hope we will be able to do is think about the future. We often spend a lot of time in State government trying to solve the problems and challenges that we have today. It's in there. It's very interesting here that some of you served on a similar Commission under Governor Dukakis and you have a book full of recommendations. It would be nice to know how many of those were carried out.

But the EOHHS is sponsoring a conference in September at the Hynes Auditorium on assistive technologies and universal design. This conference is meant to recognize the fact that Massachusetts is the center, the seat of innovation and we have a lot of talent in this Commonwealth. We have a lot of enthusiasm for incentivizing that talent to solve difficult problems for us.

This summit that we are doing is not simply for people with disabilities or people who we might predict will have mobility problems in the future, but also for those who are growing older, all of us, those with

certain types of chronic diseases, and the ways in which technology can help us remain in the community and be as productive and interactive as possible.

There are also ways that we can design our homes, our schools, our workplaces, our communities, including the transportation systems, that predict that people will have special needs and rather than see it as a special add-on or as an aside, predict it and try to think about whether the system that we design for the future can take us into account. We have a lot of work to do on the Commission, and I really do want to thank the Commissioners that accepted these appointments for being here and sharing your points of view and your expertise. I also want to point out that as I said, silos is one of the challenges that we face. Secretary Mullan and I have a history of trying to work together. We also have a health transportation compact, and the work that this Commission will do, I am sure, will also be reflected in that work. It's completely aligned. I think that the work that we look forward to doing here, it's something that I know will be successful if we can continue to do it together. So thank you.

Secretary Mullan: Thank you, Secretary.

Before we end the meeting, I would like to make some closing remarks. First, I would like to thank everyone in attendance for coming and listening today, getting a sense of what the Commission and the Executive Order is all about. Secondly, I wish to thank the Commission members, Secretary Bigby. We have been given the responsibility, as co-chairs, to forge this Commission ahead and right now I will give you homework. Along with your role on the Commission, first you need to read the materials and familiarize yourselves with the issues that are in the materials and those that are intended to be the charge of the Commission as laid out in the Executive Order. The second thing Commission members need to do is think about your role on the Commission. Each of you has unique talents and perspectives and viewpoints about the Commission. That's what we need. That is what the Governor wants, and I hope you heard a lot of that today. The third is you need to reach out to our people. Secretary Bigby said and other members of the Cabinet said that this is all about people. You need to reach out to your people because we need their voices to be heard, and that is your homework. The first listening session is at the Lawrence Public Library on September 13th at 3:00 PM. All the listening sessions will be held from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. I will hold out the potential that there may be a meeting of the Commission prior to the 13th. I will leave that to the pleasure of the members and Secretary Bigby and incoming Secretary Davey to decide. Let me ask that if the members have an opinion about that, they can contact Heather. And you have Heather's contact information. Please use it.

Lastly, this is my first and last meeting of this Commission. It's been nice to be a member among the original members of the Commission. My last day after four and a half years in the Administration is Friday, September 2nd. At which point, Rich Davey will become the Secretary.

Congratulations, Rich.

Jon Davis, the Acting General Manager of the MBTA, will assume Rich's role on the Commission. Clinton Bench will serve as Rich's designee. So I wanted to attend to that detail. People are concerned about continuity – I think we have that covered.

Thank you all, Commissioners for speaking, Secretary Bigby. And we look forward to seeing you in Lawrence or at the meeting, depending on what the Commission's pleasure is.

Thank you all.