INTRODUCTION

The MBTA's enabling legislation requires the Authority to develop a 25-year "master plan," which must be updated every five years. This plan, the Program for Mass Transportation (PMT), establishes the long-term vision for transit in the region. As a vision document, the PMT is fiscally unconstrained and outlines the universe of potential transit projects that could be built over the next 25 years to achieve the plan's defined goals.

In addition to mandating that the PMT be updated regularly, the MBTA's enabling legislation also requires the Authority to develop an annual Capital Investment Program (CIP). The CIP is a rolling five-year document that programs projects for implementation and identifies funding sources. Unlike the PMT, the CIP is financially constrained: only capital projects the MBTA can afford are included. The PMT and the CIP are complementary planning and programming tools; the PMT planning document defines the capital investment projects that could be implemented to meet the long-range system vision, and the CIP budgetary program document funds the immediate, near-term investment priorities.

At the time of this updated PMT, we find ourselves in a period of deepening economic anxiety, with U.S. and global financial markets in crisis and government at all levels— federal, state, and local— anticipating prolonged recession and consequent budget cutbacks. All public transit agencies are currently facing budget challenges due to price volatility in fuel and energy markets. The fiscal challenges at the MBTA are intensified by projected revenue shortfalls, increased labor costs, and a financial structure that includes a legacy debt burden that is the largest of any at a major transit agency in the country.

While policy makers grapple with reform options aimed at building a sustainable financial model for the MBTA, one issue is certain: over the next 25 years, regional population, employment, and economic growth will place ever greater demands on the Commonwealth's roadway and public transportation systems. Maintaining and expanding a robust and reliable transit network will be critical not only to sustaining the economic well-being of eastern Massachusetts, but also to improving the region's environmental health. The MBTA will be called upon to play a central role in fulfilling public policy goals for energy conservation and greenhouse gas emission reductions. Accomplishing these goals will require that the Commonwealth have in place a reliable, accessible, safe, and convenient transit system with sufficient capacity to accommodate increased regional travel demand and expanded transit mode share.

The PMT planning process provides the decision-making framework for a long-term capital investment strategy that will meet future challenges, and is a unique public forum in which the MBTA outlines its vision for Boston area transit and lays out the options and trade-offs for creating and supporting a world-class transit system. For the MBTA, its first priority is clear: it must fix the existing system and ensure that the backlog inventory of unaddressed infrastructure-preservation needs does not lengthen over the next two decades.

However, as this PMT shows, action toward attaining a full range of goals for 2030 in the areas of regional economic competitiveness, energy independence, and sustainable land use patterns will necessarily entail a more ambitious transit investment agenda, one that greatly expands the system's capacity to move more people—and to move them more frequently and more efficiently—than was forecast in the 20th century. Our age is characterized by a globalized economy in which innovation and mobility of information and people are keys to success.

As stewards of the regional public transit infrastructure that our forefathers presciently began building more than a century ago, we at the MBTA have an obligation to make wise decisions about how the system we have inherited can best be shaped and retooled to meet the needs of a region that is constantly changing and is competing in an interconnected global marketplace. Making those capital investment decisions—allocating scarce transportation resources among many interests and priorities—will require foresight, civic engagement, and planning. It is our hope that the PMT process can set a path toward building a transit system that is responsive to the needs of the generations that come after us, while honoring and respecting the accomplishments of those who came before.

In Chapter 1 of this document we discuss the challenges and opportunities that present themselves as the MBTA looks ahead over the 25-year period addressed by this PMT, while in Chapter 2 we look back at the progress that the MBTA has made toward implementing projects envisioned in the 2003 PMT. In Chapter 3, we explain the PMT planning process and how it fits into the larger planning processes of the region and the state. In this chapter we also outline the vision, goals, and objectives of this PMT, as well as the process by which potential projects were evaluated. To lay out the context in which the development of this PMT occurred, in Chapter 4 we discuss the existing conditions of the transit system and describe demographic, commuting, and congestion trends. In Chapters 5 and 6 we introduce the universe of projects that have been considered in this PMT, with Chapter 5 focusing on system preservation needs and Chapter 6 summarizing enhancement and expansion options. Finally, in Chapter 7 we offer and compare modeling scenarios that illustrate varying levels of investment and the associated benefits of three different approaches to improving transit in the region during the coming 25 years.