

March 10, 2014

Greg Bialecki  
Secretary for Housing and  
Economic Development  
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
One Ashburton Place  
Room 2101  
Boston, MA 02108

Re: 128 Central Corridor Infrastructure Priorities

Dear Secretary Bialecki:

It was a pleasure to have you attend our November meeting and to discuss some of the regional challenges that the 128 Corporate Alliance has prioritized for action over the past several years. As you know the Alliance was formed to address infrastructure challenges along the 15-mile stretch of Route 128 from Burlington to Weston, including the communities of Waltham, Lexington and Lincoln. The Alliance represents a number of businesses employing more than 5,000 workers in the region including Fresenius Medical Care, ImmunoGen, the Massachusetts Medical Society, National Grid, PerkinElmer, and Thermo Fisher. Sponsor members include major landlords along the corridor like Clarion Partners and Davis Marcus Partners.

During the course of our meeting, we discussed a variety of topics and agreed that we would follow-up with a summary of infrastructure challenges and priorities that would serve as a set of broad principles for action. These fall into five categories including short and long term traffic and transportation measures, essential services challenges, and emergency planning. Within each of these broad principles we have attempted to offer some specific examples. The underlying theme that links all of these principles is the economic development objective of promoting continued growth in the corridor, which ultimately means more jobs in the Commonwealth. More specifically, these principles are as follows:

**1. Support ongoing traffic mitigation measures and use of transportation technology:**

The Alliance supports the use of dynamic messaging to provide better traffic flow (i.e. route warnings and other current data monitoring). This will also provide for enhanced incident management. Technology offers a current means to enhance route planning and the State has implemented the use of travel message signs on various roadways. We support the integration of this technology and other measures on the Central 128 Corridor as quickly as possible.

## **2. Pursue short-term transportation measures aimed at reducing traffic congestion:**

We believe that the State in concert with employers, local stakeholders and public/ private partners, must pursue a number of actions that could help reduce traffic congestion. This is also critical as we plan for longer term initiatives that would reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles (SOV) operating in the region. These measures include:

**a. Build on existing public and private transit service in the corridor** – Members would like to see increased TMA shuttle use by employees and shortened travel times. While the service has added equipment capacity under greatly enhanced leadership, the overall appeal remains limited among member organizations. Limitations to its wider adoption remain. For example, the current transit service is negatively impacted by being a part of the current traffic flow. One potential proposed solution is the use of bus-on-shoulder for express transit during peak commuting times. Apparently this is constrained by bridge clearances. It is unclear if the current State plans to improve and replace bridges recognizes the importance of this priority.

**b. Study multi-modal transit (MMT) options**– The 2011 study prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)- *The Route 128 Corridor Plan*- recommended that MMT options be a key consideration for the region. The report advocated for the study of a Multi Modal 128 Transit Center with service along the MBTA Fitchburg rail line. This study remains an open and unfunded item that needs further exploration in the context of other MMT study options. The State, in concert with local stakeholders, needs to demonstrate that they are evaluating MMT options in the corridor.

**c. Exploration of public / private economic development planning initiatives**– The region includes a rich mix of leading employers and development and investment organizations that seek to improve the workplace along the 128 Central Corridor. The bordering communities including Burlington, Lexington, Waltham, Lincoln, and Weston have also been actively engaged in a shared dialogue through the Central Corridor Commission (C3). These efforts to promote a shared vision for improved transportation and other essential services needs further support from the State. Thus far the regional focus provided by the State has been limited to the MassDOT jurisdictional responsibilities and would appear to lack a targeted economic development focus.

## **3. Develop transportation alternatives and long term measures to reduce traffic congestion:**

Hopefully a targeted set of current and short-term initiatives will shed light on the larger infrastructure projects that could come on line over the longer term- 5 to 7 years. These projects could include:

**a. Fund pilot programs to innovatively reduce the number of SOV on Route 128**– Support the implementation of pilot programs that have been utilized in other regions to increase public transit options and capitalize on some existing infrastructure while improving other outdated transit alternatives (i.e intermodal vs. exclusively suburban to urban transit). The hope is that these pilot programs would set the stage for larger more comprehensive regional investments.

**b. High impact bridge reconstruction/improved interchanges**– Identify and schedule corridor improvements over the next 5-7 years supported by a fully informed dialogue among key stakeholders within the community, among employers, and major development and investment interests.

**c. Coordinate the impact of bridge reconstruction to ensure MMT options**– Members have significant concerns regarding construction related traffic delays that occur while attempting to improve the roadway. The delays in completing the Winter Street Bridge project provided important lessons in transportation planning with regard to construction contracting methodologies, planning for relocation of utilities, and scheduling of critical work to avoid traffic delays. The improvement and replacement of area bridges is integral to enhance transit options as noted in Item 2a, yet there is no integrated plan for bridge projects that takes into consideration community, transit, and proposed development projects.

#### **4. Providing essential services through transparent and consistent delivery systems**

The Alliance has been consistent in raising concerns about local area infrastructure and the ad hoc approach to some key challenges related to power reliability, local mobility, and cross jurisdictional management of economic development priorities. These include the following:

**a. Access to regular reporting from major utilities identifying repair and maintenance (R&M) priorities and timing for needed upgrades** - We have had a series of successful conversations with NSTAR regarding a number of power outages that impacted businesses to the west of Route 128. NSTAR made a number of important infrastructure upgrades that have improved reliability greatly over the past several years. Given increasing growth in the immediate area, we remain concerned that this infrastructure keeps pace with increased demands. An ongoing dialogue with all major utilities remains a priority and we would welcome the support of the state to make this an economic development priority for the region.

**b. Fund efforts to improve localized workforce mobility (i.e. pedestrian networks and bike to work options)** – Employers along the corridor would like to see greater integration of existing elements of pedestrian networks as well as bike routes. Funding options to study these systems in areas of potential high bike and pedestrian use would be an important next step. The State could be helpful to identifying potential resources for such projects as well as convening the varied stakeholders.

**c. Coordinate permitting efforts requiring multiple jurisdictions (i.e. Winter Street expansion along the Cambridge Reservoir)** – The completion of the Winter Street Bridge project coincides with significant improvements to Winter Street on the westbound side of Route 128. Some of these improvements were completed through private funding and current efforts are

underway to improve drainage along the Reservoir. Further efforts to improve Winter Street adjacent to the Reservoir will require a collaborative effort among the city of Waltham, the Cambridge Water Department and the local business community. Infrastructure improvements include potential road widening, opportunities for bike access, and the addition of pedestrian walkways. Again the State could play an important role in raising the awareness of key economic development priorities for the region.

## **5. Promoting a regional dialogue to address emergency planning and management**

The 128 Alliance was formed in part due to concerns among local employers that there was insufficient focus on local and regional planning efforts around emergency planning and response. Over the past few years, efforts to better understand these planning measures at both the state and local level have led to more questions and concerns. We believe the state can play an important role in addressing some of these concerns and positioning the corridor as a leader in the effort to assure a safe workplace experience that includes travel to and from work.

**a. Emergency response** – Potentially catastrophic traffic delays resulting from winter storms or other declared emergencies point to the need for more elaborate and thoughtful emergency traffic management in the region. A recent action by the City of Boston in concert with the MassDOT to re-route vehicles transporting hazardous materials to Route 128 further underscores the importance of this issue. Many of the key intersections along the Central 128 corridor are not designed for extraordinary traffic challenges. Disjointed responses from local fire and safety officials often result in more complexity and challenges. Contingency planning to avoid past problems have been a critical focus of the Alliance agenda. To date the response has been limited at all levels.

**b. Improve limited communication among municipalities** - The key to successful planning efforts requires the coordinated efforts of state officials, local governments and public utilities. Our understanding is that emergency planning takes place at the state, regional, and local levels. Federal law has created emergency response required by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC), and Local Emergency Planning Committees that coordinate local teams of police, fire, EMT, as well as officials from the health department, schools and public works. Weather emergencies are managed by a different set of protocols. The Alliance is committed to fostering this dialogue in a constructive and fruitful fashion to avert unreasonable delays while protecting the safety of the workforce. We would like to initiate these discussions with some input at the State level.

**Next Steps: 128 Central Corridor Call to Action**

Hopefully, this follow-up letter provides a broad set of principles consistent with our discussions in November. The principles are organized around a list of challenges and concerns, intended to provide you with an overall perspective in an effort to determine how the Secretariat of Economic Development and the Commonwealth can be a resource. As noted in the introductory remarks, we see the need to address these challenges as critical to the continued success of the region as a leader in the State's job creation efforts. We welcome the continued opportunity to meet with you and other State officials to review your further thoughts and suggestions regarding these concerns.

Sincerely,

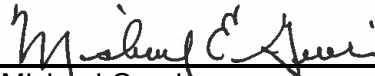


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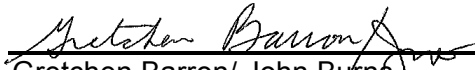
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