



# The Research Bureau

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, the Central Mass Regional Caucus of Legislators held its first Economic Summit. In addition to bringing together business and community leaders, state and local officials and concerned citizens, the Summit proved to be a valuable forum in which to highlight both challenges and opportunities facing our Central Mass Region.

After hearing from three experts: Barbara Berke, Director of Economic Development in the Romney administrations, John Mullen, Vice Chancellor, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, John Bassett, President, Clark University and other knowledgeable and articulate Central Mass stakeholders, the Caucus wishes to direct its collective effort on the following priorities. The Caucus recognizes there are both specific tangible issues to which it can legislatively address and intangible issues which will require a regional collaborative effort to achieve.

The Central Mass region enjoys a “connectedness” in terms of roadways and fiber optics, a growing biotechnology and life sciences industry, and 15 colleges and universities. We fall short, however, in creating a “livable” environment attractive to young working professionals. Instead, Central Mass is turning into an area from which workers travel to Boston/Providence and beyond to work. We can and should strive for a Region that is both “livable” and “workable.” The three major factors essential for economic development both between industries within the region (i.e. plastics – biotech, academic - health care), for nurturing existing industries (i.e. agriculture - farming<sup>\*</sup>) and attracting new industries are: (1) transportation/infrastructure (2) housing/regional planning, and (3) workforce development, retention and retraining.

## **Specific Tangible Issues**

### Transportation/Infrastructure:

The Caucus is committed to the following transportation projects/issues:

1. Expedient completion of the Route 146 connector of the Mass Turnpike into Worcester and the I-290 portion of the project

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<sup>\*</sup> Worcester County ranks 4<sup>th</sup> among all counties in the entire United States in terms of value of direct sales of agricultural products and beyond for work. Worcester County has over 980 farms in operation.

2. Expansion of the commuter rail services between Worcester and Framingham including “reverse commuter” services
3. Encourage MassPort to develop and plan to revitalize Worcester Regional Airport so that it can become an engine for economic growth. As part of this plan, MassPort should negotiate a permanent agreement with Worcester that would make the airport part of the status regional transportation plan.
4. Support a partnership between MassHighway and the City of Worcester to develop a suitable access road to the airport.
5. Encourage development of a Transportation Management Association (TMA) in the region. A TMA is an association of development, major employer and property owners who work together and with state/local government to improve access to and within the area.
6. Improve transportation needs of the Central Mass Corridor along Routes 2, 9, I-290, and I-495.
  - a. Implementation of one A.M. and P.M. express train Monday through Friday for Fitchburg South Acton /Zone 9. These commuters pay the highest rail price and are subject to the longest ride in and out of the city.
  - b. Instituting reverse commute from Boston to Devens and Fitchburg.
  - c. Double-tracking between West Concord and Ayer
  - d. Extending the commuter rail lines further into the Central Mass Region (service to Athol, Gardner, Northborough/Marlborough and additional stops in Framingham)
  - e. Establishment of a regional intermodal facility at or west of I-495
7. fiber optic?

### Regional Planning – Housing/Economic Development

The need to create both low/moderate housing and market rate housing transcends the Central Mass Region. A key component of economic development is to promote an affordable and attractive housing market to employers/employees. However, in order to develop suitable housing that is both appropriate for downtown areas and makes sense for the build-out of our suburban communities, a Regional Master Plan overlay is essential. The caucus supports the following action:

1. Empower the Central Mass Regional Planning Commission or the appropriate group to develop a Regional “Smart Growth” Blueprint. If directed by a state agency, then additional funding will be necessary to spearhead such a regional effort. If directed by a private group like the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council in Springfield, then all major players, including Chambers of Commerce, Municipals, Business, and Academic Institutions must commit resources for a permanent, ongoing organized effort.
2. Require a “Regulatory Impact Statement” for any new regulation proposed by a state agency. A “Regulatory Impact Statement” would detail the purpose and financial impact of such a regulation. The Regulatory Impact statement would identify all costs to the state and to the private sector related to the implementation and enforcement of any regulation promulgated by an agency of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the exception of the Department of Telecommunications and Energy, and the Division of Insurance. The measure also requires final approval of any regulation by the Secretary of Economic Development.
3. Develop stronger state-local partnership in order to streamline permitting and coordinate infrastructure capacity issues (i.e. water/sewer extension permits) with expanded commercial and residential development.
4. Amendments to Chapter 40A and 40B....

### Workforce Creation/Retention/Retraining

We have the ability with our 15 diverse colleges and universities<sup>†</sup> to create an educated workforce. We must focus on assuring that the right job/career is available to our Central Mass graduates and our unemployed workers requiring retraining. The Caucus will continue to support the following:

1. Fair funding for the Central Massachusetts Regional Employment Board (i.e. \$76,000 for Workforce Central vs. millions for others in the Commonwealth). REB is the lead workforce development organization within the Central Mass region providing private and

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<sup>†</sup> Anna Maria College, Assumption College, Atlantic Union College, Becker College, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Nichols College, Quinsigamond Community College, Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester State College, WPI, Fitchburg State College, Mount Wachusett Community College

corporate citizens with a full array of employment, education and training programs.

2. Continued matching grant for Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP). MEP provides services to small and medium sized manufacturers throughout the Commonwealth by identifying and implementing advanced manufacturing and management technologies that will help them to become more competitive in a global economy.
3. Support the Consortium of Colleges and identify the research strengths and professional expertise available within our college/university network to foster a partnership that will lead to both economic growth and improved quality of life. Here are a few examples of our colleges and their interaction in our community: (1) The Massachusetts Academy of Mathematics and Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) is a public high school for the sole purpose of providing a mathematics and science education for high achieving public school students and contributes directly to economic development by educating young men and women for biotech, high tech and manufacturing jobs being created in the Commonwealth; (2) WPI's Bioengineering Institute which is part of the Gateway Park initiative. The Institute should bring not millions but billions of dollars into this Region. It is a collaboration among many players the two central ones being UMass and WPI, but also including biotech companies, MBI, WBDC and potentially Clark University and other universities; and (3) Clark University is widely recognized for its work in urban economic geography and has forged a strong partnership with Worcester through its University Park program. Research in Geography including advanced work in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can help with regional planning development and quality of life initiatives.

## **Regional Intangible Issues**

### Regional Identity

The Central Mass Region is suffering from an "identity crisis." We need to develop a brand name identity that best describes our strengths. What makes our region attractive to families, young professionals, our graduates? What is the "sizzle" that will make Central Mass part of the "buzz" for people looking to grow and expand business? How will we sell our region as "home" to the next generations? Together, we will need to answer these challenging questions.

### Regional Collaboration

In order for our Central Mass region to become an economically viable, independent and self sustaining region of our Commonwealth, we must think “regionally” on all levels of government, and in our private business community and within our non-profit sectors. The parochial mindset of suburban vs. urban, public vs. private, democrat vs. republican must be changed if we hope to achieve our common goals.

We want fair state funding of Central Mass programs/projects. We want to retain existing business and attract new industry in order to expand municipal tax bases. We want our college graduates to find jobs and careers here and keep them from leaving Central Mass.

We deserve all of the above if we work together and speak with a common voice about our priorities, solutions and future direction of our attractive Central Mass region.

In closing, the Central Mass Caucus is committed to a regional approach for the economic growth of our region. We will work together and with you to accomplish a shared vision.