Good Morning and thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me this opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation – the Transportation Bond Bill.

Let me start by saying that I cannot stress enough how much investing in our transportation infrastructure means to our state and our regional economy. And it is doubly important in our region that has lagged behind the state in economic performance, in no small part due to our poor transportation connections to the metro Boston area.

Let me mention a few important regional projects, many of which are included in the bill.

First and foremost, South Coast Rail: Those of us from Southeastern Massachusetts are very aware is a big investment to ask of the Commonwealth, but we remain the only region in eastern Massachusetts not served by the MBTA commuter rail system. Let me give you three compelling reasons why this project is so important.

1. South Coast Rail is not simply a regional project – it has enormous benefits statewide. According to the Corridor Plan, up to 1,280 of the projected 3,800 new jobs created by the project, or fully one third, are outside of our region. They are in metro Boston and the rest of the state. Of the $487 million of projected business output associated with the project, $192 million are outside the region in the rest of Massachusetts. And the project will generate significant new income and sales taxes for the Commonwealth.

2. Secondly, the potential growth of the South Coast economy is now significantly constrained by the existing transportation network. The inadequate and frequently congested Route 24 acts as a choke point on the region’s economy and prosperity. It severely limits the access of metro Boston workers to the region’s affordable housing supply, and limits the ability of our region’s abundant labor force to get to good jobs in the metro Boston area.

3. Finally, we have been working hard to maximize this investment by planning for a future with South Coast Rail, including Transit Oriented Development around ten new train stations and designating priority development and priority protection areas throughout the region.

South Coast Rail may be our biggest transportation need, but it is not the only project that will be aided by this bond bill. Let me note some important highway projects:
• Middleboro Rotary: This site where I-495, Routes 44, 28 and 18 converge is the region’s worst traffic nightmare. The rotary experiences daily backups over a mile in length, and was the site of 121 crashes in 2011. There have been numerous false starts to fix the problem. After several high level and very public commitments to complete the project, the state deferred to the Mashpee Wampanoag Compact in 2007 which promised to invest $172 million on Route 44 and the rotary in Middleborough. When the Compact collapsed, there was no alternative plan in place. SRPEDD’s Joint Transportation Planning Group, comprised of local officials from our 27 municipalities, voted to devote 100% of a future year’s target funding to be dedicated solely to this project. We cannot overstate the importance of advancing this long overdue project.

• Route 24/140 interchange, Taunton: This is an existing bottleneck that will be made far worse if the Mashpee Wampanoag are successful in their federal casino application. It acts as a choke point for New Bedford area residents trying to drive to Boston. There is still uncertainty over federal approval of the Native American casino proposal, and we cannot afford to sidetrack this project while we await federal action.

• Widening of Route 24 between Route 140 and I-495 to 3 lanes in each direction. This six mile stretch is another obstruction between our region and metro Boston.

• Two projects that will help reunite cities with their waterfronts: the Route 79 boulevard project in Fall River, and future phases of the JFK Highway/Route 18 in New Bedford.

• Replacement of the New Bedford/Fairhaven (Route 6) Bridge.

Finally, let me put in a word of support for the Active Streets bill which you have heard about this morning. This is a low cost initiative which will do a great deal to enhance the quality of life in our communities.

Thank you

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December 11, 2013