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News Release

For Immediate Release

June 11, 2004

MTF Calls on Legislature to Enact Transportation Restructuring

The Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation today called on the Legislature to enact a major overhaul of the state's transportation agencies. Both the full Senate and the Joint Transportation Committee have put forth comprehensive and thoughtful proposals to strengthen the Commonwealth's ability to finance, build and maintain its transportation assets and to integrate the state's array of fractured transportation agencies and authorities. The two proposals have more features in common than differences:

- Both proposals expand on the administration's plan to merge the Turnpike Authority with the Highway Department while retaining the critically important operational and revenue-generating capacities provided by the independent authorities;
- Both empower the Secretary of Transportation to develop a much-needed comprehensive statewide transportation plan that encompasses highways and roads, passenger rail and other public transportation, freight rail, aviation, shipping and water transportation;
- Both create a commission of outside experts to recommend strategies for financing the state's most critical—but unfunded—transportation needs;
- Both charge the Secretary with identifying ways to share resources across agencies; and
- Both generate savings for the Highway Department by shifting responsibility for certain interstate highways to the Turnpike Authority.

The chief differences are in the role and powers of the Secretary in setting the transportation agenda for the Commonwealth, and in the degree of independence of the authorities. The Senate plan makes the Secretary chair of a restructured Turnpike Authority board while continuing as chair of the MBTA. The Transportation Committee restructures the Turnpike and MBTA boards along the lines of the MassPort board, with seven voting members appointed to staggered seven-year terms for each authority. The Secretary would not serve on the boards, but his influence over the authorities would be strengthened by chairing a nine-member council made up of representatives of each of the authorities and planning agencies. The council would be empowered to set priorities for the Commonwealth's transportation investments and would ensure that the capital programs of the authorities were in agreement with the overall state plan. The Transportation Committee's plan is much more comprehensive and preferable to the more modest proposal for a coordination council contained in the House budget.

With an effective transportation system critical to Massachusetts' economic competitiveness, the Legislature should bolster the state's capacity for addressing its enormous transportation needs by enacting one or a combination of the Senate and Transportation Committee plans.
