
*Our city and region are flourishing,
but our future success is not guaranteed.
To prepare for the 21st century, we must sharpen
our understanding of the interdependence
of Boston and its region.*

The Regional Context

The United States government defines a metropolitan area as “a large population nucleus together with adjacent communities which have a high degree of social and economic integration with that nucleus.” Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, Boston has been at the hub of a regional system of transportation and commerce. One out of every six jobs in Massachusetts and one out of every thirteen jobs in New England is located in Boston’s city limits.

The “Boston region” is defined in a number of ways. It can mean:

- **the six states of New England**, with a total population of about 13 million;
- **the state of Massachusetts**, with about six million people;
- **the Boston Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area** or CMSA, which, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, runs from Worcester, Massachusetts to York, Maine, to Nashua, New Hampshire, to parts of Connecticut. With a total population of 5.6 million, it is the seventh most populous consolidated metropolitan region in the United States;
- **the Boston Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area** or PMSA, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as encompassing 129 cities and towns in Massachusetts and two in New Hampshire, with a total population of 3.2 million;
- **the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)s region**, encompassing 101 Eastern Massachusetts municipalities — 19 cities and 82 towns — with a total population of about three million (see map on facing page);





- **the “inner core” of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s region**, including the 21 cities and towns immediately surrounding Boston, with a combined population of about 1.5 million people.

For the purposes of this report, the “Metro-Boston region” refers to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s definition of the Boston region unless otherwise noted.

Historical Context

Since 1950, with the construction of Route 128/I-95 ten miles from Boston, and I-495, about thirty-five miles away, suburban communities around Boston have doubled, tripled or even quadrupled in population. Over the same period Boston’s population declined by 25%.

By 2025, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ population as a whole is expected to grow by 800,000 or so residents, about 350,000 of whom

are expected to locate in MAPC region, or in the 101 cities and towns surrounding Boston. This projected rate of growth is slow compared to the nation’s high-growth regions.

Regional strengths

- **Metro-Boston has diverse local economies and includes over 1.7 million jobs, many in “new economy” growth clusters.** Five industries requiring high-skilled workers comprise the foundation of the metropolitan economy: high technology; health services; financial services; higher education; and, the “creative industries.” The area’s economic base is made up of industry clusters poised for growth.
- **The Boston region is still a “real place” in a world becoming more and more homogenized.** The region’s heritage, its cultural offerings and growing racial/ethnic diversity generate civic pride, vibrancy and many jobs. The region contains many historic buildings and designated historic districts as well as archaeological sites documenting the region’s Native American roots and the mills and factories of our industrial past. As one reflection of this cultural wealth, tourism is Massachusetts’ third largest industry. The state’s three Easternmost counties — Suffolk, Middlesex and Barnstable — constitute the state’s largest travel market, with more than twelve million visitors in 1999.
- **Metro-Boston contains a wealth of diverse landscapes, habitat and recreational opportunities in a very small area.** These range from Massachusetts Bay, the Boston Harbor and islands to fresh-water and marine beaches, marshes, rivers and lakes, farms and forests, and landmark designs such as Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace. The area’s working farms, orchards and cranberry bogs remind us of our agricultural heritage while renowned environmental institutions plan the future. Cities and towns are also using their environmental assets to promote economic development. The North Shore Task Force recently embarked on an Environmental Tourism project with more than fifty destinations and seasonally designed tours. Inner Core communities lead in recycling “brown-

fields,” industrially contaminated sites, for productive new development.

- **The region’s transportation network of roads, rail, air, bicycle, pedestrian, and water facilities is vital to its economic viability.** The diverse transportation system includes major airport and port facilities, radial patterns of extensive rail transit lines and walkable central cities.

- **Fifty-one public and private colleges and universities in the region generate a supply of highly educated workers, producing research that fuels the high technology and biotechnology sectors.** They are also among the region’s largest employers. Massachusetts is one of the preeminent medical research centers in the nation with an unparalleled collection of world-class hospitals, medical schools and research facilities that led the country in National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants for the past several years, with awards reaching \$1 billion in 1999. Metro Boston is now considered the capital of the Northeast biotechnology industry.

Regional Challenges

- **Metro-Boston lags behind on regional collaboration compared to many other “city-states.”** Many metropolitan regions — sometimes called “city-states” — are retooling their policies and systems of government to create more effective regional collaboration and partnerships. They are laying out paths for constructive dialogue and decision making, and taking stock of their strengths and challenges. Here, in contrast, political fragmentation too often results in overlapping water, sewer, electric, gas and transit services, uncoordinated and cumbersome land development decisions, and a lack of solutions to the region’s most pressing challenges such as sprawl and affordable housing.

- **Despite the high proportion of college graduates in the area, many of the region’s companies are facing a labor shortage, particularly of highly skilled professionals, while the region’s under-employed residents lack the skills necessary to compete for these jobs.** For the past three decades, the region has been losing traditional industrial and durable manufacturing

jobs that provided middle-income wages and expanded the benefits of the regional economy. As a result, the region contains a number of distressed communities with strained public budgets for revitalization, lack of economic opportunity, loss of community cohesion, and barriers to educational advancement for young people. Most of the region’s lowest-income residents live in a dozen urban communities in Metro-Boston’s inner core.

- **Despite the shortage of tech-savvy workers, low-income residents are much less likely than others to have access to computers, technology training and electronic infrastructure in their communities.** Other high-tech impacts, too, fall heavily on low-income residents. New technologies are leading to automated manufacturing processes that increase productivity but require fewer workers. They are also enabling companies to locate far from population centers, leading to difficult commutes for entry-level workers from urban core communities.

- **The per capita income in the region is about 36% above the national average, yet the Boston area is more than 44% more expensive than comparable regions, reflecting high housing, health care and energy costs.** While the rising cost of living is creating extreme hardship for low-wage workers and their families, it is also discouraging young high-skill workers from locating or remaining in the region. According to a report by the think tank Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC), Massachusetts’ labor force grew more slowly than 46 other states’ and 8% more slowly than the national average between 1990 and 1997, with many young workers leaving the state. The high cost of living also translates to high business costs, which undermine the region’s ability to retain high technology ventures as they expand into manufacturing, a source of good jobs. This causes business decentralization to lower-cost regions.

- **Only eight of 101 Metro-Boston municipalities meet the state benchmark of 10% affordable housing units — an unmet goal for the past 30 years.** At the same time, housing costs are skyrocketing. High housing costs are

Sprawling Massachusetts

Massachusetts is “sprawling” at an alarming rate. According to a recent report by the Civic Initiative for a Livable New England sponsored by the Boston Society of Architects, a local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and the local chapter of the American Planning Association, the Boston region is “driving itself crazy....”

Between 1970 and 2000, total annual miles traveled in Massachusetts increased by nearly 75% while the population increased by only about 10%. Tougher automobile emission standards were enacted in that period, but their impact was offset by the number of vehicle miles driven, and half of the region’s air pollution now comes from local automobile use.

In another measure of sprawl, almost 50% of Massachusetts’ farmland was replaced by development between 1950 and 2000. Developed land in the region contains less than half the population density (about five persons/acre) than in 1950 (11 persons/acre).

Sprawling development is also putting pressure on the region’s water supply. With less open land to absorb rain water and replenish water tables, water demand within the I-495 area is expected to exceed supply within ten years. Run off from paved or built surfaces, moreover, is now the primary source of water pollution problems in New England.

For more information contact: The Civic Initiative for a Livable New England, Boston Society of Architects.

displacing many long-time and low-income residents and forcing them into overcrowded conditions or homelessness. The region has a strong network of housing organizations and community-based developers, and a legacy of innovative programs. However, little new affordable housing is being built, and existing affordable housing is at risk due to expiring use restrictions and a decade-long decline in public funding at the state and federal level.

■ **Many of the region’s schools are under performing despite seven years of education reform.** Failure to improve educational outcomes will be a severe drag on the region’s economy and a lost opportunity for the Commonwealth’s economically disadvantaged populations. The cost of college is also an impediment to many, and job training programs are generally under funded and scattered across many agencies. Ladders of opportunity for advancement — from basic adult literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to community college and university systems — are needed to train the regional workforce for good 21st century jobs.

■ **Disparities in educational attainment, health and economic status continue to disproportionately affect newcomer immigrants, people with disabilities and people of color in the region.** The region’s growing diversity has stepped up the challenge of overcoming racial discrimination and other barriers to achieving equitable opportunities for all. Local governments may also need to experiment with new forms of civic deliberation to achieve a inclusive civic participation.

■ **More than 90% of Massachusetts’ residents reported access to a health plan in 1997; geographic pockets of poverty correlate with racial/ethnic and other disparities in health care access and health outcomes.** The region’s health care sector has also faced tremendous challenges in the last few years as health care centers and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) struggle for survival, along with many hospitals. Changes underway in the health care industry need to be managed effectively while offering high quality health care to all.

■ **Towns within the region lack adequate infrastructure to support economic or population growth without undermining the environmental quality of life.** The Proposition 2 ½ property tax cap requires that local land development decisions be based on revenue from new construction, often at the expense of environmental protection and infrastructure investment. Only one-third of the region’s rivers meet their water quality standards under the Federal Clean Water Act, and many outlying towns lack adequate sewer and water resources.

- **The region is in non-attainment of the Clean Air Act’s standard for ozone**, reflecting worsening traffic congestion and air pollution, primarily due to mobile sources. Urban sprawl is forcing longer commutes while distancing urban workers from new entry-level and other jobs. In 1990, despite the region’s relatively good public transportation system, of about 500,000 daily commutes, 224,000 took place in cars driven by one person.
- **Much of the region’s transportation system is old and in need of repair, and the Big Dig is requiring a vastly disproportionate share of transportation resources.** Many towns lack direct highway or public transportation access to major job centers.
- **Unlike many other states, Massachusetts lacks comprehensive policies to support its cultural sector.** This may leave Greater Boston vulnerable to more aggressive regions. For example, Providence, Rhode Island, and the state of Vermont are actively courting artists as a vehicle for community development and tourism. State policy affects cultural life in areas such as housing for artists, arts and music programs in the schools, bilingual signage,

inclusive design, historic preservation and funds for public art in the public realm.

A number of initiatives are beginning to confront the need for regional solutions to these regional challenges. The Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, a consortium of organizations coordinated by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, is providing an umbrella for dialogue on regional issues, developing a common agenda and a set of regional indicators in accordance with updating its comprehensive plan for the region. Northeastern University recently established a Center for Urban and Regional Policy, which is collaborating with the Boston Archdiocese on solutions to housing affordability in the region. Housing is also a focus of the work of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organizing Initiative, which is bringing together the members of congregations throughout the region. The Boston Society of Architects, a local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, has kicked off a three-year Civic Initiative for a Livable New England to focus public attention on “sprawl” and related issues and to mobilize the public, municipal leaders, planners and design professionals to come together to develop solutions.



Metro-Boston Indicators*

Indicators	Measures	How Is Metro-Boston Doing?
CIVIC HEALTH		
High Voter Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Voter participation vs. voter registration by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Voter participation dropped about 8% between the last two presidential and gubernatorial elections, with steepest declines in the affluent towns of Hingham and Holliston
Local Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of owner-occupied structures by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Homeownership rates range from 93% in Lynnfield and Wilmington to 30% in Cambridge
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Racial diversity by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Metro-Boston is about 80% white, with rapidly growing minority populations
ECONOMY		
Low unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Unemployment rate by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The region's unemployment rate is 2.6%, a record low
Adequately Prepared Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Educational attainment by community ■ Number of communities offering ESL and Adult Basic Education classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 40% of residents 25 years and older have a college degree, ranging from 76% in Weston to 17% in Chelsea and Everett. ■ 30% of communities offer immigrant education programs; many have long waiting lists.
Family Self-Sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of households with families below the Self-Sufficiency Standard by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 75% of households in the region earn enough to be self-sufficient; 25% have incomes that do not cover living costs.
EDUCATION		
High Academic Achievement for All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of third graders reading at grade level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In 90% of municipalities, two-thirds or more 3rd graders are proficient or advanced readers; Boston and inner core average at about 35%
Higher Education Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of high school graduates planning to go to college by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In most communities, over 70% of high school graduates plan to attend college; Boston is the only community with less than 50%
Quality School Culture and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public funding per student vs. test scores by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Generally, wealthy school districts with the most public funding per student have the highest proportion of 4th, 8th and 10th graders at proficiency or above in English, math or science

Indicators	Measures	How Is the Region Doing?
ENVIRONMENT		
Clean Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage of rivers meeting water quality standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Only 30% of regional river miles fully meet federal water quality standards; nearly half fully fail
HOUSING		
Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of municipalities with at least 10% subsidized housing units ■ Number of municipalities with Section 8 Housing units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Only eight communities have reached the state's benchmark of 10% for subsidized housing units; Boston leads with 19.2% ■ 42% of municipalities have no Section 8 housing units
PUBLIC SAFETY		
Low Crime Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Trends in reported criminal activity by community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —violent crime (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) —property crime (burglary, larceny, vehicle theft, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Between 1995 and 1998, total crimes, violent crime and property crimes decreased, with a drop for Boston. About 20% of suburban communities saw an increase in violent or property crime
TECHNOLOGY		
Use of Technology for Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of students per computer in public schools by community ■ Percentage of classrooms wired for Internet access by community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 47% of public schools have fewer than the statewide average of 10.6 students per computer ■ About 60% of municipalities have wired more than half of their classrooms for Internet access
TRANSPORTATION		
Environmentally Sound Transportation System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vehicle ownership vs. transit-user households by community ■ Vehicles miles traveled vs. population growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nearly 80% of households in the region own one or more vehicles. Affluent communities have nearly 100% household vehicle ownership; in Inner Core communities, about 30% of households depend on public transit ■ Vehicle miles traveled are increasing much faster than the population indicating sprawl. By 2020, vehicle miles traveled are expected to increase by 26% but the population by only 5%.

* Metro-Boston is defined as the 101 Cities and Towns included in the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's region of Eastern Massachusetts (see map on page 26)