

# Summary Case Assessment



The purpose of this section is to summarize the transit planning and decisionmaking process in the Boston region in light of the guidelines listed in the Introduction to the case assessments. The summary, therefore, is divided into two parts: (1) Assessment of the Institutional Context, and (2) Assessment of the Technical Planning Work.

## 1. ASSESSMENT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

• **Forum for Decisionmaking.**—Historically, transportation decisions in Boston were made by semiautonomous highway and

transit agencies and local governments. Recent agency reorganization programs have centralized transportation policymaking in the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) and have clarified transportation planning and project development responsibilities in the Boston area. Through the reorganization of EOTC and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (M BTA), as well as the five-agency Memorandum of Agreement that established Joint Regional Transportation Committee and the Central Transportation Planning Staff, the Boston area has developed the institutional

mechanisms necessary to permit effective interagency and intergovernmental coordination. As its planning responsibilities have been transferred to EOTC, MBTA has come to function primarily as a transit operating agency.

- . **Accountability of Decisionmakers.**—The Secretary of EOTC—and, ultimately, the Governor who appoints him—are becoming increasingly involved in setting transportation policy and reaching major project decisions in the Boston area. Because the Governor is the sole elected official directly accountable to all the citizens residing within the MBTA service district, the shift of decisionmaking power to EOTC gives citizens a greater degree of formal control in the transportation planning process. The State legislature continues to exercise considerable influence over the region's transit programs through its power to approve or disapprove bonding authority.
- . **Public Involvement.**—The Boston Transportation Planning Review (BTPR) constituted a major experiment of nationwide significance in its approach to developing an open, participatory study process. The BTPR philosophy and approach have been carried over to the newly established JRTC and CTPS institutions.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF THE TECHNICAL PLANNING WORK

- . **Goals and Objectives.**—The transportation goals and objectives for the Boston region—originally developed during BTPR and subsequently refined and extended—constitute a thoughtful attempt to incorporate a broad range of nontransportation objectives as well as transportation-related concerns in the region's transportation planning process. These goals and objec-

tives provide a basic point of reference for judging specific projects and proposals contained in the region's transit development program.

- **Development of Alternatives.**—The current transit improvement program incorporates MBTA's longstanding rapid transit extension proposals, supplemented by a renewed emphasis on the retention and improvement of commuter rail facilities. However, programs for expanding bus services and other lower-cost approaches to transit improvements as well as technological and service innovations all merit greater study.
- . **Evaluation of Alternatives.**—BTPR conducted the most significant alternatives analysis in Boston transportation history, involving an in-depth iterative process with continuous citizen and public agency participation. In general, however, there has been so little serious controversy over transit projects in Boston, at least until recently, that State transportation officials have resisted undertaking detailed analysis of the social, economic, and environmental impact of transit. Each of the major studies now underway has been structured to allow indepth consideration of a full range of alternatives. As yet, the work has not progressed to the point where the technical products can be evaluated.
- . **Financing and Implementation.**—MBTA's current schedule and capital budget estimates appear optimistic in light of the authority's recent lack of success in securing Federal project approvals and funding commitments, as well as in the assumption that State and Federal funds will keep pace with future construction cost inflation. The State's current financial crisis and MBTA's rising operating deficit (which would be further aggravated by an expanded transit system) also may hinder completion of the capital program on its current schedule.