



## Recommendation: Improve regional coordination and partnerships for infrastructure and services

### Strategy 1

Give regional and local officials and residents more say in shaping services and infrastructure.

Many locally made decisions have a large effect on the region, although the region as a whole does not have a voice to represent regional interests. There are also many regional bodies that do not have mechanisms in place to ensure representation of individual municipalities and their residents. While there are often shared goals across local and regional entities, elevating both perspectives in decision-making can set the stage for stronger regional collaboration. For the most optimal reflection of our collective public interests, local and regional decisions need to accurately represent all those concerned.

- ▶ **Action 1.1: Add local voices to the boards of all regional organizations.** The governing and decision-making Boards of all regional entities, such as the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), and the Massachusetts Port Authority (MassPort), should have most of their members selected by local officials and from among residents of Greater Boston. Groups of municipal leaders deciding regionally should suggest candidates to represent their interests, and populations from underrepresented groups and from service users should also have designees on regional Boards. All regional entities should create new and meaningful opportunities to enable service users to contribute to decision-making and collaborate in developing plans and policies. More specific recommendations are included in, “Make government more participatory and inclusive.”

## Strategy 2

Improve coordination and create new regional entities with the authority to effectively shape services.

Several systems could be better governed by regional actors and through cross-sector collaboration. Infrastructure, in particular, should be thought of more holistically, given that decisions about land use and infrastructure investment include consideration of interactions among transportation, housing, and natural resource management. While we have regional bodies for transportation and water provision, other areas where decisions should be made regionally and where assets should be seen as a connected system, such as for parks and recreation, do not benefit from regional governance. While critics might point to a history of poor administration of such entities, past problems did not stem from the regional nature of these organizations and strong oversight structures and transparency could ameliorate such concerns in the future.

► **Policy Action 2.1: Regionally coordinate the management, investments, and expansion of parks, recreation areas, and open spaces throughout Metro Boston.**

Our region is home to world-class parks and protected open spaces, but there is little coordinated vision or management of these assets. MAPC's LandLine vision and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) recently released Parkways Master Plan are important vision efforts and guiding documents, and they should be part of a larger coordinated strategy for the future of all parks, recreation areas, and open space in the long-term.<sup>1,2</sup> The DCR, cities and towns, land trusts, statewide conservation organizations, and other entities own and operate these assets. By bringing together these landowners, along with advocates and resident representatives, a regional vision for a holistic network of open space and recreation could result. Through this elevated coordination, regional priorities can be identified and acted upon for connections among protected lands, expansion, and investments to ensure all corners of the region have access to parks and other open spaces and these lands become an interconnected network.

Over the long-term, creation of a Greater Boston Regional Parks and Recreation Agency could govern all DCR parks and facilities in the region, and potentially link to and support major municipal parks as well. Establishing such an entity would require a dedicated regional revenue source, potentially via a property tax surcharge or community assessment for municipalities being served and accompanying borrowing powers to support that infrastructure and offer robust recreational services. Dedicated revenues would reduce the need to rely on state appropriations for funding and enable more accountability to area residents. Governance for this new entity would include a board selected by regional, state, and local leaders and would include residents from underrepresented populations, environmental justice communities, and park and recreation constituencies.

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1 <https://www.mapc.org/transportation/landline/>.

2 <https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-parkways-master-plan-2020/download>.

**Best/emerging practice:** The Metropolitan Council is charged with overseeing the long-range planning, acquisition, development, outreach, and research for regional parks and trails across the Twin Cities, Minnesota metropolitan area.<sup>3</sup> The Met Council works with ten partner cities, counties, and special districts that own, operate, and maintain day-to-day functions at each park and trail in their jurisdiction. All proposed policies, grants, and other park-related plans and actions are first considered by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. If approved, they are forwarded to the Met Council’s Community Development Committee for consideration, and finally, the Met Council policy board. The Met Council also oversees implementation of the Regional Parks Policy Plan, a 2040 blueprint for the development of a world-class regional park system for the Twin Cities region.<sup>4</sup>

► **Policy Action 2.2: Give the region a say in major development and land use decisions.** Sometimes local development decisions result in outcomes that have negative impacts on neighboring communities or that conflict with regional goals around smart growth and equitable transit-oriented development. These decisions can also conflict with objectives identified in the community’s own master plans, housing production plans, and other documents, or those adopted by neighboring municipalities. Creating a regional land use board to oversee and, in appropriate cases, to enforce policies to ensure more coordinated and equitable development, including housing production, should be explored. In addition to this oversight function, it may be necessary to consider giving this board the authority to overturn exclusionary zoning decisions. Not only does the region suffer when municipalities adopt zoning measures that exclude a certain subset of people, include BIPOC or low-income individuals and families with children, but these measures also oftentimes conflict with objectives identified by locally adopted planning processes (see Action 2.4 in **“Make government more participatory and inclusive”**). The regional board could also work with cities and towns to facilitate inter-municipal transfers of development rights, multi-community development plans, tax and cost sharing agreements, and other inter-municipal agreements. The regional land use board could be appointed by local and state officials representing a diversity of communities and populations, as well as appropriate areas of expertise. Additionally, the regional land use board could develop a regional housing development fund with revenues generated from significant projects and pooled to support affordable housing preservation and expansion in the region. Additional funding mechanisms are explored in **“Give Expand and improve the way we finance local and regional government.”**

<sup>3</sup> <https://metro council.org/Parks/About/Oversight.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://metro council.org/Parks/Planning/Parks-Policy-Plan.aspx>.

## Policy Strategy 3

Reshape service provision in key sectors such as health and education.

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5 <https://www.boston.gov/finance/payment-lieu-tax-pilot-program>

Health and higher education are two of the largest and most important sectors in the Greater Boston economy. They care for, educate, and employ thousands of residents and shape our culture and society in countless ways. The health, prosperity, and equity of our region can be furthered by seeing these vital institutions better support the communities and region in which they reside. While it is no doubt beneficial that they have national and international reputations and clientele, they should also consider it a priority to strengthen the life chances of people in Greater Boston. They are generally non-profits with a charitable and community aim, which can and should play a larger role in their operation.

Hospitals are currently obligated to provide community health assessments and to justify new expansions through a Determination of Need approval from the Department of Public Health (DPH), with funding obligated from such expansions to support community health initiatives. Area colleges and universities work with their municipalities in a number of ways, but do not have a statutory or regulatory obligation to serve their communities. Partnerships between local government and regional agencies and higher education should be formalized and focus on the economic and social needs of the region.

- ▶ **Policy Action 3.1: Elevate local and regional input in the health and education sector.** Health and education services should be planned for at the regional level, with input from the people who reside in Greater Boston and its sub-regions. In health care, the state DPH currently regulates health care needs and quality with other actors and agencies, such as the Attorney General and Health Policy Commission, evaluating the economic and financial implications of health care expansions and mergers. Often, the health needs of regions, sub-regions, and communities do not receive significant consideration in such exercises. In education, state actors also oversee institutions of higher education. Public universities and the community college system in particular create links to their home communities, but this is done informally. There may be some consideration given to educational needs of area residents, or potentially workforce development imperatives, but there is no coordination of such efforts and certainly nothing at a regional level.
- ▶ **Policy Action 3.2: Strengthen the community obligation of hospitals.** Regional and local actors don't have a significant role in overseeing decisions about health care services, even when their communities may be greatly impacted by expansions or contractions in care. Decisions by health care entities may consider community impacts but, as they are increasingly part of national for-profit corporations or large regional systems, it is unclear whether community interests and needs sufficiently factor into their decision-making. That should change. Health care entities should be governed by

a statutory “community commitment” to the residents in the cities and towns they serve, and not simply the patients they treat. Additionally, the Commonwealth should require that all health care entities have at least some members of their governing boards appointed from the communities they serve, including from underrepresented populations, bringing local and regional interests to the table in shaping health care programming and service. The community commitments should specifically seek to ensure that hospitals give priority to the goals in regional health plans regarding both investment and care provision and address the needs of low-income residents, residents of color and people with chronic and long-term health conditions. Health care entities should also form close partnerships with local public health agencies in their catchment areas, jointly conducting community health assessments and implementing health improvement plans for their cities and towns.

► **Policy Action 3.3: Facilitate consistent payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) for large tax-exempt property owners.** Greater Boston is home to a diverse array of medical, educational, and cultural institutions. Many of these institutions own property worth tens of millions of dollars. Because of their tax-exempt status, these institutions are not required to provide payments to their host communities, despite being provided services such as police, fire, and snow removal. Beginning in FY2012, the City of Boston created a voluntary PILOT program that asks institutions with holdings over \$15 million to contribute 25 percent of what their tax obligations would be if they were not tax exempt. They may reduce the requested cash payment by up to 50 percent by demonstrating the value of eligible community benefits (such as scholarships and trainings). In FY20, 79 percent of the requested PILOTs were paid. Other cities and towns with large tax-exempt landowners should consider implementing a similar program and the state Legislature should adopt a mechanism to ensure at least some minimum payments, combined with community benefits, can be collected to cover municipal services provided. Pending bills would expressly allow cities and towns to create a program similar to Boston’s ([S.1874](#) filed by Senator Adam Gomez and [H.3080](#) filed by Representative Erika Uytterhoeven).

► **Policy Action 3.4: Connect and fund community colleges at the sub-regional level and align them to K-12 systems.** Community colleges should be governed and funded on a sub-regional basis with better integration into K-12 systems in the geographies they serve. Texas has such an arrangement, where K-12 school districts are linked to area community colleges. Texas school district voters determine the funding for their community colleges so their curriculum and workforce development programs are better aligned and meet the needs of their students.