

OPINION | AYANNA PRESSLEY, MICHELLE WU, AND STACY THOMPSON

Don't just fix the infrastructure, let's rethink our transit policies

By Ayanna Pressley, Michelle Wu and Stacy Thompson , Updated October 18, 2019, 3:00 a.m.



Leroy Miller of Mattapan (right) waits for the bus in Mattapan Square. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

It's no secret that simply getting around American cities is becoming a nightmare, and metro Boston is no exception. While our focus has been largely on our lamentable ranking as the [most congested city in the United States](#), the issues at the heart of our transportation crisis lie much deeper than traffic alone. In fact, they mirror the deep-rooted disparities of our society.

For years, we have known that our transportation systems — our road, bus, and rail

networks — have not equitably served our most vulnerable communities. According to the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#), black bus riders spend 64 hours and Latinx riders spend 10 hours more per year onboard MBTA buses compared to their fellow white passengers. [Commuters from Mattapan](#) are more likely to have longer, more expensive commutes than their neighbors in distant, wealthier suburbs. These inequities are even in the air we breathe. According to a recent [Union of Concerned Scientists report](#), communities of color in our region are 66 percent more likely to be exposed to tailpipe emissions.

These impacts are the direct result of generations of policies that have pursued the wrong goals, where advancing mobility for some has been furthered at the expense of others. If we are going to tackle our [climate crisis](#) and ensure that the United States remains a nation where everyone has a shot at [socioeconomic mobility](#), we need to make sure our transportation policies allow us to go further together as a society.

For too long, there has been a disconnect between what has been encouraged by Washington and what is needed here in our neighborhoods. This is why this week, with the support of local leaders and advocates, Representative Pressley is launching the Future of Transportation Caucus in Congress.

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Instead of chasing after new, capital-intensive projects, we need to consider how best to maintain and improve our existing infrastructure. According to the [American Society of Civil Engineers's 2017 Infrastructure Report Card](#), nearly 500 bridges in Massachusetts are structurally deficient. This safety crisis is an outcome of the federal government's wrongheaded incentives, where states are encouraged to forgo [state of good repair](#) needs in order to apply for funding to expand infrastructure. By redefining the federal highway funding formula, we can motivate states to dramatically reduce our national road, bridge, and transit maintenance backlog in half.

We need to prioritize projects that promote the safety and well-being of our communities. As an example, according to the [Governor's Highway Safety Association 2018 report](#), pedestrian deaths on our nation's roads are the highest they have been since 1990. We need to require that state and local governments put safety before expediency.

And finally we need to ensure that we're delivering on projects that connect people to the jobs, housing, education, and health services they depend on in order to bridge disparities once and for all. Every road and transit project we back as a country should be working toward this goal, to ensure the next generation is connected to thriving communities.

Our current federal policies aren't set up to address this crisis in Boston, or in any city or town across the country. It's time to completely rethink our federal transportation policies — and we believe the Future of Transportation Caucus will achieve that. We can no longer simply throw money at our crumbling infrastructure thinking that's what will fix it. A comprehensive strategy to spend our money is vital to the success and sustainability of our transit system.

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley represents Massachusetts' Seventh Congressional district. Michelle Wu is an at-large Boston city councilor, and Stacy Thompson is

district, MICHELE WU is an at-large BOSTON CITY COUNCILOR, and STACY THOMPSON is executive director of LivableStreets Alliance.

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