

## Finance plan for T, Pike readied

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### Details expected on cost-sharing

By Noah Bierman, Globe Staff | September 15, 2008

The Patrick administration hopes to give a \$13 million shot to the state's financially ailing mass transit agencies through a new cost-sharing program with other state agencies.

The proposal expected to be unveiled today falls far short of a bailout for the beleaguered Massachusetts Turnpike Authority and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, both of which are struggling under billions in debt and considering raising tolls and fares. But political leaders are trying to show the public they are doing everything they can to save money before raising fees or fares.

Yet even these modest measures face potential hurdles: Both require outside approval and at least part of the plan faces union resistance.

The eight cost-sharing measures - which include changing who inspects bridges and who pays to maintain some roads and T stations - would also further Governor Deval Patrick's goal of streamlining some complicated transportation bureaucracies.

"Are they going to solve the problem? No," said Bernard Cohen, transportation secretary. "But we're trying to look everywhere we can to clean our own house, recognizing that we still have embedded fundamental problems that are creating financial problems for both agencies."

Cohen had promised last month to find the new cost-saving measures, after meeting with state transportation officials in hopes of heading off toll hikes next year and substantial fare increases in 2010 for buses, trains, and subways.

Cohen's plan would get help for the Turnpike and MBTA from the Massachusetts Port Authority, which runs Logan International Airport and the Tobin Bridge, and from the Massachusetts Highway Department, which maintains most of the state's major roads outside of the turnpike.

The biggest proposal would shift responsibility to inspect almost all the state's bridges to MassHighway, saving the MBTA \$3.5 million in its annual budget and the Turnpike Authority \$2.5 million. MassHighway would also cover about \$1.2 million in costs for hiring flaggers at bridge construction projects over MBTA tracks.

The plan also calls on Massport to cover the \$3.7 million in annual maintenance for the tunnel that connects Interstate 93 and the Tobin Bridge in Charlestown. Massport would also pick up more costs for portions of the Silver Line and Blue Line that bring travelers to Logan, relieving the MBTA of about \$1.6 million in expenses.

Daniel A. Grabauskas, general manager of the MBTA, said he will be glad to get some relief in his budget, though he acknowledged it will not solve the myriad problems he is facing, including a deficit that is forcing his board to borrow money and raid the reserve fund to pay operating expenses this year.

"It further highlights the fact that there is a need here at the T," he said. "I guess the old saying is: It's necessary but not sufficient."

Though all the state's transportation leaders say they support the plan, it is not a done deal. Massport's board and the FAA have to approve it.

One of the proposals is likely to meet resistance from the United Steelworkers union, whose members

currently inspect Turnpike bridges. If the inspections move to MassHighway, union members would lose that responsibility.

"That's just our function and we're not going to give that up," said Stephen Finnigan, subdistrict director for the union. "We would challenge anything that they would try to do to take those positions away."

Susan L. Quiñones, director of interagency affairs for Cohen, said the Turnpike Authority would work with the union to make sure collective bargaining obligations are met.

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