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*****EMBARGOED TO 12:30 A.M. TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2015*****

REPORT URGES OLYMPIC PLANNERS TO “PUT LEGACY FIRST”

Identifies Opportunities and Challenges in Olympic Bid

Calls on State to Create Olympic Commission to Unify Planning Efforts and Focus on Legacy of Games

Suggests Housing, Transportation and Environmental Actions to Ensure Metro Boston and Massachusetts Benefit over Long Term

BOSTON – A new report released today outlines that Boston’s Olympic bid offers a unique opportunity to create new neighborhoods, build more housing, improve transportation infrastructure, generate short- and long-term jobs, and increase tourism in the Boston region. But the report says this can happen only if Boston 2024, the Commonwealth, the City of Boston, and neighboring municipalities establish a coordinated planning process that focuses on the “legacy impacts” of the Games – the long-term, regional benefits that will last beyond 2024.

The report was issued jointly by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance (MSGA), and Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA).

“We have to put legacy first,” said Marc Draisen, Executive Director of MAPC, whose staff were the prime authors of the report. “It’s not just about writing a winning bid and making the Games a success; it’s about making sure our region ends up with more affordable homes, better jobs, beautiful parks, and a 21st century transportation system. These things won’t just happen by themselves. We have to leverage the Olympic bid to make them happen, and the sooner the better.”

The report’s prime recommendation is for the Commonwealth to establish an Olympic Planning Commission to oversee public planning around the Games and to ensure the Boston region and Massachusetts benefit from the new development and infrastructure that hosting the Olympics could bring. The Commission would coordinate the public planning process, recommend amendments to the bid, identify critical infrastructure upgrades, and help to develop legacy plans for the venue sites, among other powers and responsibilities. The report calls upon the Commission to “maximize public input and participation with a special focus on under-represented groups,” and to make the planning process “regional, transparent, and inclusive.” The Commission would also evaluate the impacts of the Games and post-Olympic development, and suggest concrete ways to minimize or mitigate negative impacts.

The report pulls no punches about the possible downside risks, especially the prospect of rising housing prices and displacement. It suggests nine overall recommendations to prevent displacement, plus specific recommendations to build affordable housing at venue sites after the Games end. Specifically, it calls for special protections so tenants will not be evicted to accommodate Olympic visitors, and suggests that between one-third and one-half of housing units built on venue sites be affordable to low and moderate-income households.

The report supports the idea of an Olympic Games that are “fully accessible by transit, bicycle, and walking.” It calls for greater focus on a number of projects to improve the MBTA (like the renovation of the JFK/UMass station), to make the Olympics more “bikeable” (like the addition of new Hubway stations and special bike lanes), and to improve pedestrian access (including much better accommodations for people with disabilities). The report warns against allowing the venues to sprawl throughout the state, which would force visitors into cars, although it recognizes that a few Olympic events might move to superior athletic facilities in other parts of Massachusetts.

Since all the main venues are along the coast or Charles River, the report strongly suggests Olympic planners use the Games as an opportunity to build resilience to climate change, sea level rise and storm surges.

“The goal of Boston 2024 is to win the Olympic bid, but our goal is to create infrastructure and thriving neighborhoods that will strengthen Greater Boston and the Commonwealth for decades to come. With coordination and good planning, these goals can be compatible,” said Andre Leroux, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance. “The public needs to have confidence that this is happening.”

“We’ve known for a long time that our transportation system – especially the MBTA – needed lots of maintenance and investment. This winter certainly proved it. The Games could provide the deadline we need to create a system we can be proud of, but it requires the state, cities and towns, and the Olympic host committee to work together to overcome the political and financial barriers that stand in the way of a world-class transportation system,” said Kristina Egan, Director of Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA).

Additional recommendations include:

- Infrastructure improvements that are solely related to the Games should be financed entirely by private sources. Projects that generate shared benefits to the Games as well as long-term public benefits should be financed by a mix of public and private funds.
- The Olympics and Paralympics should serve as a catalyst to accelerate efforts to make the MBTA fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- The Olympic venues provide an opportunity to create new and vibrant neighborhoods after the Games. Before the Games, venues should be designed to avoid displacement of existing residents, tenant protections put in place, and specific and binding targets established for affordable housing at redevelopment sites. Post-Olympics, the neighborhoods should feature housing at a variety of price points, walkable and bikeable streets, parks and other amenities.
- A series of infrastructure improvements – especially related to transportation – are needed at all three main venue sites (Widett Circle/Cabot Yards, Columbia Point, and North Allston/Beacon Yard Precinct). These projects will help to transport Olympic guests, and they will also make stronger neighborhoods after the Games end. Boston 2024 should advocate for these improvements, and contribute to their funding.
- The Olympic legacy should include meaningful improvements to existing parks, open spaces, and youth sports facilities, determined with the engagement of the municipal government and local neighbors.
- The MBTA should modernize parking fee and fare collection systems in preparation for the Games and for the long-term benefit of the region.

About the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

MAPC is the regional planning agency serving the people who live in the 101 cities and towns of Metro Boston. MAPC's mission is to promote smart growth and regional collaboration by working toward sound municipal management, sustainable land use, natural resource protection, efficient and affordable transportation, a diverse housing stock, public safety, economic development, clean energy, healthy communities, an informed public, and equity and opportunity for people of all backgrounds. The work of the agency is guided by "MetroFuture: Making a Greater Boston Region," MAPC's long-term regional plan. For more information, visit www.mapc.org and www.mapc.org/metrofuture.

About Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA)

T4MA is a diverse coalition of organizations working together to create safe, convenient, and affordable transportation for everyone. T4MA advocates for transportation funds to be spent fairly and responsibly, for transportation decisions that are transparent and accountable, and to ensure that our transportation network has sufficient resources to meet tomorrow's needs throughout the Commonwealth. Visit www.t4ma.org for more.

About Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance (MSGA)

MSGA comprises nine statewide organizations working to create a Commonwealth filled with walkable, welcoming and vibrant communities where residents help shape their future and have access to good jobs, homes, and a healthy environment. For more information, visit <http://ma-smartgrowth.org>.

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