

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 2978**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

***Jack Patrick Lewis***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

**An Act relative to regional transportation ballot initiatives.**

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Jack Patrick Lewis</i>	<i>7th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/17/2021</i>
<i>Harriette L. Chandler</i>	<i>First Worcester</i>	<i>2/24/2021</i>
<i>Tami L. Gouveia</i>	<i>14th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>James K. Hawkins</i>	<i>2nd Bristol</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Lindsay N. Sabadosa</i>	<i>1st Hampshire</i>	<i>3/18/2021</i>
<i>Carmine Lawrence Gentile</i>	<i>13th Middlesex</i>	<i>3/25/2021</i>
<i>Natalie M. Higgins</i>	<i>4th Worcester</i>	<i>7/22/2021</i>

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 2978**

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By Mr. Lewis of Framingham, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 2978) of Jack Patrick Lewis and others for legislation to authorize municipalities to assess certain taxes for financing regional transportation needs and investments. Revenue.

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[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION  
SEE HOUSE, NO. 2535 OF 2019-2020.]

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court  
(2021-2022)**  
\_\_\_\_\_

An Act relative to regional transportation ballot initiatives.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. The General Laws are hereby amended by inserting after chapter 64M the  
2 following chapter:

3           Chapter 64N. Regional Transportation Ballot Initiatives

4           Section 1. Definitions. The following terms shall have the following meanings:

5           “District agreement”, a document specifying the terms and conditions of the powers and  
6 duties of the two or more municipalities forming a district under section 4 of this chapter,  
7 pursuant to the laws governing any such municipality, the provisions of this chapter, and such  
8 procedural regulations as the commissioner of revenue may promulgate.

9           “Payroll Tax”, a tax an employer pays on behalf of its employees based on a percentage  
10 of the wages of the employees of the employer.

11           “Single subject of taxation”, one of four taxes, payroll, sales, property, or vehicle excise  
12 tax, as determined annually by the board of assessors or department of revenue, that the city or  
13 town, or district, may subject to the tax surcharge.

14           Section 2. Taxing authority and acceptance of sections 2 through 5.

15           (a) Sections 2 to 5, inclusive, shall take effect in any city or town upon the approval in a  
16 city by the city council with the approval of the mayor or in a town by the board of selectmen  
17 and their acceptance by the voters of a ballot question as set forth in section 3.

18           (b) Upon passage of this Act, a city or town shall have authority to impose any tax  
19 surcharge within its city or town on a single subject of taxation including a payroll, sales,  
20 property, fuel, or vehicle excise tax. However, no tax surcharge shall be imposed within the city  
21 or town unless it has first been approved in a city by the city council with the approval of the  
22 mayor or in a town by the board of selectmen and accepted by the voters of a city or town  
23 through a ballot question as set forth in section 3, except as provided in section 4.

24           (c) Notwithstanding the provisions of chapters 59, 60A, 64H, 62, or any other general or  
25 special law to the contrary, the city by the city council with the approval of the mayor or town by  
26 the board of selectmen may vote to accept sections 2 to 5, inclusive, by approving a surcharge on  
27 a single subject of taxation, as determined annually by the board of assessors or department of  
28 revenue. A city council or board of selectmen that intends to approve sections 2 to 5 shall  
29 determine prior to approval which single subject of taxation will be levied and the amount of

30 surcharge. For a property tax surcharge, the amount of the surcharge shall not be included in a  
31 calculation of total taxes assessed for purposes of section 21C of chapter 59.

32 (d) All exemptions and abatements of any single subject of taxation for which a taxpayer  
33 qualifies as eligible shall not be affected by this chapter. A taxpayer receiving an exemption for  
34 any single subject of taxation shall be exempt from any surcharge on any single subject of  
35 taxation established under this section. The surcharge to be paid by a taxpayer receiving an  
36 abatement of any single subject of taxation shall be reduced in proportion to the amount of such  
37 abatement.

38 (e) Any amount of the surcharge not paid by the due date shall bear interest at the rate per  
39 annum as authorized by the law for any single subject of taxation, and in the case of a payroll  
40 tax, at the rate per annum as authorized by the law for the taxation of corporations.

41 (f) Revenues raised through the tax surcharge shall be used for transportation-related  
42 purposes only including for the expenditure by the city or town for maintaining, repairing,  
43 planning, design, financing, operating, improving and constructing of public transportation and  
44 transit systems, roads, bridges, bikeways, pedestrian pathways, and other transportation-related  
45 enhancement projects.

46 Section 3. Municipal or state election on adoption of ballot initiative.

47 (a) Upon approval in a city by the city council with the approval of the mayor or in a  
48 town by the board of selectmen, the actions of the body shall be submitted for acceptance to the  
49 voters of a city or town at the next regular municipal or state election. The city or town clerk or  
50 the state secretary shall place it on the ballot in the form of the following question: "Shall this  
51 (city or town) accept sections 2 to 5, inclusive of chapter 64N of the General Laws, as approved

52 by its (in a city by the city council with the approval of the mayor or in a town by the board of  
53 selectmen), a summary of which appears below (Set forth here a fair, concise summary and  
54 purpose of the law to be acted upon, as determined by the city solicitor or town counsel,  
55 including in said summary the specific single subject of taxation to be levied and percentage of  
56 the surcharge to be imposed.)”

57 In the ballot question, the city or town may include a list of specific transportation-related  
58 projects or activities in accordance with section 6 for which the tax surcharge funds may be used.  
59 The city or town may also include a sunset provision in the ballot question, but in no event shall  
60 the authorization for the surcharge exceed 30 years.

61 If a majority of the voters voting on said question vote in the affirmative, then its  
62 provisions shall take effect in the city or town, or district as set forth under section 4, but not  
63 otherwise.

64 (b) The final date for notifying or filing a petition with the city or town clerk or the state  
65 secretary to place such a question on the ballot shall be 35 days before the city or town election  
66 or 60 days before the state election.

67 (c) If the city by the city council with the approval of the mayor or the town by the board  
68 of selectmen does not vote to accept sections 2 to 5, inclusive, at least 90 days before a regular  
69 city or town election or 120 days before a state election, then a question seeking said acceptance  
70 through approval of a particular surcharge rate, may be so placed on the ballot when a petition  
71 signed by at least 5 per cent of the registered voters of the city or town requesting such action is  
72 filed with the registrars, who shall have seven days after receipt of such petition to certify its  
73 signatures. Upon certification of the signatures, the city or town clerk or the state secretary shall

74 cause the question to be placed on the ballot at the next regular city or town election held more  
75 than 35 days after such certification or at the next regular state election held more than 60 days  
76 after such certification.

77 Section 4. Two or more municipalities.

78 (a) Two or more municipalities may, by vote of the city or town thereof, in a city by the  
79 city council with the approval of the mayor or in a town by the board of selectmen, form a  
80 district for the purposes set forth in section 2. Upon approval by each of the municipalities to  
81 form a district for purposes of this chapter, Sections 2 to 5, inclusive, shall take effect in the two  
82 or more municipalities upon the approval by the each of the municipalities thereof, in a city by  
83 the city council with the approval of the mayor or in a town by the board of selectmen, and their  
84 acceptance by the voters of a ballot question as set forth in section 3. Formation of a district may  
85 occur before or after voters accept a ballot question as set forth in section 3.

86 (b) If a majority of the voters in the district, for the purposes set forth in the first  
87 paragraph of this section, vote on said question in the affirmative then its provisions shall take  
88 effect in the district, but not otherwise.

89 (c) Two or more municipalities that choose to form a district for purposes of this chapter  
90 shall apply a surcharge to the same single subject of taxation. The percentage of the surcharge  
91 may vary for each municipality that comprises the district.

92 (d) Two or more municipalities forming a district under section 4 shall adopt a district  
93 agreement with approval in a city by the city council with the approval of the mayor or in a town  
94 by the board of selectmen. The district agreement shall specify:

95 (1) the purpose and nature of the arrangement;

96 (2) the single municipality to serve as the treasurer of the local and regional  
97 transportation fund or the regional planning agency to serve as fiscal agent of the local and  
98 regional transportation fund under section 7, and that said municipality or regional planning  
99 agency shall also serve as treasurer or fiscal agent for purposes of section 9;

100 (3) how the money will be used and for what purposes, and how the municipalities will  
101 decide on details of use, plan changes, or urgent circumstances;

102 (4) the work to be performed, and the division or sharing of responsibility among the  
103 municipalities;

104 (5) the estimated costs and the methods of financing;

105 (6) the method of administration;

106 (7) the composition of the district's regional transportation committee, the length of its  
107 term, and the criteria and method of selecting its members; and

108 (8) the duration of the proposed agreement.

109 (f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to:

110 (1) amend, repeal or otherwise alter the authority or jurisdiction of, or establish, a  
111 municipality;

112 (2) confer any management authority over funds, land, or natural resources beyond the  
113 authority exercised by participating municipalities in the district agreement set forth in this  
114 section and this chapter.

115 Section 5. Levy and collection of tax.

116 (a) Upon acceptance of sections 2 to 5, inclusive, and upon the assessors' warrant to the  
117 tax collector, the accepted surcharge shall be imposed. The city, town, or district, shall notify the  
118 commissioner of revenue of the date and terms on which the voters accepted said sections 2 to 5,  
119 inclusive.

120 (b) For a surcharge levied on either property or excise tax, after receipt of the warrant, the  
121 tax collector shall collect the surcharge in the amount and according to the computation specified  
122 in the warrant and shall pay the amounts so collected, quarterly or semi-annually, according to  
123 the schedule for collection of the single subject of taxation, to the city's or town's treasurer, or  
124 the district's treasurer. The tax collector shall cause appropriate books and accounts to be kept  
125 with respect to such surcharge, which shall be subject to public examination upon reasonable  
126 request from time to time.

127 (c) Two or more municipalities forming a district under section 4 shall select one of the  
128 municipalities or the regional planning agency to serve as the district's treasurer for purposes of  
129 section 5 and in accordance with section 4. The district agreement under section 4 shall establish  
130 the method of selecting the district treasurer. The municipality or regional planning agency  
131 selected to serve as district treasurer shall perform duties in accordance with section 5 and  
132 chapter 41. Two or more municipalities forming a district under section 4 shall also select that  
133 same municipality or regional planning agency to receive funds and provide certification for all  
134 municipalities within said district for purposes of section 9 and in accordance with section 4.

135 Section 6. Local or Regional Transportation Committee.

136 (a) A city or town that accepts sections 2 to 5, inclusive, and is not a party to a district  
137 agreement in accordance with section 4, shall establish by ordinance or by-law a local  
138 transportation committee not more than 180 days following acceptance of sections 2 to 5,  
139 inclusive. The committee shall consist of not less than five members. The ordinance or by-law  
140 shall determine the composition of the committee, the length of its term and the criteria and  
141 method of selecting its members by appointment only. The committee shall include, but not be  
142 limited to, one or more representatives from the municipality, one representative of the  
143 Massachusetts Department of Transportation as designated by its board, one member of the  
144 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority as designated by its board if the city or town is  
145 within the service area of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, one member of each  
146 regional transit authority to which the city or town is a member community, one member of the  
147 regional planning agency to which the city or town is a member community, or persons, as  
148 determined by the ordinance or by-law, acting in the capacity of or performing like duties of the  
149 department, board or authority if they have not been established in the city or town.

150 (b) A district as set forth under section 4, that accepts sections 2 to 5, inclusive, shall  
151 establish by district agreement in accordance with section 4 a regional transportation committee.  
152 The committee shall consist of not less than seven members. The committee shall include, but  
153 not be limited to, one or more representatives from each municipality, one member of the  
154 Massachusetts Department of Transportation as designated its board, one member of the  
155 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority as designated by its board if any municipalities of  
156 the district are within the service area of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, one  
157 member of each regional transit authority if any municipalities of a district is a member  
158 community, one member of each regional planning agency serving one or more municipalities of

159 a district, or persons, as determined by district agreement, acting in the capacity of or performing  
160 like duties of the department, board or authority if they have not been established in the city or  
161 town.

162 (c) Both the local and regional transportation committees shall study the transportation-  
163 related needs, possibilities, and resources of the city, town, or district. The committees shall  
164 consult with existing transportation agencies, including the Massachusetts Department of  
165 Transportation and regional planning agencies, to develop transportation-related projects  
166 including maintaining, repairing, planning, design, financing, operating, improving and  
167 constructing of public transportation and transit systems, roads, bridges, bikeways, and  
168 pedestrian pathways, and coordinate joint-funding where appropriate in accordance with the  
169 ballot initiative. If a list of specific transportation-related projects or activities for which the tax  
170 surcharge funds may be used was included in a ballot question, the committee shall include said  
171 projects or activities in its study, however, the committee may recommend or not recommend  
172 said projects or activities.

173 (d) Both the local and regional transportation committees shall not meet or conduct  
174 business without the presence of a quorum. A majority of the members of the local or regional  
175 transportation committee shall constitute a quorum. The committees shall approve its actions by  
176 majority vote. Both the local and regional transportation committees shall keep a full and  
177 accurate account of all of its actions, including its recommendations and the action taken on them  
178 and records of all appropriations or expenditures made from the Local and Regional  
179 Transportation Fund. The records and accounts shall be public records.

180 (e) The city, town, or district as set forth in section 5, shall receive the approval of the  
181 Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the regional planning agency or agencies for all  
182 transportation-related projects or activities prior to listing specific projects on the ballot as set  
183 forth in section 3, unless the transportation-related project or activity is under local jurisdiction.  
184 If a city or town includes no specific transportation-related projects or activities in the ballot  
185 question, or the ballot question was initiated under section 3(c), the local transportation  
186 committee shall receive the approval of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the  
187 regional planning agency prior to submitting the local transportation committee's  
188 recommendations to a city council or board of selectmen, unless the transportation-related  
189 project or activity is under local jurisdiction. If the district includes no specific transportation-  
190 related projects or activities in the ballot question, the regional transportation committee shall  
191 receive the approval of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the regional  
192 planning agency or agencies prior to implementing the regional transportation committee's  
193 recommendations, unless the transportation-related project or activity is under local jurisdiction.  
194 The city, town, or district shall study projects that promote access to public transportation,  
195 biking, and walking.

196 (f) Not less than once every two fiscal years, the local transportation committee shall  
197 make recommendations to the city council of the city or board of selectmen of the town  
198 regarding efficient and effective ways to improve and enhance local transportation systems.  
199 Recommendations to the city council or board of selectmen shall include anticipated costs. The  
200 committee may include in its recommendation to the city council or board of selectmen a  
201 recommendation to set aside for later spending funds for specific purposes that are consistent  
202 with transportation-related purposes but for which sufficient revenues are not currently available

203 in the Local and Regional Transportation Fund, as set forth in section 7, to accomplish that  
204 specific purpose, or to satisfy debt payments incurred from transportation-related projects, or to  
205 set aside for later spending funds for general purposes that are consistent with transportation  
206 improvements and in accordance with the ballot initiative.

207 (g) After receiving such recommendations from the local transportation committee, the  
208 city council or board of selectmen shall then take such action and approve such appropriations  
209 from the Local and Regional Transportation Fund as set forth in section 7, and such additional  
210 appropriations as it deems appropriate to carry out the recommendations of the local  
211 transportation committee and in accordance with the ballot initiative.

212 (h) Not less than once every two fiscal years, the regional transportation committee shall  
213 make recommendations to the designated municipality treasurer or regional planning agency as  
214 set forth in section 4 regarding efficient and effective ways to improve and enhance local and  
215 regional transportation systems. Recommendations to the designated municipality treasurer or  
216 regional planning agency shall include anticipated costs. The committee may include in its  
217 recommendation a recommendation to set aside for later spending funds for specific purposes  
218 that are consistent with transportation-related purposes but for which sufficient revenues are not  
219 currently available in the Local and Regional Transportation Fund, as set forth in section 7, to  
220 accomplish that specific purpose, or to satisfy debt payments incurred from transportation-related  
221 projects, or to set aside for later spending funds for general purposes that are consistent with  
222 transportation improvements and in accordance with the ballot initiative.

223 (i) After receiving such recommendations from the regional transportation committee, the  
224 designated municipality treasurer or regional planning agency shall then take such action and

225 approve such appropriations from the Local and Regional Transportation Fund as set forth in  
226 section 7.

227 Section 7. Local and Regional Transportation Fund.

228 (a) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 53 of chapter 44 or any other general or  
229 special law to the contrary, a city, town, or district that accepts sections 2 to 5, inclusive, shall  
230 establish a separate account to be known as the Local and Regional Transportation Fund, of  
231 which the municipal treasurer or fiscal agent shall be the custodian. The authority to approve  
232 expenditures from the fund shall be limited to the city council of a city or board of selectmen of a  
233 town, or the designated municipality treasurer or regional planning agency of the district, and the  
234 municipal treasurer or fiscal agent shall pay such expenses in accordance with chapter 41.

235 (b) Two or more municipalities forming a district under section 4 shall select one of the  
236 municipalities or regional planning agency to establish a separate account known as the Local  
237 and Regional Transportation Fund in accordance with this section and section 4. The  
238 municipality or regional planning agency selected to establish said fund shall only use the funds  
239 for the district as a whole based solely upon the recommendations and approvals of the regional  
240 transportation committee as set forth in this chapter.

241 (c) The following monies shall be deposited in the Local and Regional Transportation  
242 Fund: (a) all funds collected from the levied tax surcharge on any single subject of taxation  
243 pursuant to section 3, except if the single subject of taxation is a sales or payroll tax which shall  
244 be deposited with the department of revenue in accordance with sections 8 and 9; and (b) all  
245 funds received from the commonwealth or any other source for such purposes. The treasurer or  
246 fiscal agent may deposit or invest the proceeds of the fund in savings banks, trust companies

247 incorporated under the laws of the commonwealth, banking companies incorporated under the  
248 laws of the commonwealth which are members of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or  
249 national banks, or may invest the proceeds in paid up shares and accounts of and in co-operative  
250 banks or in shares of savings and loan associations or in shares of federal savings and loan  
251 associations doing business in the commonwealth or in the manner authorized by section 54 of  
252 chapter 44, and any income therefrom shall be credited to the fund. The expenditure of revenues  
253 from the fund shall be limited to implementing the recommendations of the local and regional  
254 transportation committees and providing administrative and operating expenses to the  
255 committees, and in accordance with the ballot initiative.

256 (d) Only those cities and towns, or district that adopt the surcharge allowed by this  
257 chapter shall be eligible to receive monies through the Local and Regional Transportation Fund.

258 Section 8. Massachusetts Local and Regional Transportation Trust Fund.

259 (a) There shall be established and set up on the books of the commonwealth a separate  
260 fund, to be known as the Massachusetts Local and Regional Transportation Trust Fund, for the  
261 benefit of cities, towns, or districts as set forth in section 4, that have accepted sections 2 to 5,  
262 inclusive, and pursuant to said sections 2 to 5, inclusive, have imposed a surcharge on either a  
263 sales or payroll tax levy, subject to any exemptions adopted by a municipality or district. The  
264 fund shall consist of all revenues received by the commonwealth: (1) from the levied tax  
265 surcharge on either a sales or payroll tax pursuant to section 3; (2) from public and private  
266 sources as gifts, grants and donations to further local or regional transportation-related projects;  
267 and (3) all other monies credited to or transferred to from any other fund or source pursuant to  
268 law.

269 (b) The state treasurer shall deposit the fund in accordance with the provisions of section  
270 9 in such manner as will secure the highest interest rate available consistent with the safety of the  
271 fund and with the requirement that all amounts on deposit be available for withdrawal without  
272 penalty for such withdrawal at any time. All interest accrued and earnings shall be deposited into  
273 the fund. The fund shall be expended solely for the administration and implementation of this  
274 chapter. Any unexpended balances shall be redeposited for future use consistent with the  
275 provisions of this chapter.

276 (c) The state treasurer shall make all disbursements and expenditures from the fund  
277 without further appropriation, as directed by the commissioner of revenue in accordance with  
278 section 9. The department of revenue shall report by source all amounts credited to said fund and  
279 all expenditures from said fund. The commissioner of revenue shall assign personnel of the  
280 department as it may need to administer and manage the fund disbursements and any expense  
281 incurred by the department shall be deemed an operating and administrative expense of the  
282 program. The operating and administrative expenses shall not exceed 5 per cent of the annual  
283 total revenue received under the provisions of section 8.

284 Section 9. Annual distributions of monies in trust fund; diversion of funds.

285 (a) The commissioner of revenue shall annually on October 15 disburse monies from the  
286 fund established in section 9 to cities and towns, or the municipality treasurer or regional  
287 planning agency of the district as set forth in section 4, that have accepted sections 2 to 5,  
288 inclusive, and notified the commissioner of their acceptance.

289 (b) The commissioner shall distribute the funds to the city or town, or the municipality  
290 treasurer or regional planning agency of the district as set forth in section 4, in accordance with

291 the first paragraph of this section based on the proportional amount the city, town, or district, has  
292 raised by imposing the surcharge. The total distribution of funds shall include all sources of  
293 revenue raised in the previous year as set forth in section 8(a), less no more than 5 per cent of the  
294 annual total revenue of the fund, as set forth by section 8(c).

295 (c) The commissioner shall be prohibited from diverting revenues derived from the  
296 surcharge into any fund created by law.

297 Section 10. Amendments to amount and computation of surcharge; revocation of Sections  
298 2 to 5.

299 (a) At any time after imposition of the surcharge, the city by the city council with the  
300 approval of the mayor or town by the board of selectmen may approve and the voters may accept  
301 an amendment to the amount and computation of the surcharge in the same manner and within  
302 the limitations set forth in this chapter.

303 (b) At any time after imposition of the surcharge, a district under section 4, with the  
304 approval of the majority of voters in the district may accept an amendment to the amount and  
305 computation of the surcharge in the same manner and within the limitations set forth in this  
306 chapter so that the surcharge becomes uniform in all municipalities of the district.

307 Section 12. Rules and regulations. The commissioner of revenue shall have the authority  
308 to promulgate rules and regulations to effect the purposes of this chapter.