

Op-Ed

# Can Massachusetts still pioneer?

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Nobody likes going to the airport.

It's called luggage for a reason – we have to lug it. If we want to drive ourselves, then we deal with exorbitant parking rates. If we want to take an Uber or Lyft then we don't know what it's going to cost until the day of our trip. And the traffic to get to the airport just keeps getting worse anyway.

We could build better transit to the airport, and this would be great. But we have a bigger problem. Logan is full.

Boston Logan Airport was constructed over 100 years ago. Last year, it hosted 43 million travelers, and that's growing at 2–3% per year. By 2040, we'll be experiencing delays not because of weather, but because of crowding.

We're going to need a bigger airport. But that's still not the hardest problem. Logan is underwater.

It's going to take billions of dollars to make Logan resilient to rising sea levels. The increasing frequency of extreme weather events will also make it harder to land and takeoff at an airport that's on the shore, right where the storms hit.

We might not believe we need it today, and it may sound daunting to consider, but we have to face the truth. Boston will need a new airport, and we're going to need it in the next 30 years.

When we're ready to face the music, we need to learn our lessons from Logan. The next Boston airport should not take up ecologically sensitive waterfront real estate. The next Boston airport should not displace existing communities. The next Boston airport must be connected with high-speed electric rail connections to downtown Boston and MBTA metro lines.

These challenges present a new opportunity for Boston: the first electric rail-connected airport in the United States.

By picking a location in the outskirts of Greater Boston, the next airport for this region can be an airport for all of Massachusetts. Electrified rail increases speeds by up to 25% compared with diesel-powered rail. We can find a location that connects Boston, Worcester, and Springfield to an international airport all within a 1 hour train ride.

Boston has an opportunity to innovate on American airport design. Because they designed frequent rail access

into the airports during construction, Oslo and Amsterdam provide rail access to their airports for millions of residents within 50 miles. Massachusetts is smaller than the Netherlands, where they are able to serve all their residents with rail-connected airports. There's no reason why our next airport can't be train-first. Airport traffic needs to become an artifact of the past.

We innovated on healthcare, now it's time to innovate on rail connectivity.

This opportunity is not only for a new airport, but it's also an opportunity for East Boston. The community surrounding the airport suffers ongoing injustice: the airport depresses land values and emits harmful particulates. East Boston children are four times more likely to have asthma.

To do right by East Boston, we need to start to undo the damage Logan Airport wrought.

But the benefits of reclaiming the airport footprint will not just flow to residents of East Boston. All of Boston will unlock new opportunities for housing and development. Boston housing is as expensive as New York City, and we need to build more housing to meet the demand. Adapting the airport's land for high-capacity housing and waterfront commercial development presents potentially billions of dollars of revenue for the city, and a chance to effectively manage the fast-paced growth we're experiencing. Not to mention how much less traffic there will be in Boston if all the airport travel is moved elsewhere.

We may not be ready today. Maybe not tomorrow. But Boston needs a new airport – Massachusetts needs a new airport. When the time comes, we'll see if we still have that pioneering spirit. What do you think of Amelia Earhart International?