

A Strategic New England

A Citistates Reconnaissance Report

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The New England Council

Prepared by:

The Citistates Group

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Introduction

New England Patriots owner Bob Kraft is no political scientist. But in these early days of the 21st century, he looks more like a realistic geographer than many politicians in New England.

In early February the Patriots won professional football's prize and 1.25 million people converged on Boston for a parade; another celebration followed in Providence. All over the six-state region there were cheers for a team called New England.

Does New England need something more than a major sports prize to stitch together its several parts? Is there any sense of a shared New England future, rather than six states going their own ways into the new global economy?

How important is the Boston area to New England's future – as a hub of technology and innovation, entrepreneurial networks, and of course, as the home of world-class universities?

What are New England's core assets going into this century? Are they deployed strategically, consciously? What could undermine these advantages?

When asked, what do leaders and key observers say about the greatest threats the New England's future? Do they see opportunities that can only be realized with joint effort, which would require a major collaborative effort? What initiatives would merit more attention and investment?

Project Description

These were the principal questions driving a brief reconnaissance of New England issues this winter. Conducting this project were principals of the Citistates Group, a national network of journalists and analysts who have, over the past 16 years, produced major studies in 21 American regions.

Under the sponsorship of the New England Council, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and the Boston Foundation, Citistates principals Neal Peirce, Curtis Johnson, and Farley Peters spent the equivalent of a month in New England, interviewing 112 people, slightly under half of which were in the Boston metro area. Running up over a thousand road miles, they visited Hartford, Portland, Concord, Providence, Montpelier, and Burlington.

The sponsors of this reconnaissance suggested many names as potential sources of insight and information. Citistates principals also gleaned sources from their own network (Neal Peirce actually wrote a book in the 1970s on New England, lives in New Hampshire each summer, and has maintained multiple ties to people in each state). The idea was to draw a sample in the region's major urban centers across categories of economic development specialists, business and trade representatives, economists, advocates for land and building preservation, historians, demographers, public officials, experts on higher education, civic and philanthropic leaders. Wherever possible, they contacted local media, especially major newspapers and public radio networks, to assess their interest in these questions and insights they could share.

Media groups in each urban center were, as assumed, excellent sources of current information, and in each case, expressed enthusiasm over the prospect of participating in a deeper exploration of these issues, if such a project is undertaken.

What follows is the collection of issues that surfaced most prominently from these interviews. These obviously do not cover the full range of high-priority issues facing the region, but they do reflect a remarkable resonance to many of the opportunities and worries sponsors registered with the Citistates team in advance.

A STRATEGIC NEW ENGLAND

Finding: With its wealth of assets, its history of Yankee ingenuity and global trade, New England should be perfectly positioned to prosper in a 21st century economy focused on R & D, intellectual activity, capital market strength and highly specialized manufacturing.

Few places on earth offer higher concentrations of great research and teaching universities, renowned hospitals, PhDs, inventors, patents, management consulting, computer and biotechnology firms and venture capital. Boston is reportedly the fourth largest center in the world for money under management, trailing only New York, London and Tokyo.

The medical money alone is formidable. The National Institutes of Health pours, just into Massachusetts, \$1.6 billion a year, with far-reaching ripple effects. Most biotech companies got their financial stake through NIH money.

“We have the intellectual, social, fiscal capital to drive change around the world,” one Boston civic leader told us.

New England lights up the map with historic villages, deep river valleys and breathtaking mountain scenes, along with bustling, world-class urban centers. Rare is the region where tourism and trade are both strong; where making a good living and living the good life are in one place.

But is there also a strategic New England -- one ready to assess its global position, willing to tap its immense institutional power, to maximize strengths, admit weaknesses, look for lost opportunities? Is the region developing the kind of collaborative academic-government-business partnerships that will be critical for future prosperity, including building stronger social equity, in a fiercely competitive new global economy?

If health care and medical technology are core assets, is there strategy for building on them, with an all-New England twist, and for leading the nation in resolving the nagging issues of affordable access? Today Maine captures some headlines with its push to lower prescription drug prices. Whether their answer is prudent or naïve, wouldn't a New England answer be both shrewd and sensible, rooted in the strength of this powerful economic cluster of research, technology innovation, and leading hospitals?

There are some efforts in the direction of “New England” strategies. Examples include the nascent effort to brand and coordinate the Hartford-Springfield-New Haven “Knowledge Corridor.” As well as the the Boston Foundation’s push to bypass status-quo mindsets by fostering a strong new generation of imaginative

civic entrepreneurs, their efforts supported by solid data in the foundation's biennial indicators of progress, change and sustainability.

But it's when strategic thinking pushes all the way to New England's geographic edges that a glimpse of full regional impact comes into view. Certainly, the New England Council's new "Creative Economy" initiative has that vision, as it highlights the major economic potential of the region's fine arts, graphic design, theater, advertising, fashion and web creation capacity.

So does the gathering force of strategy-making around transportation. Businesses and citizens experience transportation problems locally, but all the solutions are regional. It's a promising sign that transportation commissioners and airport directors are meeting and agreeing on the need for a common New England strategy as TEA-21 is teed up for reauthorization. As one former state official puts it, "Enough of this saying 'I'm okay,' or whining that you got too much and we got too little. It's time for a New England strategy."

Still, some massive pieces of a coherent 21st Century New England plan seem either missing, or seriously underdeveloped.

Challenge: Develop and promote a vision of a single New England. Outside of New England, the six-state region has perhaps the clearest image of any in the U.S.; within, one encounters confusion, New Englanders themselves wondering if they live in a coherent region or simply owe allegiance to individual towns or states.

We're in an era of citistates -- the great metropolitan regions that are the engines of the new global economy. Boston is such a citistate, transformed in recent decades from a hub city and close-in suburbs to a high-tech driven metropolis reaching out to Routes 128 and I-495 and encompassing a whole ring of economically-linked satellite cities, among them Providence, Worcester, Nashua, Manchester and (increasingly) Portland. Roughly a quarter million commuters a day cross the state lines of this region. The New York City region, on New England's south flank, provides the same kind of impact on southwestern Connecticut. The I-91 Connecticut Valley (New Haven-Hartford-Springfield) and Southeast Connecticut-Rhode Island (New London-Newport) urbanized corridors are the region's major metropolitan anchors.

Successful 21st century citistates will be those that learn they're primarily economic, not political entities -- *the citistate is what the economy does*. But the goal's not just business success; indeed true prosperity will only be reached by regions which grasp the new reality that goals of sustainable metropolitan-wide growth, an educated and skilled workforce, a clean environment, good physical planning, and progress toward social equity, aren't contradictory, but profoundly interdependent.

But New England is more than its urbanized cores. It's the Berkshires. It's Vermont, the northern two-thirds of New Hampshire, and what some call "the real Maine" -- the vast expanses of that state north of Augusta, strikingly different from the small urbanized slice located from Portland southward. The rural areas -- from the Cape to Tanglewood to the Vermont and New Hampshire mountains and Maine coast -- are the region's playgrounds, all reached in a day's drive or less. Yet the quality of their natural environment isn't just critical for vacationing and tourism -- it helps define quality of life for all New Englanders.

One market such areas draw are "lone eagles" -- professionals, usually quite affluent, who choose the rural lifestyle but also like urban centers within convenient reach. They communicate chiefly by Internet (making the spread of broadband access critical). There also appears to be a nascent rural/northern New England marketplace. Vertical Market Ventures, with headquarters in Concord, believes it's reaching critical mass in offering venture capital services across the northern Vermont-New Hampshire-Maine tier. Williamstown-based Village Ventures, on a similar track, aims to introduce venture capital, business experience and networking connections to benefit new businesses mounted in college towns and such "second-tier cities" as Amherst, Worcester, Providence, Burlington and Portland.

For a single and successful New England, urbanism (large or small) everywhere matters -- healthy, attractive city centers, whether in a Providence or Worcester, Burlington or Augusta, Hartford or Manchester. Such centers are critical to the entire region's image, draw, well-being. So is the development of new businesses, whether in an Ellsworth, North Conway, Rutland or Fall River. In the post-9/11 world, corporations may find such locations, easily reached from Boston or New York, more attractive as expansion sites than southern or western U.S. sites that can only be reached by long-distance air.

Editorial Tasks:

1. Examine how New England can (a) increase its pool of leaders aware of and committed to solving its pressing problems and challenges, and (b) keep track, through targeted indicators of progress in each of the six states and regionally, of how well it's doing.

Henry Bourgeois, president of the Maine Development Foundation, suggests a New England-wide leadership institute of emerging leaders who're taken on a six-state-wide bus tour with in-depth policy briefings. Plus some form of yearly report on economic and cultural achievements across New England.

2. Identify one or more critical issues through which the six states could refine a practice of thinking "New England", planning strategically, and acting collaboratively. Health care leaves a big economic footprint and remains a sizzling public policy issue; is this the best front on which to organize? Or the

inseparable twins of tourism and environment? Or transportation – from everyday mobility to moving goods through and around this most truck-dependent section of the U.S? Or creating a sufficient supply of housing near job centers affordable to workers?

The four issues examined below emerged most prominently from the leadership sampling process. They may not be the best four for further study, but they certainly seem exemplary as fronts on which progress now begs for strategy and collaboration on a New England wide basis.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Finding: The very concepts, “New England” and “higher learning” -- in universities and colleges, research laboratories, entrepreneurial firms -- are globally synonymous. This is the region’s franchise. A resourceful New England will capitalize fully on it.

New England’s economic success after 1980 came easily because the transformation from a mill-based to mind-based economy placed a premium on activities the region was already strong in, ranging from higher education to world-famed hospitals, strength in financial services to high technology.

But in today’s world, regions everywhere are catching on -- that it’s ideas, not raw materials or low-skill, raw-brawn industries that spell success in the modern global economy. If today’s New England leaders hope to emulate the success of the shrewd Yankee traders of old, they’ll have to promote New England’s core assets -- not just assume the world will genuflect instinctively before New England superiority. Promoting the region will demand intensive collaboration, including cooperation among proud universities, corporations and governments -- institutions historically not accustomed to working with others. But the rewards could be significant.

Take enrollment in New England colleges and universities. Incoming students (some 125,000 a year, from the rest of the U.S. and abroad) enrich the region’s economy with tuitions which support not just the famed institutions but a vast, six-state network of colleges and universities which sustain salaries and a high quality of life cities and towns across six states. Even a decade ago, the region’s institutions of higher learning were contributing an estimated \$12 billion to New England’s gross product, with an indirect impact of close to \$30 billion. (Update?- Check John Harney at NEBHE).

New England may slip in its percentage of the United States’ college students -- indeed that’s likely inevitable, given national population growth. But the region should be determined to build its net enrollment figures, not let them drop.

Further, the Citistates team heard reports that the region is not holding on to the share of talented university graduates that might be expected. If true, it is a condition at serious odds with today's and tomorrow's need for scientific, technological, and medical talent that fits New England's strong economic clusters.

The New England Board of Higher Education focuses to some degree on these issues. It takes justifiable pride in the Regional Student Program, begun in 1954, which allows students from New England states where their chosen specialty is not offered to enroll in another New England state at the in-state rate. (Last year some 7,600 students enrolled, saving a cumulative \$38 million.) Presently the Board is pushing the idea of a New England Transfer Compact, to allow community college students to take their credits to any four-year institution in the region. That sounds OK -- though we could identify no systemic effort, with business input, to identify shortages in the higher education system's academic offerings across this closely interconnected region.

Challenge: Is New England actually underplaying its core strategic asset? Should it make a collective decision to promote a New England education aggressively, within the United States and abroad?

While New England's premier colleges and universities, even with escalating tuition charges, still find more applicants than they can accommodate, some institutions are suffering. Some New England states find themselves very low on national charts for retaining their college-bound high school graduates (especially Vermont, New Hampshire, and Connecticut). Is there an untapped cachet of a New England education that would bolster overall enrollments and the aggregate economic/intellectual benefit to the region?

To advance the region's collective learning capacity, what impact might an on-line, globally accessible "University of New England" make? This could be a consortium arranging on-line courses, across multiple disciplines, from the very best this region has to offer? If the University of Phoenix, unknown a couple of years ago, is picking up thousands of applicants from across the globe, imagine the potential of an on-line New England institution, linked to some of the finest universities ever known in world history! Arrange a "degree" from such a university, based on solid credit hours, and one can easily imagine a rush of applicants from around the world.

A strong New England might also encourage its colleges and universities to focus on rich course offerings (on-line or on-campus) to enhance its own residents' lifelong learning and career advancement. Business could be part of challenging sometimes-aloof academic institutions to collaborate and stimulate each other in cutting edge language, writing, technical skills -- yet another way to

assure high quality of life, retain and build an entrepreneurial population in the region.

In the process, the actual enrollment figures in New England institutions of higher learning would seem almost sure to rise dramatically. A strong Internet presence, promoting New England nationally and globally as a richly diverse, fascinating place to study, live and work, might supplement such efforts dramatically.

New England has a compelling reason to consider this agenda. Census reports indicate the region is suffering a clear drop in its 18-to-24-year-old cohort. The last decade's figures showed Maine, along with New Hampshire and Vermont, registering the country's biggest drop of people 35 and under. The region has a strong population cohort 50 to 60 years of age -- many skilled people in specialized manufacturing, whose succession is murky at best. But New England's overall labor force would have declined in the 1990s if it hadn't been for immigration.

Challenge: New England has such prestigious private education that its public institutions of higher learning have, historically, been undernourished. If New England is committed to preparing all its youth for the full range of today's and emerging jobs, that situation begs for a correction.

Challenge: There's also reason for rising concern about the millions of people presently in the New England workforce who are either functionally illiterate or have nothing more than a high school diploma of marginal value in today's economy. Strategically, the region has few more pressing problems. The last decades' rapid decline in solidly-paying manufacturing jobs has created, as one economist told us, "an economy with tour guides on one side, molecular biologists on the other." Solutions, we heard, include radical steps to focus the community college and vocational education system on real and emerging job needs; steps to work systematically within high schools to direct more young people toward technical and scientific fields; and heavy efforts for continuing education of the existing adult workforce.

Clearly, it's difficult, in a recession period, to galvanize public support for such steps. Promoting the region's sparkling higher education opportunities to the nation (and to its own young people) would cost some dollars, though perhaps a reasonable amount -- and could be planned, most likely, outside of government. One benefit of a successful effort could be to retain more college graduates within New England. (We were struck by a 1997 Bank of Boston report noting that MIT faculty, students and graduates had founded Metro Boston companies with annual revenues exceeding \$50 billion. Even if the same yields are marginally true from other institutions, the cumulative payoff is stunning -- and worth every kind of promotion.)

Challenge: the brain drain. This is the last place in America we would expect to uncover complaints about losing talent to other places. Here, the place to which so many are attracted for their university years finds itself staring at a sobering spreadsheet suggesting it's losing more than the usual market share of graduates.

This was the testimony generally in New England, though an overarching theme in the Boston area. The best students in America are attracted to New England. They enjoy the culture, nurture new networks of relationships, then awkwardly as they graduate, make plans to leave. When they are interviewed, we're told some report they always planned to return to wherever home is. But many also say they would like to stay but don't think they can afford to live in New England. Is this just a housing price problem, or something more?

Editorial tasks:

1. Check all relevant research on the role/benefits of the higher education segment in the New England economy, and ties to benefits for incomes of residents and the state and local governments.
2. Examine the role of ethnic diversity in economic growth. For example, it's clear that many immigrants come with minimal education and skills. But is it correct there's also a significant flow of immigrants with basic skills and potential to enrich the six-state economy? If so, how can that segment be enhanced?
3. Interview a wide range of experts on the various ways by which New England might in fact promote its higher education institutions, indeed its entire intellectual structure, to a U.S.A.-wide and global audience, and the results they believe such an effort might yield.
4. Examine how New England can (a) increase its pool of leaders aware of and committed to solving the education/skills problems, and (b) keep track, through targeted indicators of progress in each of the six states and regionally, of how well it's doing.
5. Discover the principal sources of the brain-drain of talent from graduates of New England colleges and universities. Why do many of the most promising young people leave after graduation? What strategies would push up the propensity of graduates of New England universities to live and work in this region?

TRANSPORTATION

Finding: A thoroughly modernized transportation system -- road, air and rail, passenger and freight -- is critical (1) to assure internal mobility in an era of severe road congestion, and (2) to make sure New England does not become the continental cul-de-sac that consultant Michael Gallis warned of in his Connecticut-focused study of the region's future.

After the construction boom of the 1950-2000 era, most future improvements to the road system -- except for a potential east-west connector in Northern New England -- are likely to be incremental. Worse congestion seems inevitable and all the more worrisome given New England's nation-leading reliance on trucks. That the region is both heavily urbanized and also very rural complicates any solution.

International trade, historically a New England strength, remains a vital part of the economy. But it will suffer if improvements are not made in intermodal capacity and efficiency of moving goods. The questions range from how many ports and where, to the system of rails and roads that connect.

Airport locations are fixed, but attitudes among those running them are shifting remarkably from competition to cooperation. The emerging consensus -- accelerated after 9/11 -- around the complementary roles of Logan, Manchester, and T.F. Green airports sets a powerful precedent for future collaboration.

The most promising development is the coming together of leadership, public and private, to forge a New England strategy for influencing the revision and reauthorization of the nation's principal statute for policy and funding of transportation -- TEA-21. This is "Exhibit #1" in the case for collaboration. Twelve senators is an advantage squandered if New England does not speak with a consolidated voice. Moreover, the experience of building a strategic consensus would seem almost certain to have collateral payoff in better regional understanding and stronger relationships.

Challenge: There appears to be one overarching omission in transportation planning: a strategic look at New England's 21st century rail needs and potentials.

Improvement of the Northeast Corridor, permitting the higher-speed Acela trains connecting to New York and southward to Washington, was a significant step. But what's the region's plan to expand and build on that breakthrough (including still-needed electrification and roadbed improvements)? How and when can Boston's Logan, Manchester and Providence airports -- not to mention Portland, and Bradley Field serving Hartford-Springfield -- be linked by rail to expedite passenger transfers, relieve auto traffic to crowded airport locations, and to clear airport gates and the skies for vital long-distance air flights? What of extending Acela-grade service to Hartford and Springfield? Are there needed additions to

the very popular new commuter lines connecting Boston with Providence and Portland? Should the region unite behind Boston-Concord-Burlington service and a potential new line to Montreal? What of an integrated transportation plan, rails and bus-ways included, to avoid massive, sprawl-inducing highway expansion to serve the casinos and other attractions of southwestern Connecticut?

For tourism, industry, quality of life and New England's domestic and global reputation, these issues demand coordinated, multi-state attention. A high-level, six-state, government-private sector task force to assess needs and press action needs to be considered.

Editorial tasks:

1. Research all elements of proposed rail improvements, together with experts' feasibility judgments and rough early cost estimates. Explain how rail can or should dovetail with highway improvements, improved airports, even water transportation, and the potential benefits.
2. Look beyond passenger transportation to freight as well -- to assure the region's industrial efficiency. Examine how much freight experts believe could be switched to rail, to relieve pressure on this compact region's roadways. Consider the New England-wide potentials flowing from such proposals as the proposed container terminal at Quonset in Rhode Island.
3. Track the chain of collaborative efforts around the reauthorization of TEA-21.

GROWTH POLICIES -- IS THERE A "NEW ENGLAND" STRATEGY?

Finding: The unique-in-America landscape of New England not only sustains an important tourist industry but creates a special quality of life critical to draw and retain the skilled personnel -- scientific, creative, entrepreneurial, managerial -- the region needs to compete successfully in the New Economy.

Yet across the six-state area, most land use decisions are presently made in piecemeal fashion. Land is being consumed far more rapidly than population is growing. New Englanders talk of their dedication to their special landscape, sparkling towns and long history, yet in more developed areas there's often "Nimby"-like opposition to the infill and redevelopment that could restore older neighborhoods, save open spaces and preserve the region's heritage. Conversely, there are economically struggling areas, including rural northern New England, where lack of zoning or local planning leads to undiscerning acceptance of almost any new development.

Challenge: The image of New England as a desirable place to live and do business depends not on one community or state, but perceptions of how the whole region is handling its growth and development challenges. Despite some “smart growth” discussions, there seems to be insufficient debate -- within states, and certainly across borders -- about planning principles that could strengthen prospects for thoughtful, sustainable New England-wide growth for this century.

Editorial tasks:

1. Check out through more detailed interviewing how various types of New England communities (urban to rural, north to south) are now handling growth and planning challenges, including open space protections and issues of infill and affordable housing. Are there experiments with inventive new models (in Rhode Island, for example) that other New England states and communities should consider? What opportunities do thoughtful New Englanders see to link more focused land planning with considerations of social equity? How do they think such goals can be accomplished without excessive regulation?
2. Prepare charts comparing the six New England states' major policies affecting local and regional planning -- planning incentives, disincentives, authority or prohibitions in law and constitutions. Example: degree of reliance on local property tax bases and strictly town-by-town rules, as opposed to any form of tax-base sharing or regional land planning.
3. Outline potential elements of a New England-wide land development ethic for the century, and how individual states' progress toward it could be mapped over time, including taking full advantage of what Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping now makes relatively easy.
4. Assess the damage from the deficit in housing that is affordable to individuals and families that businesses want to hire and retain; discover and explain whatever strategies are being tried, even in small scale, to reverse the trend.

POLITICS-PATRONAGE-PAROCHIALISM

No one doubts New England and its Puritan roots were key to the birth and development of self-government in America. It was in New England, as historian James Truslow Adams observed, that “the gristle of conscience, work, thrift, shrewdness became bone.” Later, New England’s perverse independence of mind cultivated the American Revolution, sparked the Abolitionist cause in years preceding the Civil War, led in refuting McCarthyism in the 1940s and 50s, even ignited America’s resistance to the Vietnam War. And it was this same region that produced some of the finest American leaders ever, from Samuel Adams to Oliver Wendell Holmes to John F. Kennedy.

And more -- this New England, which gave birth to town meetings, remains the place on the continent where unvarnished citizen democracy seems to enjoy its most dramatic presentations. Just this winter, the citizens of Burlington, Vermont, (no longer such a small place) gathered to debate whether to buy a new fire truck or replace the ambulance. Such civic intimacy is easily celebrated as the sustaining sinew of strong town and city identities, preserving the sense of place so often lost in the anomie of mass modern culture.

Yet we are obliged to report --

Finding: New England's very strong home rule guarantees and local discretion powers of town and city governments, undergirded by strong property tax reliance across the New England states, raise questions about essential efficiency -- and equity -- of the region's critical government structures.

Such a conclusion needn't dictate taking a machete to home rule or the property tax base. But it does suggest analyzing their impact, and a need for public debate about potential modifications.

Typical of the concerns we heard was this statement by Richard Godfrey, Executive Director, Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation: "Municipal planning must accommodate housing for all incomes and family styles. Reliance on local property taxes and localized zoning decisions often favors commerce over community, and large houses over smaller ones." A statewide or regional approach, he suggested, could "bring low- and moderate-wage earners, essential for economic growth and community vitality, back from the margins."

Across the U.S. today one does hear calls for more coherent regional governance. But the demand is not for monolithic regional governments, but rather ways to prompt debate, agreements, fresh forms of collaboration among localities. Technology and history have profoundly altered the needs of government, world, dictating that 300-year old cities and towns must at least reexamine operations and approaches. Virtually no issue -- environmental protection, social services, transportation, education -- can any longer be determined within the boundaries of single cities or towns. And e-government is about to revolutionize how local services are conceived and delivered, from tax collection to permits to police and fire protection.

And up to now, voluntary collaborations of local officials have yielded modest results at best. A current example is the Boston area Metro Mayors Coalition, initiated in summer 2001 and staffed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The effort is a significant start, reflecting parallel efforts in such metro regions as Denver and Chicago. The coalition's purpose: to determine ways seven mayors and two strong city managers can collaborate. The initial goals were a common purchasing pool for employee health care insurance, an energy policy to deal

with such issues as joint purchasing of street lights, and addressing such shared perils as liquid natural gas containers entering Boston Harbor.

Yet the post-9/11 era seems to be calling for radically -- not marginally -- increased regional coordination. A comparison with the Washington, D.C. area illustrates the point. By February 2002, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments had a task force writing a regional emergency response plan. A major Board of Trade-Potomac Conference meeting had debated coordinated response plans. A Washington government-business delegation had visited New York to compare preparedness plans with Wall Street leaders. Area radio and television stations had been enlisted to discuss emergency broadcast policies and pooling of information in the event of a crisis. Local police and fire departments had attended briefings with executive security advisers led by Israeli military, intelligence and police consultants. Law enforcement, transportation, media and government officials had been asked to take part in an attack simulation. A regional communications center was being developed, to avoid the cacophony of messages and broadcast bands encountered on 9/11.

Yet in Boston, our repeated questions on homeland security preparations failed to reveal many parallel efforts. The idea of mayors and city managers enlisting help from the Boston area's diverse, multi-talented business community, or its big hospital sector, seemed not to have surfaced. Local officials seemed somewhat preoccupied with such challenges as negotiating small-scale cross-border public safety agreements, or persuading firefighter unions to allow personnel to be more sensibly deployed -- not the mega-issues of joint or cooperative emergency equipment purchase to hold down potentially explosive costs for duplicative equipment. The idea of obtaining advice from some of the country's leading academic experts on fighting terrorism, located in universities just across the Charles River, seemed totally new.

(The Metro Area Mayors Coalition did, however, decide to look at creating a base of common radio bandwidths so that first responder personnel can respond in the event of a terrorist attack or other disaster.)

Finding: At least by appearance, patronage-influenced hiring of officials and letting of contracts seems to be as severe in sections of New England, if not more severe, than anywhere else under the American flag.

We make that judgment on the basis of careers spent observing public life and issues across the American continent, monitoring local media in American communities and interviewing thousands of officials and citizen leaders. We confess there are other states -- Pennsylvania, for example -- in which fragmented governance certainly rivals New England's. We recognize there's no way to know to what degree that the appearance of official malfeasance reflects actual, comparative conditions. We acknowledge there are sections of New

England in which government rectitude is apparently high if not absolutely exceptional.

Challenge: The image of government decisions made on a non-merit basis may harm New England as the new global economy places increased value on transparency, openness and fair business dealings.

It's inevitable, for example, that "word" of difficulty doing business within New England will spread. Consider the judgment we heard from an executive recently brought in to head a major Massachusetts enterprise. This person was surprised and disturbed by pervasive patterns of "patronage and corruption." Specific reference was made to the multi-billion dollar Big Dig, its gross cost overruns and contracting problems -- a situation, the newcomer told us, which not only raises questions of where else all that cash could have flowed, but threatens to make New England "a laughing stock of America." (One immediate, embarrassing casualty: the \$3 billion cut from the now-bloated budget that would have paid for a North-South station connector.) Behavior like the Big Dig contracting and price overruns, we were told, "will ultimately besmirch the fine name of this community."

The same executive cited, from personal experience, a number of examples of unqualified persons who were placed in government patronage jobs and then protected by high-level political figures.

In Providence, we found people pointing with pride to Mayor Vincent A. Cianci's achievements (which are considerable). One such observer, without batting an eye, continued: "Look, even with a 38-count indictment, don't you think among 12 people on a jury, there won't be at least one friend?" -- an observation which leads a visitor to wonder whether he should simply assume that corruption has to travel with competence.

The Boston Globe and other media crusade on such subjects. But the echoes of civic outrage seem dim.

We also heard complaints that some unions' power, especially relating to work rules, hinders productivity in government and universities.

Editorial Tasks:

1. Using homeland security as a case test, query groups of governments and businesses across the New England states about the level of their emergency preparedness plans, especially the presence or absence of a credible *regional* response.
2. Explore with economists and with business leaders answers to the cost questions raised by a culture of town-by-town governance, strict home rule, and

heavy reliance on political patronage. Does it in fact cost more to do business in Providence, or Boston, Hartford, or Manchester than in San Francisco or Charlotte? Do any data suggest public practices -- from the fragmentation of localism to the baggage of slippery ethics -- actually cost more? If so, can such costs be estimated? What savings might be possible?

3. Based on consultation with expert observers in the region, select a handful of other issues around which more formal collaboration would seem to have high potential -- such as energy independence, supply of housing, preservation of New England's urban distinction, intra-New England mobility. Explore practical prospects for each.

4. Conduct a search through all conversations for the threads of a *strategic* regionalism -- a governance approach that doesn't require giving up local identities -- but does try to put the same fabric of regional approaches around such major issues as new infrastructure, housing, the environment and land use - - issues that people may as gladly concur in as sports and symphonies.

Illustrating the problem: "This is a politico-centric region. It takes its politics more seriously than its economy. And takes its local community more seriously than any sort of regional consciousness. Everything's very competitive. We like hand to hand combat. Others have compared Route 128 to Silicon Valley; if that's the rain forest, this is the plantation. every one for themselves. Even while there is collaboration on issues like energy." -- A Boston civic leader