

STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN



MBTA SAVES 200 JOBS...IN IDAHO

In November, the Federal Transit Administration derailed the MBTA's plans to buy 28 diesel electric locomotives from a Spanish company for an estimated cost of \$186 million. The T had been seeking an exemption from the Buy American Act, which requires transit agencies to buy equipment assembled in the US, because only one American company indicated it would bid on the contract. But Idaho officials objected to the T's desire to pick and choose, and the FTA effectively ordered the contract to go to MotivePower of Boise, saving a reported 200 American jobs. (At press time, MotivePower and the MBTA had not yet agreed on final terms of a contract.)

Still, last fall's elections may be good news for transit agencies such as the T. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, voters across the US approved 23 proposals that, if fully implemented, will channel \$75 billion into mass transit projects, including a high-speed rail network in California. Thanks to the growing demand for buses and railway equipment, there may soon be more American manufacturers willing and able to bid on contracts from agencies such as the MBTA. Or more than one, anyway.

MASSACHUSETTS: HEALTHY BUT HARD-DRINKING

Massachusetts is the nation's 6th healthiest state, up from 9th a year ago, according to the United Health Foundation's latest America's Health Rankings, released in December. Vermont, Hawaii, and New Hampshire were named the healthiest states. Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina were at the other end of the continuum.

The Bay State placed first in four categories: We have the lowest percentage of residents without health insurance, the lowest occupational death rate, the most primary care physicians per capita (which may be misleading; see "Conversation" on Page 80), and the least "geographical disparity" in health outcomes within a state. (But how can anyone beat tiny Rhode Island in that category?)

Our worst category: binge drinking, where we rank 39th (or 12th worst), with 18 percent of adults reporting that they had more than five drinks at one sitting during the previous month. Then again, Kentucky and Tennessee have the lowest incidence of drinking but are in the bottom third of states for overall health. Massachusetts is also below average (32nd) in avoiding "preventable hospitalizations." Hawaii scores best in effectively using outpatient care rather than overnight stays, but if you lived in that climate, wouldn't you do anything to get back outside?

BRIDGEWATER'S TOWN MEETING BOTTOMS OUT

One of the largest communities in the Bay State that's still governed by open town meetings may soon make the switch to an elected body. The *Bridgewater Independent* reported that its namesake town, which has 26,000 residents, will likely vote on a proposal this spring to switch to a representative town meeting or town council. The biggest impetus for change was last spring's open town meeting, called to approve the annual budget, which attracted only 3.5 percent of the electorate.

An open meeting in November, called to consider the possibility of a representative form of government, may have answered its own question: Only 68 of the town's 15,347 registered voters showed up, for a turnout of 0.44 percent.

The largest community in the state with an open town meeting form of government is Andover, with 33,000 people.

**BAY STATE STUDENTS
WELL PREPARED FOR
UNAFFORDABLE COLLEGES**

A new report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education gives Massachusetts an “A” for academically preparing high school students for college, but an “F” in making public colleges affordable.

According to the report, an average “poor and working-class” family must devote 49 percent of its annual income to pay for the costs of attending a public four-year college (even after receiving government aid) in the Bay State, one of the highest such percentages in the nation. The national average is 40 percent.

ROAD SALT WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD?

Stateline.org reported that the cost of salt used to cover snow-covered roads went up 20 percent for public works departments looking to stock up early for this winter, adding to the woes of state and local governments already trying to do more with less tax revenue. But this wasn’t news to the city of Attleboro. The *Sun-Chronicle* already broke the bad news last June: “The cost of a ton of salt shot up to \$64.21 from \$51.46, a 25 percent hike... Last winter, the city bought about 3,000 tons of salt at a cost of \$154,351. If the same amount is bought this coming winter, it will cost the city \$192,630. That would mean the cost for salt alone would put the city \$115,130 over the \$77,500 budget for snow and ice control.”

One town has apparently seen the wisdom of buying in bulk. The *Brockton Enterprise* reported last fall that Hingham was thankful for a larger storage facility: “The new shed can hold 3,000 tons of salt—much more than the current shed’s 280 tons.”



MASSACHUSETTS WELCOMES CALIFORNIA TO ITS DEMOGRAPHIC NIGHTMARE

It may be little comfort that the biggest state in the US has many of the same problems that we do, but these days a little comfort may be the best we can hope for. Last month, the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California released a report whose title rings true in Massachusetts: *California’s Future Workforce: Will There Be Enough College Graduates?* PPIC projects that 41 percent of California’s workers will need bachelor’s degrees by 2025, thanks to the ongoing replacement of manufacturing with white-collar jobs. (That change is also happening here, as noted in the MassINC report *Mass Jobs: Meeting the Challenges of a Shifting Economy*.) But it’s going to be almost impossible to meet the demand for college educated workers. Report author Deborah Reed notes that the most educated age group in the state is the 50-to-64 cohort (i.e., people about to retire), and the growing Latino population is not making significant gains in education.

Another problem is a familiar one to Massachusetts: out-migration. Since 2000, California has lost 1.2 million people to other states (while gaining 5.7 million people from births and international immigration), and PPIC concludes, “This is likely the first time in its history that California has sustained net out-migration of college graduates.”

In 2003, the MassINC report *MASS.migration* detailed how the continuing loss of young, highly educated residents could be a major threat to our economy in the new century. Among the states stealing our talent was...California.

At Partners HealthCare, the journey never ends.

Massachusetts General Hospital and Brigham and Women's Hospital have been the sites of many important medical breakthroughs. Essential work in the journey to fight disease and improve the quality of medicine continues to this day, as recent discoveries demonstrate.

2008 Breakthroughs in the news

"Using a test they pioneered, scientists from Brigham and Women's Hospital [led by Dr. Paul Ridker] screened patients...missed by conventional cholesterol tests and then gave them preventive doses of a type of drug known as a statin. The result: heart attacks and strokes were cut by roughly 50 percent among patients who received the pill as part of a sprawling medical study that spanned 26 countries and included nearly 18,000 people."

— *The Boston Globe*, November 10, 2008

"Brigham and Women's Hospital, in a first-of-its-kind medical trial has performed...a safer, less traumatic operation to help address the nation's obesity epidemic."

— *The Boston Globe*, June 28, 2008

"The technology, invented at Massachusetts General Hospital uses a microchip scanner no bigger than a business card to...identify minute amounts of tumor cells floating in the blood of cancer patients..."

— *The Boston Globe*, July 3, 2008

"Researchers have pinpointed 32 genes linked to Crohn's disease...That is the biggest reported catch for any disease...said Mark Daly of Massachusetts General Hospital...the study's senior author"

— *The Boston Globe*, July 7, 2008

1846 First public demonstration of ether use during surgery

— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

1883 First use in North America of antiseptic during childbirth to protect mothers and newborns from deadly infections

— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

1896 First use of X-ray image for diagnosis in U.S.

— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

1929 First use of iron lung to save polio victim

— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

1954 First successful human organ transplant

— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*



1962 First successful surgical reattachment of severed limb

— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

1984 First heart transplant performed in New England

— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

1993 Discovery of genes responsible for Huntington's disease and inherited ALS

— *Massachusetts General Hospital*

2003 Development of CRP test to predict risk of heart attack and stroke

— *Brigham and Women's Hospital*

2005 First use of new type of laser surgery to treat vocal injuries

— *Massachusetts General Hospital*



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