

boston.com

Preferences | Log Out

Home Delivery

The Boston Globe

Local Search Site Search

GO



The Toughbook® 30.

- Wireless-ready design
- Shock-mounted hard drive
- Magnesium alloy case
- Spill-resistant keyboard
- Intel® Core™ 2 Duo processor

TOUGHBOOK

Panasonic ideas for life

HOME TODAY'S GLOBE NEWS BUSINESS SPORTS LIFESTYLE A&E THINGS TO DO TRAVEL CARS JOBS HOMES LOCAL

Local National World Campaign '08 Business Education Health Science Green Obituaries Special reports Traffic Weather Lottery

HOME / NEWS / LOCAL

Officials punt on police details

Political will once again fades; Unions resist shift to flagmen

The Boston Globe



A police officer worked a construction detail on West Broadway in South Boston. Police have said they provide the best protection for the public and for road workers. (John Tlumacki/Globe Staff/file 2000)

By Matt Viser
Globe Staff / May 25, 2008

Email | Print | Single Page | Text size - +

Governor Deval Patrick and the state's top legislative leaders stood united in March and made a bold proclamation: They would use their combined political muscle to take on powerful police unions and their sacred perk - construction details.

They grabbed headlines and plenty of airtime as they touted the \$100 million the state could save by replacing police officers at low-risk construction sites with civilians in bright vests with flags.

Two months later, political will has faded.

Patrick was the first to publicly back off the tough stance when, just a week after the highly orchestrated news conference, the governor said on WTKK-FM's monthly "Ask the Governor" radio show, "The more I think about it, the less certain I am that we can fix this top down."

Confronted with a withering lobbying blitz by police officers, meanwhile, key lawmakers inserted legislative language in a transportation bill that would protect municipal union contracts and, with those contracts, the construction details that boost police salaries by thousands of dollars.

ADVERTISEMENT



New Shirt Every Week.

INSIDE BOSTON.COM

MEMORIAL DAY 2008



Scenes from parades and ceremonies across the country

FINDING THE FALLEN



The search to bring home 2,000 Americans lost during WWII

BIG ENERGY WASTERS



Larry David? You? Check out these seven power wasters

MATTHEW GILBERT'S TV-14



See 15 season finales that left this TV critic reeling

PLUS...

- Blogs | Games | Podcasts
- Puzzles | Personals | Movie listings
- Classifieds | Globe Magazine

MOST POPULAR

Degrees
forWorkinMoms.com

Kids aren't the only ones who can learn at home.



Earn your degree online, on your schedule.

Click Here For Free Info >

The result?

"This thing has been hobbled," said David G. Tuerck, executive director of the Beacon Hill Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank at Suffolk University. "The politicians seem to be totally unwilling to take this issue on in a serious way."

The performance by the state's politicians - quickly retreating from a plan that is popular with fiscal watchdogs and reformers - once again demonstrates the political might of police unions and the inability of elected leaders to make significant changes in a practice embedded in police contracts across the state.

It is a not a retreat the officials are eager to discuss. Senate President Therese Murray and House Speaker Salvatore F. DiMasi did not respond to requests for comment on Friday.

Kyle Sullivan, Patrick spokesman, said the governor, who in November first proposed the idea for detail reforms, "has been consistent since then in his desire to address this issue in a manner that is fiscally responsible and places public safety first."

The administration is scheduled to release a set of draft regulations in the next two weeks - and at a minimum is expected to include a recommendation that flaggers replace police at a limited number of state road and bridge construction zones where it can be done safely.

A final version of the recommendations is expected to be produced by mid-July and sent back to the Legislature for further debate. If adopted, it would mark the first time flaggers have appeared on state roads.

But critics said the mandatory union contract protections approved by the House and Senate have doomed much of the reforms, almost ensuring they will have little impact on municipal police on local roads.

They say Massachusetts will remain the only state that uses police officers, rather than less-expensive flaggers, on almost all work sites.

"Given the limitations of the legislation, it can't be anything dramatic," said Michael J. Widmer, president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation. "By tossing it to the local level, they've essentially passed the buck."

Although there are no statewide regulations requiring the use of police details for state or local road projects or utility jobs, state and local officials have used them for decades at construction sites anyway, in deference to politically powerful unions.

Police have argued that the presence of a cruiser and a uniformed officer slows traffic and provides the best protection for the public and for road workers.

"There are some serious safety issues if we go from police officers to flagmen," Richard Brown, president of the State Police Association of Massachusetts, said last week at a public hearing on the issue. "I've almost been killed more working details than working as a police officer."

Municipalities would save \$36.5 million to \$66.5 million a year by replacing most police details with less expensive flaggers, according to a 2004 study by the Beacon Hill Institute. The study estimated that cities and towns spent \$93.3 million in police details in 2003.

In 1992, Governor William F. Weld proposed legislation to replace police details with civilian flaggers. After 800 police officers picketed the State House, Weld gave up and few have tried to revive the issue.

That appeared to change in March, when the state's top politicians appeared

- [Kennedy](#)
- [Red Sox](#)
- [White Coat Notes](#)
- [Lacrosse at Foxborough](#)
- [Water Filters](#)
- [Organic Fertilizer](#)

[About this list](#)

[MORE IN SEARCH](#)

together in the Senate Reading Room to unveil a broad transportation reform package, which included streamlining construction projects, cracking down on retirement and pension plans at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and changing police details.

"We are going to roll up our sleeves," said DiMasi.

"This is a necessary step," said Murray.

"This is one of a host of areas where the Senate president, the speaker, and I . . . are working very closely in partnership," Patrick said.

It was a striking announcement from the state's top Democrats, who typically count public safety unions among their key political allies.

But they didn't release details of how they would do it, and then just a week later, Patrick indicated it wasn't going to be so easy.

"It feels simple," the governor said on the radio show, "but there are public safety issues, and that has to come first."

Police union officials were swarming the hallways of the State House.

Local police officers were calling legislators on their cellphones - even showing up at their homes - pleading with them to soften the initiative.

"I now understand why reform sometimes doesn't rise to the surface," said Senator Steven A. Baddour, a Methuen Democrat who was chief sponsor of the legislation and remains optimistic that it will bring about reforms. "It was the most difficult two weeks I've had in the Legislature."






It is still unclear how the state will encourage cities and towns to follow voluntary guidelines, although one idea is to tie state transportation funding to whether a municipality adopts the state recommendations.

With the protections for existing union contracts, however, local officials do not expect much change under a voluntary system.

"There ultimately will need to be change so that communities won't have to negotiate changes to use civilian flaggers," said Geoff Beckwith, executive director of the Massachusetts Municipal Association. "Otherwise, what happens is the unions ask for other concessions like pay increases or additional benefits in exchange."

Matt Viser can be reached at mviser@globe.com. ■

© Copyright 2008 Globe Newspaper Company.

 Email	 Print	 Single page	 Reprints	 Share
---	---	---	--	---

<p>Your Name</p> <input type="text"/>	<p>Message (optional)</p> <input type="text"/>
<p>Your e-mail address (for return address purposes)</p> <input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Send"/>
<p>E-mail address of recipients (separate multiple addresses with commas)</p> <input type="text"/>	
<p>Name and both e-mail fields are required.</p>	

DISCLAIMER: Boston.com does not share this information or keep it permanently, as it is for the sole purpose of sending this one time e-mail.

Ads by Google

what's this?

Become A Police Officer

SWAT, K9, Narcotics, CSI & More. Online Degrees For Police Careers
www.Public-Service.US/PoliceCareers

Police Fleet

View The Complete Line-Up of Dodge Law Enforcement Vehicles.
www.fleet.chrysler.com

Police Ringtones

Send Complimentary Ringtones to your cell.
BestTones4U.info



Shop our Award Winning non-iron shirts for Men and Women.



Maine & Nova Scotia on One of the World's Super Ships



Over 150 EXTREME N.E. weather photos. Buy the book!



Let your new home find you with email alerts

[Home](#) | [Today's Globe](#) | [News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [A&E](#) | [Things to Do](#) | [Travel](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Homes](#) | [Local Search](#)

[CONTACT BOSTON.COM](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Work here](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS feeds](#) | [Make Boston.com your homepage](#)

[CONTACT THE BOSTON GLOBE](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Manage your subscription](#) | [Advertise](#) | [The Boston Globe Extras](#) | [The Boston Globe Store](#) | © 2008 NY Times Co.



Get rewarded for your excellent credit with a **Capital One® No Hassle Miles™ Card.**

- ✓ No miles expiration
- ✓ Fly any airline, any seat, any time
- ✓ No annual fee

[Apply Now](#)