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## **Access to transportation important factor to housing - by Thomas House**

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Thomas House

The good news is that despite the bad news - economic uncertainty - things are looking solid in New England, better overall than other parts of the country. Before we consider housing markets and the like, let's consider home builder confidence as the bellwether.

The NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index records subpar builder sentiment all around, below 50 since the change in administration, but the northeast holding on with solid number (three-month rolling averages):

- 44 (-1) Northeast
- 42 (+1) Midwest
- 29 (-1) South
- 24 (-1) West

The national average of 35 blurs distinctions that look like there is a significant climatological element to this, as though floods, wildfires, and water supply might be influencing these numbers.

The survey also showed that 37% of builders nationally cut home prices in this month, the average price reduction consistently 5%, the same as it's been since November 2024.

There are weeds in this garden though - these numbers have been declining since January, when the Northeast was at 60 (and alone above 50). The Midwest, actually, has been roughly as flat as its landscape.

Still and all, better times here than there.

And given that the hottest housing markets are in New England, Beverly, MA #1, Leominster, MA #3 according to Realtor, and Lewiston, ME #9 according to Cotality, these are comparatively good times to be in New England real estate.

The barrier everywhere is affordability, but there is a particular New England dimension reflected in sales figures: price gains are tracking with pre-COVID performance yet staying below the rate of inflation. The result is a subtle shift to a buyer's market - they are buying when they spot the right opportunity.

Both Cotality and Realtor show that the low risk buys are in the Midwest, where housing prices are low, and the Northeast, where higher demand keeps prices high. Because of accumulated equity, homeowners are holding on to it rather than selling. Potential buyers are biding their time in rentals, whose rates only rose a modest 2.9% between June 2024 and June 2025 - but that is now higher than price gains.

And don't miss the big picture from high altitude: time-on-market is very short in the smaller cities, not in core Boston, Portland, or their inner suburbs.

Low builder confidence is inhibiting new development, which instead of luring buyers into the market, instead adds upward pressure on prices. But they should worry less: build it in New England. Put the shovels in the ground where buyers are buying. They will come.

Up is still up.

In the topsy turvy economics of real estate in what seems like unending uncertainty, Boston Agent says about Realtor's national number one: "While the median listing price in Beverly was \$746,000, higher than the national average, buyers appeared willing to pay a premium for access to the area's amenities, location and market momentum. Buyers are drawn by Beverly's commuter rail access to Boston, its natural beauty and its blend of small-town charm with big-city convenience, according to the report."

And what of Leominster at...wait! Number three? "A similar pattern emerged in Leominster. Ranked third nationally, this central Massachusetts city also experienced heightened buyer attention, with listings viewed four times more than average. Homes there sold in just 18 days, reflecting a fast-paced local market, with a median listing price of \$441,000."

These high-cost metros offered a mix of lifestyle appeal and cost savings when compared to city-center prices, according to the report. They represent a "sweet spot" for shoppers who want suburban amenities and proximity to jobs without paying top-tier metro premiums.

— Boston Agent Magazine / Agent Publishing (August 2025)

For developers then, identifying the sweet spot is the key to where the shovels should go next, and these just happen to align with our own sense of things here at THA. Look for ready access to transportation (transportation oriented design, as it were), a measure of mixed urbanity and suburban less-crowdedness, and an easy drive to getaways that can cost you a bundle if you got it - and won't if you don't. A hike in the White Mountains, an autumn drive in Vermont, a picnic on one of Maine's coastal rocks is an affordable daytrip.

These high-performance locations look an awful lot like New England's gateway cities, don't they?

No AI was used in the creation of this article - this material is 100% human-powered.

Sources

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