the late 1980s, but leveled off during the 1990s. Three recent studies of the Boston Metro economy all concluded that four primary industries currently provide much of the impetus for economic growth: financial services, health, high technology, and higher education. One study indicates that these four industries effect almost half of all jobs in the greater Boston area.

Consequently, the immediate future of the Boston Metro economy will likely be substantially influenced by two major factors: the performance of these four industries; and completion of the major public projects and the potential growth of those businesses which benefit the most from that improved transportation infrastructure.

David Terkla

David Terkla is a professor and chair of the economics department at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He is also a faculty member of the Environmental Coastal and Ocean Sciences Program. Dr. Terkla has written extensively on the importance of nontraditional cost factors to local economic development and has been involved in several projects related to environmental management and economic development issues.

Central Massachusetts
Facing the Second Industrial Revolution

The cities and towns of Central Massachusetts, many of which played a critical role in the nation’s first industrial revolution, are in dramatic flux. Indeed, it is common to note the mills formed under Samuel Slater’s nineteenth century system of manufacturing now juxtaposed with futuristic industries making products for the new millennium. The region serves as both the center of the Commonwealth and of New England. From the cultural attractions of Worcester’s famed institutions, to skiing on Mount Wachusett, to tourism in the Blackstone Valley, to pockets of modernized traditional industries, to high technology firms and biotech research, the area is steadily transforming itself.

The economy of the region is varied. In the north, the Montachusett region is recovering quite well. While some of its communities, such as Athol and Petersham, are still suffering from the last recession, others are in the midst of a growth spurt. Leominster, for example, is virtually out of space for its rapidly expanding plastics industry. The region is also home to the Central Massachusetts “sleeping giant,” Devens. Once New England’s largest military installation, Devens is now rapidly converting into a powerful civilian job generator. To the south, the Blackstone Valley is slowly and steadily expanding its industrial base. Spurred by the completion of Route 146 as a divided highway, the construction of the Rt. 146 - Mass Pike interchange, the establishment of the Blackstone Heritage Corridor and development on its fringes, the Valley has established a strong cadre of regional leaders to insure its economic growth. In the center, the city of Worcester and its surrounding suburbs are in the midst of several initiatives to expand the area. Its medical city and biotechnology activities are particularly noteworthy.

Central Massachusetts is not without problems. Its northwestern communities suffered dramatically in the last recession and recovery has been slow. The Blackstone Valley, while well positioned for growth, has yet to capture its potential. And Worcester itself, despite many striking successes, must continue to struggle to revitalize its downtown and extensive brownfields.

Clearly, Central Massachusetts will evolve into a remarkably different area over the next decade: from furniture making to Simplex in Gardener; from plastics to polymers in Clinton; from old mills to biotech plants in Worcester; and from geographic isolation to high speed access ways through the Blackstone - economic change is in the wind. Central Massachusetts is facing the second Industrial Revolution.

— John Mullin

John Mullin is a professor of urban planning and director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts. His research focuses on industrial planning with a specific emphasis on revitalization. Over the past ten years, his research and planning work has involved more than twenty projects in Worcester County.