

Figure 1: Preferred Alternative - Flex Route to Warwick Hub



Executive Summary

Quonset Transit Market Study and Service Plan

November 2016



With Support From:



Background

The Quonset Transit Market Study and Service Plan was initiated by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA), the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC), and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) in order to identify and develop proposals for improving commuter access to the Quonset Business Park (QBP). Currently the vast majority of commuters to the Park drive alone to work, and the lack of commuting options is an ongoing challenge for QBP's businesses. The study

explores a variety of alternatives for improving transit access, along with providing guidance on enhancing other means of transportation like carpooling and vanpooling. The recommendations in this study are intended to be implementable in the near term, but funding sources still need to be identified. The final study outlines a proposal for flex route service to and from the park, along with an expanded carpooling and vanpooling program.

Existing Conditions and Market Analysis

A former naval base, the Quonset Business Park today is one of the fastest growing employment centers in the state, with over 200 businesses and 11,000 jobs. Presently over 90 percent of commuters to the Park arrive by car and there are a number of challenges to implementing effective transit service. The Park is located 20 miles south of the core of RIPTA's bus network in Providence. Quonset businesses are spread out across an area larger than downtown Providence, and due to the irregular shift times at the Park, a large number of employees arrive outside the typical peak commute period.

As part of this study, RIPTA and its consultant conducted one-on-one interviews with key businesses, hosted a focus group with Park tenants, and distributed a commuter survey for employees. These provided a better understanding of the commuting needs of the Park, including that Quonset businesses want to be able to access the labor market of Rhode Island's densely populated Providence urban area, yet the lack of transit connections to Quonset makes this a

challenge. The few survey respondents who do use public transit to commute to Quonset were much more likely to be dissatisfied with their commute compared to the average respondent.

The existing conditions analysis concluded that there is an unmet need to provide improved connections between the Park and Rhode Island's core urban areas. Any transit service would have to be carefully scheduled to ensure it both provides adequate transfers within the RIPTA network while serving the Park at the start and end of major shift times.

As the Park has a sizable second and third shift that operate late at night, transit alone cannot meet all of Quonset's commuting needs. Due to the diverse shift times and large commute shed for workers, vanpools shared among workers with similar commutes may fill in a gap that transit alone would struggle to serve.



Flex Vehicle
Operated by RIPTA

Recommended Commuter Improvements

Quonset Flex Route

The study explored a wide variety of transit service options and concluded that the most feasible alternative would be to operate a flexible service between the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) in Warwick and the Park (Figure 1). RIPTA operates eight other flex services in the state; as opposed to a regular bus line, flex routes operate with smaller vehicles that pick-up or drop-off passengers anywhere within a designated zone. Flex services are an optimal way to link the RIPTA bus network to dispersed areas, like Quonset, that are challenging to serve with a fixed-route bus.

The service would have scheduled stops at key employers, while allowing riders to request service to businesses not directly served by a dedicated stop. Once through the Park, the service would operate express to CCRI; CCRI was chosen as the terminus because of its convenient transfer opportunities and direct highway access from Quonset.

Implementation of the service could include minor schedule adjustments to connecting RIPTA routes to ensure efficient transfers and minimize travel times. The service would require two vehicles during peak operations and would serve the Park only between 6:20 AM and 8:30 AM in the morning and 3:00 PM to 8:15 PM in the evening. The service as proposed is expected to cost approximately \$411,000 a year to operate and would serve on average a 110 trips a day.

Carpooling and Vanpooling

Traditional public transit alone cannot meet the transportation needs of the QBP, and the study explores other options for enhancing commuter access to the Park. Many of these options carry little cost and can be implemented in the short-term. Vanpooling is an especially promising opportunity as there is a long history of operating vanpools from the Park and RIPTA is in the process of implementing a publicly subsidized vanpool program.

Vanpools

Vanpools are a shared-mobility option where commuters share the cost of leasing and operating a van for commuting. Electric Boat, the largest tenant in the Park, has a long history of operating vanpools to Quonset. The state is currently in the process of implementing a state-wide vanpool benefit program. This program would help match riders and provide a subsidy to vanpools.

Carpools

Rhode Island operates a state-wide carpooling database managed by NuRide. The service is not well known within the Park, with only 12 registered carpools operating to Quonset. Instead of ad-hoc promotion of carpools by individual businesses, the Park would benefit from coordinated promotion of the state's existing carpool resources. Expanding the number of carpools within the Park would greatly improve the service's utility.

Transportation Demand Management

Transportation demand management (TDM) will need to play a key role in ensuring that transit, vanpooling, and carpooling succeed at Quonset. The study outlines a number of different TDM tools that can be implemented to encourage commuters to travel to Quonset in a mode other than their own car, as well as ensure that current and potential employees who do not have a personal automobile have a consistent and reliable way to get to work at the Park. TDM services include marketing transportation options to Quonset's commuters.

Dynamic Flexible Services

Dynamic flexible services, either operating by RIPTA or a third party Transportation Network Company (TNC) like Uber, show promise in improving access to the Park during off-peak hours ill-served by transit. These services allow commuters to request rides at the time of travel to transportation hubs where they can transfer to other services. This model is made possible by new technologies and smart-phone integration, yet is still largely untested in the context of serving a place like QBP.

Some Key Findings



Over half the businesses surveyed placed a priority on improving commuter links between Quonset and the Metro Providence core cities (e.g. Providence, Pawtucket).



Over 70% of Quonset commuters surveyed would like to see some kind of transit, pedestrian, or carpool/vanpool commuter improvements.



The majority of the businesses surveyed stated that the lack of public transit to Quonset impacts their ability to recruit and retain employees.



Fewer than half of the Quonset commuters surveyed who use a mode other than driving alone are satisfied with their commute.