



## Purpose, Need, Goals & Objectives (Draft)

As of: September, 2024

### PROJECT PURPOSE

*Transit Forward RI 2040*, Rhode Island's statewide Transit Master Plan, was adopted into the State Guide Plan<sup>1</sup> in 2020. The Plan identified that much of metropolitan Providence has very high underlying demand for transit which rivals that found along existing light rail and bus rapid transit corridors in much larger cities across the US. Two corridors were identified that connect such areas of high demand and that run north-south across the Providence metropolitan region, the first extending from the Central Falls/Cumberland border through Pawtucket, downtown Providence, Cranston, and Warwick to the CCRI-Warwick Campus, and the second connecting downtown Providence to T.F. Green International Airport.

The purpose of the Metro Connector Study, as identified in and adopted in *Transit Forward RI 2040*, is to consider options for providing a safe, fast, reliable, and frequent alternative to automobile travel that connects regional activity centers, neighborhoods, and transportation centers in metropolitan Providence while achieving other State goals related to climate, sustainable housing growth, public health, and economic development in an equitable manner.

### PROJECT NEED

A safe, reliable, and convenient alternative to automobiles for intercity travel in metropolitan Providence addresses several key needs:

- **High ridership demand merits greater investment:** *Much of metropolitan Providence has higher underlying transit demand than many downtowns and other larger cities across the United States with recently built rapid transit lines. RIPTA has significantly more ridership than other transit agencies in peer New England cities. For example, RIPTA's R-Line rapid bus service, which connects high-demand areas in Pawtucket and Providence, is one of the highest ridership bus routes in all of New England, with daily ridership levels that rival CTfastrakExpress and MBTA's*

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<sup>1</sup> The State of Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning publishes the State Guide Plan, Rhode Island's centralized and integrated long-range planning document.

highest ridership bus routes. Existing ridership levels show a need for investments to increase transit capacity and service quality in the study area.

- **Binding State Goals to Reduce GHG.** Rhode Island's 2021 Act on Climate<sup>2</sup> set binding emissions reduction goals to achieve net-zero by 2050. A more recent 2022 Climate Update<sup>3</sup> identifies the transportation sector as the largest source (39.7%) of GHG emissions in the State and recommends priority actions to reduce transportation emissions, including implementation of Transit Forward RI 2040 to encourage mode shift (estimated to help avoid approximately 0.23 MMTCO<sub>2</sub> of GHG emissions in 2030, or 7.9% of all emission reductions modeled by the EC4). High-capacity transit plays a pivotal role in emissions reductions because it moves more riders, has the biggest potential to capture trips made in personal vehicles today, and increases the attractiveness of the entire transit network, boosting ridership on other transit lines.
- **Housing Supply Gap:** Rhode Island has a significant gap in housing supply. Over the past decade, RI's housing production rate has ranked last in the nation, and more than one-third of RI households are cost-burdened. An additional 24,000 affordable units are needed to close this gap, particularly in Providence, Warwick and Cranston, and up to 55,000 units are needed to meet overall housing needs.<sup>4</sup> To incentivize sustainable housing production, the RI General Assembly amended State Zoning law<sup>5</sup> in 2023 to incentivize housing within 1/8 mile of frequent transit stops as defined in Transit Forward RI. The introduction of more frequent transit along the corridors under study would provide significant opportunities to address our State's housing gap, while offering low-cost mobility to new residents.
- **Lack of crosstown mobility:** Today, many transit trips between nearby destinations outside of downtown Providence require passengers to travel into Kennedy Plaza and transfer to a different outbound route. Improved transit frequency and capacity along a north-south corridor could act as a regional transit spine which can allow for new crosstown transit connections along major east-west arterials, particularly in Cranston and Warwick. These crosstown connections would improve access to both local and to regional destinations, dramatically improving transit mobility and convenience.
- **Limited Access to Regional Activity Centers:** Some of our region's most important economic generators and activity centers are not well connected and are

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<sup>2</sup> [2021 Act on Climate](#), RIGL §42-6.2-2

<sup>3</sup> 2022 Climate Update, RI Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4), December 2022

<sup>4</sup> [Housing Supply and Homelessness in Rhode Island](#), Rhode Island Foundation, April 2023.

<sup>5</sup> [Transit Oriented Development Pilot Program](#), RIGL §45-24-77.

*difficult to access using transit. This is particularly true south of Providence where CCRI's flagship campus, RI's T.F. Green International Airport, the State's satellite offices at Pastore Center, and a large concentration of retail centers are located along busy urban arterials. Faster, more frequent, and direct transit connections could potentially attract new riders to transit serving these key trip generators.*

- **Transportation Equity:** *Low-income people, people of color, women, those without a vehicle and those with limited English proficiency in the Providence region are more likely to rely on transit for travel than residents as a whole, meaning investments in high-quality transit service improve mobility for those who have the most to gain. Study-area residents are 52% racial/ethnic minorities<sup>6</sup> and 12% low-income<sup>7</sup>, compared to 47% and 10% overall in the five municipalities.*
- **Safety and Complete Streets:** *Rhode Island law requires that "Complete Streets" design be considered for safe travel by all roadway users including public transportation riders, pedestrians, bicyclists, and individuals of all abilities.<sup>8</sup> Several segments of the corridors under study have relatively high incident rates and safety improvements warranted. The Providence Streets Coalition documented<sup>9</sup> 85 incidents between 2010 and 2022 on N. Main Street in Providence, with four pedestrian fatalities along this stretch in 2023 and 2024, to-date. In early 2024, Mayor Smiley and the City Council signed a Vision Zero resolution to end such tragic incidents. Two pedestrian fatalities along Reservoir Avenue in Cranston in early 2024 are equally tragic. This study will consider design features to support safe access to transit facilities in these corridors, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signals, bicycle lanes, bus pull outs, accessibility features, and traffic calming measures that help improve the perception of safety.*
- **Public Health:** *Investments in transit infrastructure and service can improve public health. When people have good access to transit and high-quality transit service air pollution can be decreased as a result of people shifting modes from driving to riding transit, leading to fewer cars being on the road. Decreased air pollution can lead to reductions in related respiratory illnesses and chronic diseases such as asthma. Additionally, Rhode Island's Complete Streets requirements encourage active transportation, such as walking or biking, to their transit stops.*

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<sup>6</sup> Defined as People of Color, including Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, some other race, two or more races, and Hispanic or Latino race and ethnicity categories.

<sup>7</sup> Defined as a household that has an annual income of less than \$35,000.

<sup>8</sup> [Safe Access to Public Roads](#), RIGL §24-16-1 and §24-16-2

<sup>9</sup> <https://pvdstreets.org/north-main-st-crash-data/>

## PROJECT GOALS

The Metro Connector Study has identified six project goals. These goals were informed by feedback from the Technical Working Group, through stakeholder interviews, and through a review of the specific goals articulated in *Transit Forward RI*, *Moving Forward RI*<sup>10</sup> (the State's Long Range Transportation Plan), the *RI Act on Climate*, and various State and local policies relating to transportation, public health and community development.

Regional rapid transit connecting the communities of Cumberland, Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, Cranston, and Warwick is aimed at improving mobility for people living, working, and visiting these areas, and enhancing access to regional destinations including employment centers, educational campuses, healthcare facilities, social services, the airport, and commercial centers. This would be done by reducing transit travel times and increasing the frequency, reliability, and convenience of transit.

The six project goals are as follows:

1. **Grow Transit Ridership:** Connect areas that have high demand for transit by providing fast, frequent, and reliable service that is competitive with driving. This aligns with:
  - *Transit Forward RI* goals to "Enhance" transit to make it attractive and compelling, and recommendations to Improve Existing Services (including the frequency of service to major destinations) and to Develop High-Capacity Transit in high demand areas.
  - *Moving Forward RI* goal to Connect People and Places, including increasing ridership and improving travel time reliability; to Maintain Transportation Infrastructure and increase the number of dedicated bus lanes; to Strengthen Communities by encouraging mode shift with faster, more frequent and reliable transit; and to Promote Environmental Sustainability
  - *RI Act on Climate* and EC4 model assumptions that rely on Transit Forward RI implementation to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.
  - *Providence's Climate Justice Plan* targets to reduce VMT and increase public transit ridership.
2. **Enhance Connectivity:** Improve multi-modal connections between regional transportation centers and support Complete Streets that provide for safe pedestrian and bicycle access. This aligns with:

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<sup>10</sup> [Moving Forward RI 2040](#), Long Range Transportation Plan, Division of Statewide Planning, 2020.

- *Transit Forward RI's* goal to "Connect" people to lives activities; and its recommendation to Improve Access to Transit and its recommendation to Improve Existing Services to the major destinations
  - *Moving Forward RI* goal to Connect People and Places, including prioritizing priority networks; and to Strengthen Communities with complete streets; and to Maintain Transportation Infrastructure by prioritizing multimodal solutions along with ADA and safety improvements.
  - *RIDOT Complete Streets policy and Statewide Vision Zero policy*
  - *RhodeWorks'* goal to connect people and places, expand connectivity across modes, and reduce travel congestion.
  - *Providence 2020 Great Streets Plan and "Providence as a Vision Zero City" goal<sup>11</sup>* to eliminate all traffic deaths and serious injuries by 2030, and to incorporate this vision into all relevant plans and policies.
  - *Pawtucket Complete Streets Plan*
3. **Focus on Equity:** Provide rapid transit where and when transit-critical populations are traveling, that allows these residents to stay in their neighborhoods. This aligns with:
- *Moving Forward RI's* goal to Strengthen Communities and achieve transportation equity benefits.
  - *RhodeWorks'* goal to strengthen communities by fostering social equity and encouraging connected communities.
4. **Support Sustainable Growth:** Support smart and compact transit-oriented development (TOD) in designated growth districts and frequent transit corridors. Reduce GHG emissions by encouraging mode-shift to transit, walking, and biking. This aligns with:
- *RI General Laws related to Complete Streets, Zoning and TOD*
  - *The Joint Pawtucket/Central Falls Conant Thread TOD District*
  - *Providence Comprehensive Plan and the city's TOD overlay districts*
  - *Warwick's City Centre TOD District*
  - *Transit Forward RI's* goal to "Thrive" by improving quality of life and ensuring Environmental Sustainability
  - *Moving Forward RI's* goals to Strengthen Communities by encouraging complete streets and TOD; to Maintain Transportation Infrastructure by prioritizing

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<sup>11</sup> [Providence as a Vision Zero City](#), City Council Resolution 43874, 2/15/2024

multimodal solutions along with ADA and safety improvements; and to Promote Environmental Sustainability.

- *RhodeWorks'* goal to promote environmental responsibility by reducing vehicle miles traveled.
  - *RI Act on Climate's* goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve net zero emissions by 2050.
  - *Providence's Climate Justice Plan* targets to reduce VMT and increase public transit ridership.
5. **Support our Economy/Provide New Opportunities:** Improve access to regional employment, workforce education, medical and social services, shopping, and other activities to open up new opportunities for regional residents. This aligns with:
- *Transit Forward RI's* goal to "Thrive" by growing the economy.
  - *Moving Forward RI's* goal to Support Economic Growth including specific objectives to maximize efficient multimodal connections at TF Green Airport, and to increase population and employment within ½ mile of frequent transit.
  - *RhodeWorks'* goal to "Support Economic Growth" including jobs and tourism.
  - *Ocean State Accelerates'* goal to actualize Rhode Island's economic potential through Strong Communities, Increased Prosperity, and Sustainable Growth.
6. **Focus on Practical and Implementable Solutions:** Achieve local consensus on an option that balances costs and benefits, aligns with local goals, and can be reasonably implemented. This aligns with:
- *Transit Forward RI's* goal to ensure Financial Sustainability
  - *Moving Forward RI's* goal to Maintain Transportation Infrastructure and prioritize multimodal solutions that have a high return on investment.
  - *RhodeWorks'* goals to Maintain Transportation Infrastructure, designing roadways to increase transportation choices, and achieving a state of good repair.