

## RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, October 10, 2024  
MEETING MINUTES

**In attendance:** Chairperson Heather Schey, Benny Bergantino, Christopher Bove, Myles Brawn-Husband, Rui Cabral, Frank Cummings, Rachel Ferreira, Deanne Gagne, Zachary Gauthier, Devin Guirales, Mona Hussein, Melanie Lawhead, Raymond Lemerick, Olivia Lozier, Crystal Martin, Richard Moreau, Grace Pires, John Soares, Mark Susa, Kristin Wilson, Mark Wilson.

**RIPTA:** Brooks Almonte, Zachary Agush, Steve Fiorentini, Nate Hannon, Joelle Kanter, Joseph Solomon.

**Call to Order:** Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:05 PM. After taking attendance, she presented meeting guidelines, reminding participants to be respectful towards each other.

Myles Brawn-Husband made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 5, 2024 meeting. Frank Cummings seconded the motion, and all were in favor. Minutes were approved.

**Remembering Ed Soares:** The committee then recognized active ATAC member Ed Soares who passed away suddenly in September. His brother John shared his own memories before others recalled what made him special: his peer travel training skills, his deep knowledge about RIPTA buses, and his desire to live independently and be treated as an equal.

**RIPTA Metro Connector Study presentation:** Zachary Agush, RIPTA principal planner presented on the Metro Connector study, which will introduce high-capacity transit (HCT) with dedicated lanes, noted for speed, reliability, and frequency. The project stems from the Transit Forward RI 2040 master plan which recommended priorities for investment.

Zach shared background information, goals, a timeline, and progress to date. The study will assess potential options for two corridors connecting activity centers between Cumberland and the Community College of Rhode Island Knight campus in Warwick and will present alternatives and implementation strategies for both.

The team has completed an existing conditions analysis and is currently building out models, looking at future conditions. Tier 1 screenings will happen into the winter, and next spring, the public will review a short list of alternatives. By next summer, a draft plan should be ready for consideration by RIPTA's board of directors.

Zach encouraged everyone to stay involved in the project by visiting the [website](#), signing up for updates, completing the survey, and attending public meetings.

Participants had an opportunity to ask questions and give feedback:

- One participant said a light rail system might be preferable for riders in wheelchairs. He added that the new system might make it easier for people to get to Garden City and other shopping centers.
- In response to another question, Zach said that the team is looking at first-mile/last-mile access, considering how people will get to their stops.

### **RIPTA project updates**

- RIPTA's on-board rider survey is underway.
- The Statewide Safe Streets for All (SS4A) survey deadline has been extended to October 18<sup>th</sup>.
- The travel training network working group will meet on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Through this project, RIPTA will develop four training modules, a printed pocket guide, and a few short videos on trip planning, fare payment, and riding. The materials should be finalized by February and updated as needed after that.
- The Pawtucket Central Falls building groundbreaking was held on September 16<sup>th</sup>, celebrating the start of construction on a new passenger facility that will feature amenities such as public restrooms, real-time passenger information screens, and a police sub-station.
- RIPTA also had a ribbon cutting ceremony on September 20<sup>th</sup> for improved stops at CCRI Warwick, completed through the \$1.8 million bus stop enhancement project.
- The East Side bus tunnel will have a soft open for the Providence Monster Dash 5K on October 27<sup>th</sup>, with a ribbon cutting ceremony scheduled on October 30<sup>th</sup>. Buses will resume traveling through the tunnel on October 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Participants should check RIPTA's website and newsletter for upcoming detours for fall festivals, races, and parades.

### **Ride updates**

- Wave payment for Ride program: Wave payment has been going well, with riders giving the Ride team positive feedback. Ride drivers have started giving riders flyers about the new option. At the next ATAC meeting, the group can share tips for paying with Wave for Ride trips. Rui Cabral mentioned that he's been recording Zoom presentations for his peers, and RIPTA staff plans to connect him with the marketing department.

During a discussion, Grace Pires suggested adding a setting for personal care attendants who should be traveling for free. This has been a challenging issue for the system, but Ride has been able to issue refunds as needed.

- Ride Anywhere pilot program: The statewide paratransit pilot program is scheduled to end on December 31, 2024 or when the \$500,000 budget is spent, whichever comes first. In September 2024, riders took 181 Ride van trips over 83 service hours, totaling \$9,556.62. Riders also took 850 taxi trips over 372 service hours, totaling \$34,101.24. Altogether, monthly expenses were \$43,657.86. Since the program inception in January 2024, costs have totaled \$237,916.89.

Several participants shared positive experiences with the program, with one rider describing a trip to a concert that allowed him to stay out later than he typically would. Another rider who lives in Cranston said that before the pilot started, she was only able to take trips at very specific times. Now she has more freedom.

- Reveal app updates: Brooks Almonte said that the team did a demonstration with the new app last week. Riders will be able to request trips through the app, and they'll go to the call center to be verified and then approved or denied. The new app will also allow riders to track their trips. Brooks hopes that ATAC will be ready to start testing it around Thanksgiving.

Participants commented on the current app, which doesn't always give updates on trip changes. Brooks said there hasn't been a policy change around this, so customer service agents should still give riders updates. Another rider said that people have had challenges with inconsistent time displays on the app.

The meeting adjourned at 5:33 PM.