

PROVIDENCE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT ENHANCEMENT STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MEETING CURRENT TRANSIT NEEDS AND GROWING OUR TRANSIT SYSTEM

The future of Providence and all of Rhode Island is directly linked to developing a robust, sustainable transit network. In recent years our state has begun to recognize the importance of transit and the essential role it plays in promoting overall mobility, environmental stewardship, and economic vitality. The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA), with support from the City of Providence, has completed the Providence Metropolitan Transit Enhancement Study (the “Metro Transit Study”) to help prepare RIPTA to enhance transit opportunities for Rhode Island.

Envisioning the future of RIPTA and mapping out our role as Rhode Island’s “Mobility Manager” is an unprecedented undertaking. It involves taking a close look at the needs of people and businesses across the state, considering new ideas and transit solutions, and identifying opportunities for change and growth. The Metro Transit Study takes the first step in advancing RIPTA’s future vision for statewide mobility by building upon the work of important previous efforts such as the City of Providence’s Transit 2020 effort.

BACKGROUND

In 2006, Providence Mayor David Cicilline convened Transit 2020, a new coalition to address the goal of building a more advanced public transit system for Providence and the surrounding region. Advisory group members represented a broad range of perspectives, including business leaders, municipal officials, RIDOT, RIPTA and various community groups. Following a year of discussion and consensus building, the group presented its final findings and recommendations to the Mayor in a 2007 report entitled "Growing Smart with Transit."

The Transit 2020 report concluded that "Rhode Island must invest in transit to develop and maintain a seamless, integrated, high quality transit service that builds on and complements the existing system. This will require a capital investment as well as a dedicated, predictable, and adequate funding stream to sustain expanded and upgraded operations."

An outgrowth of the Transit 2020 effort, RIPTA initiated the Metro Transit Study to recommend potential transit improvements to better serve Providence and facilitate mobility between the state's urban center and the immediately surrounding metropolitan area.

The study area is focused on Providence and includes the adjacent, higher-density, urban areas of East Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, North Providence, and portions of Warwick and Cranston east of I-295.

In the Metro Transit Study, RIPTA:

- Crafted a new vision for transit in Rhode Island
- Examined the benefits and challenges of supporting a first class transit system in Rhode Island
- Recommended actions for meeting current transit needs within major Metro Area travel corridors and between key residential and employment centers
- Recommended actions to grow our Metro Transit system, identifying appropriate transit modes and alternatives to meet both short and long term Metro Area growth objectives
- Identified additional policies and incentives to support commuters and encourage transit usage
- Identified the costs and benefits of these recommendations
- Coordinated with the general public, local municipalities and other state agencies and issued a Call to Action to encourage these partners to advocate for funding to advance these objectives.

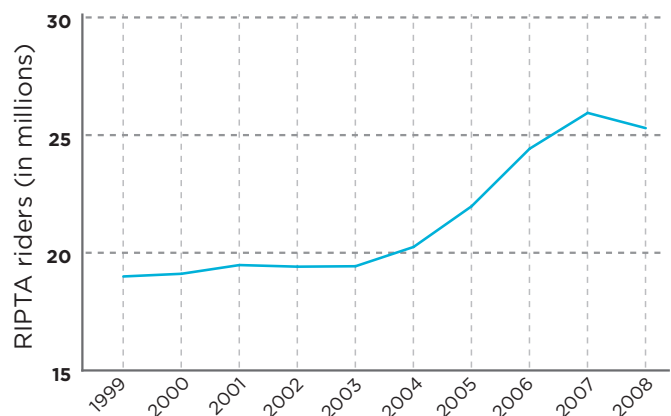
METRO TRANSIT WORKING GROUP

RIPTA and the City of Providence established a Metro Transit Working Group to help guide the study and evaluate the potential solutions. This group included representatives from each study area municipality, the state legislature, state agencies, local businesses and institutions, and non-profit advocacy groups.

RIPTA RIDERSHIP

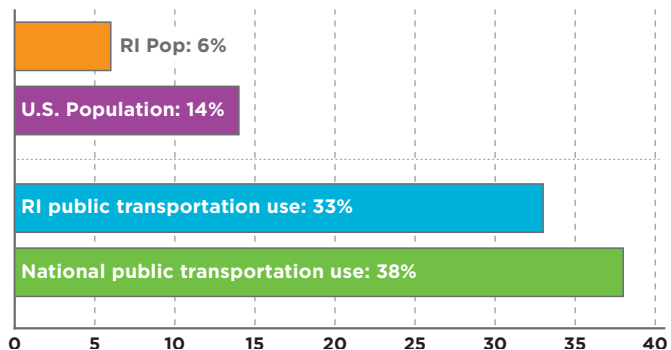
RIPTA is dedicated to meeting growing demand for transportation options and to planning for the future in a responsive and thoughtful manner. Over the last several years, as RIPTA ridership has increased at a record rate, there has been increasing recognition that transit is a critical component of the state's infrastructure. Estimated annual ridership rose from 19 million passengers in 1999 to 24.8 million riders in 2008. **In other words, ridership increased 33 percent over a ten year period.**

RIPTA Ridership Over Ten Year Period



In 2008, RIPTA carried an estimated 24.8 million passengers or roughly 2 million passengers each month. RIPTA's rapid growth is consistent with the findings of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) regarding transit use nationwide. In Rhode Island, transit ridership has grown at a rate nearly six-times that of Rhode Island's population over the same time period. Nationally, public transit ridership has grown at a rate nearly three-times that of US population growth over the last decade, and nearly twice that of highway usage.²

Percent Change in Population and Transit Use from 1995-2008



¹ Growing Smart with Transit, City of Providence Transit 2020 Working Group, February, 2007. www.transit2020.com

² <http://www.apta.com/mediacenter/ptbenefits/Pages/default.aspx>

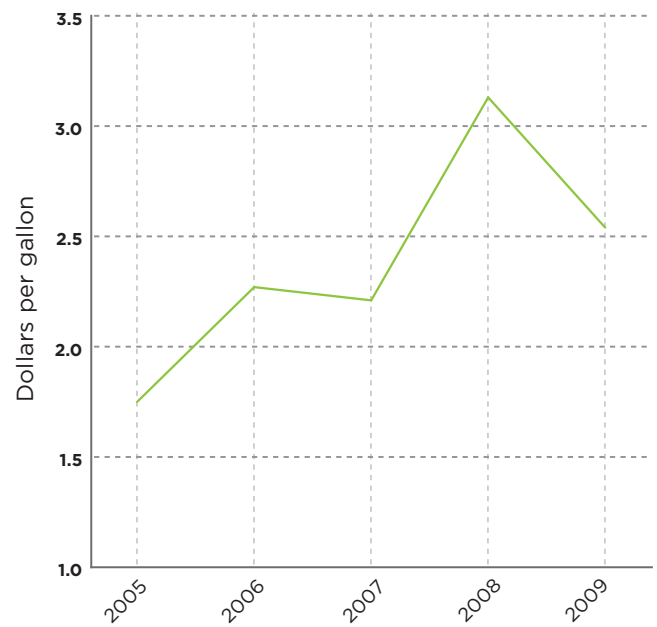
TRANSPORTATION FUNDING IN RHODE ISLAND

Despite our progress, increasing costs related to the delivery of transit services have led to an ongoing struggle to maintain services. RIPTA's labor costs are escalating due in large part to pension and retirement contributions as well as increasing health care costs beyond RIPTA's control. As Rhode Islanders drive less, RIPTA's main source of local support, the gas tax, decreases. All of these factors have forced RIPTA to repeatedly evaluate service cuts and restrict growth in order to cover increasing operating costs and maintain core operations.

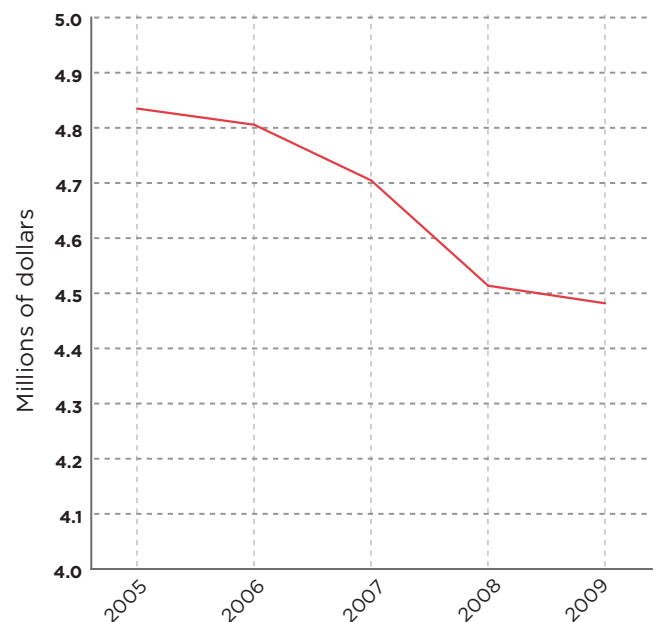
RIPTA's financial picture is largely dependent on the statewide economic outlook and the ability of the state to dedicate sufficient revenues to support annual transit operations. RIPTA is not alone in this predicament; annual budgetary shortfalls and the lack of dedicated future funding streams also affect other Rhode Island transportation agencies, namely the Department of Transportation and the Tunnel & Bridge Authority. RI DOT estimates nearly a doubling of their budget over the next ten years to meet their needs. RIPTA, to advance the recommendations of the Metro Transit Study, would need close to a six-fold increase to achieve our goals.

As RIPTA struggles financially, the General Assembly, the State Budget Office and other organizations have conducted several audits to streamline RIPTA operations and identify potential cost savings. Yet these reviews have found RIPTA to compare favorably in terms of operational and management performance, recognizing the vital role our transit system plays in the state's economic health and calling for increased financial support and long-term sustainable funding. In fact, RIPTA compares favorably in terms of overall ridership and management performance when compared to other transit systems, and effectively meets these goals with lower per capita transit funding.

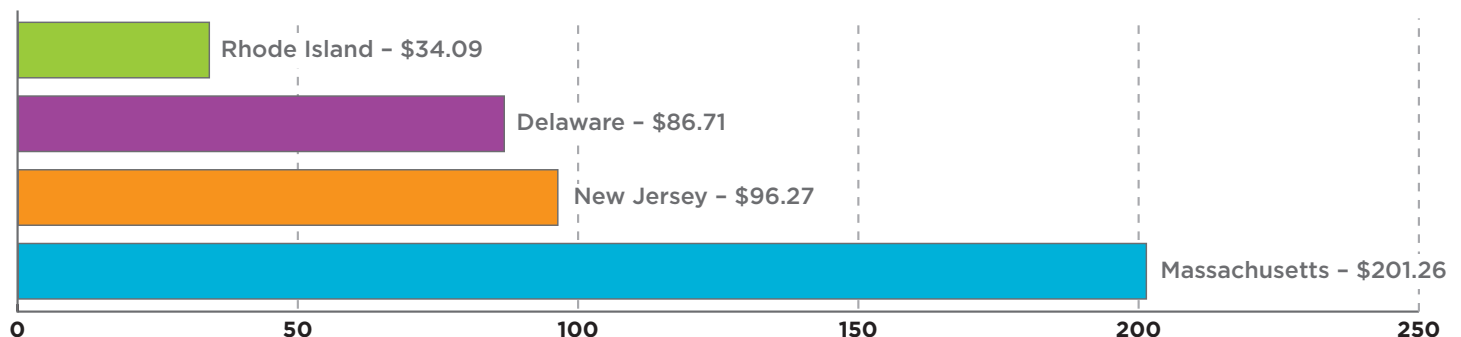
Fuel price change over five years



RI gas tax yield change over five years



2007 peer comparison of state funding per capita* for statewide transit systems



*(Comparative Review and Analysis of State Transit Funding Programs Transportation Research Board NCHRP Report 569, 2006)

A NEW VISION FOR TRANSIT IN RHODE ISLAND

In 2007, the Rhode Island General Assembly revisited RIPTA's enabling statute and modified the language to designate RIPTA as "Rhode Island's Mobility Manager." This change effectively broadened RIPTA's responsibilities from serving as a transit service provider to working as a full partner in managing the state's network of transportation options.

MISSION AND GOALS

RIPTA is responsible for Rhode Island's public transit system, a critical component of the state's infrastructure and a cost-effective means of providing mobility – access to jobs, health care, education, shopping and recreation.

As Rhode Island's Mobility Manager, RIPTA promotes, coordinates and operates a range of high-quality, safe, reliable and affordable transportation choices. RIPTA is dedicated to providing travel options, information, and staff support to meet mobility needs throughout Rhode Island. (RIPTA's mission is established and further described by Section 39-18-3 of the General Laws.)

Goal #1: Maintain a first-class transit system and further enhance service quality.

Goal #2: Improve and grow an intermodal transit system.

Goal #3: Increase coordination and cooperation with public and private entities.

Goal #4: Identify and develop adequate, stable and sustainable funding.

METRO TRANSIT STUDY – FIRST STEP TOWARDS STATEWIDE PLAN

RIPTA manages and operates a statewide transit system, making it unique amongst transit agencies elsewhere in the country. Pursuing a vision for statewide transit requires a systematic approach to clearly define service needs and goals for each community. An effective and appropriate statewide transit system must be driven by population demographics, land use patterns, employment centers and other special needs which may differ throughout the state.

The Metro Transit Study takes the first step in advancing RIPTA's future vision for statewide mobility. The results will be incorporated with other local planning efforts to create an integrated statewide plan for transit. The study's detailed recommendations take into account current and projected conditions and will be a model as similar plans are developed for the rest of our state. Together, these plans will produce a statewide strategy that reflects the local needs of communities.

In considering long-range plans, RIPTA must also consider bus and rail transit as components of an integrated transit system. Statewide agencies will work together to determine how these modes can play mutually-supportive roles in an overall intermodal transportation system that maximizes financial investments and connects all forms of transit.



RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The Metro Transit Study recommends a series of improvements in support of RIPTA's mission to promote, coordinate and operate a range of high quality, safe, reliable and affordable transportation choices.

The first five recommendations are designed to **meet current demand** and the second five to **enable RIPTA to grow** with increased demand for a multi-modal, seamless, easy to use transit system. As the steward of public transit investment, RIPTA has carefully considered the costs and benefits for each recommendation.

MEETING CURRENT TRANSIT NEEDS

The first set of recommendations relate to specific enhancements or improvements to enable existing RIPTA services and operations to meet needs of our system today. These recommendations include projects to:

- Provide additional bus service
- Improve the transit experience
- Reinvent Kennedy Plaza
- Introduce new transit hubs
- Increase Park and Ride capacity

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL BUS SERVICE

RIPTA can build on its existing capability and meet ridership demands today by including more frequent service on existing routes, longer spans of service during evening and weekend hours, extensions of existing routes, and possibly the development of new routes.

To meet this demand and make the bus system more available and reliable, RIPTA aims to provide a ten percent increase to existing bus service to strengthen corridors that already enjoy high ridership and levels of service, such as Chalkstone Boulevard, Cranston Street, Elmwood Avenue, Hope Street and Manton Avenue. Further enhancing corridors with increased transit need or key destinations will help to establish the ridership necessary to support future initiatives, such as "Rapid Bus" projects (described later in this section).

In order to offer expansions of service where they are most needed throughout the state, RIPTA plans to conduct a service analysis to identify potential improvements to routes and services throughout the state, determine how to provide the most cost-effective service possible, and develop a plan to prioritize the expansion of service as finances permit.



Above, left: the Transit 2020 report cover. Right: a typical RIPTA bus.

IMPROVE THE TRANSIT EXPERIENCE

Better branding of routes, improved customer information, and greater investment in amenities at stops will greatly enhance the convenience and ease of using the RIPTA system.

To improve the experience of its system, RIPTA proposes the following three enhancements that will increase its visibility to riders. The first **1.)** is to develop service brands, including identifiable colors and graphics on vehicles, signage, and information materials, for through routes, rapid bus and transit hubs. The second **2.)** is to improve all forms of communication between RIPTA and the public. This begins by creating up-to-date RIPTA system maps and schedules and providing real-time bus arrival information on bus stop displays or riders' cell phones. Finally, **3.)** RIPTA will build new, well-designed bus stops that are consistent system-wide, yet specific by location, meaning that they can be both immediately identified by riders and useful in looking for detailed information.

REINVENT KENNEDY PLAZA

Reconfiguration of transit use in Kennedy Plaza will relieve pedestrian and vehicular congestion and create a more pleasant and welcoming environment.

Kennedy Plaza is RIPTA's principal hub of operations for the metropolitan area and much of the State. The redesign of Kennedy Plaza will reinforce it as the central hub of the RIPTA system, but will disperse, rearrange and eliminate several bus berth locations to better serve pedestrians and open up more flexible public space that can help connect it to Burnside Park and downtown Providence.

RIPTA sponsored a Kennedy Plaza workshop in the summer of 2009 to generate visionary ideas for the Plaza to improve our center of operations. For the city, beyond enhanced transportation, the economic and social benefit of Kennedy Plaza is that it simply provides a concentration of students, workers, residents and visitors in the downtown area. By redesigning activity locations, physical features and open space, this population density is an opportunity to nurture businesses and activities.

INTRODUCE NEW TRANSIT HUBS

Development of four new hubs will heighten the visibility, accessibility and convenience of transit to employment centers and destinations just outside the downtown area and will enable RIPTA to reduce bus layover time and the overall level of bus activity in Kennedy Plaza.

These new hub locations have been identified around the periphery of downtown Providence in the following areas: the West Side, College Hill, Capitol Hill and the Hospital District. Extending RIPTA bus routes beyond the primary downtown destination of Kennedy Plaza to other hubs just outside of downtown will eliminate the need for many passengers to transfer in order to reach their final destinations.

INCREASE PARK AND RIDE CAPACITY

Doubling the number of Park and Ride locations in Metropolitan Providence will relieve existing overcrowded lots and provide new lots needed to serve communities along crowded commuter routes, such as Route 295.

RIPTA currently serves twenty-eight Park and Ride locations where riders can park their cars or receive rides in cars to access RIPTA bus routes. Nine lots are located in Metropolitan Providence. A plan to improve and grow the Park and Ride program, in partnership with RIDOT, includes: addition of new lot locations, introduction of more frequent and midday bus service, installation of passenger amenities at these locations, expansion of the guaranteed ride home program, and efforts to increase EcoPass participation, our employee transit pass program.



Above: rendering of what a mobile RIPTA schedule might look like.



GROWING OUR METRO TRANSIT SYSTEM

While the first set of recommendations aims to meet current transit demand, the next set recommends improvements for new and expanded services to grow the Metro transit system. These recommendations include projects to:

- Initiate rapid bus service
- Build a Providence streetcar system
- Strengthen intermodal connections
- Expand programs for commuters
- Capitalize on transit-oriented development

INITIATE RAPID BUS SERVICE

Two routes in the RIPTA system collectively serve over 10,000 riders a day, far more than any other routes in the system. Implementation of Rapid Bus service will greatly improve bus service on the 11 Broad Street and 99 North Main Street/Pawtucket lines.

Rapid Bus offers the opportunity to enhance existing bus service to provide faster and more reliable service, a higher level of passenger comfort and amenities, and a distinctive service identity. By creating an integrated system of transit enhancements, Rapid Bus will significantly improve the speed and attractiveness of service along the corridor. Over time, Rapid Bus would be expanded to other lines in the RIPTA system.

BUILD A PROVIDENCE STREETCAR SYSTEM

To enhance the transit system and economic vitality of the metropolitan area, a streetcar concept has been proposed to serve as a circulator within a roughly two-mile corridor in downtown Providence. A streetcar line within this corridor would connect major activity centers, existing bus routes and the train station.

While alignment and operating plans will be finalized in the next phase of streetcar development, a “Meds to Eds” concept would create connections between the Hospital District, through the newly developed Jewelry District, and up to College Hill. A feasibility analysis has concluded the concentration of activities and a supportive pedestrian environment within the center of Providence makes our city an excellent candidate for a streetcar system and planning should continue towards its development.

Streetcars are often catalysts for new development, revitalizing existing neighborhoods and promoting public transit use by new riders. Building a streetcar system in Providence would generate near-term economic stimulus from construction activity as well as sustained mixed-use development opportunities in areas targeted for economic growth by the City. The proposed starter streetcar line also includes points of connection to potential future extensions into city neighborhoods.

STRENGTHEN INTERMODAL CONNECTIONS

While Rhode Island has airports, regional and commuter rail, buses, bicycles and pedestrian routes, RIPTA can be the mobility manager that coordinates with other transit providers to create a seamless experience for riders. In order to create a truly multimodal transportation system, RIPTA must implement a series of improvements to enhance existing and upcoming commuter rail services, as well as bicycle and pedestrian connections.

RIPTA proposes three improvements over the next five years. The first is the creation of a bus transfer from downtown Pawtucket and East Providence to the South Attleboro MBTA station. The second improvement would offer new and reconfigured routes to connect schools, employment areas and local neighborhoods to the new Warwick Intermodal Station at T.F. Green Airport. Finally, RIPTA would provide additional passenger amenities at the Providence Amtrak Station for RIPTA, MBTA and Amtrak riders. This effort would also facilitate schedule and fare coordination between transit agencies, Amtrak and private intercity bus operators. Additionally, RIPTA would introduce improved bike and pedestrian connections and amenities throughout its system.

EXPAND PROGRAMS FOR COMMUTERS

Service improvements that enhance our system's speed and reliability will only attract a certain level of ridership. We also need to provide a program of incentives that can make transit a better deal, increase its convenience, and make the value of transit available to more travelers.

RIPTA's Commuter Resource Rhode Island (CRRI) program already helps employers and employees by offering commuters benefits for taking public transit through innovative programs that break down the perception of driving as a better value in terms of cost, time, and ease. RIPTA seeks to expand commuter alternatives by growing the CRRI program, building upon existing programs and establishing new ones. Suggested ways to build existing programs include establishing a Transportation Resources Center, coordinating interstate carpooling, and expanding universal pass programs. New CRRI initiatives would include adding car and bicycle sharing programs.

CAPITALIZE ON TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is a powerful way to use infrastructure to promote sustainable urban growth. By creating dense mixed-use development in close proximity to transit stops, significantly fewer vehicle trips are produced as residents and employees take advantage of "walkable" areas with a mix of uses (work, live, play).

Local governments can offer incentives to developers that encourage increased density and the concentration of mixed-use growth around transit stations. Creating TOD may require modifications to existing zoning requirements, such as allowing a density bonus or removing off-street parking requirements, and involve very little or no cost to the municipality. Transit-oriented development programs can also be supported through enforcement of Rhode Island's Land Use 2025 Plan, business development tax credit program, and Jobs Growth Act.

Promotion of practices that lead to greater levels of development around new and future transit will improve transit, increase development and preserve land use, requiring cooperation between communities, state agencies and other partners working in coordination with RIPTA.



Above: the Lloyd TMA's Commuter Connection transportation store, located in Portland, Oregon. A "one-stop shop" for commuters, it opened in February 2004. Since then, it has served 125-150 customers per month. The Commuter Connection completed ~\$7,000 in transactions in 2004; it is on track to complete ~\$80,000 in transactions in 2009.

SUMMARY OF CAPITAL AND OPERATING COSTS

The total estimated capital costs and ongoing annual operating costs required to implement each Metro Transit Study recommendation are summarized below. The total capital investment required to implement these recommendations would be approximately \$126.7 million (in \$2009). Once implemented, an additional \$18.9 million in annual operating costs would be required to support the operation and maintenance of these new transit projects.

Capital and annual operating costs of recommended improvements

RECOMMENDATION	CAPITAL COST	ANNUAL OPERATING COST
Provide additional bus service	\$12.8 M	\$8.2 M
Improve the transit experience	\$4.3 M	\$134 K
Reinvent Kennedy Plaza	\$950 K	\$0
Introduce new transit hubs	\$5.7 M	\$3.3 M
Increase park and ride capacity	\$2.6 M	\$12 K
Initiate rapid bus service	\$14.2 M	\$0
Build a Providence streetcar system	\$76 M	\$2.7 M
Strengthen intermodal connections	\$10.2 M	\$4.4 M
Expand programs for commuters	\$0	\$113 K
Capitalize on transit-oriented development	\$0	\$0
TOTALS	\$126.7 M	\$18.9 M



BENEFITS OF RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

There are compelling benefits associated with each of the proposed investments. Benefits include enhanced mobility and travel efficiency as well as broader economic, social and environmental benefits to create a sustainable return on investment.

TRANSIT IS A GOOD INVESTMENT

Transit provides access to jobs, a cleaner environment, energy independence, and a better quality of life. As we consider new investment in our transit system, it is helpful to consider all the benefits our transit system brings to Metropolitan Providence and Rhode Island.

Investment in Transit:

- Facilitates the overall mobility of residents, providing access to health care, job opportunities, education and other needed services
- Provides a vital link for older Rhode Islanders and those with disabilities
- Stimulates our state's economy by creating local and green jobs
- Supports the state tourism industry by offering visitors easy access to key destinations and attractions
- Maximizes travel safety and reduces traffic congestion
- Reduces wear and tear on Rhode Island roads, saving on reconstruction costs
- Promotes walking, leading to healthier citizens and less strain on our health care system
- Reduces our state's dependence on foreign oil
- Helps protect our environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO RIDE

The proposed improvements are projected to increase current system-wide ridership by thirty-three percent leading to approximately 8.2 million additional passengers annually. The Rapid Bus project is estimated to increase annual ridership by more than 600,000 and the Streetcar project is expected to result in an annual increase in ridership of 1-2 million. The remaining ridership will be spread across other projects. Some projects may not produce direct ridership increases, but will have an overall positive impact on the convenience and attractiveness of transit, with significant positive impacts over the long term.

The impact of the overall set of improvements will be most directly felt by individual riders who will benefit from better information, more reliable, timely service, and stronger connections to other modes of travel.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Improving mobility is a primary goal of many public transportation investments, but it is well understood that transportation projects can yield other benefits. In the current economic environment, it has become increasingly important to



View north on Richmond Street across from proposed Brown Medical School, by Kliment + Halsband



demonstrate the value of any proposed transportation investment. This study evaluated the benefits of both current RIPTA services and ridership along with the additional benefits anticipated due to the recommended transit enhancements. This evaluation is based on a series of economic reports for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), customizing the findings to RIPTA ridership and passenger miles.³

As shown in the table on the following page, benefits were assessed in terms of transportation cost savings, affordable mobility benefits, and economic development. Transportation cost savings are attributable to the time savings experienced by riders, the vehicle operating cost savings, emission savings, and accident savings. For existing RIPTA service, these benefits total \$95.7 million. Another \$22.6 million is attributable to vehicle operating cost savings. Affordable mobility benefits are estimated to be \$23.7 million, with most of the benefit

attributable to the value of transit for low-income travelers. The benefits associated with residential and commercial development total \$25.4 million. In total, \$144.8 million in benefits can be associated with the current level of RIPTA ridership.

Based on the additional passenger miles that will result from the proposed recommendations, additional congestion, mobility, and community development benefits total of \$54.4 million. This figure represents an approximate 30% increase in overall benefit to the surrounding Metropolitan Providence region. The total combined benefits attributable to the RIPTA services, based on passenger miles resulting from the existing service and the service enhancements, are \$199.2 million.

Economic Benefits of RIPTA Services and Recommended Improvements

ECONOMIC BENEFITS	EXISTING	IMPROVEMENTS	COMBINED
Total transportation cost savings	\$95.7 M	\$36.0 M	\$131.7 M
Total affordable mobility	\$23.7 M	\$8.9 M	\$32.6 M
Total economic development	\$25.4 M	\$9.5 M	\$34.9 M
TOTAL BENEFITS	\$144.8 M	\$54.4 M	\$199.2 M

Source: HDR Calculations

The proposed streetcar system provides an example of how a transit investment can create huge economic benefit. A preliminary assessment of the development potential related to the proposed streetcar project estimates 3.0 million square feet of development of vacant and underutilized properties (within a range of 1.5 to 6.0 million square feet). Over 2 million square feet of this development is projected to occur in the Jewelry District and DOWNCITY areas of Providence alone. Development is expected primarily in residential, office and retail uses with a corresponding increase in employment of 3,365 and a population boost to the downtown area of over 2,200 new residents.

Other economic impacts related to transit enhancements include capital construction spending effects, increased operational expenditures and jobs, and the sustained economic impacts to business as RIPTA service and performance is improved. These economic impacts stem from reduced transportation costs to

business, improved reliability and productivity, and enhanced access to labor with more diverse skills. Based on findings from the latest APTA report, the proposed transit improvements in Rhode Island could lead to an increase of \$253.5 million in annual gross state product (GSP) and up to 4,333 additional jobs.

³ *The Optimal Supply and Demand for Urban Transit in the United States*, American Public Transportation Association, prepared by HDR|HLB Decision Economics, February 2008; and *Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment*, American Public Transportation Association, prepared by Economic Development Research Group and Cambridge Systematics, October 2009.

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RIPTA'S NEXT STEPS

Any recommendations for enhancing transit within the Metropolitan Providence area must be considered within the broader context of RIPTA's overall statewide program. RIPTA has a range of planned and proposed improvement projects that include both statewide initiatives as well as local planning efforts and projects targeted for specific regions of the state.

Recognizing that the scope of desired improvements is beyond any near term funding capacity, RIPTA's Board of Directors has initiated a more formalized strategic planning process. Most importantly, the Board will work with RIPTA staff to set priorities for system repair and asset replacement, service enhancements and system expansion and establish a vision and timeframe for addressing these needs in a cost-effective, sustainable manner.

There are a set of actions which will be implemented in the near term and funded within the limits of RIPTA's current capital and operating budgets. In fact, RIPTA has already initiated efforts to forward several Metro Transit Study recommendations.

Subsequent actions to move forward with additional improvements would require funding above and beyond what is currently programmed at both the federal and state levels. RIPTA is committed to pursuing additional funding sources to advance these improvements. However, in order to be successful, this effort must involve outside partners and advocates to fundamentally change the way transit is envisioned and supported in Rhode Island.



A CALL TO ACTION

BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON TRANSPORTATION

In their 2008 report to Governor Carceiri, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Transportation issued a “Call to Action:”

“It is time to take charge of our own destiny. The economy and the quality of life of the people of Rhode Island depend on safe and reliable transportation. Continued deterioration of our infrastructure will only serve to perpetuate the downward spiral we are in. Studies have shown that investment in transportation will yield great economic benefits for the State.

There is no silver bullet to solve our transportation funding crisis. Every strategy recommended by the Blue Ribbon Panel will have its challenges. The Panel is mindful of the impacts that the proposed funding options will have on families in Rhode Island. Some may think that we cannot afford to invest in our infrastructure at this time, but we really have no other choice. We must act now, for if we do not, the future costs to rebuild our infrastructure, as well as the cost to the economy, will only be higher.”

It is time to do what is right and invest in the future of our State. These are our bridges, our roads, and our buses. Reason and wisdom must prevail, and provide the courage for us to make the investment necessary to preserve our transportation system for future generations.”

GARNERING STATE AND LOCAL PARTNER SUPPORT

There has been a growing call for renewed investment in Rhode Island’s transit system and those contributing to this call represent a wide spectrum of interests and perspectives.

The City of Providence recognizes this work is vital to securing our economic and environmental futures while protecting our quality of life. Mayor Cicilline has been a leader in efforts to

expand transportation choices, beginning with Transit 2020. Looking ahead, Providence will lead a new era of transit advocacy, creating an Action Committee to ensure the successful execution of recommended improvements for Metropolitan Providence.

Like Providence, surrounding communities in the metropolitan area will play a central role in moving these efforts forward. As members of the Transit 2020 Action Committee, and as advocates in their own communities, local leaders will continue to work with RIPTA implement projects and grow our transit system. Key state agencies include Rhode Island Department of Transportation and Rhode Island Statewide Planning, two partners that share the vision of a coordinated, multimodal transportation system for Rhode Island.

Beyond government walls, there is a growing advocacy pushing the state to commit to greater levels of transit investment. In October 2009, the Coalition for Transportation Choices set forth their vision which calls for “a 21st century transportation system that enhances our economy and provides all Rhode Islanders with healthy transportation choices.” The Coalition represents independent non-profit groups that have unified to advocate for an intermodal transportation system that is sustainable and provided with predictable funding for future growth.

A NEW ERA IN FEDERAL TRANSIT POLICY

On the national level, there is growing recognition that transportation is the foundation for a variety of other policy goals (More Livable Communities, Housing, Energy Efficiency, Job Access, Aging in Place, etc.) and new programs are being developed that may open new avenues for collaboration between transit agencies and other community efforts.

The federal outlook on transit is becoming increasingly optimistic. The new administration has indicated strong support for transit, with recent stimulus funds directed towards transit resulting in an eighty percent increase to the Federal Transit Administration budget.

When Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood submits the administration’s proposal to Congress for the next surface transportation authorization bill, it will focus heavily on the idea of “livable communities.” Land use and housing development would be linked more closely with transportation projects and require the Department of Transportation to coordinate with other federal agencies such as HUD and EPA, creating unprecedented levels of partnership and a model Rhode Island can follow.



The Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel recognized the importance of a strong, effective transit system and clearly stated that transit system needs should be part of any statewide transportation funding solution. Despite their charge to optimize operations of the existing transit system, the Special Legislative Commission to Study Transit realized that current operations are not adequate to meet growing needs and new funding must be identified to expand the system. Both of these groups acknowledged legislative action is needed to identify new, long-term, reliable funding sources for RIPTA operations.

Here in Rhode Island we must capitalize on this discussion and encourage all residents to view the transit system through a wider lens. Transportation is a common resource that can help the state achieve many of its other environmental, economic development and quality of life goals. By carefully envisioning, planning and providing transportation investments we can help reduce energy consumption, improve air quality, encourage development near existing infrastructure and support overall mobility for all RI residents, communities and businesses.

RIPTA VISION STATEMENT

Rhode Island's compact size and historical development pattern offer a unique advantage in providing cost-effective public transportation and rebuilding communities for the 21st century. The availability of transit and transportation choice can be powerful incentives to foster economic growth, maintain vibrant urban centers, support public health, contain sprawl and build greener communities in Rhode Island.

RIPTA will provide and promote seamless, efficient and appealing transportation choices that are responsive to these statewide goals and the mobility needs of all RI residents and businesses.

RIPTA's new vision clearly states our commitment to increasing coordination and cooperation with both public and private partners. These partners include state and local land officials, other transit providers, housing developers, health care providers, and others. RIPTA is willing to support these partners by providing transit services to meet the diverse needs of their constituents and to achieve overall statewide and community goals. In turn, these partners must be called upon to make decisions and investments that positively impact the efficiency and effectiveness of transit (e.g., land use, new development, and community-based care).

Finally, transit advocates must support the identification of new revenue sources to support transit in Rhode Island and to support strategic growth and expansion of the system. RIPTA will continue to work to identify and communicate the benefits, savings and return on transit investments to be provided to the taxpayers of Rhode Island.

Metro Transit Working Group

Brown University	Rhode Island Hospital
City of Cranston	Rhode Island Statewide Planning
City of East Providence	RI Senate Policy Office
City of Providence	RI Department of Transportation
City of Warwick	RI Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
Coalition for Transportation Choices	RI Economic Development Corporation
Cornish Associates	Sierra Club, Rhode Island Chapter
Grow Smart Rhode Island	
Providence Foundation	
Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau	

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