

**Rhode Island Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council  
ANNUAL REPORT 2019**



**SCOTT AVEDISIAN**

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# LETTER FROM RIPTA CEO

On behalf of Rhode Island’s Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council, I am pleased to present this annual report highlighting Council goals, recent priorities, and plans for 2020. Since the state legislature directed the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) to convene the Council in 2017, and the Rhode Island Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan was released in early 2018, the group has worked to better integrate transportation programs that support individuals in need of specialized assistance.

The Council has brought together a broad coalition to achieve its mission: Promoting independence through enhanced statewide mobility while fostering collaboration between public, private, and non-profit sector partners by gathering and sharing information, supporting transportation initiatives, and advocating for positive change.

As we lead the coordination effort in 2020, we look forward to continuing to implement the priority recommendations identified within the Coordinated Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Avedisian".

Scott Avedisian  
Chief Executive Officer, Rhode Island Public Transit Authority

## COORDINATING COUNCIL MEMBERS REPRESENT

AAA Northeast  
 AARP Rhode Island  
 Age-Friendly Rhode Island  
 Comprehensive Community Action Program  
 Crossroads Rhode Island  
 The Economic Progress Institute  
 Integra Community Care Network  
 Long Term Care Coordinating Council  
 Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Health,  
 Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals  
 Rhode Island Department of Health  
 Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
 Rhode Island Department of Transportation  
 Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council  
 Rhode Island Executive Office of Health & Human Services  
 Rhode Island Governor's Commission on Disabilities  
 Rhode Island Hunger Elimination Task Force  
 Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging  
 Rhode Island Office of the Lieutenant Governor  
 Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services  
 Rhode Island Organizing Project  
 Rhode Island Public Transit Authority  
 RIPTA Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee  
 Rhode Island Senate Fiscal Office  
 Rhode Island Transit Riders Alliance  
 Town of Burrillville  
 United Way of Rhode Island/ 2-1-1  
 Westbay Community Action

# ABOUT THE COORDINATING COUNCIL

Throughout 2017, hundreds of Rhode Islanders came together to envision a more seamless, comprehensive, and accessible statewide transportation network. These efforts resulted in the Rhode Island Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan, a federally required plan that provides strategies for meeting the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes.

Also in 2017, the Rhode Island General Assembly directed RIPTA to convene a Coordinating Council in consultation with key state agencies and stakeholders to better integrate programs that support individuals in need of specialized transportation assistance.

Since early 2018, the Coordinating Council has been working steadily to implement the Coordinated Plan and bring its recommendations—from leveraging resources to strengthening communication—into reality.

# 2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

2019 was a year of growth and progress for the Coordinating Council. Among the Council's top accomplishments were advocacy for funding of RIPTA's free and reduced fare bus pass program for low-income older adults and low-income individuals with disabilities, creation of new communications tools, and strengthened partnerships within Rhode Island and with peer agencies in neighboring states.



**ADVOCATING  
FOR POSITIVE CHANGE**



**BUILDING  
PARTNERSHIPS**



**STRENGTHENING  
COMMUNICATIONS**



**EXPANDING  
TRAVEL TRAINING**

# ADVOCATING FOR POSITIVE CHANGE: FUNDING

A Coordinating Council report released in December 2018 recommended the identification of appropriate and sustainable funding for RIPTA's free and reduced fare bus pass program. With the Council's support, in June 2019, Rhode Island adopted a fiscal year (2020) budget that includes \$5 million for the program. Lawmakers also eliminated a sunset provision on the program, making it permanent.



## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Council members also developed partnerships by participating in a variety of statewide committees and working groups including Health Equity Zone Learning Community events, the Hunger Elimination Task Force, Age-Friendly RI's Transportation Subcommittee, and the Lieutenant Governor's Long Term Care Coordinating Council. By working together, partners have expanded their knowledge base, found strategies for addressing transportation service gaps and minimizing duplication, and supported each other's efforts.

Where partnerships thrive, funding often follows. In May 2019, the FTA awarded an Access and Mobility Partnership Grant for Human Services Coordination Research to RIPTA and project partners, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP), to develop a short-term pilot transportation program to serve individuals participating in the RI Works job training program. The Rides Toward Work program will provide on-demand, curb-to-curb transportation to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) clients who demonstrate that they face significant transportation barriers.





# STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATIONS

The Council launched a webpage: [www.ripta.com/human-services-transportation-coordination](http://www.ripta.com/human-services-transportation-coordination) in September 2019 which features vision and mission statements, background information, meeting agendas, and minutes. In November, the Coordinating Council created its first quarterly e-newsletter to supplement the website and start a dialogue among service providers and advocates about successful local projects and opportunities for collaboration and learning.

In addition, the Council's bi-monthly public meetings featured a speaker series, bringing together peer agency leaders and subject matter experts to share knowledge and insights. Topics included statewide and regional mobility management, healthy aging, and service provisions to veterans, low-income individuals, and adults with disabilities. Special thanks to featured speakers: Rachel Fichtenbaum, Angela Constantino, Mackenzie Thiessen, Jody Shue, Bob Cooper, Seena Franklin, and Mike Jolin.

# EXPANDING TRAVEL TRAINING

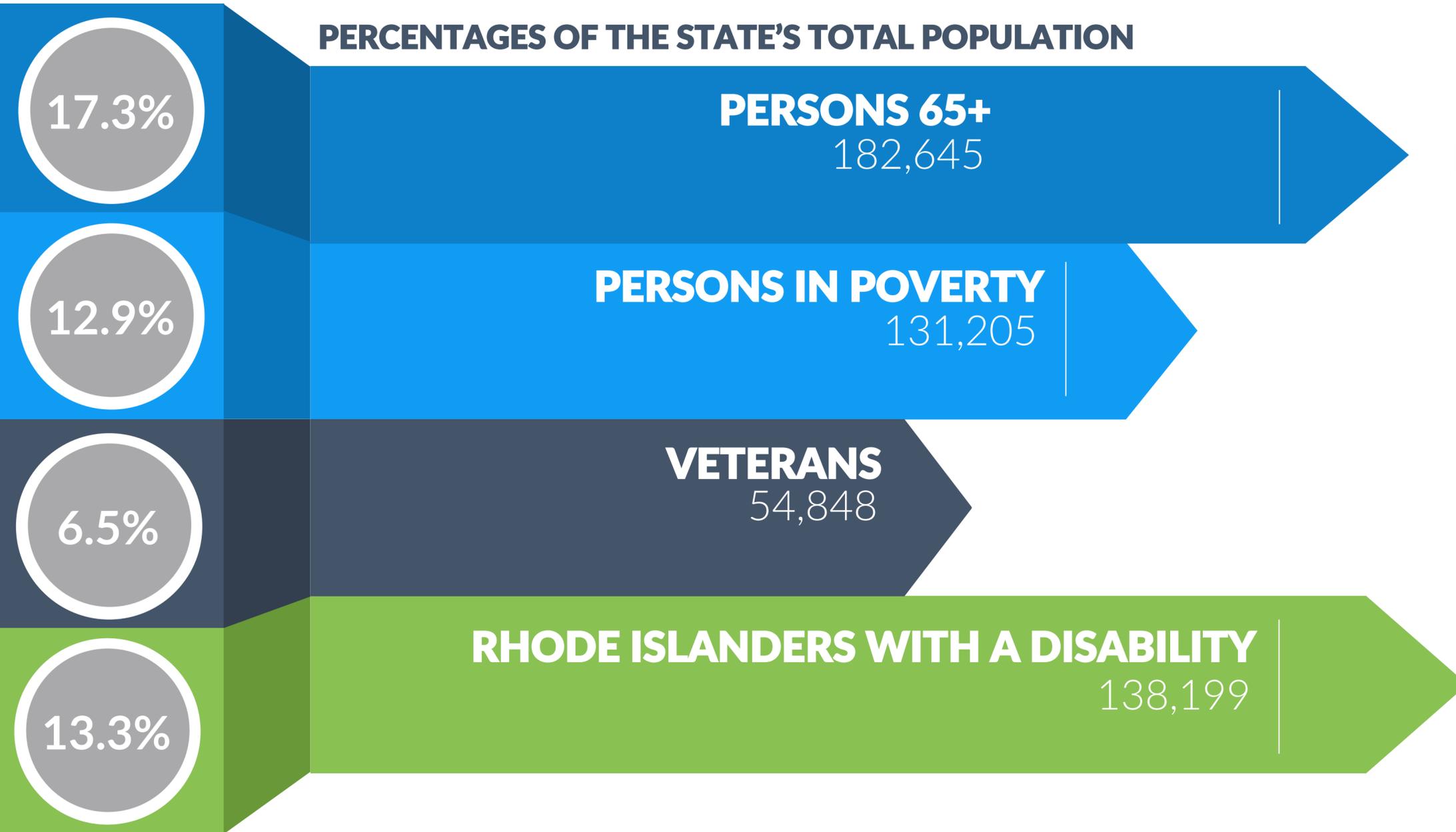
Together with senior centers and other community-based partners around Rhode Island, RIPTA's Commuter Resource team provided individualized training to an estimated 1,500 older adults and individuals who have disabilities in order to encourage independence through access to fixed route public transportation. Travel training helps people gain confidence by guiding them through the steps of reading a schedule, using related apps, boarding a bus, paying fare, and requesting a stop. In 2019, recipients have included the Groden Center, Donovan Manor, Westerly Senior Center, Narragansett Senior Center, Providence Transition Academy, Woonsocket Senior Center, Newport County Mental Health, Central Falls High School, and several others.



# BY THE NUMBERS

The Coordinating Council strives to be as data driven as possible in working toward fulfilling its vision: **Accessible, coordinated statewide mobility for all Rhode Islanders.** These pages provide a brief overview of Rhode Island's targeted population for human services transportation and available services, including transportation resources.

## PERCENTAGES OF THE STATE'S TOTAL POPULATION



## POPULATIONS SERVED

According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey 1-year population estimate (July 1, 2018), Rhode Island's population is 1,057,315.

Source:  
2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimate,  
US Census Bureau.

# TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Several alternatives to fixed-route transportation are available for those who cannot drive.

## NEMT

The state’s publicly-funded **Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)** services are provided by a vendor contracted through Medicaid. The transportation broker coordinates with qualified transportation providers to offer this important benefit for Medicaid members who need to get to and from Medicaid-covered non-emergency services but have limited or no means of transportation. Through this contractor, bus passes are also provided to TANF/RI Works recipients.

## ETP

Through the **Elderly Transportation Program (ETP)**, Rhode Island offers adults age 60 and older curb-to-curb and door-to-door transportation to community services such as medical appointments, meal sites, adult day programming, treatment centers for cancer/dialysis, and the Insight program. The program is administered by the state vendor who is responsible for recruiting and managing a registry of local transportation providers.

## VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

Age-Friendly Rhode Island’s transportation and civic engagement subcommittees have discussed best practices for organizing **volunteer driver programs**, focusing on issues related to liability, background checks for drivers and passengers, volunteer financial responsibilities, volunteer recruitment and training, and management of reservation systems. An advisory committee has developed a statewide database for these programs and plans to develop a manual that private or municipal organizations can utilize.

## VET PASS PROGRAM

Working with the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services (RIVETS), RIPTA used grant money for a **Vet Pass pilot program** that offered unlimited bus transportation to 87 veterans. That pilot program expired on February 1, 2020, having provided 25,399 trips to participants in 2019. Moving forward, RIPTA will continue to seek additional opportunities to partner with RIVETS to serve veterans with transportation needs.



# RIPTA RESOURCES

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## **RIPTA FREE AND REDUCED FARE BUS PASS PROGRAM**

RIPTA complies with federal transit guidelines by offering half-fare boarding to seniors and persons with disabilities, regardless of income, during off peak hours. In addition, qualifying low-income older adults (age 65 or over) and low-income persons with disabilities may apply for special photo ID cards that allow them to travel for free on fixed-route and Flex buses for two years.

## **RIDE PARATRANSIT PROGRAM**

Through the Ride program, RIPTA offers paratransit service for individuals whose disabilities prevent independent use of the fixed route system as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Paratransit operates within a 3/4-mile corridor of a fixed route during the same hours that the bus runs, and requires advance reservations for door-to-door service. (See pg. 12)

## **COMMUNITY VAN PROGRAM**

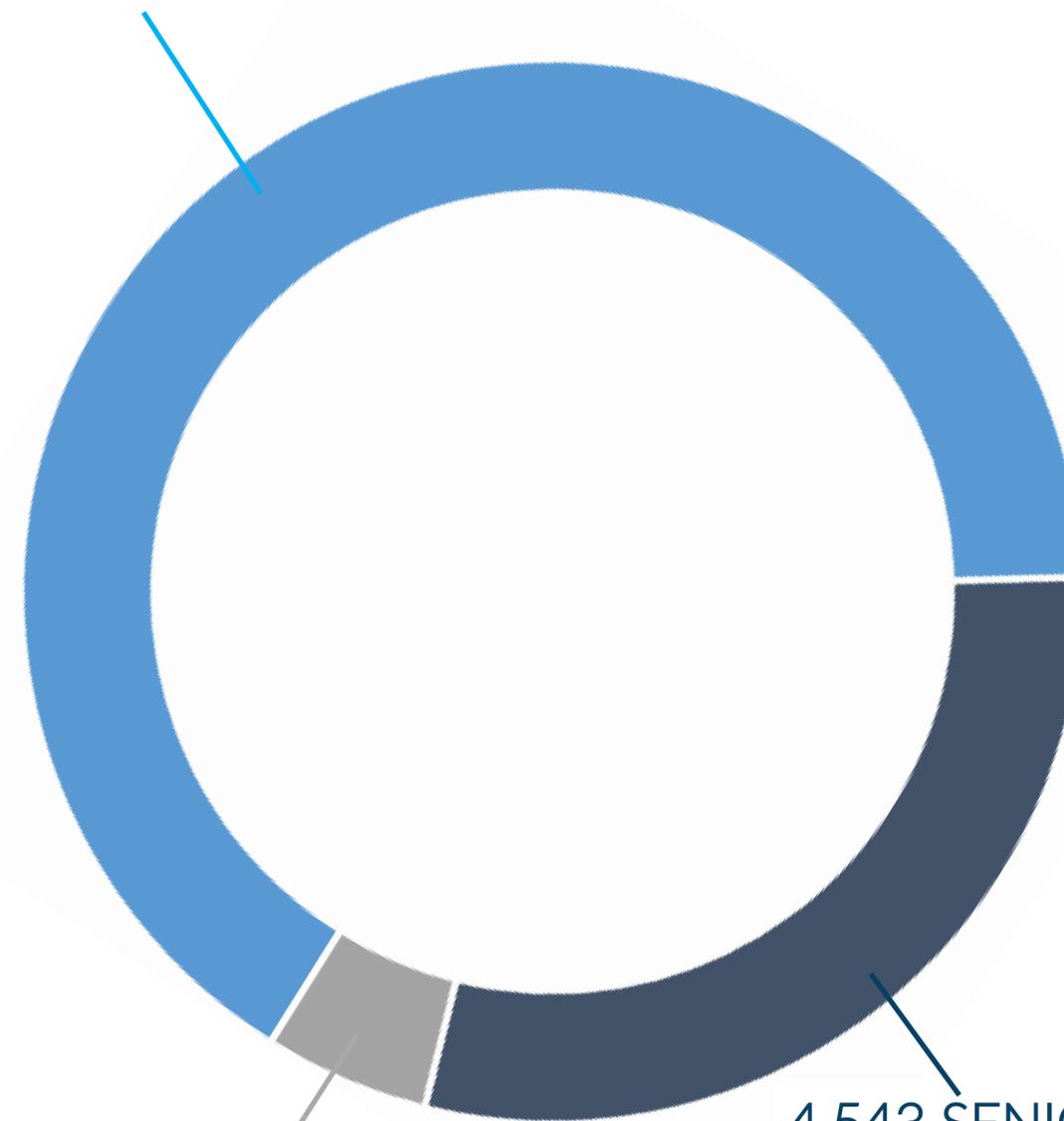
RIPTA is utilizing a federal grant for senior transportation that provides 80% of the cost of new vans. The Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP) is designated to receive a new Ford Transit in 2020 along with the communities of Cumberland, Foster, Pawtucket, and Westerly. Although limited in scope, RIPTA also has a program that allows retired paratransit vans to be donated to local municipalities. Based on the success of these programs, RIPTA is exploring other funding opportunities to expand these partnerships. (See pg. 13)

**FREE AND REDUCED FARE  
BUS PASS PROGRAM  
ACTIVE ENROLLMENT**

**15,499  
TOTAL  
PROGRAM  
PARTICIPANTS**

YEAR END 2019

10,177 INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES (FREE FARE PROGRAM)



4,543 SENIORS (FREE FARE PROGRAM)

779 OFF-PEAK REDUCED FARE PARTICIPANTS



**16.4 MILLION**

total RIPTA trips system-wide in 2019  
including

**4.35 MILLION**

free trips taken by participants in the  
no-fare program for low-income seniors  
and low-income adults with disabilities

# 2019 RIDE PARATRANSIT SERVICE SNAPSHOT

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**4,981**

CUSTOMERS APPROVED TO USE RIDE

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**983**

ACTIVE RIDERS (OCT-DEC)

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**287,029**

TOTAL TRIPS

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# SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS

Across the state, a number of municipal governments have instituted transportation services specifically meant to serve their community’s older adult population and those with mobility needs. In many cities and towns, buses and vans ensure access to senior meal sites and other enrichment activities at municipal senior centers, and may also make trips to grocery stores and health centers.

## RHODE ISLAND OFFICE OF HEALTHY AGING (OHA)

While many communities offering transportation services cover a significant portion of the cost with municipal funding, a handful of communities take advantage of state and federal financial supports. Specifically, the Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging (OHA) administers two separate grants through which local governments and community organizations can apply and utilize funds to support local transportation.

*Data provided is from current state fiscal year (2020).*

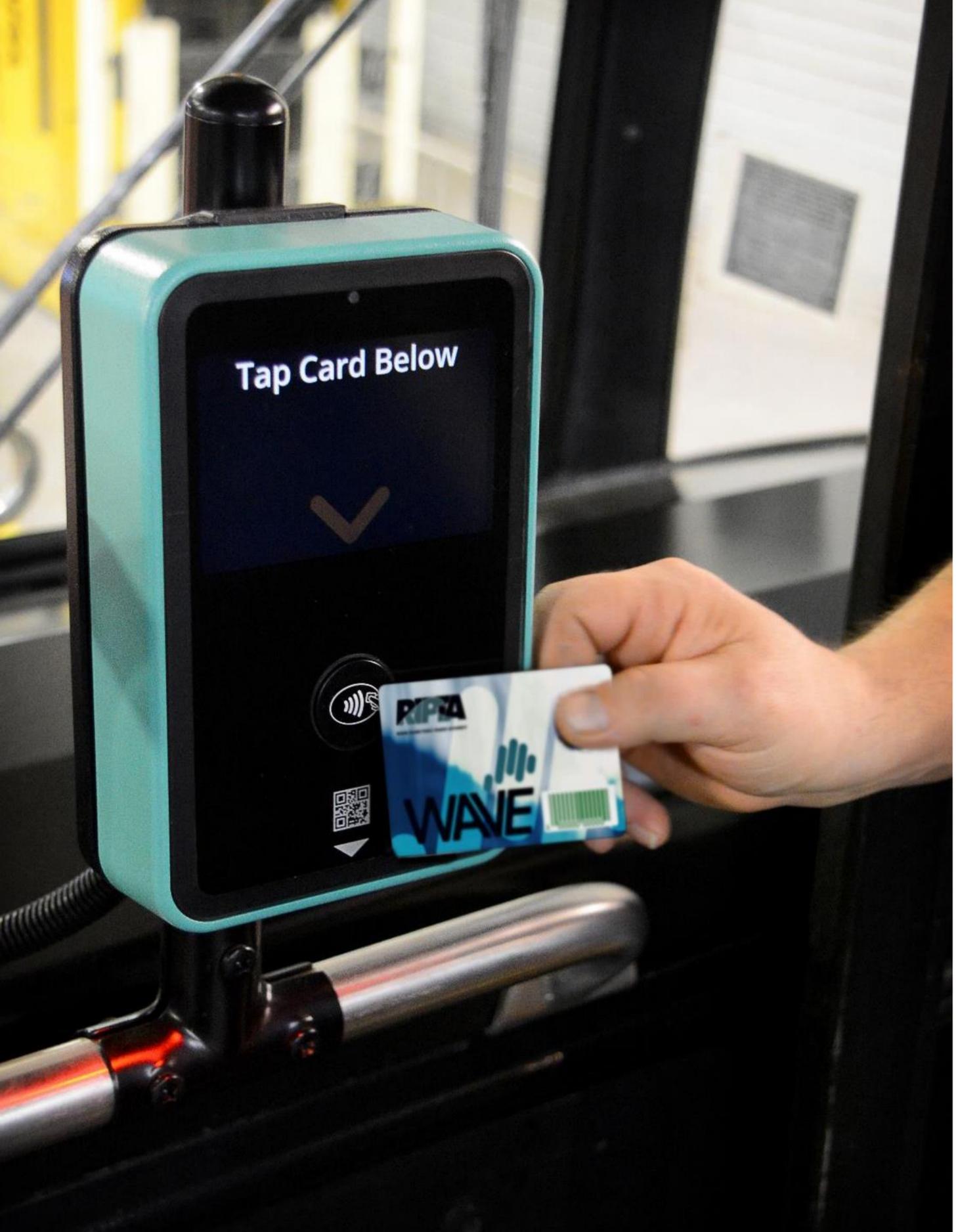


**14 Rhode Island communities use at least a portion of their state designated grant funds for transportation supports.**



**5 communities allocate their Older Americans Act grant monies, administered through OHA, for these services.**

Last year, local communities reported to OHA a sum total of 23,896 unique trips provided with Older Americans Act funding.



# LOOKING AHEAD TO 2020

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## **WAVE**

RIPTA plans to introduce WAVE, a convenient new smart fare collection system, in 2020. People who receive benefits from social service agencies will now have a streamlined way to get RIPTA fare products. Instead of using paper tickets, passengers will use account-based WAVE cards or virtual cards on their smart phones. They can register their accounts online to gain benefits such as balance protection, trip history tracking, and an earn-as-you-go feature that enables them to ride free after they reach the value of daily or monthly passes.

## **ONE-CALL/ONE-CLICK**

One-Call/One-Click systems are a nationally recognized best practice for providing easily accessible, customized travel information to the public, especially for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and any others reliant on public or community transportation services. RIPTA will begin laying the groundwork for phased implementation of a One-Call/One-Click system by reviewing best practices from transit agencies and partners across the country, evaluating those models, and developing a white paper that recommends a solution for Rhode Island. The system should be simple to use, accessible for users with varying abilities, and equally accessible by phone and web.

## **RI OFFICE OF HEALTHY AGING (OHA)**

As we enter the new decade, OHA intends to capitalize on its recently released Strategic Plan, buttressed by five pillars: Create Connections, Pursue Health Equity, Promote Choice, Ensure People's Safety, and Inspire a Performance Culture. While OHA begins to realign and enhance the POINT network as part of this Plan, a larger state effort is underway to ensure Rhode Islanders in every corner of the state have the information, resources, and opportunities necessary to live happily and healthfully in their community of choice. Part of achieving this goal is to embrace continued efforts towards the development of a network of transportation services designed to empower people of all ages and abilities.