



COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #2

LOCATION OF MEETING: RIPTA BOARD ROOM, PROVIDENCE

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: SEPTEMBER 20, 2012, 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

ATTENDEES

Jenn Bailey, Discover Newport
Laurie Brayton, Senate Fiscal Policy
Jeffrey Broadhead, Washington County Regional Planning Commission
Elaine Colarusso, Town of East Greenwich
Beth Cotter, RI House of Representatives
Steve Devine, RI Department of Transportation
Anne Galbraith, ASG Planning
Martina Haggerty, City of Providence (Alternate)
Paul Harrington, ATU 618
Greg Harris, RIPTA
Laura Hart, RIPTA Resource Team
Tom Kravitz, Town of Burrillville
Peter LaPolla, City of Cranston
Maureen Martin, RIPTA Board Member
Michael Moan, RI Department of Administration, Statewide Planning
Anthony Paolantonio, RI General Assembly
Amy Pettine, RIPTA
Tim Pimental, RI Airport Corporation
Don Rhodes, RIPTA Riders Alliance
Clare Sedlock, RIPTA Resource Team
Geoff Slater, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting
Angie Stabile, Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)
Ray Studley, RIPTA Interim CEO
Mark Therrien, RIPTA
Mike Walker, RI Economic Development Corporation
Michael Wilcox, City of Pawtucket (Alternate)

PURPOSE/AGENDA:

This was the second meeting of the Advisory Committee for the RIPTA Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA). The agenda included a recap of the project purpose, and discussion on RIPTA Service Guidelines, COA Route Evaluations, Hub Planning, Passenger/Non-Rider Surveys.

HANDOUTS: Agenda, Sample Route Evaluation



Welcome and Introductions

Mark Therrien, RIPTA, opened the meeting by providing a recap of project goals. Amy Pettine of RIPTA reviewed the project timeline and summarized the materials reviewed at the last Advisory Committee meeting. She reminded committee members that all materials are being made available on the COA project page of RIPTA's website. To date, the project team has completed a statewide market review and stakeholder interviews, and is currently focusing on route evaluations, passenger surveys, and updated service guidelines.

RIPTA Service Guidelines

Greg Harris, RIPTA, provided an overview of Transit Service Standards and Guidelines and outlined the process that will be followed as part of the COA to update these guidelines.

Service Guidelines are quantifiable measures used to determine appropriate levels of transit service and to evaluate service effectiveness on an ongoing basis. As part of the COA, RIPTA is proposing to update Service Guidelines relating to service coverage, service design, level of service, and productivity/performance. Mr. Harris walked through examples of the type of measures that might be used under each of these categories (e.g. span of service, service frequencies, # of bus stops per mile, etc.).

All RIPTA routes will be categorized into a family of services (e.g. Rapid Route, Key Corridor Routes, Urban Arterials, Crosstown/Suburban, Regional/Hub Connectors, Express, Flex and Lifeline). Updated Service Guidelines will be prepared for each category and used to determine whether changes should be made to individual RIPTA routes. Routes that do not meet minimum standards within their category would be candidates for potential changes intended to improve performance. Routes with very low performance may be candidates for elimination, with resources redirected to areas with greater passenger demands.

Martina Haggerty, City of Providence, asked how RIPTA would judge whether a Key Corridor Route should be made into a Rapid Route. Ms. Pettine responded that this would be tricky, as elevating Key Corridor Routes to Rapid Routes would require service improvements as well as capital investment.

Don Rhodes, RIPTA Riders Alliance, noted that if a route is eliminated, ADA Paratransit service would likewise be eliminated. Mark Therrien responded that the Lifeline category is intended to capture routes that may not perform well, but are considered necessary in order to maintain service in an ADA corridor or to a critical destination such as a hospital.

Paul Harrington, ATU 618, suggested that routes be extended to ensure Lifeline and ADA service in all parts of the state. He also noted that Lifeline and Suburban routes are critical parts of the system, bringing riders to feed the major bus routes. He added that RIPTA customers are interested in faster service, so RIPTA is headed in the right direction with the new Rapid Route service.

Route Evaluations

Geoff Slater of Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates walked the committee through the detailed technical process being used to evaluate RIPTA's 58 bus routes and 8 Flex zones. The goal of these evaluations is to assess how well each route is performing, or more specifically, which parts of RIPTA's system are working well and which parts of the system might be modified to better match service with customer needs.



Each Route Evaluation will include a description of the route's alignment and service pattern (e.g. schedule and ridership), an assessment of route performance, and a list of potential service changes that should be considered. Mr. Slater walked through each of these sections, giving a detailed explanation of the charts depicting ridership patterns and summarizing route performance.

Maureen Martin, RIPTA Board member, noted that there was a great deal of public outcry when RIPTA recently held hearings regarding potential service cuts. She said it is very important to keep existing riders happy, as these individuals will bring new riders to the system.

Ms. Pettine announced that each Route Evaluation will be posted on RIPTA's website as it is completed. RIPTA hopes that people take a moment to review the potential service options being considered for the routes that interest them, and post comments to indicate whether they agree, disagree or have other ideas to share.

Tim Pimental, RI Airport Corporation, asked whether Advisory Committee members should provide their comments on the on-line blog or forward them directly to RIPTA. Ms. Pettine suggested it would be helpful to do both, since others would benefit from seeing RIAC's perspective on the local transit needs of airport travelers. Mark Therrien added it would be a good idea to look at the "package" of airport related bus services together.

Steve Devine, RIDOT, asked whether it would be possible for individuals to recommend new destinations to be served by bus, such as new park and ride lots. RIPTA will add a "general comment" section to the Route Evaluation blog to collect such comments. Paul Harrington noted park and ride services represent a great opportunity for RIPTA to expand their business and ridership market.

Don Rhodes suggested that more late night service be provided between universities and downtown entertainment venues during the school year, but many recognized the challenges in dealing with the drinking and rowdiness and suggested that RIPTA develop a policy on such services.

Hub Planning

Amy Pettine provided an update on hub planning being conducted as part of this project. Many stakeholders interviewed as part of the COA believe that visible, attractive bus hubs are a critical part of the transit system and serve as a helpful catalyst to local economic development.

"Reinventing Kennedy Plaza" was one of 10 initiatives recommended as part of RIPTA's 2009 Metro Transit Study. RIPTA is now working with the City of Providence, the Downtown Parks Conservancy and private businesses in the area to identify new ways to program and energize the Kennedy Plaza area, while maintaining a successful transit hub. The COA team will consider the impact of any proposed service changes on Kennedy Plaza, and try to design service to meet mutual goals for the area. It is also possible that a second downtown Providence hub location may be identified to help alleviate the density of bus traffic in the Kennedy Plaza area.

The City of Pawtucket has approached RIPTA about potentially relocating the Pawtucket bus hub away from the Slater Mill area and into a more central downtown location. RIPTA is working with the City to identify a location that can accommodate bus circulation for the 12 routes that pass through Pawtucket and to find an appropriate location to terminate the new Rapid Route.

The COA will also consider whether there is a need to facilitate transfers and connections between bus routes in other locations, such as Woonsocket, Warwick and URI. Mike Walker, RI EDC, suggested



Pastore Center might be an appropriate place to consider a hub, with several RIPTA routes now serving this location.

A suggestion was made to consider express trips between hubs (such as Kennedy Plaza to Pawtucket). Don Rhodes noted the importance of maintaining bus stops and hubs during the winter months. Amy Pettine agreed that RIPTA should be clear about its snow removal policy, and noted that the Boston area MPO has just issued a regional policy on this. Others noted the cost involved with plowing and maintaining stops, whether done by RIPTA or local communities.

Update on Passenger Surveys and Non-Rider Surveys

Anne Galbraith of ASG Planning provided the group with an update on the passenger and non-rider surveys that are currently being conducted to better understand local travel patterns and preferences for the COA. Passengers on 15 bus routes in Pawtucket and Newport were surveyed in late August, and the remainder of RIPTA routes are being surveyed this week. Surveys are being distributed on-board buses, but may also be accessed via RIPTA's website (and in both English and Spanish).

Ms. Galbraith provided an overview of the questions being asked, and noted that while there are many questions that would be useful, it is important to keep the survey short to encourage participation. She shared a sample summary from Route 63 in Newport, that showed rider demographic characteristics and information on how Route 63 riders accessed the bus and paid their fare.

The rider surveys also ask a series of questions to identify whether customers would prefer more service at night or during the day, on weekends or weekdays, etc. A summary of rider preference information collected to date was shared.

The non-rider survey will be available via RIPTA's website and will collect data on why individuals do not use RIPTA, and what factors might encourage them to consider taking the bus. Amy Pettine noted that she will forward links to the survey to the committee, as well as to businesses, universities and other groups and organizations around the state.

Final survey results will be shared at the next Advisory Committee meeting.

Next Meeting and Next Steps

Route evaluations will be completed over the upcoming month, and all survey data will be summarized and reviewed. This information will be used to develop a series of service scenarios or potential changes that could be implemented to better match RIPTA service with customer needs. The next meeting is anticipated to occur in November, and will include a discussion of these potential scenarios.