



COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #3

LOCATION OF MEETING: RIPTA BOARD ROOM, PROVIDENCE

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: NOVEMBER 8, 2012, 2:00 PM – 3:30 PM

ATTENDEES

Dan Baudouin, Providence Foundation
Linsey Callaghan, RI Statewide Planning
Regan Checchio, Regina Villa Associates
Elaine Colarusso, Town of East Greenwich
Beth Cotter, RI House of Representatives
Steve Devine, RI Department of Transportation
John Flaherty, CTC
Anne Galbraith, ASG Planning
Greg Harris, RIPTA
Peter LaPolla, City of Cranston
Amy Pettine, RIPTA
Tim Pimental, RI Airport Corporation
Don Rhodes, RIPTA Riders Alliance
Clare Sedlock, RIPTA
Geoff Slater, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting
Raymond Studley, RIPTA
Mark Therrien, RIPTA
Mike Walker, RI Economic Development Corporation

PURPOSE/AGENDA:

This was the third meeting of the Advisory Committee for the RIPTA Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA). The agenda included an overview of recent passenger and “non-rider” surveys, a overview of proposed updates to RIPTA’s service guidelines, and an update on the ongoing route evaluation process and the themes that are emerging. A brief presentation was also made to highlight the challenges faced by RIPTA when balancing the need to meet travel demand with requests for coverage based service.

HANDOUTS: Agenda, Proposed Update to RIPTA Service Guidelines (Table of Contents), Emerging Service Improvement Themes



MEETING SUMMARY:

Welcome

Amy Pettine, RIPTA, opened the meeting and reviewed the meeting agenda. She walking the Advisory Group through the project timeline and noted that a significant public outreach effort for the project is scheduled to begin in January.

Fixed Route, Flex and Non-Rider Survey Results

Anne Galbraith, ASG Planning, reviewed the results of the surveys collected to date as part of the COA. She noted that the onboard passenger surveys were completed in August and September, but that non-rider surveys are still being collected via RIPTA's website. The team is looking to publicize the non-rider survey better and get more respondents over the next few months.

Ms. Galbraith noted that the results of the surveys will be posted on the website, by individual route. She then summarized some of the overall results of the fixed route surveys. Overall, respondents expressed a preference for for faster service, with fewer stops. But, in many cases, when asked to choose preferences, respondents' choices were contradictory (e.g. wanting both more weekday service AND more weekend service, rather than one or the other), indicating passengers are looking for more service in general.

Dan Baudouin, Providence Foundation, noted that employment status of the respondents. Based on the results, about 50% of respondents work (either full or part-time).

Geoff Slater, Nelson\Nygaard, noted that there was not a strong correlation between use of the senior/disabled pass fare product and respondents who are "65 or older," leading the team to believe most users of this pass product qualify through some sort of disability.

Ms. Galbraith also provided a summary of the non-rider survey results to date. She noted that the most common reason respondents expressed about why they do not use the service is due to the trip-time length.

Mr. Baudouin asked what type of outreach RIPTA performed to encourage non-riders to participate. Ms. Pettine said that she had sent notices to businesses and universities. RIPTA will also sent out a press release, advertising the suvey. She encouraged the Advisory Committee to help promote the availability of the online survey.

Proposed Update to RIPTA Service Guidelines

Mr. Slater provided aa overview of the proposed updates to RIPTA's Service Guidelines and noted that service should be direct and easy for the customer to understand. It is proposed that RIPTA organize their bus routes as part of a family of services (Rapid Bus, Key Corridor, Urban Arterial, Crosstown/Suburban/Non-Urban, Regional, Express/Commuter and Flex) with different service design guidelines for each category.

Route Evaluations

Mark Therrien, RIPTA, provided an update on the ongoing route evaluation process. He noted that 24 detailed route evaluations have been posted to the project website and explained that the process is designed to be iterative. The consultant team performs the analysis and provides RIPTA with the results, along with a list of potential improvements. Each evaluation is reviewed and discussed with RIPTA staff, and the resulting proposals for service improvements are adjusted as appropriate. The revised evaluations are posted on the website "blog" for comments by the public. Feedback to date has been excellent.



Mr. Therrien said that RIPTA hopes to receive more comments during the January public outreach process. Ms. Pettine added that interior bus cards have been posted publicizing the route evaluation process and encouraging riders to review the proposed options for their route and to make comments.

Emerging Themes

Mr. Therrien then explained the themes that have emerged to date from this process with regard to service design and scheduling.

Service design improvement themes that have been identified to date include:

- Improving the downtown transit experience at Kennedy Plaza;
- Reconfiguring downtown Pawtucket service;
- Developing a "Family of Services;"
- Developing a Key Corridor Network;
- Developing transit emphasis corridors;
- Applying service guidelines;
- Considering new or expanded services;
- Developing new transit centers or superstops;
- Improving marketing and rebranding.

Scheduling improvements may include:

- Improved service coordination in trunk corridors (e.g. Westminster, Charles, Elmwood)
- Clockface headways to make schedules easier for customers to remember
- Adjusted service frequency and span of service

Mr. Therrien also showed a short time-lapse video of Kennedy Plaza between the hours of 3:00 to 5:30 PM, demonstrating trafficking and pedestrian flows.

Mr. Baudouin suggested incorporating another goal to "integrate transit properly into a great public space (Kennedy Plaza)."

Mr. Therrien noted that RIPTA is pleased about the prospect of moving the downtown Pawtucket service to High Street because it will improve overall operations. Linsey Callaghan, RI Statewide Planning, asked if this new plan accommodates the prospective two-way streets. Mr. Therrien said it was included in the planning.

Mr. Slater noted that maps shown in the discussion about hubs and superstops were still preliminary and incomplete. Mr. Therrien also said it will be critical to decide which of these are hubs and which are superstops.

A participant asked if future service will be a function of these standards with no variants. Mr. Therrien said that some will stay, but the non-productive ones will be removed. He estimated that about 85% of the poorly utilized variants will be removed. Mr. Slater said that Rhode Island Hospital is an example of a deviation that makes sense.

Mr. Therrien noted that bus stop spacing is including in the new service guidelines and will likely lead to much bus stop consolidation and faster service. Ms. Pettine added that up to 40 stops could be eliminated from Elmwood Avenue in Providence, where some stops are just a few 100 feet apart.



Ms. Callaghan asked if bus drivers only stop at marked bus stops. Mr. Therrien indicated that is RIPTA policy, as a matter of safety.

Don Rhodes, RIPTA Riders Alliance, asked if stops are ideally located in pairs. Mr. Slater said stops should be paired on opposite sides of a street whenever possible.

Mr. Baudouin asked if there will be a more explicit discussion of intermodal connections. Mr. Slater noted that the study is looking at whether buses might better connect to commuter rail stations. For example, Route 66 stops at a park and ride south of Wickford, but this might be better located at the station providing commuters more flexibility. (They could take the train in one direction and bus in another.)

Peter LaPolla, City of Cranston, suggested that based on the ridership survey, very few respondents were transferring. Tim Pimental, RI Airport Corporation, said most transfers only occur in Providence. Ms. Pettine added that it is hard to coordinate timetables, but emerging themes show a desire to make connections to places like the airport. She emphasized the need for multimodal coordination such as including airport signs on buses that go to the airport.

Mr. Pimental added that rail ridership is primarily to Boston. Steve Devine, RI Department of Transportation, said that reflected the economy and most of the jobs were located in Boston. He said that fact will hopefully change.

Balancing Demand vs. Requests for Coverage Based Service

Mr. Slater then led a discussion about balancing demand-driven service with coverage-based service. He noted that this decision is a challenge for RIPTA (and all transit authorities). Should resources be focused primarily where there is the greatest demand (e.g. on overcrowded routes?) or should the state ensure that some minimum level of coverage is provided throughout the state, even where there is much lower demand and ridership will likely be low?

John Flaherty, CTC, asked if coverage-based service could align with land-use plans for the state and the revitalization of town centers. Mr. Slater said if downtown Providence is a destination of service, it may be justified in some cases as a natural connection. He added that service cannot be provided until after the development occurs. Mr. LaPolla added that density is needed to support service.

Mr. LaPolla added that he assumed that considerations of service for the disabled and elderly were included in the analysis. Mr. Therrien said that any proposed change in service may affect the ADA paratransit corridor and that aspect will need to be considered.

Mr. Baudouin asked if RIPTA will be considering pricing changes – charging more for low usage or longer-distance trips. Mr. Slater said that that is not part of the COA scope. Ms. Pettine said that discussion could be combined with this effort, but it would need additional thought.

Mr. Baudouin also suggested using vanpools to connect to parts of Massachusetts if bus service is not permitted.

Next Meeting and Next Steps

The next meeting is anticipated to be scheduled for late December.