

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Kennedy Plaza is currently the focal point of Rhode Island's statewide transit system. It is located in the primary business district of the state's capital city and is served by 38 of RIPTA's 55 bus routes. In many respects, it is an attractive transit center, with a location central to key activity centers, and offering amenities such as customer information, ticketing and restrooms. However, ongoing ridership growth is presenting RIPTA with increasing challenges to the delivery of safe, on-time and attractive service at this location.

Since the last significant upgrades were made at Kennedy Plaza in 2001, the number of passengers boarding and alighting at the Plaza each day has continued to grow. Today, the Plaza is overcrowded, especially at peak travel times. About 20,000 RIPTA passengers board or alight from buses at Kennedy Plaza each day.

Passengers waiting for buses on the outer berths are squeezed onto narrow and unsheltered islands. High passenger volumes mean buses must linger longer in berths to allow for boarding and fare payment, often falling behind in their schedules. Many buses must be scheduled to spend additional time in their berths, an issue compounded by the fact that the Plaza is the terminal "layover" for several long distance regional routes. Security has also become an increasing issue. While some of the problems are caused by transit riders and crowded conditions, many are caused by non-transit riders who take advantage of the shelter that the crowds provide and the lack of dedicated security.

Efforts to address these issues have been discussed since 2006, with most focusing on how to streamline bus operations in the Plaza. Implementation of operational improvements identified as part of RIPTA's Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) will reduce bus berth requirements from 18 to 15, but will not reduce overall bus volumes, which are driven by passenger demand. Full implementation of COA improvements are anticipated to attract new riders and *increase*, not decrease, the volumes of bus passengers using Kennedy Plaza. Furthermore, a growing downtown residential population is also spurring transit growth, as the number of residents living between the RI State House and Garrahy Courthouse grew by more than 70.6% between 2000 and 2010.

None of the solutions proposed to date have been embraced by all of the area's stakeholders. RIPTA and its riders are concerned that deemphasizing transit at Kennedy Plaza will degrade service. The City of Providence and local business leaders are concerned that continuing to accommodate growing transit ridership around Kennedy Plaza will limit its potential to thrive as a key civic center.

The common element of these previous efforts is that all have attempted to maintain Kennedy Plaza as the single downtown focal point for bus transit service. However, at some point, downtowns become too big to effectively terminate all downtown transit service at one location. Providence, if it has not already outgrown Kennedy Plaza, is moving in that direction. The ongoing transformation of Providence is spreading downtown activity further from the historic city center, and beyond walking distance from Kennedy Plaza. Growing commuter and intercity rail ridership has increased the volume of passengers arriving via rail at the Providence MBTA/Amtrak station. The relocation of Interstate I-195 has opened new land for development in the Jewelry District south of downtown, where Brown and Johnson & Wales universities continue to expand.

PURPOSE AND NEED OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the introduction of additional downtown Providence transit terminals could improve service for existing riders, enhance downtown accessibility and mobility, and resolve operational passenger experience issues at Kennedy Plaza.

When cities outgrow a single transit hub, the most common approach is to identify additional transit centers and to integrate bus operations in a manner that expands service coverage and improves overall transit service. Buses can be routed to pass through and serve more than one transit center, providing passengers with more convenient access to new locations and better distributing volumes of bus traffic. This study will evaluate whether this approach could both improve transit service in downtown Providence and resolve growing operational challenges at Kennedy Plaza. New transit centers will be considered in the vicinity of the Providence Train Station and in the Jewelry District.

Introducing new transit centers and terminals may also offer secondary benefits of meeting desired community development goals, including the revitalization of the Kennedy Plaza/Burnside Park area, providing better connections to Providence Station to support continued growth of commuter and intercity rail ridership in Rhode Island, and meeting City goals for desired development on vacant parcels in the the Station area and Jewelry District.

Two sites have been identified for assessment as potential new transit terminals. Both are publicly owned, located adjacent to major activity centers, and identified as available for development. At the Train Station, the study will consider the use of Parcel 6, a publicly-owned site designated for development by the Capital Center District Commission. Parcel 6 is adjacent to the Station and bounded by the rail right-of-way, Smith Street, Canal Street and Park Row. In the Jewelry District, the study will consider the use of the Garrahy Courthouse parking lot between Friendship and Clifford Streets. This lot is owned by the State and concurrently being evaluated for development of a public parking garage by a committee appointed by the General Assembly.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This project has the following primary goals:

1. Improve service for RIPTA riders and attract new riders
2. Address operational and security challenges at Kennedy Plaza
3. Develop cost-effective solutions
4. Support local community development goals

For each of these goals, there are a number of more specific objectives, which are detailed below.

1. IMPROVE SERVICE FOR RIPTA RIDERS AND ATTRACT NEW RIDERS

RIPTA's fundamental mission is to provide the best possible service to its riders, and specific objectives with respect to this project are:

- A. Improve access throughout downtown
- B. Provide comfortable passenger facilities
- C. Reduce passenger travel times
- D. Improve bus and intermodal connections, and minimize the need to transfer

2. ADDRESS OPERATIONAL AND SECURITY CHALLENGES AT KENNEDY PLAZA

The degree to which transit changes can facilitate the revitalization of Kennedy Plaza are generally related to the degree to which the transit presence at Kennedy Plaza can be reduced, and are:

- A. Provide a safe and secure environment
- B. Reduce passenger volumes at Kennedy Plaza
- C. Reduce bus berth requirements at Kennedy Plaza/around Burnside Park
- D. Reduce bus volumes at Kennedy Plaza

3. DEVELOP A FUNDABLE PROJECT

It is essential to develop improvements that RIPTA will be able to build and operate:

- A. Minimize operating cost increases
- B. Ensure reasonable capital costs
- C. Support the opportunity for funding partnerships

4. SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Finally, the project aims to support other local community development goals and encourage continued growth of the rail ridership market in Rhode Island.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The downtown transit improvements developed as part of this study will be evaluated using criteria that are tied to the goals and objectives presented above and presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

Objective	Evaluation Criteria
1. IMPROVE SERVICE FOR RIPTA RIDERS AND ATTRACT NEW RIDERS	
A. Improve access throughout downtown	• Number of jobs within ¼ mile of transit centers • Number of residents within ¼ mile of transit centers • Number of routes and bus trips within walking distance (or ¼ mile) of major activity centers • Number of daily bus routes, trips and estimated passengers connecting to each transit center per day
B. Provide comfortable passenger facilities	• Description of proposed facilities • Qualitative assessment of proposed facilities • Qualitative assessment of pedestrian access and egress
C. Reduce passenger travel times	• Walk times from major transit centers or transit emphasis corridors to major downtown activity centers
D. Improve bus and intermodal connections, and minimize transfers	• Number of bus routes, trips and passengers directly connecting to each transit center per day • Number of routes, trips and passengers that would directly connect with future streetcar service • Number of routes, trips and passengers that would directly connect to MBTA commuter rail/Amtrak • Qualitative assessment of convenience of connections at transit centers and other locations
2. ADDRESS OPERATIONAL AND SECURITY CHALLENGES AT KENNEDY PLAZA	
A. Provide a safe and secure environment	• RIPTA Security Dept. assessment of expected conditions
B. Reduce passenger volumes at Kennedy Plaza	• Change in passengers volumes at Kennedy Plaza
C. Reduce bus berth requirements at Kennedy Plaza/ Burnside Park	• Number of required berths • Location of berths
D. Reduce bus volumes at Kennedy Plaza	• Number of buses serving Kennedy Plaza • Vehicle time at Kennedy Plaza
3. DEVELOP A FUNDABLE PROJECT	
A. Minimize operating cost increases	• Change in bus operating costs • Change in facility operating costs
B. Ensure reasonable capital costs	• Total capital costs
C. Provide opportunity for funding partnerships	• Potential for additional public partners in the development of new transit centers • Potential for public-private partnerships
4. SUPPORT COMMUNITY GOALS	
A. Support local development goals and encourage continued growth of the rail market in RI	• Attractiveness of space for mixed use activity in Kennedy Plaza • Number of bus routes, trips and passengers connecting to Providence station • Consistency with local plans (City of Providence, Capital Center Commission and I-195 Commission)