



2020

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Delivering Excellence During a Time of Adversity

Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority

“

Our biggest asset is our employees.
A healthy workforce and the well-being
of our workforce is the most paramount issue.

– **Scott Avedisian, CEO**
Rhode Island Public Transit Authority



COVID-19

a global health crisis

As 2019 drew to a close, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) was poised for increased success in the coming year. It was on track financially with its annual budget, and it was continuing to build ridership.

Several exciting new initiatives were launching soon – including a high-frequency bus corridor in the heart of downtown Providence and a convenient, cashless payment option called Wave. Then, on March 3, 2020, news broke that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Rhode Island.

Our State moved quickly to put public health safety measures in place, and Rhode Islanders began changing their daily habits, with many able to work from home. The health crisis had a swift and marked impact on RIPTA. Typically, RIPTA transports approximately 58,000 people a day. In April 2020, daily ridership declined to its lowest point of the year, dropping 75 percent to about 15,000 passenger trips on weekdays.

RIPTA's leadership recognized the fact that many of our passengers are frontline workers who needed public transportation to get to jobs at hospitals, nursing homes, supermarkets and more. The Authority also knew that other passengers were relying on RIPTA to get them to the grocery store, pharmacy, doctor's appointment or other essential services. As a result, RIPTA made the decision not to cut service, and it has continued to run regular service levels throughout the pandemic. This makes RIPTA one of the few transit providers or agencies in the country that did not reduce service during this public health crisis.

RIPTA is committed staying the course. It will do so with continued support of our state, sound management and the assistance provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Through the work of Rhode Island's Congressional Delegation, the CARES Act appropriated approximately \$91.2 million in emergency funding to the transit authority.



Safety first

As the first cases of COVID-19 were documented in the state, RIPTA went to work to protect the health and safety of its workforce, its passengers and the public. Currently, about a majority of the Authority's administrative workforce is working from home part or full time.

While RIPTA's roughly 200 fixed-route buses are routinely cleaned every night, the onset of COVID-19 meant that they also had to be disinfected. Buses are now cleaned and disinfected nightly using EPA-approved and CDC-endorsed disinfectants. We currently use foggers that disperse hypochlorous acid (HOCl) which we produce on site.

RIPTA is following the guidance of our State leadership, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the CDC to ensure that the most current and appropriate public safety measures are being taken. Buses currently operate at about two-thirds capacity to make social distancing easier. Also, RIPTA deploys extra vehicles whenever possible to try to prevent time delays from someone not being able to board a bus that is at the designated capacity.

Bus operators are required to wear face cloth coverings. Cotton masks provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are routinely distributed to the drivers and are available for passengers who do not have one when they board. This fall, RIPTA began the installation of barriers to help enclose the driver area, giving them more protection.

A video highlighting some of the many safety measures RIPTA has implemented during the pandemic is available at [RIPTA.com/COVID-19](https://www.ripta.com/COVID-19).

Lending a hand: **community** initiatives in times of crisis

Since the onset of the pandemic, RIPTA has been sensitive to the fact that, despite the challenges it is facing, it has resources to help our State and its communities. In the spring, RIPTA began reaching out to a number of state agencies and social service organizations to see how we could be of assistance during this time of need. A variety of meaningful partnerships has resulted.



Office of Healthy Aging

31,000 meals delivered

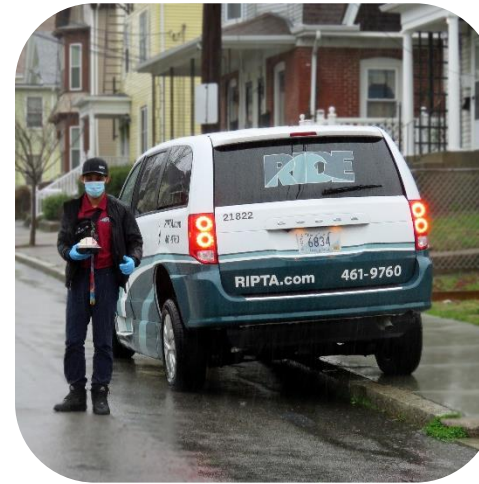
Working with the State Office of Healthy Aging, RIPTA used paratransit vehicles to deliver donated meals to community sites throughout the State.



Little Roady

1,557 trips

When the State's private contractor for the autonomous vehicle project in Providence ceased service because of COVID-19 concerns, RIPTA stepped in to cover the loop route, ensuring no riders were left stranded.



Meals on Wheels

6,724 trips

Ride vehicles were deployed to help Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island make their deliveries as more people were not able to leave their homes.



Honeywell

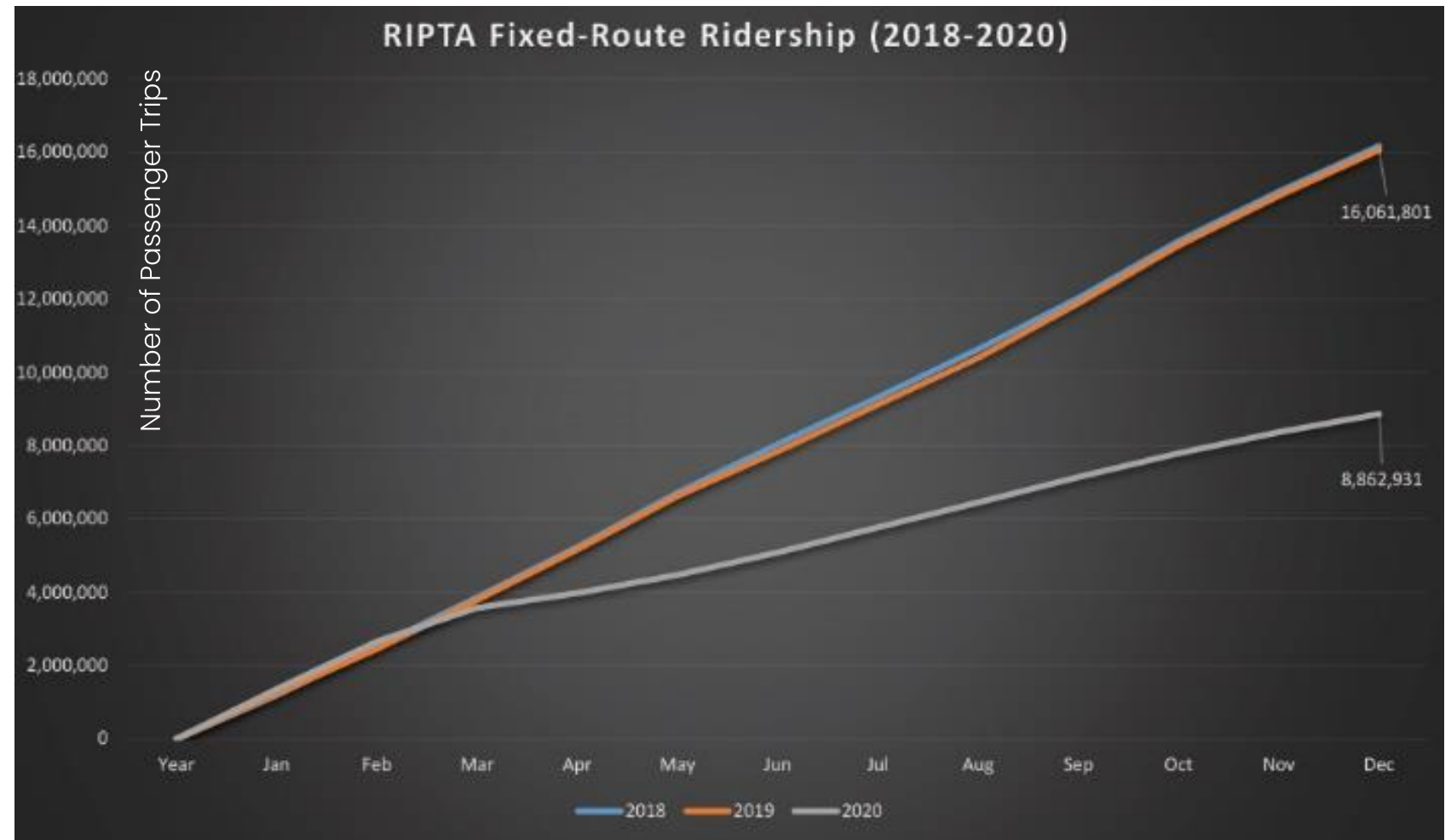
15,365 trips

After Honeywell retrofitted its Smithfield manufacturing site to begin production of much-needed N95 protective masks, RIPTA assisted by providing transportation to some of their employees.

IMPACT ON RIDERSHIP

This chart shows the impact of COVID-19 on fixed-route service.

Like other transit authorities nationwide, RIPTA has experienced a marked drop in ridership – not only on its regular fixed-route service, but also in RIde, our paratransit division. Our RIde division uses smaller vehicles to provide public transportation to people who have disabilities that prevent them from using our regular service. On a typical day, we average more than 1,000 passenger trips with RIde. On March 30, 2020 – less than three weeks after the state’s first COVID-19 case – there were 135 passenger trips with RIde for that day. The ridership drop was just as precipitous with our regular, fixed-route service. In April 2020, our lowest ridership month to date, about 404,400 passenger trips were taken – down about 70 percent from April 2019. The adjacent chart shows monthly ridership numbers for our fixed-route service which provides 57 bus routes across the state.

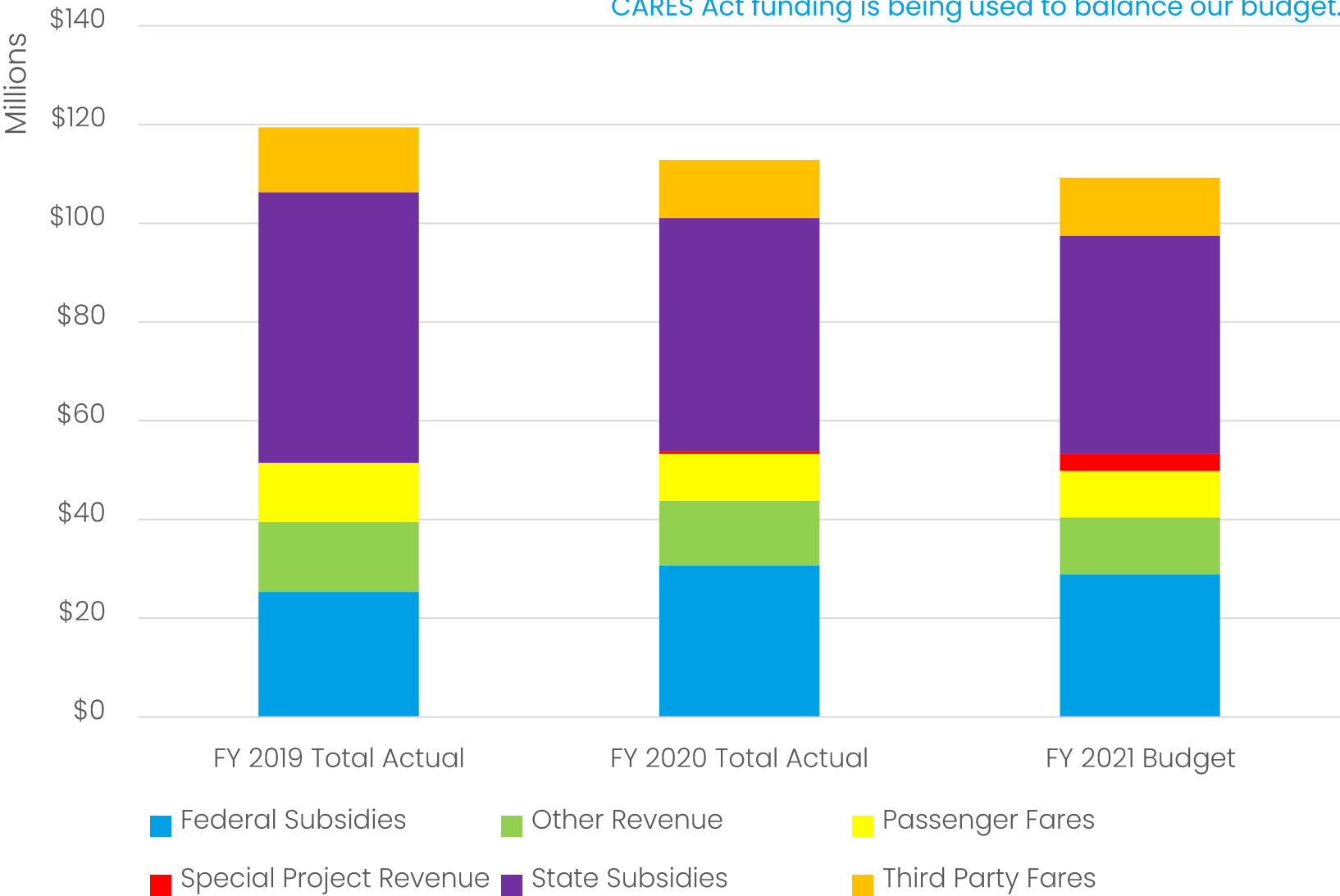


FINANCIAL IMPACT

This chart shows current revenue loss projections and how CARES Act funding is being used to balance our budget.

The health crisis has meant a double hit for RIPTA’s finances. Fare revenue has dropped as ridership declined. At the same time, the transit authority faces additional costs related to the acquisition of personal protective equipment, increased cleaning and sanitation efforts, computer equipment for remote working, and more. Revenues that have decreased include State subsidies (derived from DMV fees and gas tax) and federal subsidies for our ADA-compliant paratransit services.

RIPTA is projecting losses of \$70-74 million through FY 2025. The transit industry in general is expecting long-term impacts from COVID-19 as people have changed their travel patterns or continue remote working. The Rhode Island Department of Revenue estimated earlier this year that RIPTA can expect to see a long-term decline in gas tax revenue, with an annual loss rate of about \$4.4 million.



Rebuilding ridership

Public transit will be dealing with the impact of the global pandemic for years to come. In the meantime, RIPTA is using every opportunity possible to rebuild ridership and attract new riders. We continue to modify routes based on passenger needs and offer new initiatives. Below is a list of some of the newer services that we are excited about and will work to promote. Many of these projects were launched or in the works before the pandemic.





Rebuilding **ridership**

Downtown Transit Connector (DTC)

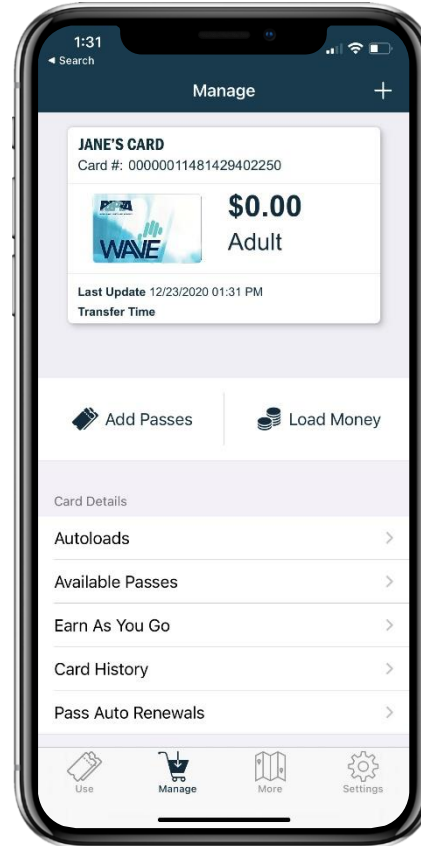
The DTC is a high-frequency bus corridor that runs through downtown Providence from Rhode Island Hospital to the Providence Train Station. Seven different RIPTA routes are funneled through the corridor to give passengers five-minute bus frequency in both directions. The corridor primarily runs along Eddy and Dorrance Streets, bringing this enhanced service to the city's rapidly growing Innovation District. Its features include bus-only travel lanes, enhanced bus shelters with real-time digital information boards, special traffic signals for buses to help them move through traffic, and more. Service began running along the corridor in January 2020, and ridership numbers are rebounding faster than the systemwide average.

Rebuilding ridership with Wave

Smart Fare Technology

In September, RIPTA launched a smart fare collection system called 'Wave' that lets passengers pay their bus fare, or purchase passes, online through their own secure, private accounts. Then they can board the bus with just a tap of their own Wave card or by scanning the Wave app, which is available for both Apple and Android mobile devices. Passengers can buy just what they want, when they want it. People who would like to try Wave, but do not have access to an online account, can get the smart cards directly from RIPTA and add value to their account by contacting RIPTA's Customer Service team or through a growing network of retail locations.

RIPTA has been working on Wave for nearly two years, and spent several months conducting pilot testing with passenger volunteers. Currently, more than 6,000 people have signed up for the new option.



Earn As You Go

The new system will save participating passengers money with its "Earn As You Go," which automatically calculates when someone has taken enough trips to earn a daily or monthly pass. That means that even if someone is not able to pay \$70 up front for a monthly pass, they can still get the pass benefit: Once they have spent \$70 in fares in a given calendar month, they will not be charged for any travel the rest of that calendar month.



Wave.RIPTA.com

Rebuilding ridership with new bus service

RIPTA launched two new bus routes in 2019 – the Quonset Express (Qx) pilot program in January and Route 24L in August.

The Qx offers limited-stop, commuter service connecting employees in Pawtucket, Providence and Cranston to businesses in the Quonset Business Park in North Kingstown. RIPTA is expanding the number of locations that are served within the park in early 2021.

RIPTA also introduced Route 24L, an express route from Newport to Providence via Fall River with limited stops.



Quonset Express

This pilot service is free of charge, with federal grant money and a contribution from the Quonset Development Corporation. With more than 200 businesses and over 12,000 employees, Quonset is a worthwhile transit investment.



Route 24L

This route includes a stop at the Louis D. Pettine Transportation Center in Fall River, giving passengers a connection to Massachusetts's Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA).



Using technology to better serve the public

RIPTA's staff continues to research technological developments that can improve the efficiency of our operations and help us better serve the public. Technology is helping us find ways to make public transportation more accessible to the public – whether it is real-time travel information or improved communications using different platforms.

Central Falls Pilot Program

Transit On Demand Study

New RIPTA.com

Transit Signal Priority

Software Upgrades

Using technology to better serve the public

Central Falls Pilot Program

With the help of a federal grant, RIPTA will be launching a pilot program in partnership with the City of Central Falls that will test the effectiveness of 'geofencing' technology in the public transportation industry. The pilot program will develop software to create a virtual boundary around Central Falls. That software will have the ability to communicate with the new Wave smart cards and mobile apps and determine if someone is boarding a bus in Central Falls. If so, they will be allowed to board for free during the pilot program. The goal of the research is to determine the effectiveness of geofencing for use in targeted marketing partnerships that would promote and increase the use of public transit. For instance, a city's business district might want to partner with RIPTA in the future to offer free transportation within a certain area in order to make retailers there more attractive to customers.

Transit Signal Priority

Transit Signal Priority (TSP) allows buses to extend green lights or shorten red lights at intersections with traffic signals. (Unlike similar technology used by emergency vehicles, buses cannot override a red light.). It is designed to help buses move more effectively through traffic. RIPTA first began using the technology in 2014 along its rapid-service R-Line, which runs from the Cranston-Providence border into Pawtucket. We have seen how this technology helps buses stay on schedule and provide passengers with improved travel times. The technology has evolved and improved since RIPTA first started using it and we are now updating intersections along the R-Line and expanding use of the technology to several other busy routes across the state – including our new Downtown Transit Connector in Providence.

Using technology to better serve the public

New RIPTA.com

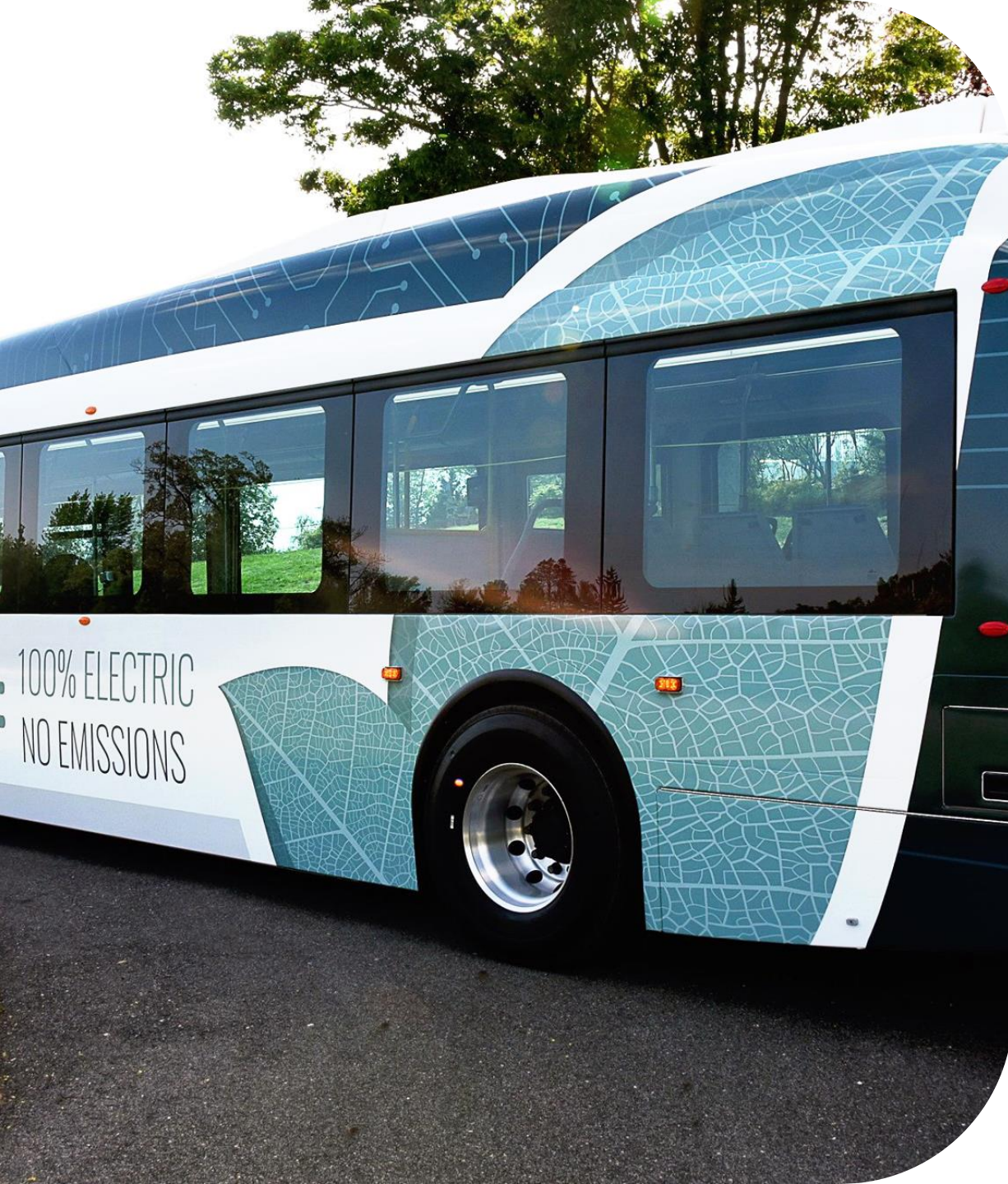
In June 2020, RIPTA launched an updated version of its website. It features eye-catching graphics and updated, easy-to-use customer tools such as our trip planner, real-time bus arrival and departure information, and service alerts for detours. We introduced a live chat feature to give passengers an additional way to interact with our Customer Service team. Since the onset of COVID-19 we also implemented an online application process for our no-fare program for eligible low-income senior citizens and low-income persons with disabilities.

Software Upgrades

For many years, RIPTA has been using HASTUS, one of the leading transportation industry software products, as an efficient tool in the creation of schedules and timetables. This year we are building on that strong foundation and upgrading our HASTUS systems to include other software modules to better manage day-to-day operations – including our real-time travel feed for passengers, payroll, driver assignments, and fleet management.

Mobility on Demand Study

RIPTA is aware of the popularity of mobility-on-demand services such as Uber or Lyft, and their impact on transit ridership. We look at this challenge as an opportunity to learn from these private models and to see how some of their operating procedures can be applied to the public transportation we provide. RIPTA's Flex service (offered in some communities with no or little fixed-route service) already encompasses some similar features since Flex passengers are allowed to schedule pick-up and drop-off points within their designated zones. Recognizing the need to further incorporate service aspects used by Uber and Lyft where possible, RIPTA is conducting a mobility-on-demand assessment with the assistance of AECOM consulting.



Protecting our environment and battling climate change

Public transportation lessens energy consumption and harmful carbon emissions, by reducing the miles traveled by single-occupancy vehicles. These established facts become even more critical when looked at in the context of climate change. By attracting more riders, RIPTA will benefit the environment, help ease traffic congestion, and encourage more efficient land use. We are also committed to making an even greater impact by moving toward a zero-emission fleet.

Key Climate Change Discussions

RIPTA is part of an internal working group on climate change assembled by the Governor. This group brings key State agencies – including the Department of Environmental Management, the Office of Energy Resources, and the Department of Health – together to discuss the impact of climate change on our state and to explore steps that can be taken to mitigate it. RIPTA is also an active participant in the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI). TCI is a collaboration of 13 neighboring states working to reduce carbon emissions in the transportation sector.

Fleet electrification pilot



2019

Pilot program launch

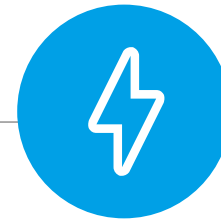
RIPTA has been operating three leased electric buses on various routes since September 2019, as part of a pilot program.



2020

Research

The data collected is helping RIPTA learn about how electric buses perform on our routes and in our climate. We are also learning more about the charging infrastructure electric vehicles require, and how that affects us operationally and economically.



2021

Acquisition

RIPTA is in the process of procuring 17 zero-emission, electric buses. The acquisition will be funded by the roughly \$14.5 million in Volkswagen settlement funds that the State earmarked for transit use in 2018 in order to improve air quality in Rhode Island. Some of the funding was used for the pilot program.

RIPTA as a strong public partner

RIPTA continues to work with partner agencies and community groups to tackle the many areas where transportation plays a key role.



One-Call One-Click Information Center Research Project

RIPTA has found that there is great interest in Rhode Island for the development of a centralized information hub for transportation information – including RIPTA services, Medicaid services, and other service options. This type of centralized information hub is typically called a “one-call, one-click” resource because people can access the transportation information they need with just one phone call or by clicking on one website. A growing number of states and counties across the country are introducing this type of resource.

With the assistance of a federal grant and working with partner agencies, RIPTA is researching the feasibility of such a resource for our State. The focus is on the transportation needs of older residents and persons with mobility challenges, but such a resource will benefit the general public. To read more about one-call, one-click resource centers, visit <https://www.ripta.com/projects/one-call-one-click-planning-study/>



Coordinating Council on Health and Human Services Transportation

RIPTA provides staff support and guidance to the Rhode Island Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council. The Council works in consultation with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to improve the coordination of transportation assistance programs in our state and also to facilitate inter-agency and public communication about these programs.



Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)

In keeping with state law, RIPTA works with an advisory committee, ATAC, which provides input on the accessibility of all transportation services and transportation-related issues affecting persons with disabilities. The majority of ATAC members are persons with disabilities who use RIPTA services.

Capital budget

RIPTA has \$48.5 million in capital projects planned for FY 2021, with federal funds comprising 73 percent of the expenditures. RIPTA's capital projects can cover a wide range, from maintaining the facilities needed to support its fleet to new endeavors that will enhance the travel experience for passengers. Key projects include:



New Transit Hub

This new Pawtucket/Central Falls transit hub, which will be less than a half mile from a new commuter rail station being constructed, will strengthen the bus-rail connections in our State while also offering passengers a new and improved station. Currently, the downtown Pawtucket hub is the second busiest hub in RIPTA's system with more than 4,000 passenger trips daily. The project cost is approximately \$7 million.



East Side Tunnel

First opened to trolleys in 1914, this concrete tunnel is an important part of the state's transit infrastructure. It cuts beneath the steep grade of College Hill and approximately 1,600 buses travel through it weekly, as well as fire and rescue vehicles. Although structurally sound, it is in need of repair. The project cost is estimated at \$9.5 million and federal funding will cover much of the work.



Chafee Maintenance Facility

The 107,000-square-foot John H. Chafee Maintenance Facility is critical to daily operations. This is where buses are repaired and receive regular, requisite maintenance. The facility is in need of \$6.6 million in renovation work which will include new vehicle lifts, roof repairs, air quality units and a new bus wash bay. Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) vehicles are also repaired here.

Planning for the future

As RIPTA looks ahead, we will carry forward many of the values that helped us serve the public so well during the unprecedented challenges of 2020. We will be moving forward into 2021 with a bold vision for the future, thanks to the completion of our Transit Master Plan – the state’s first ever master planning document for public transportation.

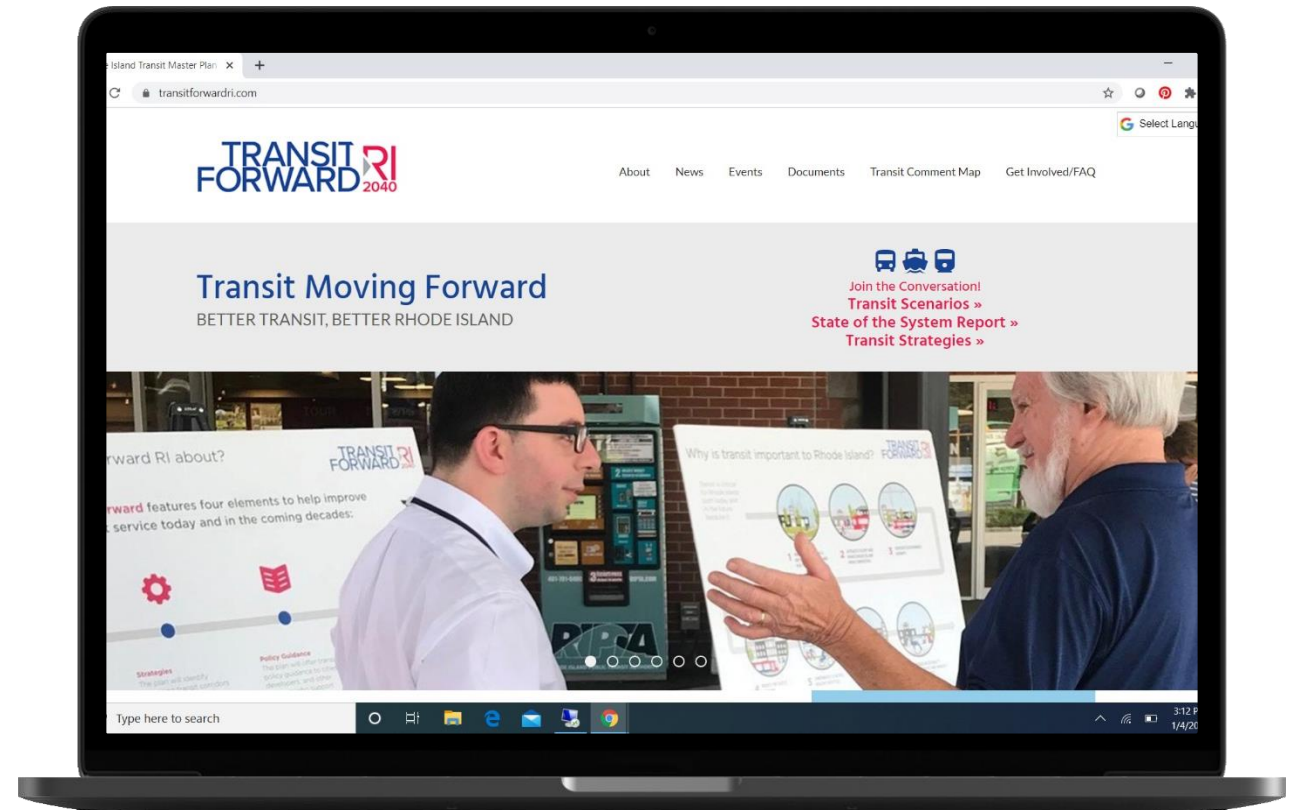
The plan, called Transit Forward RI, is a visionary look at the future of public transportation in Rhode Island – including bus and rail services. The projects and investments outlined in the plan will improve the quality of life for the public, help protect our environment, attract new businesses, and help existing businesses and industries thrive.

Transit Forward RI

Adopted by the State Planning Council in December 2020, it looks to improve public transportation services on several fronts, including:

- Improving existing services with longer hours and more frequent trips
- Expanding services into new areas
- Developing higher capacity transit with more rapid transit routes and possibly the introduction of light rail
- Creating improved access to transit
- Continuing to make transit easier to use by incorporating new technologies and products that benefit passengers

To read more about the plan and the extensive public engagement that has been conducted over the past couple of years, please visit <https://transitforwardri.com>.





Rhode Island Public Transit Authority

Board of directors

Normand Benoit, Chairman

Joshua Brumberger, Vice Chair

Michelle Wilcox, Treasurer

Maureen Martin, Secretary

Peter Alviti

Robert Kells

Jose Rosario



2020

Driving 2021 Forward