

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

RIPTA board room, 705 Elmwood Avenue, Providence, RI
Thursday, November 4, 2021
MEETING MINUTES

Participants: Rui Cabral (Chair), Benny Bergantino, Justin Cartwright, Barbara Henry, Barry Humphries, Dona Lombardi (support), Janice Musco, Grace Pires, Heather Schey, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa.

By phone: Kerry Clark, Monica Dzialo

RIPTA Staff: Steve Fiorentini, Nate Hannon, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Yolanda Kuiee, Greg Nordin, Joe Solomon.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Rui Cabral called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:09 PM.

Angie Stabile motioned to approve the minutes from the October 7, 2021 meeting. Grace Pires seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

II. ATAC Election Planning

- By-laws review and vote: ATAC by-laws were updated to incorporate changes to the articles on membership and officers. As presented, ATAC membership must be established during the meeting that immediately precedes the officer election. Officers shall be elected at the last meeting, every other year, with terms beginning the following January. Angie Stabile motioned to accept the changes to the by-laws, and Grace Pires seconded the motion. All were in favor.
- ATAC membership: Joelle Kanter read the list of ATAC members who meet the criteria outlined in the by-laws, which require attendance at 5 of the past 12 meetings. Current members are: Robert Beauregard, Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Liza Burkin, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Frank Cummings, Vincent DeJesus, Laurie Diorio, Monica Dzialo, Elisabeth Hubbard, Grace Pires, Heather Schey, Angelina Stabile, Lisa Stamp, and Mark Susa. New officers must be selected from this group.

Monica Dzialo asked a question about the travel protocols outlined in RIPTA's COVID screening sheet. Rui Cabral confirmed the rules and said that several groups are lobbying to amend a section of the state's open meeting law to allow virtual public meetings to

continue. When the legislative session starts, he also expects bills to be introduced on this topic.

III. RIPTA Reports

- Key performance indicators: Joe Solomon shared RIde data from September 2021. During that month, RIde provided 12,134 van trips and 643 taxi trips for 18,831 passengers (including personal care attendants). Of the 3,833 customers approved to use RIde, 797 were active over a 90 day period. On-time RIde performance was at 92.6% for the month. RIde also provided 8 trips to vaccine appointments.

Joelle also shared fixed route on-time performance data over a period of four months. On-time performance was 81.8% in July, 81.5% in August, 79.1% in September, and 78.6% in October.

- Project updates:
 - RIPTA is currently reviewing proposals for the update of the state's Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan, which should begin early next year. RIPTA staff also continues to work on website updates recommended by the One-Call/One-Click study.
 - Greg Nordin announced that RIPTA's board approved service changes that ATAC discussed last month, including expanded evening service on several routes, which will go into effect on January 15th.
 - He described a new Route 16, which will cover Bald Hill Road, Route 2, East Greenwich, and Quonset. (Postponed to June 2022). As designed, it will eventually travel along Universal Boulevard to Market Basket. It should run every 55 minutes, and in the long term, it should connect CCRI's Warwick hub to the URI campus.
 - The Woonsocket Flex zone will operate 7 days a week and will expand to Manville.
 - In the spring, a new Flex zone will make trips inside the Quonset Business Park, complementing RIPTA's QX express service.
 - RIPTA also awarded a contract for its first electric bus charging station on the R-Line, which should be fully electric by the end of next year.
 - Greg also mentioned the Mobility on Demand study, which aims to make RIPTA's Flex services more responsive to customers by allowing them to make same-day trip reservations. The study recommends launching a pilot project in West Warwick and potentially expanding into other zones. He added that Reveal, the RIde software provider, offers a same day booking module, but its contract will expire soon, and RIPTA plans to procure new scheduling software within the next year.

- RIPTA continues to work with two software vendors—Init and Reveal—to integrate Wave into the paratransit system. When RIPTA issues an RFP for a new paratransit software vendor, Wave integration will be a requirement.

IV. Discussion

- General Q&A
 - Janice Musco requested a stop on Route 59X at a shelter on George Washington Highway. She said that it can be difficult to cross the street to wait for the Route 54 bus when there's snow on the ground.
 - As RIPTA considers changing software vendors, Kerry Clark wants to ensure that all apps are accessible with screen readers and voice over technology. Greg suggested that RIPTA could involve ATAC members in the software selection process.
 - Angie Stabile reported that Ride tickets are not available at several Shaw's and Stop & Shops in and around East Providence. Greg said that the stores have agreed to keep Ride tickets in stock as part of the transition to Wave, and he will ask them to contact RIPTA when their supplies run low. One customer also recommended taking pictures of RIPTA fare products with their phones to show store employees images of the products they're asking for. Nate Hannon said that customers can continue ordering Ride tickets through RIPTA's Finance Department, and Customer Service can help to facilitate this.
 - The group discussed the application process for RIPTA's Free and Reduced Fare Bus Pass Program. Applications are available on RIPTA's website and may be downloaded, printed, and mailed in or submitted directly online. Applications are no longer accepted in person, but people may call RIPTA customer service to request print copies. Nate Hannon described the disability verification piece, which requires a Medicare card with a disability code, an SSI or SSDI award letter, a signed disability certification letter from a treating physician, or a veterans' disability certification letter. For the income piece, RIPTA will accept an IRS tax transcript, an SSI award letter, or a Medicaid notice proving that the individual falls below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

In the past, more than a dozen organizations, including the RI Office of Rehabilitation Services, were able to authorize an individual's disability for the bus pass program, but that option has been discontinued. Today, primary care providers and licensed social workers are authorized to verify that information. Anyone who needs help with the bus pass application process can contact Steve Fiorentini at (401) 784-9500 x2012.

- RIPTA Service Feedback
 - The group responded positively to plans for service expansion, which support the

Transit Master Plan goals. These changes give riders better access to employment, medical appointments, and other services, and increase opportunities for participation in community activities during evening hours.

- The group discussed the status of Ride paratransit vehicles, recognizing that the vans purchased in 2011 and 2012 will be retired soon. They expressed concern about the 2019 vans, describing them as small and uncomfortable for passengers in wheelchairs. They also have a high step, which makes it difficult for passengers to get in. RIPTA staff will confirm that Ride records indicate which types of wheelchairs and mobility devices customers use, allowing the vans to be deployed in specific ways.
- The group asked RIPTA to consult with ATAC before purchasing new vehicles. Greg described several significant challenges, noting that most paratransit vehicles use gas, but RIPTA doesn't have fueling capacity for gas, and instead, uses diesel fuel. Supply chain issues have also pushed paratransit vehicle procurement back a year, and the agency has experienced staffing shortages and challenges with recruiting drivers and mechanics. Heather Schey strongly suggested that RIPTA should approach ATAC at the beginning of the procurement process instead of offering committee members a vehicle demonstration after the vehicles arrive. Greg Nordin will invite John Chadwick, RIPTA's Director of Procurement and Inventory, to talk to the committee about the procurement process and get feedback. ATAC members may be able to assist with updating vehicle specs to meet their needs.

The group agreed to schedule the next meeting for two hours.

The meeting adjourned at 5:38 PM.