

## ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, May 5, 2022  
MEETING MINUTES

**Participants:** Heather Schey (Chair), Robert Beauregard, Jean Bousquet, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Frank Cummings, Vince DeJesus, Laurie Diorio, Monica Dzialo, Devin Guirales, Elisabeth Hubbard, Heidi Showstead, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa.

**RIPTA Staff:** Brooks Almonte, James Canty, Chris Durand, Julia Evelyn, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Chris McKenna, Greg Nordin, Joe Solomon.

**Consultant:** Anne Galbraith

### I. Call to Order

Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order on Zoom at 4:02 PM. Zoom participation guidelines followed.

**II. VOTE:** Frank Cummings motioned to approve the minutes from the March 3, 2022 ATAC meeting. Robert Beauregard seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

### III. RIPTA Project Updates

- Coordinated Plan: Anne Galbraith, a member of the consulting team, shared an update on the RI Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan. She referenced recommendations from the current Coordinated Plan, adopted in 2018, and asked the committee for additional feedback on some questions that were discussed during 4 public listening sessions in late April/early May.

Suggestions from ATAC meeting participants included:

- Expanding Flex zones, improving promotion of Flex services, and offering reservations on demand.
- Providing Ride transportation to recreational areas.
- Giving people opportunities to pay more for paratransit trips outside the ADA corridor.
- Ensuring that transfers happen safely between RIPTA fixed-route service and other modes.
- Creating a pilot circular system in the East Bay to take people to beaches, parks, and shopping.
- Reducing the cost for low-income paratransit riders.

The next step is to report on the project to the RI Human Services Transportation

Coordinating Council. Additional work includes updating an inventory of available services, analyzing needs and gaps, and reviewing best practices. Another round of listening sessions will be planned in July to focus on prioritizing recommendations, and in September, the draft plan should be ready for review.

- Transportation survey: Joelle Kanter shared that the RI Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council launched an anonymous online survey in April for anyone who utilizes RIPTA services, the state's Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) program, Elderly Transportation Program (ETP), train service, or municipal shuttles. The results will help the Coordinating Council understand how current services meet Rhode Islanders' needs and identify areas for improvement. The link is: <https://tinyurl.com/HSTCCSurvey>.
- Dorrance Street Transit Center: Greg Nordin announced that RIPTA is looking to build a new transit center in downtown Providence to largely replace Kennedy Plaza. This is an opportunity to improve transfers, provide a better passenger experience, and move operations indoors. RIPTA is currently building its project team to begin the financial analysis and engineering work, and will soon start working on plans to form a rider advisory committee. Heather Schey confirmed that ATAC wants to engage with RIPTA to improve the accessibility of amenities and services at the new hub.
- RIPTA service changes: Greg announced that the following service changes will go into effect next month, noting that Ride mirrors fixed route service:
  - Some routes on the Downtown Transit Connector will be retimed to reflect real conditions.
  - RIPTA is introducing a new route, 16, from Bald Hill Road in Warwick to Route 2, East Greenwich, and Quonset, providing front door service to Market Basket before continuing south. This route will also expand the ADA corridor to medical offices in East Greenwich.
  - Another new route, 23, will travel from CCRI Warwick to the Center of New England shopping center in Coventry.
  - Routes 13 and 29 will be recalibrated slightly.
  - Route 49 on Camp Street in Providence will be discontinued. High frequency service is available nearby on Route 1 and the R-Line.
  - Route 67 on Bellevue Avenue in Newport has a planned summer expansion, offering 15 minute weekend frequency.
  - Newport also has a new route, 68, going from the North End to Gateway, America's Cup, First Beach, and the Dept. of Human Services office in Middletown.
  - Also, Route 54 service to Woonsocket began deviating a few trips in January to serve one company.
  - Route 65x with express service to Wakefield has extended to Salt Pond Plaza.

- Key performance indicators:  
Joe Solomon shared RIdE statistics for several months in a report, but he highlighted February and March 2022 figures in his meeting presentation. Total paratransit trips were 12,158 in February and 12,677 in March. On-time performance also increased from 93.6% in February to 95% in March. RIdE had 804 active riders in February and 902 in March.
- Presentation: Chris Durand, RIPTA's Chief Financial Officer  
In his role as CFO, Chris Durand oversees RIPTA's accounting, procurement, and inventory control functions. His departments are responsible for setting up contracts, paying employees, and handling budget reporting, development, and analysis. RIPTA's annual budget is \$126 million, and about 70% is dedicated to labor-related expenses. RIPTA is committed to operating efficiently and will continue seeking sustainable funding in order to grow service.

Chris described RIPTA's federal funding, noting that the agency receives about \$1.1 million per year in Section 5310 funding that supports paratransit vehicle service. Annual paratransit fleet maintenance costs about \$3 million. He suggested that ATAC members can assist RIPTA by brainstorming about funding and telling the General Assembly how the agency's financial issues impact riders.

#### **IV. Understanding Transit Needs: Riders with Visual Impairments**

ATAC chairperson Heather Schey introduced the first in a series of presentations on different disabilities related to mobility, led by Monica Dzialo. Monica described several visual impairments, such as totally blind (TB) and no light perception (NLP). She said that some people can see although they may have field loss or diabetic retinopathy which causes them to lose vision throughout the day.

People with visual impairments have functional limitations for travel such as not being able to find shelters, read schedules, understand signs, see route numbers, or walk long distances. She believes that individuals with disabilities must be creative to function within a visual world, and paratransit service is essential for dropping passengers off safely.

Other ATAC members shared their own experiences riding transit. Angie Stabile mentioned that people with visual impairments have challenges with using Kennedy Plaza on their own, and Kerry Clark added that he is grateful for audible announcements on board buses. Monica also credited the mobility specialists like Jean Bousquet who teach people how to navigate bus stops.

#### **V. Discussion**

- In response to a question about Wave RIdE integration, Greg Nordin said that RIPTA is actively working with two software providers, InIt and Reveal. It should be in place in a few months.
- A participant asked whether RIPTA's consumer information is safe. Greg reported that

RIPTA is working on data compliance and will only keep the most critical information. For example, once RIdE applications are processed, the information is deleted.

- One meeting participant described an experience where a driver passed a deaf/blind passenger who was waiting for the bus. He also noted that some stops in grassy areas do not have a slated curb to help get passengers to level ground.
- A RIdE customer requested notification through the Reveal app when RIPTA changes the mode for a trip. This passenger also noted that RIPTA customer service had a full voicemail so she couldn't leave a message.
- Another RIdE customer said that he tried booking a trip online, but he got stuck. RIPTA staff clarified that the RIdE Reveal app may be used to check on trip status, but the trip booking feature is not currently available.
- Kerry Clark also said that he has to log into the RIdE Reveal app frequently because of a security feature.
- Liz Hubbard, Disability Rights RI, asked whether those who are blind consider the Wave app to be usable or completely accessible. To help answer the question, Rui Cabral defined something as accessible if it can be used with minimal training, and usable if it may be used but is challenging.
- Other announcements: Jean Bousquet, Heather Schey, and Joelle Kanter are planning a Jane's Walk on Saturday afternoon, May 7<sup>th</sup> in front of the Dunkin' Donuts Center. Participants will have an opportunity to be occluded and discuss their experience.

The meeting adjourned at 5:57 PM.