

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, October 6, 2022
MEETING MINUTES

Participants: Robert Beauregard, Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Tracy Clossick, Grant Dulgarian, Monica Dzialo (Vice-chairperson), Deanne Gagne, Devin Guirales, Barry Humphries, Grace Pires, Heather Schey (Chairperson), Heidi Showstead, Ed Soares, Angelina Stabile, Mark Susa

RIPTA Staff: James Canty, Julia Evelyn, Sarah Ingle, Nate Hannon, Joelle Kanter, Greg Nordin, Joe Solomon

Call to Order: Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:07 PM.

RIPTA Update: Fall Service Changes

Greg Nordin, RIPTA's chief of strategic planning, described service changes that will go into effect on October 22nd, reducing service frequency to help some routes run closer to schedule. This short-term contraction is in response to RIPTA's workforce crisis coming out of the pandemic. Since service span won't be affected, this won't impact paratransit service. RIPTA plans to add staff in Kennedy Plaza during the week of the changes. The agency will also advocate for more sustainable state funding to help expand service and increase driver pay.

Attendance and Approval of Minutes

Introductions followed the update on fall service changes. Angelina Stabile then motioned to approve the minutes from the September 1, 2022 ATAC meeting. Robert Beauregard seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

RIPTA Project Updates: East Side Bus Tunnel

Julia Evelyn, RIPTA, shared an update on the East Side Bus Tunnel improvement project, which was introduced at the June ATAC meeting. Consultants Geoffrey Morrison-Logan and Jill Cahoon, AECOM, joined as well. The consulting team previously described the goal of enhancing the curbside experience to make stops at both tunnel entrances safe and comfortable for pedestrians and riders. They are now focusing on bus operations, bus alignment, and crosswalk access.

They presented three alternatives for both stations—on the east side on Thayer Street and on the west side on North Main Street at Waterman—and gave side-by-side comparisons. On the east side, options have: both stops on ramp, one on Thayer, or both on Thayer. On the west side, options have: both stops on ramp, one on North Main, or a contraflow concept.

ATAC participants expressed concerns about slopes at the ramps. They also suggested taking weather conditions and lighting into account when planning improvements, stressing the importance of having

steady foot traffic and good public visibility at night. Meeting participants liked the east side alternative showing both bus stops on Thayer Street and the contraflow concept on the west side.

When asked about the project schedule, Jim Canty, RIPTA, said that engineers are addressing internal tunnel repairs including drainage and lighting. The plan is to close the tunnel in summer 2024 to complete all work and minimize disruption. Buses will be rerouted during construction.

Presentation: Understanding Transit Needs

Deanne Gagne described her experience using RIde. She was born with Cerebral Palsy and also has a shoulder injury that requires support. She can get onto RIde vans by herself, but she needs help getting ready. She has been using RIde since 1992, before it was operated by RIPTA, and she likes having one flat rate for all trips. She also appreciates that RIde allows her to travel where she needs to go, and it's particularly important for getting to work. In most cases, she finds the drivers considerate and mindful, but she expressed some concerns about getting strapped into her wheelchair, and said that bumps can be problematic. She also said that ATAC members used to be involved in driver trainings, which was beneficial.

Other RIPTA Updates:

- Key performance indicators:
 - Joelle Kanter shared fixed-route on time performance data for August 2022. 394,368 time points were sampled, and 7.5% of trips were early, 81.3% were on time, and 11.2% were late.
 - Joe Solomon shared RIde data from May through August 2022. There were 923 active riders in May, and 920 in August. Total passenger ridership (including personal care attendants) was 21,524 in May and 22,549 in August. RIde met its on-time performance goal of 93%, providing 95% of trips on-time in May and 93% in August.
- Paratransit service area map: Julia is working on a visual display of the paratransit service area. The online map will differentiate between service areas on weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays and will have an option for users to search by address. She requested input from the committee on coloration and contrast, and heard several comments. People would like to have information available by text, and they hope to have hours of operation included. They also commented that brighter colors with more contrast are easier for people to interpret.
- Statewide paratransit expansion study: Joelle said that RIPTA is performing a study in response to a Rhode Island General Assembly request to evaluate the needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities traveling outside the current paratransit service area. At the end of the year, RIPTA will produce a final report outlining alternatives, estimating the number of individuals potentially served and the resources needed to support them. Last month, RIPTA hosted two virtual meetings to introduce the study and seek public input about locations people would like paratransit service to go to, and priorities, such as universal fare, unlimited trips, and unlimited trip purpose.
- Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan: The Coordinated Plan is updated every 5 years and focuses on Section 5310 funding, which addresses the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults and people with low incomes. Since the last meeting, the team has focused on prioritizing strategies including mobility

management, training, and vehicles and infrastructure. They have also continued researching best practices. The draft plan should be ready for review soon, and another update will follow at the November ATAC meeting.

- Wave/RIde integration: RIde will share a detailed update soon.

Discussion:

- Devin Guirales asked for an update on the hub project. He rides route 72 and route 73 to the R-Line, and he expressed concerns about winter travel. He noted that the transportation challenges have been difficult for people going to school and morning appointments. He is also interested in getting a copy of the new brochure that outlines service changes.
- Ed Soares asked about plans to expand service on route 14. Greg said that RIPTA has a long-term goal to increase service from hourly to every 30 minutes, but that would require doubling the current investment.
- Bob Beauregard noted that two individuals who use white canes were dropped off at a meeting at Insight recently, and drivers didn't assist them. Jean Bousquet noted that some people might not want assistance. Monica Dzialo suggested that people should always ask before offering help.
- Several participants expressed interest in coordinating with Uber and Lyft for paratransit-type trips, describing pilot programs in Massachusetts.
- Jean Bousquet requested information about bus stop signage. She also pointed out that stop announcements were not made inside a bus on route 1 today. RIPTA staff advised her to contact customer service. When the system doesn't work, drivers are expected to make the announcements.
- Kerry Clark also said that he has experienced some announcements not working outside buses.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.