



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 27, 2023
1:30 p.m.
269 Melrose Street, Providence
Transportation Board Room

Members Present: Peter Alviti, Board Chair; Robert Kells, Board Vice Chair; Michelle Wilcox, Board Treasurer; Patrick Crowley, Board Secretary; James Leach; and Normand Benoit.

Absent Members: Marcy Reyes and Heather Schey.

Also Present: Scott Avedisian, CEO; Edward Pare III Esq., Board Counsel; Christopher Durand, Chief Financial Officer; Jamie Pereira, Chief of Security; Steven Colantuono, Chief Legal Counsel; Kathy Nadeau, Chief Human Resources Officer; members of RIPTA's staff; and members of the public.

Call to Order: Mr. Alviti called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m., indicating that quorum was present.

Agenda Item 1: **To Consider for Approval the Draft Regular Meeting Minutes of August 23, 2023.**

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to approve the minutes of the August 23, 2023 meeting. Ms. Wilcox seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Alviti; Mr. Kells; Mr. Leach; and Mr. Benoit.

Agenda Item 2: **Public Comment**

1. Patricia Raub:

- Ms. Raub says RI Transit Riders have responded to calls to increase marketing and publicity for RIPTA by devising wording for signs on highway displays and electronic boards.
- Ms. Raub adds that a few weeks ago, she was pleased to see safety and security improvements in Kennedy Plaza. However, the recent incident involving police and students sets back Kennedy Plaza's image.
- Ms. Raub also describes an incident the day before when she tried boarding a bus along with a person who was not allowed to board. Supervisors and police were involved. She believes RIPTA should put more pressure on the city to increase its police presence in the plaza.

2. Simona KvietkauskYTE

- Ms. KvietkauskYTE encourages RIPTA to extend the free fare pilot program for another six months, expressing that it helps a lot of people, especially in colder weather.

3. Harmoney Kimberly

- Ms. Kimberly says that many organizations that provide transportation assistance to clients only distribute 1-hour passes or day passes.
- She suggests that RIPTA should reconsider providing free public transportation.

4. Cecilia Nunes

- Ms. Nunes requests an extension of the pilot program to help people go shopping, get groceries, go to doctors' appointments, and get medicine.

5. Mark Rowland

- Mr. Rowland says the pilot program helps people get to employment, job training and doctors' appointments. He urges RIPTA to consider reinstating the program or funding it again.

6. Jogo Enos

- Mr. Enos feels that the RIPTA pilot passes are beneficial for those who need to go to doctors' appointments and pick up prescriptions. He wants to see the program extended.

7. Joe Cole

- Mr. Cole speaks on behalf of passengers that cannot get to the meeting.
- Mr. Cole acknowledges that the free R-Line pilot will stop in a few days, and that many passengers cannot afford transportation. He believes that when a pilot program exceeds the expectations it was designed for, it should continue, but it did not. He recognizes that \$2.5 million was allocated for the program, and he believes more state funding is available since R-Line ridership is high between Providence and Pawtucket.
- Mr. Cole also expresses that many people do not understand how to use the Wave card or app, and instead, they pay \$2 in cash per trip segment. He says that RIPTA spends a lot of money on electric buses for the R-Line, and instead, should help people who need it.
- Mr. Cole also states that buses should be sanitized at night for Covid. When drivers get sick, there is absenteeism.

8. Christopher Plouffe

- Mr. Plouffe says that the free pilot program helps many people experiencing health challenges.

9. Randall Rose

- Mr. Rose says that approval of financial statements is on the agenda, but the statements were not sent out with the board packets. He describes this as part of a pattern and believes the agency needs more transparency and broader involvement.

- Mr. Rose expresses concern about the Dorrance Street project and urges RIPTA to involve riders and advocates in contract negotiations.
- Mr. Rose also reiterates that riders who ask questions during public comment should expect to receive answers. He has requested an accurate figure identifying the percentage of Rhode Islanders who use RIPTA once a week or once a month. He also wants to understand the effect of the free R-Line pilot on RIPTA ridership.
- Mr. Rose states that RIPTA has been telling the press that locations other than Dorrance are being considered for a bus hub, but there is no transparency. He says the public needs to know about them to help identify problems early in the process.
- Mr. Rose announces that Dally Dixon is organizing a March for RIPTA funding on Monday, October 9th at 1 PM at the State House Plaza to advocate for increasing funding to address the fiscal cliff, continuing the free R-Line pilot, and offering drivers better pay.

10. KC

- KC says that the free pilot program was one of the most wonderful things for people who really needed it, allowing them to put their lives together and reclaim their foundations. KC highlights the good the program has done and the lives it has helped to elevate.

11. Grant Dulgarian

- Mr. Dulgarian references Barry Schiller's recent recommendation to give riders a free month in April in honor of Earth Day. Although he likes the idea, he suggests limiting the period to a free week when schools are on vacation.
- Mr. Dulgarian says that for the last three months of the year, Ecology Action of Rhode Island wants to offer one hundred \$10 restaurant gift cards to RIPTA's longest serving drivers.
- Mr. Dulgarian thanks the individuals who responded to his request for suggestions last month. One of the comments related to cost efficiency. He suggests that RIPTA try a low-cost alternative to relocating buses from Kennedy Plaza by moving bus shelters from Fulton Street to Washington Street, limiting traffic on Washington Street to buses, and opening Fulton Street in both directions to vehicular traffic.

Agenda Item 3: CEO Report

Scott Avedisian, RIPTA's CEO, presents the CEO report. Topics included in his update are:

1. RIPTA At A Glance
2. RIPTA Q&A
3. RIPTA In The News
4. Commendations

Agenda Item 4: Request for Approval: FY23 Financial Statements

Erica Olobri, CPA, Marcum, LLP, presents draft financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2023, along with the audit results and required completion procedures. The audited financial

statements are in quality review while the state completes its final review. Ms. Olobri expresses a clean unmodified opinion.

RIPTA Chief Financial Officer Christopher Durand answers questions regarding the audit schedule. The Board vote to approve FY23 financial statements is deferred until a special meeting before the state's submission deadline in October.

Agenda Item 5: Request for Approval: Review and Approval of Revised Board of Directors Bylaws

Mr. Benoit suggests an amendment on page 7 in Article 5, section 5a, to allow written notice of each meeting to be given to each member of RIPTA via email or by depositing the same in the United States mail.

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to approve the revised Board of Directors Bylaws incorporating the amendment as articulated by Mr. Benoit. Mr. Leach seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Kells; Ms. Wilcox; Mr. Benoit; and Mr. Alviti.

Mr. Alviti also mentions his interest in establishing a RIPTA performance and finance oversight committee and recommends adding this item to the agenda at the special meeting in October.

Agenda Item 6: Request for Approval: Free Fare Pilot Program

Sarah Ingle, RIPTA Director of Planning, and Nate Hannon, RIPTA Customer Service Operations Administration, present on the free fare pilot program for 775 low-income participants. While Title VI requires the pilot program to close out after 6 months on September 30, 2023, RIPTA staff recommends a one-month grace period through October 31, 2023 to enable partners to communicate with passholders about the close and finalize research. Staff also recommends returning to the Board with a specific proposal for how to continue providing a benefit to riders.

Mr. Benoit notes that RIPTA has 6 months of data on the pilot program that should be analyzed to make conclusions. He recommends extending the pilot for one month and using that time to create another program, informed by the analysis, that the Board can vote on.

Following a discussion, Mr. Benoit makes a motion to extend the program for one month, conduct the analysis, and come up with a new program. Ms. Wilcox seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Leach; Mr. Crowley; Mr. Alviti; and Mr. Kells.

Agenda Item 7: Adjournment – 3:30 p.m.

Mr. Alviti references a discussion item in the CEO report about RIPTA contributions to charitable organizations, and considers whether the Board should provide consent. He recommends adding this to the special meeting agenda as well.

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to adjourn. Ms. Wilcox seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Leach; Mr. Benoit; Mr. Alviti; and Mr. Kells.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Crowley, Secretary