

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, September 7, 2023

MEETING MINUTES

Participants (Teams and in-person): Heather Schey (chairperson), Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Tracy Clossick, Carney Coopwood, Frank Cummings, Casey Gartland, Asmae Hamdi, Aniko Laszlo, Bianca Mintor, Nicola Mukome, Grace Pires, Linda Shepard Salzer, Heidi Showstead, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa, Katherine Tennett.

RIPTA: James Canty, Marc Ebuña, Nate Hannon, Joelle Kanter, Maribeth Pacillo, Joe Solomon, Nicole Yee.

Call to Order: Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:05 PM.

Aniko Laszlo, MBTA Director of Coordinated Mobility, led a presentation from the agency's System-Wide Accessibility Department. She described the origins of the MBTA Mobility Center concept, beginning with the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. In response to a class action lawsuit in the early 2000s, the department was created in 2007, covering design review, accessibility training, rider engagement, emergency preparedness policies, and other services.

In 2022, MBTA re-envisioned its mobility services, bringing the customer-facing Office of Transportation Access, the RIDE program, and travel training services together as a one stop shop, giving customers easy access to their services. Bianca Mintor, MBTA Travel Training Manager, said that the travel training department handles technical training, application assistance, RIDE assessments, and interviews. The RIDE Flex program has a contract with Uber and Lyft, allowing eligible, enrolled customers to schedule trips in advance by phone, online, or through an app. These trips cost the same as RIDE trips and may include wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Linda Shepard Salzer gave an overview of MBTA travel training services and accessibility features on buses, with a focus on the new commuter rail station at the Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center. Information is available in alternative formats and languages including audible options. Linda highlighted several trip planning tools and apps including M Ticket, pay-by-phone for parking, Google maps, the Transit app, and Mass Ride Match. She also explained how MBTA staff can assist customers with reduced fare program applications, renewals, and requests for replacement cards.

MBTA offers individual travel training for seniors and people with disabilities, and staff typically schedules 5 sessions per client, repeating the information or visiting multiple destinations. Group training may also be held on site at the training center, or offsite at schools, senior centers, or vocational programs.

Linda described the layout of the Pawtucket-Central Falls transit center, including platform

locations, bus berths, ramps, and elevator locations. Questions followed the presentation.

Jean Bousquet, an Orientation and Mobility Specialist for the RI Office of Rehabilitation Services, recently led a training session in Mansfield. She had a good experience overall but said that the Charlie Card machine wasn't tactile for her client who is legally blind and doesn't use Braille. Linda noted that the machine has an audio feature marked by an ear symbol, and riders can press 5 on a metal keypad, which is differentiated by a raised dot. Linda also said that riders traveling with sighted guides may tap their Charlie Cards twice.

A rider noted that the new transit center seems more complicated than expected and has an extremely long ramp on the side heading from Boston to Pawtucket. Linda said that passengers can take an elevator or stairs next to the pedestrian crossover to get to the Pine Street side.

Marc Ebuña, RIPTA, added that the MBTA website was redesigned to be very readable, and the Commuter Rail page is useful for screen readers: <https://www.mbta.com/schedules/commuter-rail>.

Another participant who is legally blind and uses a wheelchair asked about which reduced fare program to qualify for. Linda said that the program for people who are legally blind gives riders free trips while the Transportation Access Pass (TAP) program charges half fare. She also said that many stations have T ambassadors, and the agency is adding more.

Following the discussion, meeting attendees introduced themselves on Teams and in-person in the board room at RIPTA's office, 705 Elmwood Avenue. James Canty, RIPTA's Executive Director of Project Management, announced his promotion to Deputy Chief, and Marc Ebuña announced that he was leaving RIPTA for a new role at MBTA.

Approval of minutes: Jean Bousquet made a motion to accept the minutes of the August 3, 2023 ATAC meeting with a modification to add titles and organization names within notes from the discussion as appropriate. Carney Coopwood seconded the motion. Heidi Showstead abstained, and all others were in favor. Minutes were approved.

RIPTA updates:

- Joelle Kanter, RIPTA planner, shared highlights from an email that Chris McKenna, Ride, provided in advance on the Ride/Wave integration. Two software providers have been working on a solution for taxi trips but encountered challenges during testing. They need further development to correct the issues. They are also trying to add functionality to allow customers to pay their fare with a digital wallet on their phones and with plastic Wave cards.
- Joelle also mentioned that work will begin soon on the FTA-funded travel training network.
- Work is underway on the statewide bus stop inventory and will continue throughout the next few months.
- Marc added that work on fixed-route bus destination signs is complete, and they all conform with mixed texts at full height, double stacked for consistency. The messaging indicates the direction the bus is heading and features route numbers and final destinations where routes end.

Discussion:

- A rider asked a question about Google maps, which showed bus delays in Boston. Marc explained that Google maps and the Transit app should automatically adjust when trips are cancelled or delayed in Rhode Island too.
- A rider also asked about onboard audio announcements. If the system isn't working, drivers are expected to make announcements at those locations. Riders should contact customer service if there are problems.

The meeting adjourned at 5:37 PM.