

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, January 4, 2024

MEETING MINUTES

Participants (Teams and in-person): Chairperson Heather Schey, Jean Bousquet, Christopher Bove, Liza Burkin, Rui Cabral, Tracy Clossick, Frank Cummings, Grant Dulgarian, Rachel Ferreira, Casey Gartland, Tina Guenette, Mona Hussein, Ashley Kajileh, Melanie Lawhead, Olivia Lozier, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, David Schultz, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa, Katherine Tennett.

RIPTA: Ella Ackerman, Zachary Agush, James Canty, Steve Fiorentini, Nate Hannon, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Maribeth Pacillo, Jamie Pereira, Joe Solomon.

Call to Order: Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:02 PM.

Angie Stabile made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 7, 2023 ATAC meeting. Jean Bousquet seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Joelle Kanter, RIPTA, then announced the individuals considered ATAC members according to committee by-laws, based on attendance at least 5 of the last 12 meetings. They are Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Tracy Clossick, Frank Cummings, Laurie Diorio, Monica Dzialo, Casey Gartland, Devin Guirales, Crystal Martin, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, Heather Schey, Ed Soares, Angelina Stabile, Mark Susa, and Katie Tennett.

ATAC Vice-Chairperson Election:

ATAC members were asked to vote online before the meeting to elect the vice-chair. Rui Cabral received seven votes. Angie Stabile made a formal motion to elect Rui Cabral as vice-chair, and Jean Bousquet seconded. All were in favor, and Rui was elected as vice-chair.

RIPTA Customer Service Overview:

Nate Hannon, RIPTA customer service operations administrator, started by fielding questions from the committee about RIPTA's customer service department. A participant asked about the correct procedure for making a complaint about Ride service. Nate responded that Ride complaints are directed to Dianne Chappel who enters them into the AS400 system. Joe Solomon added that Dianne coordinates with the Ride supervisor to investigate complaints and then follows up with the client about the resolution. Participants expressed interest in hearing about Ride complaint metrics.

Nate then described roles of the RIPTA customer service team which includes staffing the front office at 705 Elmwood Avenue, a satellite location in Kennedy Plaza, and a seasonal office in Newport. The photo ID office is also open once a week, on Wednesdays, in Kennedy Plaza. Items left behind on fixed route buses and paratransit vehicles funnel to the Lost and Found office where customer service staff receives them, documents them, holds them for 30 days, and then disposes of them. Customer service also provides support to individual riders and institutions who have Wave accounts.

The RIPTA call center is currently open from 7 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, but due to staffing shortages, hours will temporarily change on January 16th to 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Photo ID staff also schedules road trips throughout the year, traveling to sites in different regions to assist people with applications for the senior/disabled bus pass program. RIPTA customer service sells RIdе tickets at 705 Elmwood Avenue. They are also available online and at Stop & Shop.

RIPTA Project Updates:

- RIdе Anywhere Pilot Program: This pilot had a soft launch this week, allowing qualified passengers with disabilities to request trips outside the current paratransit service area. At this point, the request process is the same as requesting a paratransit trip. Enrolled customers may call the RIdе office with the date, time, and locations for each trip segment. When RIPTA is able to supplement its resources by contracting with a vendor, the process will likely change. During the soft launch, the fare is \$4.00 one-way, but that may change as well.

A discussion followed.

- A participant asked whether RIdе would guarantee trips through the pilot program, and how RIdе would address capacity. Jamie Pereira, RIPTA Chief of Security and Operations, said that RIdе must cover its ADA paratransit service first and hopes to work with a vendor to supplement this service. Until then, RIdе will handle requests for trips or delegate them to taxi companies.
- A participant asked about the timeline for hiring a vendor. RIPTA is awaiting board authorization to enter a contract. The next board meeting is scheduled on January 25th, and the agenda has not been set yet.
- A rider asked when customers would know if the vendor cannot provide a requested trip. RIdе is accepting requests for trips now, but if RIPTA contracts with a vendor, RIdе customers would request their own trips directly through that company.
- A teacher mentioned that she plans to use the pilot service in the mornings to get to her school, so she would need to book the trips in advance.
- The pilot geography was discussed. The pilot is statewide, with one or more trip points required to be outside the current paratransit service area. Trips cannot originate or end out of state. Fort Adams in Newport should be included.
- The state budget dedicated \$500,000 of RIPTA's gas tax funds to the pilot. The program will end when the funds run out or after a year, whichever comes sooner.

- For trips that start or end just outside the paratransit service area, a suggestion was made to fund a limited portion of the trip cost from the pilot program. RIPTA may look into this further.
 - Questions were asked about service hours. This pilot gives RIPTA the opportunity to track demand during regular service hours and understand which trips can and cannot be fulfilled.
 - A suggestion was made to survey pilot participants once it ends.
 - A question was asked about whether the pilot would provide trips within the current paratransit service area after the adjacent bus route stops running. The pilot was designed to expand the geographic area served but not the span within the current service area. Geofencing the service area would prevent those trips from being accepted.
 - A participant wanted to know when RIPTA plans to announce the pilot. It is currently in the soft launch phase, and qualified participants may request trips.
 - Sarah Ingle, RIPTA's Executive Director of Planning, added that RIPTA's fiscal situation is serious and affects all services. The agency appreciates the group's advocacy and hopes for resources to meet the needs of people in the state.
- Travel training network: The consulting team led by Nelson\Nygaard presented on this project last month. RIPTA has a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to create a statewide travel training network that will coordinate activities and ensure that training materials remain up to date. The consulting team recommends new supporting materials, including a checklist of skills, and will review them with a working group later this month.

Discussion:

- A question was asked about new signs at the Community College of Rhode Island bus hub. Zachary Agush, RIPTA, said the signs have a newer design, but RIPTA still intends to do a comprehensive review, present concepts, and solicit feedback on them. RIPTA is exploring technologies for non-visual assistance.
- A participant wanted to know about testing the Wave payment system on RIde vehicles.
- A discussion followed about the reliability of the Reveal app, including incorrect trip time projections. Joe Solomon, RIde, confirmed that Reveal is supposed to update the app. Another rider asked whether she would be able to propose a new system. In Houston, she was able to book paratransit trips, track them, and pay for them online efficiently. The committee requested information about the Reveal contract, and they suggested prioritizing accurate time projections.
- A rider asked whether she could request a specific taxi company for standing orders. She said that it can be difficult to find some taxis when they wait outside her school.

- Another rider expressed concern about Ride vans having surveillance cameras without audio. She also asked whether taxis could have surveillance cameras installed. She mentioned specific situations when she was concerned about a driver smoking marijuana during breaks, a driver not wearing a seatbelt, and a taxi driver texting while driving.
- The group requested the names of taxi companies that currently contract with Ride.

The meeting adjourned at 5:36 PM.