

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, February 1, 2024
MEETING MINUTES

Participants (Teams and in-person): Chairperson Heather Schey, Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Christopher Bove, Rui Cabral, Tracy Clossick, Frank Cummings, Laurie Diorio, Grant Dulgarian, Rachel Ferreira, Casey Gartland, Zach Gauthier, Tina Guenette, Mona Hussein, Ashley Kajileh, Melanie Lawhead, Crystal Martin, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa, Katherine Tennett.

RIPTA: Zachary Agush, Steve Fiorentini, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Maribeth Pacillo, Joe Solomon, Nathan Watchous.

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

Frank Cummings made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 4, 2024 ATAC meeting. Angie Stabile seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Ride Updates:

Ride key performance indicators: Joe Solomon shared Ride data from July through December 2023. On-time performance ranged from 93.1% at the lowest point during this period in August up to 94.5% at the highest point in December. Total ridership was 16,572 in July; 18,456 in August; 18,115 in September; 19,062 in October; 15,910 in November; and 16,669 in December. Over these six months, vans provided 82,990 trips and taxis provided 21,794 trips. While 3,804 customers were approved for Ride, 1,301 riders actually used the service at least once.

Joe also provided a list of the taxi companies that currently contract with Ride: Anytime Anywhere, Christie Seymour Transportation, City Express Cab, Direct Medical, Kay Dolly Taxi, PRL Taxi, R&C Caring, Samkay Taxi, Sin-cere Transportation, and WT Betterdays Auto.

Participants asked questions about Ride capacity. Joe explained that Ride is able to field all required ADA trips and assigns taxis based on the distance or time required.

In response to a question about how Ride assigns taxis, Joe said that Ride knows the companies' schedules, number of vehicles, staffing levels, and areas where they operate. The Ride scheduling supervisor then determines when they're a good fit.

Another Ride customer then asked whether she can request a specific taxi company, noting how important it is for people with disabilities to have consistency. Others suggested that it would be helpful for the app to show which cab is assigned.

Ride van procurement: Nathan Watchous, RIPTA Finance, reported that RIPTA ordered 50 new

paratransit cutaway vans which should arrive sometime this year. RIPTA will share a more detailed update at a future meeting.

Reveal contract extension: RIPTA's Board of Directors approved an extension of the contract with MTM for the Reveal mobile app. It will maintain its current features, providing basic trip information, estimated time of arrivals, and trip cancelation options. By November 2024, the app will also enable customers to book and cancel trips directly and will provide real time updates on van locations before customers are picked up.

Meeting participants expressed concern about the length of time expected to develop these new features. They requested clarification on the estimated completion date for upgrades and asked about recourse if MTM doesn't meet expectations. They also want more accurate time projections for van arrivals and want to know how taxi information will be integrated.

Ride Anywhere Pilot Program: This statewide pilot program had a soft launch in January, providing eligible Ride customers with trips that have at least one segment outside the designated paratransit service area (3/4 mile from a bus route). Last fall, RIPTA staff issued a request for qualifications (RFQ) to vendors to supplement Ride service for this pilot and received two proposals. Since RIPTA's Board of Directors did not approve the staff recommendation to contract with Uber, Ride will continue providing pilot trips by request and will continue searching for new taxi companies to onboard.

A discussion followed:

- One participant said that RIPTA staff's recommended Uber subsidy was insufficient. He also said the program would be out of reach for many, as Uber has limited availability in South County, and some Uber drivers are known to turn down trips. He also suggested that it would have been beneficial to know details about Uber's proposal before the board meeting.
- Another participant suggested a different way to structure the proposal. He recommends giving riders in the metro core area vouchers for Uber and using Ride vehicles for trips outside the current service area.
- Another participant mentioned two companies that can provide pilot program trips, including one that employs CNAs to drive wheelchair accessible vehicles. She will share their contract information with the Ride team.

Ride ticket availability: RIPTA's website shows that Ride fare products are available at Stop & Shop and Eastside Marketplace, while Wave products are available at Shaw's.

RIPTA Project Updates:

- Pawtucket Central Falls Transit Center: A virtual public meeting was held yesterday on the proposed transit center passenger facility. Also, the push-to-talk buttons under the Connectpoint screens in the bus shelters are no longer functional and are being replaced.
- Travel training network: A working group will meet on Tuesday to review a checklist of skills and a mockup of training materials. The consulting team will come back to ATAC for feedback at a meeting later this spring.

Announcement: Public hearings on spring service adjustments

RIPTA staff announced the updated schedule for public hearings on proposed service changes due to staffing levels, on these dates at 12:30 PM and 5:30 PM:

- Monday, February 12, 2024: Barrington Public Library
- Tuesday, February 13, 2024: Pawtucket Public Library (later rescheduled)
- Wednesday, February 14, 2024: The Providence Foundation
- Thursday, February 15, 2024: Newport CCRI Auditorium
- Monday, February 19, 2024: URI Memorial Union, Room 360
- Wednesday, February 21, 2024: West Warwick Public Library

Joelle Kanter agreed to re-send the press release with more details about specific routes. Heather Schey also suggested sending written comments to marketing@ripta.com.

Discussion:

- A participant asked about the timeline for integrating Wave payment into the RIdе system. He would prefer to use a Wave card to pay for trips instead of individual RIdе tickets. Joelle said that RIPTA plans to announce when the system is ready for testing.
- A rider asked whether the Reveal app upgrades would allow more flexible timing for trip cancelations. Currently, the app doesn't let people cancel trips until the night before.
- Participants asked about the status of the RIdе Anywhere pilot. To date, all pilot trips have been completed unless the customer canceled. RIPTA staff is regrouping and will have more updates at the next meeting.
- A customer made several recommendations related to RIdе fare. She asked whether RIdе would consider offering a monthly pass for double the price of a fixed route pass, adding that the cost of daily RIdе trips to and from work can get expensive. She then suggested setting up a zone-based fare structure for RIdе, which Rhode Island had in place before restructuring about 20 years ago. As a follow up, questions were raised about the portion of RIdе's budget that can be covered by RIdе fare.

The meeting adjourned at 5:29 PM.