

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, March 7, 2024
MEETING MINUTES

Participants (Teams and in-person): Chairperson Heather Schey, Benny Bergantino, Liza Burkin, Vice-Chairperson Rui Cabral, Frank Cummings, Rachel Ferreira, Deanne Gagne, Zach Gauthier, Devin Guirales, Mona Hussein, Olivia Lozier, Crystal Martin, Richard Moreau, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile.

RIPTA: Ella Ackerman, Zachary Agush, James Canty, Joelle Kanter, Chris McKenna, Maribeth Pacillo, Joe Solomon, Nicole Yee.

Call to Order: Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:03 PM. She reminded participants about expectations for those who attend meetings in person: to bring personal care attendants for assistance with personal needs and to secure their own rides to and from meetings.

Frank Cummings made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 1, 2024 ATAC meeting with two changes: the addition of Grace Pires as a participant, and a mention of the discussion about testing Wave payment for RIdе trips. Angie Stabile seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Ride Updates:

Wave payment testing for the RIdе Program: Chris McKenna announced that a software account manager was recently on site to test Wave payment processing for RIdе trips. When the system launches, customers will call RIdе customer service agents to have their plastic or virtual Wave card number added to their profile. Once the CSA verifies that the Wave card is active, the customer may choose to draw down \$4 from their Wave account to pay for RIdе trips.

Chris requested help from ATAC with testing the new system and giving RIdе staff feedback before it rolls out to all riders. After the launch, riders will still be able to pay with cash and physical RIdе tickets on board. Drivers have been trained to process Wave payment. On RIdе vans, drivers will draw down funds immediately, while on contracted taxis, the process will happen through billing overnight. For taxi trips, riders will first choose Wave as their form of payment when they call RIdе to request a trip, and then they'll confirm that choice with their driver.

A discussion followed:

- Riders will only need to provide their Wave card number to RIdе customer service when they set it up in their profile.
- Riders may ask to change their payment type on board, and RIdе drivers can select other payment options on their tablets. If riders experience challenges with Wave payment during the testing period, Chris said that RIdе will support them and won't overcharge or deny trips.

- Customers can link credit cards to add fare value to their Wave cards. Credit card information will remain secure and will not be visible to RIPTA staff.
- Customers will be able to use the same Wave card to pay for fixed route bus and RId e trips.
- Questions were asked about using Wave to pay for multiple roundtrips on RId e in the same day and checking the card balance through the app. Others agreed that it would be helpful if RId e CSAs could also provide that information.
- Another rider requested receipts for Wave payments.
- In response to a question about accessibility, Chris said that the Wave app is ADA compliant, and other transit agencies have used similar versions. If riders have any issues, they should let RId e know.

Chris then recruited volunteers to help with testing and said that RIPTA would waive the \$5 card processing fee. He offered to mail plastic Wave cards to home addresses.

RId e Anywhere pilot program: This pilot program began in January, allowing RId e customers to request trips with at least one segment located outside the current paratransit service area. RIPTA’s Board of Directors did not approve the staff recommendation to supplement service by contracting with Uber, so RId e is providing trips through its own vehicles and contracted taxi companies.

Sixty-four unique riders have taken trips through the pilot program so far. The average trip costs \$40 to operate, although paratransit costs differ from standard taxi rates which are set by the RI Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Customers pay the standard RId e fare of \$4 per trip. RIPTA has budgeted \$500,000 for the pilot program and will report back to ATAC on the remaining funds.

If RIPTA moves forward with any proposed changes to fixed route service, paratransit customers would still be able to request trips anywhere in the state during the pilot period.

RIPTA Reports:

- East Side tunnel closure: Maribeth Pacillo reported that RIPTA is working on a project to make the East Side tunnel structurally sound. She shared maps showing bus detours while the tunnel remains closed to traffic from March 24th through the third week of September. Outbound buses will stop at Washington Place before North Main Street and travel on Waterman Street up to Thayer Street. Inbound buses will travel on Angell Street and will not pick up passengers at the bottom of the hill. At the top of the hill, passengers should use the outbound stop at Hope and Waterman and the inbound stop at Angell and Waterman.

ATAC participants stressed the importance of publicizing detours before spring events on campus. They also confirmed that these detours would not impact RId e service.

- Providence transit hub: James Canty said that RIPTA is working with Next Wave RI Partners, and the team will start evaluating several sites in Providence to build a secure indoor bus facility. More information will come within the next few months, and a public engagement

process will be announced soon. Committee participants requested RIPTA Board meeting agendas to track the project.

A discussion followed:

- A customer said that the Reveal app doesn't work consistently, so she doesn't know when trips are changed from taxis to paratransit vans or vice versa. She asked whether RIdE CSAs call customers when that happens. RIdE's policy is for dispatch staff to call customers, and some riders said that they have received those calls. The app should also be working better.
- Another customer said she would prefer to get texts about those changes. She doesn't like calling and waiting on the phone.
- One person thought the Android version of the Reveal app was no longer available in the Google Play store. However, another participant checked and found the app. Chris McKenna said it should be available but is not supported. He also described some of the new functions expected in the Reveal contract update, such as the ability to reserve trips directly through the app.
- A question was asked about sharing customer information with taxi companies. RIdE's policy is to protect customer privacy.
- Another customer noted long wait times of up to an hour when calling RIdE to reserve trips. These estimates are generated by an automatic system and may not be accurate, but they present a barrier to getting service. Chris will talk to RIPTA's IT team about this.
- A customer asked about the geographic restrictions for RIdE Anywhere pilot trips. They must be in state.
- Customers discussed the music while on hold with RIdE, with some recommending a change.

Announcement:

The Providence Streets Coalition encourages participation in budget hearings at the State House on Tuesdays and Thursdays through the end of June.

The meeting adjourned at 5:34 PM.