

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, June 6, 2024
MEETING MINUTES

In attendance: Chairperson Heather Schey, Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Christopher Bove, Myles Brawn-Husband, Liza Burkin, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Tracy Clossick, Frank Cummings, Laurie Diorio, Rachel Ferreira, Mark Fields, Deanne Gagne, Casey Gartland, Zachary Gauthier, Devin Guirales, Mona Hussein, Melanie Lawhead, Diane LeSuer, Nick Lett, Olivia Lozier, Crystal Martin, Richard Moreau, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa.

RIPTA: Alex Akinrimisi, Ella Ackerman, Zachary Agush, James Canty, Morgan Dethlefsen, Julia Evelyn, Steve Fiorentini, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Chris McKenna, Joseph Solomon.

Call to Order: Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:04 PM.

Joelle Kanter announced the list of active members in good standing based on their participation in five of the past twelve meetings, either online or in person: Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Liza Burkin, Rui Cabral, Kerry Clark, Tracy Clossick, Frank Cummings, Laurie Diorio, Rachel Ferreira, Casey Gartland, Crystal Martin, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, Heather Schey, Ed Soares, Angie Stabile, Mark Susa, Katherine Tennett.

Rui Cabral made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 2, 2024 meeting. Grace Pires seconded the motion, and all were in favor. Minutes were approved.

RIPTA Updates:

- Providence Transit Center: Sarah Ingle, RIPTA's executive director of planning, gave an update on the Providence Transit Center project. She thanked everyone who participated in public meetings and encouraged the group to stay involved. The team has many parties involved, and they are working hard to find the best solutions. Multiple sites are under consideration, and the team is still gathering information. A selection decision is likely in August or September.
- Safe Streets 4 All: Julia Evelyn, RIPTA planner, presented the Safe Streets 4 All project, a grant program funded through the Federal Highway Administration, taking a holistic approach to addressing deaths and serious injuries on roadways, making them safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. RIPTA applied for the grant on behalf of 32 municipalities in the state and is now coordinating with local community groups to complete safety action plans that will recommend small and large-scale improvements. Public engagement will happen over the summer through a statewide survey, newsletter, project website, and pop-up events. Once the plans for each town are completed in spring 2025, municipalities can apply

for future implementation funding. A statewide planning process is also underway to create a Statewide Planning Complete Streets Plan.

Following a discussion, Julia agreed to share a list of the participating towns and opportunities for engagement.

Other project updates:

- Principal Planner Zachary Agush said that RIPTA is in the process of looking at existing conditions for the Metro Connector High Capacity Transit Study. Public facing materials will be available later this summer.
- Deputy Chief of Planning and Project Management James Canty said that RIPTA received proposals to build a passenger facility at the Pawtucket Transit Center. Staff will request board approval at the end of June, and the building should be completed by September 2025.
- James added that demolition work is complete on the East Side bus tunnel, and it is expected to reopen in September. Meanwhile, RIPTA identified two temporary bus stops away from the construction site.
- The transit hub at the Community College of Rhode Island campus in Warwick is complete with the addition of four new shelters. Smart screens and push-to-talk buttons were delayed, and RIPTA is waiting to receive new glass for the shelters.
- Alex Akinrimisi joined RIPTA's project management team to focus on bus shelters. RIPTA is planning to install 18 additional shelters, and the team is working through environmental review, design, and ADA compliance before finalizing their locations. The Rosa Parks shelter should be completed in February 2025.

Ride Updates:

- Joe Solomon, Ride system performance analyst, shared data related to the Ride Anywhere pilot program. Most trips are provided by taxis, and Joe will adjust the Ride van data in response to questions raised at the meeting.

Going forward, the group asked for the following details to be included in reports:

- Combined data from taxis and Ride vans.
- Calculations on pilot program costs and times per trip.
- Forecasted program expenses.
- Number of trips that cannot be accommodated due to capacity limits.
- Towns where most trips originate and end.
- Number of new customers who enrolled in the Ride program due to the pilot.

Discussion:

- A participant noted that the quality of taxi service has decreased, and she asked how companies are vetted. Chris McKenna, Flex admin. superintendent, said that taxi companies must be registered with the RI Public Utilities Commission and compliant with regulations.

Ride confirms how long they've been in operation and whether they provide services for seniors or people with disabilities. Ride then sends a contract with extensive requirements including insurance and drug screening. Once it's signed, Ride establishes a start date with a low volume of trips. After showing that they can maintain timeliness and other customer service requirements, the service volume may increase.

- A participant expressed concerns about a specific company that called her repeatedly and asked to pick her up earlier than scheduled. In May, she also noticed a seatbelt that was cut. In response, Chris McKenna reminded Ride customers that taxis and vans shouldn't arrive before the pick-up window, and customers aren't required to board early. Complaints are aggregated, and companies with complaints get a low volume of trips. He added that safety concerns are serious and must be corrected, and he urged customers to let Ride know when they have concerns about vehicles or drivers.
- A customer with a visual impairment said that drivers often talk on their phones, and she doesn't know whether they're using Bluetooth. ATAC Chairperson Heather Schey said drivers should never take personal calls while driving passengers.
- Several participants expressed fear of backlash from drivers if they complain. Chris said he would bring these concerns to RIPTA's chief of security.
- Another rider added that people may be reluctant to complain because RIPTA doesn't follow through. For example, he said that one taxi company is still assigned many trips even though he's complained about drivers smoking and not picking him up on schedule.
- In response, Chris McKenna said he would follow up with taxi companies that were recommended.
- Jean Bousquet, RI Office of Rehabilitation Services, recently took a Ride trip with a client for training and suggested that RIPTA staff should do anonymous quality checks. Chris McKenna appreciated the recommendation and shared the audit form used by RIPTA street supervisors on Ride vehicles. They check whether pickups are timely, drop-offs are appropriate, drivers assist customers to and from the door, vehicles are clean and well maintained, and trip times are comparable to other services.
- Another participant suggested structural changes around RIPTA's responsiveness to complaints. He said that RIPTA needs accountability and should develop a policy that it can stick to and enforce.
- A Ride customer said she needs assistance with carrying her bag into a taxi, but some drivers won't help her. Ride will follow up to verify the policy but recognized the difficulty of enforcing it. A suggestion was made to add a note about this in her file.
- A RIPTA rider for over 15 years believes some parts of Ride service should be outsourced, and a partnership with Uber would work. Others acknowledged that RIPTA has been resistant to that approach.
- Sarah Ingle, RIPTA, mentioned that the RI Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan recommends establishing customer service standards for all transportation services in the state. She asked whether there was interest in pursuing this, noting that it would take time to train new providers to high standards.
- A request was made for a written update on Wave testing for the Ride program.
- The group then spoke about the Reveal app, with participants stating that they've missed

trips because of it. Chris McKenna said a new app with additional features will be available within this calendar year and will give customers the ability to book trips online. Participants expressed interest in helping with beta testing.

- A participant gave feedback on the first Providence Transit Center public meeting, noting that it wasn't very accessible for people with visual impairments.
- Heather Schey announced that RIPTA would not be cutting any routes.
- ATAC will not meet in July.

The meeting adjourned at 5:41 PM.