



RIPTA Public Hearing – Proposed Service Changes
Newport CCRI Auditorium, One John H. Chafee Blvd., Newport
Tuesday, July 29, 2025
5 PM – 6:30 PM

RIPTA staff in attendance: Christopher Durand, Cristy Raposo Perry, Ken Vinacco, John Chadwick, Greg Harris, Tim McKenna, Jane Williams, Christel Chavez and Nicky Mudryy

Elected Officials in attendance: Senator Louis P. DiPalma

On Tuesday, July 29, 2025, thirteen (13) members of the public attended. Ten (10) made oral comments. Two (2) provided written comments.

Chief Executive Officer Christopher Durand opened the hearing by giving an overview of RIPTA's financial situation and budget deficit. Principal Planner Tim McKenna followed with an overview of proposed service changes.

Oral comments were provided as follows:

Beth Ward, a Portsmouth resident, expressed that RIPTA is a wonderful service; she been using it since the 1980s and 1990s. As she grew older, she began riding it full-time. If free shuttle buses could be offered, then more could be done with the services currently under consideration for cuts. She stated that while minor delays are manageable as a rider, the elimination or significant reduction of service poses a much greater concern. It is a tragedy to consider cutting routes that, even if not used daily, remain essential to have as an option.

Senator Lou DiPalma thanked RIPTA and its CEO for attending. He spoke about the importance of securing additional funding, whether characterized as a need or a want, and emphasized that such funding should be part of the ongoing budget, rather than a one-time allocation as was the case last year. This year, the General Assembly went above the Governor's proposal, which did not include any funding for RIPTA. He emphasized that this funding must remain in the base budget and not be treated as a temporary solution.

Senator DiPalma raised concerns about proposed cuts to Routes 68 and Flex 231 in Middletown, which are critical to the local workforce and healthcare-related services—particularly in the lower end of Aquidneck Avenue and the corporate park area. He noted that the Middletown Town Administrator will be sending a formal letter to RIPTA, requesting that these services be considered for reduction rather than complete elimination, especially in areas expected to grow.

As an engineer, Senator DiPalma requested that RIPTA provide data and facts to substantiate each proposed service change. He stressed the importance of understanding the rationale behind each decision, asking RIPTA to clearly articulate the facts, context, and personnel-related costs associated with each route modification. He also emphasized the broader regional impact, noting that RIPTA already does not serve Little Compton, and with these cuts, Tiverton may lose service as well. Senator DiPalma urged RIPTA to reflect on what it truly means to be the state's mobility provider and to ensure that decisions about service changes reflect that responsibility.

Randall Rose, a Providence resident and member of the Kennedy Plaza Resilience Coalition, spoke against RIPTA's proposed service cuts, warning that they will severely impact seniors, workers, and students across the state. He emphasized that RIPTA does not want to make these cuts but was forced to do so after not receiving the additional \$10 million it had requested in the state budget.

Randall urged attendees not to direct blame at RIPTA, but instead to contact key state leaders such as Governor McKee, House Speaker Joe Shekarchi, and the Senate President, who are responsible for budget decisions. He stressed that public testimony alone is not enough and encouraged people to call their elected officials and ask others to do the same.

He also encouraged participation in advocacy groups like the Kennedy Plaza Resilience Coalition, Rhode Island Transit Riders, and Save RIPTA. Randall concluded by expressing disappointment that Senator Lou DiPalma had voted against adding the \$10 million to RIPTA's budget and called on him to reconsider his position.

Remi Lloyd, a Middletown resident, spoke about the serious implications of eliminating bus routes. They emphasized that such cuts would leave many people stuck in their homes and entire areas of the state, such as Tiverton, without access to public transit.

Remi noted the personal and statewide economic impacts, saying people will no longer be able to get to work or contribute to the economy in productive ways. She also raised concerns about general public safety, explaining that while she personally can drive, a stronger RIPTA system benefits everyone, especially those who cannot. Public transportation is vital for people who may not always be able to rely on driving.

John Flaherty, a Slatersville resident and longtime rider for over 20 years, thanked RIPTA for being present and acknowledged that no one wanted to be in the position of proposing service cuts. John lives in one of the northernmost parts of the state and has closely followed RIPTA's operations and the way state leaders have treated the agency over the years.

John stressed that Rhode Island should be expanding and enhancing RIPTA, not shrinking it because of the importance of transit to economic opportunity, housing production, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and overall mobility. He called this proposal the largest service cut in

RIPTA's 59-year history and noted that in his two decades of advocacy, he had never seen anything like it. He also pointed out that RIPTA faces a funding crisis nearly every year.

This instability stems from the failure of state leaders to provide RIPTA with reliable, sustainable funding. Relying on the gas tax is no longer viable, as more drivers switch to fuel-efficient and electric vehicles. RIPTA may be the most scrutinized public agency in the state. He referenced eight audits and reviews over the years that all concluded RIPTA runs an efficient system.

He pointed out that 51 cities across the country have passed ballot measures to improve and expand public transit, while Rhode Island's legislature did approve a permanent funding source for RIPTA but one that still left the agency with a \$17 million shortfall. There is a path forward. He referenced a June 25 interview in which Governor McKee said there was a method to transfer surplus funds and a portion of gas proceeds to RIPTA. He questioned why the Governor isn't flexing that authority now to completely solve RIPTA's funding issues.

The better RIPTA is, the more he would ride it. He added that many people who don't currently use RIPTA would do so if it offered timely, reliable service, a challenge driven in part by lack of frequency.

John concluded by urging the public to contact the Governor and ask him to flex the \$10 million to avert these cuts.

Joseph Bong, a Providence resident, shared personal stories to illustrate the impact RIPTA's proposed service cuts would have on everyday people. He spoke about a woman he knows who came to study at Johnson & Wales University. She relies on Route 33 to travel from Shaw's in Riverside to Providence. If the service changes take effect, it will be devastating for her; she will be stranded. He also shared the story of his uncle, who with reduced service, will be forced to walk more, often in sweltering heat or freezing cold, making his job significantly harder. He emphasized that the proposed service cuts will have widespread, harmful effects on the community, calling it deeply unfortunate that people are being put in this position.

Brice Loose, a Newport resident and URI Bay Campus employee, testified about the importance of Routes 14 and 64, which he regularly uses to commute to work along with colleagues. He noted that his children, who now attend the same school, often commute with him, and because there is no bikeway across the bridges, they rely on the bus before biking the remainder of the way. Brice expressed concern that the proposed service cuts fail to meet the needs of the current generation and ignore the needs of future ones. Speaking on behalf of the URI Bay Campus, he highlighted that Rhode Island voters recently approved a bond for a major redevelopment of the campus, including the construction of new buildings and an expected increase in student attendance. Route 64 is the only direct connection between the Bay Campus, Narragansett, and Kingston. Cutting service to that route, he warned, would severely undermine strategic investments made in the area and harm students who rely on the connection between campuses.

Brice expressed his frustration that they were once again gathered to advocate against service reductions. He emphasized that the existing RIPTA service enables people from all over the state to travel to Newport, Providence, and the beaches. Thanks to the service, individuals can work in Jamestown while living in Newport or be students on campus while residing in Newport. He concluded by thanking RIPTA for the outstanding job it has done throughout its history.

Fiona Chlebeczek, a Middletown resident, uses Route 60 to commute to work in Providence. While attending URI, she heavily relied on Route 64, which connects the graduate school to the main campus. She explained that Route 64 runs from Newport over the bridges, with the first bus arriving at 7:30 am to get students to 8 am classes on time. However, the last bus leaves too early, making it difficult for students attending night classes. The proposed service changes will significantly impact the students' access to education.

Derek Custodio, a North Kingstown resident who works at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, relies on the bus daily for his commute. The proposed reduction to just two trips per day would severely limit his ability to travel to and from work during an 8-hour shift. The eight-hour gap between the two round trips would have a significant negative impact on him and others in similar situations. This reduction will severely limit the ability to travel between URI campuses.

Stephen Whittaker, a Portsmouth resident who works at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, relies on Route 60 for his daily commute. The proposed reductions in frequency and service as incredibly inconvenient, making it increasingly difficult to use public transit in Rhode Island. He recounted that tonight he had to ask a friend to drive him because no buses were available to bring him home after the meeting. On Sunday, his friend waited 1.5 hours at Kennedy Plaza to catch a bus back to West Main, where service is alternating. Stephen warned that these reductions will make transit even more inconvenient and predicted that RIPTA will lose ridership as a result. He added that if the cuts go into effect, many people will find it easier to drive than to rely on public transportation.

With no further comments, the hearing ended at 6:30 PM.

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: Deerick Cystadro

Address: [REDACTED]

North Kingstown, RI 02852

Thank you for attending RIPTA's public hearing. Please use this sheet for any comments or questions you may have. Thank you.

Proposing service cuts is the wrong way to handle
this deficit. It hurts the people who rely on the bus.
Instead of cutting service it would be more beneficial
to motivate and ~~provide~~ provide incentive for non-
riders to use the bus more. Especially in Rhode Island,
where public transportation is limited.

Personally, I rely on Route 64 to get me to and from
The Naval Undersea Warfare Center, where I work. It
allows me to efficiently get ~~to~~ to and from work and
save on car and transportation costs which are
significant. I need ~~more~~ trips to and from ~~the~~ NUWC
that allow me to work an 8.5 hour work day in
between with flexibility ~~to~~ in the schedule!

Thank you.

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: Steven Whitaker

Address: [REDACTED]

Portsmouth, RI 02871

Thank you for attending RIPTA's public hearing. Please use this sheet for any comments or questions you may have. Thank you.

"Revenues have not kept up with expenses" - Arent all public services not profitable? Isn't that the point??

~~Is~~ ^{Is} this not directly an antithesis to the environmentally friendly work that our politicians are pushing for?

Washington Bridge repair is awarded a ⁴²⁷ ~~\$10M~~ contract but RIPTA can't get \$10M? ~~100%~~ of the budget.

5 of the routes are labeled as affecting "low income" persons, but, riding the bus, looks to be closer to 100% of buses have low income persons.

↑
A massive reduction in bus use for a small increase in private car ride speed.

Phil Eng mentioned in a podcast about the MBTA that ridership confidence is necessary for anyone to use public transit. ^{& convenience}

Constantly changing and reducing services do not give any confidence or convenience, so even less people will use the transit. This is a downward spiral and might as well get rid of all buses at this point, if we are going this direction.