



RIPTA Public Hearing – Proposed Service Changes
Providence Foundation, 30 Exchange Terrace, Providence, RI
Monday, August 4, 2025
5 PM – 6:30 PM

RIPTA staff in attendance: Christopher Durand, Edward Brown, Cristy Raposo Perry, Greg Harris, Joe Philbin, John Chadwick, Ken Vinacco, Sara Furbush, CJ Headley, Christel Chavez, Nicky Mudryy, Jane Williams, Peter Michaud and Tim McKenna

Board members in attendance: James Leach

Elected Officials in attendance: Representative David Morales and Providence Councilman Miguel Sanchez

On Monday, August 4, 2025, one hundred and twenty-eight (128) members of the public attended. Forty-five (45) made oral comments. Four (4) provided written comments.

Chief Executive Officer Christopher Durand opened the hearing by giving an overview of RIPTA's financial situation and budget deficit. Executive Director of Service Planning and Scheduling Edward Brown followed with an overview of proposed service changes.

Oral comments were provided as follows:

Zachary Gauthier, a Johnston resident, expressed strong opposition to all proposed service cuts. He urged both legislators and RIPTA leadership to work together to find a permanent funding solution, stating, "I know the money is somewhere—believe me." Zachary emphasized that with 40% of RIPTA riders using transit to get to work, these cuts could lead to job loss, family instability, or worse. He called on the state to invest in Rhode Islanders and public transit in order to keep Rhode Island strong.

Kristen Quaedvlieg, a North Providence resident and lifelong RIPTA rider, acknowledged the vital service RIPTA provides and emphasized that everyone has different reasons for relying on the bus instead of driving. She stressed the serious consequences of cutting transit services, including job losses and missed medical appointments. Kristen expressed frustration that despite repeated pleas, cuts are still being considered. She highlighted the financial hardship riders face, noting that switching to rideshares like Uber would cost about four times more. Kristen urged government and transit officials to understand the importance of keeping Rhode Island's transit system intact to maintain mobility, community connection, and daily survival—not asking for new services, but simply to preserve what currently exists.

Amy Glidden, Chair of Rhode Island Transit Riders and a Cranston resident, has attended many public hearings. She noted that it's rare for the RIPTA CEO to appear and explain the situation. She praised RIPTA's efforts during the pandemic and highlighted that the efficiency study confirmed that RIPTA is doing a good job. Amy criticized Governor McKee for failing to allocate sufficient funding in his budget to support the transit system.

Amy rides two buses daily to get to work in Providence and is concerned that with the proposed service cuts, she might have to rely on costly alternatives like Lyft, which would strain her financially. She stressed that many transit users intentionally design their lives around not driving, choosing jobs and residences based on transit access due to reasons like age, climate concerns, or affordability. Without adequate funding, essential access to education, healthcare, social services, religious activities, and child resources will be compromised for many Rhode Islanders. Governor McKee must find funding for RIPTA now to avoid devastating impacts on the community.

Maddie Harris, a Providence resident, spoke out in support of maintaining RIPTA services, emphasizing the importance of public transit for people of all ages in the community. She moved to Providence because of accessible bus lines and is advocating to legislators on behalf of both young people and seniors. Maddie highlighted key routes like the 55, used on holidays and by Providence College students, and the 50, which serves Bryant University. She pointed out that many students cannot have cars on campus and rely heavily on RIPTA. Minimizing service to Providence College and other areas will create additional barriers.

RIPTA riders include a wide range of community members: beachgoers, Brown University students, hospital staff, airport travelers, elderly residents, and service workers. Many take multiple routes to attend college classes at CCRI or RIC, or to reach basic necessities like grocery stores in neighborhoods lacking other options. Commuters to Boston connect to MBTA from RIPTA as well.

Maddie stressed that proposed RIPTA cuts will negatively impact her own commute and continue to widen disparities for vulnerable populations. The proposed reductions will widen the gap between those who are struggling financially and those who are not. She urged lawmakers not to use the budget deficit as an excuse to cut services, reminding them that preserving RIPTA is essential to the system's future success and equitable access for all Rhode Islanders.

Liza Burkin, Board President of the Providence Streets Coalition, is strongly opposed to the proposed transit cuts. Referencing her repeated testimonies at earlier hearings that same day, in South Kingstown, and even last year, Liza expressed deep frustration that Rhode Islanders must continually fight for access to basic public services. She criticized the system that forces riders to "beg and grovel" for essential transit, calling the situation unjust and unsustainable, especially for a service that benefits the state's economy and supports thousands of residents.

While expressing her love for the transit community, she lamented that riders are again gathered in a room fighting to protect what should be guaranteed. Liza urged everyone present to take action beyond the hearing: to call Governor McKee, leave voicemails, send emails, comment on social media, and pressure their state representatives and senators. She stressed that sustained public pressure will stop the cuts from going through.

Liza also promoted two key upcoming actions: a solidarity rally at Kennedy Plaza on Wednesday at 5 p.m., and the RIPTA board meeting on Thursday morning at 9:30 a.m. She made it clear that if the Board votes in favor of the cuts, it will have lasting consequences, but she also affirmed her belief in the power of collective action to prevent them. She urged advocates to keep showing up, keep speaking out, and use the power of the people to protect Rhode Island's public transit.

Gala Heimer, a 16-year-old Exeter resident, commutes to East Providence and Providence for school, a journey that already takes 1 hour and 40 minutes. Missing a connecting bus by mere seconds could force him to wait 30 minutes to an hour for the next bus. With the proposed frequency reductions, getting to essential destinations will become even more difficult and unreliable.

Eliminating Route 14 will turn his already long two-hour round trip into an exhausting six-hour journey. Cutting Route 69 will disconnect him entirely from beaches, friends, and the only library he can access by transit. Although he expects to receive a driver's license in the fall, he plans to continue relying on RIPTA, stressing that driving is not a realistic or affordable option for many Rhode Islanders.

Heimer urged decision-makers to remember that public transit riders, often among the most vulnerable in the community, should not face increased barriers to mobility. "We do not need nor deserve more complications and restrictions in the ways we get around."

Calling RIPTA a "vital institution," he urged the state to recognize the harm these cuts will inflict on students, workers, and others who either cannot or choose not to drive. Rhode Island must do more to support equitable and accessible transportation.

Maddock Thomas, a Providence resident, is a RIPTA rider and labor leader at Brown University. Representing over 5,000 workers at Brown University and Brown University Health, he emphasized that both employees and students heavily rely on RIPTA services. Personally, he depends on Route 92 and noted that even small changes, like eliminating direct access to Federal Hill or weekend grocery trips, would be deeply disruptive to his life.

He stressed that these cuts are not inevitable. Funding exists, and with the right action, the cuts can be delayed or entirely avoided. Despite having a full-time job, a second job, and working on a thesis, he dedicated his weekend to writing and publishing a new RIPTA funding proposal. In it, he outlined a dozen funding strategies that could be enacted through short-term executive action, which have not yet been proposed publicly.

Among the suggestions, he pointed to reallocation of federal or state funds, adjustments to bond measures, and reforms to the University Pass (U-Pass) program. He highlighted that Brown University currently pays less than other institutions for U-Pass and could voluntarily contribute more to support the transit system as part of its commitment to the local community.

He also referenced a \$50 million federal agreement signed by Brown University for workforce development programs. Such programs are ineffective without reliable public transit, as people cannot train for jobs or commute to work without mobility. Redirecting a portion of those funds, through a partnership with the state and RIPTA, could help provide free passes to job trainees and support transit access.

He called on the public to pressure the governor and demand emergency funding to prevent the cuts.

Pablo Calderon, a Providence resident and high school teacher in Woonsocket, testified to the essential role RIPTA plays in his life and the lives of his students. He shared that public transit is his only mode of transportation and has been since high school. After attending college in a place without transit options, he said one of the things that excited him about returning to Providence was the bus system — emphasizing that “*the buses*” were a meaningful and reliable part of his daily life.

Pablo highlighted the ripple effects of proposed service cuts, not just for him but for his students. He rides Route 31 and transfers to Route 54, a transfer with a tight window that already results in delays for students. With proposed service reductions, these missed connections will only increase, making timely attendance even harder for students already doing their best to get to school.

He noted the broader consequences on education and opportunity, referencing a former student who just told him they may no longer be able to attend Rhode Island College in the fall due to the proposed cuts to Woonsocket service. Without reliable service, access to education and employment is jeopardized—for himself, his students, and the broader community.

Ian Westcott, a Providence resident in the Elmhurst neighborhood, is a homeowner who shares a car with his wife. In addition to driving, he frequently rides a bicycle and uses RIPTA buses as part of his regular transportation routine.

While many Rhode Islanders depend on public transit because they have no other option, Ian called out the value of transit for those who *do* have a choice. As someone with the privilege to choose how he gets around, he often chooses RIPTA.

Ian commutes to Boston, typically using Route 55 or 57 to connect with the commuter rail. He also takes the bus to the mall to shop for his son, and often rides to downtown Providence for

lunch, or to Federal Hill or Fox Point for dinner. He appreciates the freedom and flexibility that transit provides and notes how having more transportation options significantly improves his quality of life.

He grew up in a part of Rhode Island without transit access, then lived in Boston and New York, where he went 17 years without owning a car. He returned to Rhode Island to raise a family—and though he owns a car now, he continues to rely on public transit because it helps him both earn and spend money more efficiently.

Rather than seeing parking and traffic as barriers, Ian views them as opportunities to make more sustainable choices. That's why he believes Rhode Island should be investing *more* in RIPTA, not less. Transit systems shouldn't be in a downward spiral caused by austerity politics; instead, they should be expanding to offer more people more choices, which ultimately benefits the entire state.

Public transit is an economic engine. Every dollar invested in RIPTA generates economic activity, helps businesses and institutions attract talent, increases property values, promotes housing development, and broadens the tax base. And beyond economics, public transit is essential for ensuring equity and expanding opportunity for low-income and disadvantaged Rhode Islanders.

Ian urges decision-makers to recognize that transit is not just a social service; it's a core part of the state's infrastructure. And for those who may not be moved by equity alone, he hopes the broader economic argument will help make the case for fully funding RIPTA.

Lev Poplow, a Cranston resident and organizer of Indivisible Rhode Island, is opposed to the service cuts. He shared his deep frustration with a recurring pattern in public policy: those who can least afford it are consistently the ones forced to bear the burden. He emphasized that the elderly, working-class individuals, and students, like the young man who commutes over an hour and forty-five minutes daily just to attend school, are the real heroes. These individuals are simply trying to build better lives and should not be penalized for relying on essential public services like transit.

He was born and raised in Philadelphia, a city known for its strong public transportation infrastructure. He admitted that he doesn't use RIPTA regularly, but the times he needed it, he was grateful it was available. He couldn't imagine enduring the kinds of hardships RIPTA's most dedicated riders face daily.

He echoed earlier speakers, referencing Amy and Liza, who both pointed to the real solution: action from the state government. Lev called on Governor McKee to exercise his authority and immediately convene the legislature in an emergency session to allocate the needed funding for RIPTA. He also cited a recent financial study presented earlier in the evening, which identified multiple viable funding sources that could prevent service cuts.

"The answer is there," Lev insisted. "What we need now is the political will to act."

He voiced his anger at a system that allows the wealthiest to avoid responsibility while forcing those with the fewest resources to grovel just to survive. “How the hell are you supposed to lift yourself into a better life,” he asked, “if you struggle just to get to work or school every day?”

Robin Barradas, a lifelong resident of Providence currently living in Olneyville, expressed gratitude for RIPTA’s recent hiring initiatives, noting they have made a noticeable difference. She recounted a recent experience sitting outside in Olneyville on a Sunday when someone remarked on the surprisingly frequent bus service. Robin explained that before the new hires, Sundays were essentially a day when people avoided going out because bus waits could total up to four hours round trip—making even a simple trip a major time commitment.

Before retiring, Robin worked for the Department of Human Services as a social worker and manager overseeing SNAP and medical assistance units. She has firsthand knowledge of how challenging it can be for people to manage transportation, especially when they need to juggle multiple trips, sometimes involving up to eight bus rides a day, to get kids to school or attend appointments. While this might be manageable within the city, she stressed that for those trying to commute into the city from outside, it is nearly impossible.

Robin emphasized that cutting bus service is not just about reducing transit options; it is literally cutting people off from their lifeline. She asked the governor to recognize this fact, explaining that for many, buses provide access to school, work, food, and medical care. In food deserts, limited bus service forces people to rely on corner stores with limited options and SNAP benefits that don’t stretch far. A doctor’s appointment often requires multiple trips—for labs, follow-ups, or physical therapy—and the bus makes these journeys possible.

Robin questioned whether people would even be able to maintain jobs or attend school if buses are cut, especially in industrial parks and other areas where transit is already sparse. Even city residents, who are somewhat more fortunate, may soon face long walks to work or essential services. She highlighted the example of the R-Line, which serves a hospice—something she imagines would be heartbreaking if people could no longer reach loved ones who are terminally ill.

She emphasized that for many, the bus is the only option besides walking, something not feasible in extreme weather like 95-degree heat or heavy storms. Transit cuts are a serious matter with far-reaching consequences. Without reliable transportation, people may lose jobs, fall behind on bills, and ultimately face eviction from already scarce affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Although she could afford a car, she chooses not to own one since she is retired, noting the hassle of maintenance, gas costs, and environmental impact. If bus fares rise while service decreases, she worries many will switch to rideshares, which are more expensive, resulting in a loss of revenue for RIPTA.

Robin closed by urging decision-makers to carefully consider these realities, emphasizing that public transit is far more than convenience, it is a crucial lifeline for many Rhode Islanders.

John Welch, a Pawtucket resident and retired nurse, shared that he has not owned a car in 15 years and relies exclusively on RIPTA. He praised RIPTA as a good organization that is simply underfunded and advocated for extending the R-Line further to the Stop & Shop in Cumberland. He suggested scheduling buses later to accommodate riders who work evening shifts, noting that the last Central Falls bus runs at 6 PM, while games at Centerville Bank Stadium start at 7 PM. John concluded by expressing hope that funding efforts will succeed. He believes affordable transportation is even more important than affordable housing, and he wants to continue fighting for it.

Randall Rose, a member of the Kennedy Plaza Resilience Coalition, is opposed to the service cuts. He acknowledged that many politicians, including state representatives and senators, supported transit funding, but emphasized that real decisions were made by the House Speaker, Senate President, and the governor. He explained that these leaders often underfunded RIPTA to test public reaction and only restored funds if there was enough outcry. Randall urged people to call top state leaders as well as their own representatives to demand permanent funding for RIPTA and to prevent service cuts. He encouraged attendees to join local bus rider groups, saying they had more political influence than individuals alone. Randall warned that politicians would not ignore voters because of upcoming elections, and he stressed the importance of making clear that votes would be influenced by their stance on transit funding. He ended by urging continued activism to protect public transportation from devastating cuts.

Traci Picard, a Providence resident, spoke out against the service cuts on behalf of everyone's bus routes. The bus system only works if all routes work together. "Who cares if I can get to my job if you can't get to yours?" she said, pointing out that in a state where people can't get around easily, it affects everyone collectively.

She challenged the notion that RIPTA only affects bus riders, insisting that it affects everyone. Each bus rider means one less car on the road and one less parking spot taken. Riders may be an emergency room doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, or a child—so service cuts impact those who don't even ride the bus.

RIPTA helps reduce drunk, impaired, and distracted driving. Transit is a key solution to those problems. However, if buses stop running after 8 p.m., people can't rely on transit to get home safely at night. People need safe transportation later in the evening.

Public transit is not just for people who need social services or cannot afford cars. It is a right for everyone, including those who do not drive. Nobody wants cuts; everyone desires better connectivity, better reliability, and care. She called on leaders to care about all people who use transit and those who don't.

Cutting bus service is a short-sighted decision, comparing it to “shooting ourselves in the foot.” Such cuts would cause long-term costs in lost jobs, increased homelessness, and other social problems. She warned, “We will pay now or pay later.”

Jillian Hubbard, a Pawtucket resident, took the bus to attend the public hearing. She is nearly halfway through a six-week term of service as a grand juror, which requires her to take the bus to the courthouse every day. Although she owns a car and could drive, she chooses not to, citing frequent repairs, hazardous road conditions, lane closures, accidents, heavy traffic, and the hassle of parking. “I don’t want to drive. I want to keep taking the bus,” she said. “I love the bus. Stop the cuts.”

Gerald D’Agostino, a Providence resident and representative of APSE (Advocates for People Supporting Employment), spoke about how proposed service cuts would directly impact his ability to work. The elimination of Route 75 will make it extremely difficult for him to commute to his job.

Currently, Gerald takes three buses just to reach his workplace. With the planned cuts, there will be no guarantee he can make his second connection on time, and he will be left waiting between 30 and 40 minutes. This delay could cause him to be late or even miss work entirely.

He urged the governor not only to stop the proposed service reductions but also to offer real solutions that support transit riders across the state. “If the governor wants our votes,” Jerry said, “he needs to step up. And if he can’t, then we need to find someone who can do the job.”

David Salzillo, a lifelong resident of Providence, emphasized that public transportation is a *basic necessity*, not just a convenience. He noted that some unhoused individuals rely on the bus system just to get a few hours of rest each night, and that countless others depend on RIPTA for essential daily travel. “We’ve heard their stories tonight,” he said, “and there are many more who aren’t here to speak.”

He criticized the state government’s priorities, pointing out that instead of maintaining essential services like public transit, leaders have long chosen to preserve tax cuts for the wealthy. “This isn’t just about RIPTA,” he said. “It’s about decades of disinvestment in people. And look where that’s gotten us—an anxious, unhappy country under constant pressure.”

RIPTA has been there through every crisis including the pandemic and many more Rhode Islanders will depend on it in the near future, often unexpectedly. “What about the person whose car breaks down in three months? What are they going to do when their only option has been taken away? Especially on weekends, when service is already limited?”

He urged the public to continue fighting for transit funding and to pressure state leadership into taking meaningful action. “We, the people, need to stand up and give the governor hell,” he said. “But more than that, I hope that at some point, our leaders find their hearts. We’ve had

decades of tax cuts for the rich—and the truth is, that’s spending that has never matched our revenue. And that’s what I know.”

Justice Gaines, a South Side Providence resident, serves on the Providence Sustainability Commission and works with Sista Fire, stated that Participatory Action Research has shown that women of color and non-binary people of color in Rhode Island are already deeply burdened—pressed for time, short on cash, and struggling to cover basic expenses. The proposed cuts will only increase that hardship.

A frequent RIPTA rider, Justice shared how the cuts will hurt countless Rhode Islanders who rely on public transit to get to work, attend medical appointments, do laundry, shop for groceries, visit parks, access shelters, go to church, or simply see their families. The impact will also extend to RIPTA employees who could lose their jobs.

“This won’t make anything more efficient,” Justice said. “It will only make it harder to live in a state already facing a housing crisis, a transportation crisis, and a government that regularly refuses to invest in working-class people.”

There will be environmental and health consequences. More cars on the road will worsen air quality, which is especially harmful to youth, elders, and immunocompromised individuals. South Side Providence and Washington Park, already ranked in the 99th percentile for asthma rates nationally. “This will only make things worse,” she said.

The cuts amount to yet another *poverty tax* on those without access to cars—particularly youth, Black and Brown families, and low-income urban residents. When RIPTA piloted free service on the R-Line, ridership surged among Black and Brown riders, low-income households, and non-English speakers. When transit is accessible, people use it.

“Public transportation is not meant to be profit-driven or revenue-dependent,” Justice said. “It’s a public investment. It’s a basic necessity, not a capitalist venture.”

She called on the governor and political leaders to prioritize people over profit and invest in transit as a way to strengthen the economy and improve lives. “But we know they likely won’t do that,” they added. “So I’m asking *you* at RIPTA—because I believe you do care. Refuse these cuts. And if you do, we will refuse with you. We will continue to stand with you and fight for public transportation that works for all Rhode Islanders.”

William Masse, a Warwick resident, regularly rides Routes 17, 18, and 31, as well as the R-Line. He often commutes by bicycle and takes advantage of RIPTA’s rack-and-ride program. He also uses the Drive Less RI app. RIPTA forms the foundation of his transportation throughout the state.

He acknowledged the difficult position RIPTA has been put in due to the failures of state legislators. He asked if the cuts go into effect, though he hopes they do not, RIPTA should

clearly mark any schedule changes or route cancellations as “*temporary*, pending full budget funding.” He urged RIPTA not to delete any routes from its website, but instead to cross them out in red and include a footnote indicating that the changes are temporary; the same for any printed materials. This would clearly communicate that these reductions are not intended to be permanent and should not be accepted as the new normal.

William described the cuts to transit service as a “deliberate and hostile attack on working-class Rhode Islanders.” In a state with a \$14 billion budget, he questioned how there is allegedly no funding to run the buses that people depend on to get to work. He pointed out that the state recently spent \$10 million on two large concrete “Rhode Island International Airport” signs on the side of I-95—structures that most tourists will see for less than 30 seconds and can’t even approach for a photo. “Mr. Potato Head was a better investment,” he said, noting that Hasbro cited the lack of public transportation as one reason for leaving the state.

He called out Governor McKee, Speaker Shekarchi, and Senate President by name, stating, “I see your priorities, tax cuts for big corporations like Citizens Bank and CVS, while you run over the working class, the disabled, the elderly, and the climate-conscious people of Rhode Island.”

He concluded by addressing the RIPTA Board directly. While acknowledging the pressure the Board may be under to move forward with these cuts, possibly even from the Board Chair, he warned that such a decision would be a stain on their records. “You will be remembered as the board that oversaw the largest service cuts in history,” he said.

He urged the board to take a different path by postponing any decisions for another week, now that they have the efficiency study to read and hours of testimony to review. They should request full funding for the agency.

Samantha Richardson, a Providence resident originally from Westerly, still visits the city often using 95x. The proposed service cuts will be particularly harmful to people living in southern Rhode Island, an area that is already severely underserved. For example, the last Route 95x bus to Westerly currently departs at 5:15 p.m., which is problematic since most workdays end at 5:00 p.m. As a result, anyone trying to get to Westerly after work may be stranded.

Andrew Nosal, a Providence resident and author of 2feet2bucks.com, suggested that instead of implementing the cuts immediately and spreading limited funding over the entire year, RIPTA should continue operating at current service levels until the money runs out. This approach will give state leadership time to find the money needed to restore service, likening the strategy to “a game of chicken” that might work in the agency’s favor.

Transit is a powerful tool in fighting poverty. When a household can operate with one car instead of two because of reliable bus service, it’s equivalent to receiving a \$10,000 raise—money that stays in the local economy instead of going to insurance or finance companies.

He referenced a recent tourism announcement by the governor, noting that every location highlighted was transit-accessible. Rhode Island is uniquely positioned to appeal to car-free tourists, especially those from other countries or cities where public transportation isn't stigmatized.

Andrew criticized the state for being "pound foolish" in spending more to support driving than to improve transit, calling it inefficient. Many people who criticize the buses don't actually ride them. In his experience, the drivers are professional, the Transit App is reliable, and riding the bus is safe. "You're doing a great job," he said, warning that the proposed cuts would take the system from "almost pretty good" to confirming the worst assumptions of those who never use it.

Virgil Reyes, a 16-year-old student, spoke on behalf of the organization Young Voices. She is concerned, along with many other high school students, about how the proposed service cuts will negatively impact the upcoming school year. The cuts will make it harder for students to get to and from school, likely resulting in increased tardiness and absenteeism, which could harm students' education. She personally relies on RIPTA to get to school, and anticipates that with fewer buses running, those still in service would fill up quickly. As a result, more students would likely be left waiting at Kennedy Plaza for extended periods, something she feared could lead to an increase in fights among teenagers. She is the oldest of three siblings, all being raised by a single father who doesn't have the capacity to drive them all to school. For that reason, she depends on RIPTA. She urged leaders to increase funding for RIPTA, emphasizing how many people of all ages rely on it for their daily lives.

Grant Dulgarian, a Providence resident and longtime transit advocate, highlighted the contradiction of cutting RIPTA service at a time when climate change and global warming are worsening, pointing out that transportation accounts for over 40% of Rhode Island's carbon emissions. He offered funding ideas, focusing on Rhode Island Hospital, which he believes provides free parking. He argued that parking isn't truly free, as it requires land acquisition, maintenance, and 24-hour patrols. He proposed charging \$5 per day for parking, half the cost of metered street parking in Providence, and using the revenue to provide employees with monthly RIPTA passes. Everyone would benefit while encouraging more people to take the bus. He acknowledged that driving may still be more convenient for those running errands, but emphasized that for most daily commutes, transit was the better option. He urged the Board not to approve service cuts, but instead adopt small, creative measures like these to boost ridership and help RIPTA recover to pre-pandemic levels.

Caelan Nesbitt, a Newport resident, relies on Route 63 for everyday activities like shopping and getting to work. She needs the bus to return to college this fall and to attend medical appointments in Newport County. Caelan criticized the gap between the state's promises in the Transit Master Plan and the reality of funding, especially given the benefits public transit offers in terms of mental health, environmental impact, and accessibility. The gas tax is no longer a reliable funding source due to the shift away from gas-powered vehicles and argued that RIPTA had already been shown to operate efficiently, with few savings left to find. Proposed service

cuts will hurt many, including tourists in Newport who depend on buses like the 14 and 64 to reach key destinations on weekends. The elimination of Route 63 will especially harm residents who rely on it to access supermarkets, leaving many unable to meet basic daily needs.

Merrill Schmidt, a representative from the Providence Student Union (PSU), spoke about the critical role RIPTA plays in the lives of high school students and families across the state. PSU, a youth-led organization focused on student rights and well-being, has been a proud member of the Save RIPTA Coalition for the past few years. Most of PSU's student members, who are currently on summer break and unable to attend the hearing, rely heavily on RIPTA to get to school, jobs, appointments, and social activities. Without access to transit, students' attendance and academic performance would suffer, particularly those from families facing economic hardship or without access to a car. RIPTA enables students to participate in PSU programming after school, offering a safe and productive environment. Personally, she shared that she and her partner, who live in Cranston and only have one car, depend on RIPTA for transportation beyond biking distance. She urged decision-makers to stop the proposed cuts, emphasizing their harmful impact on students, families, and the state's future.

Ellis D. Tammelleo, a Providence resident and lifelong transit rider currently owns two cars, but chooses to ride RIPTA, even using the bus to get to his mechanical lot, underscoring his commitment to public transit. He stressed the importance of "choice riders" like himself, noting that if service is cut, many of them will return to driving, worsening traffic for everyone, including those who don't currently use the bus. He urged legislators, many of whom do not rely on RIPTA, to recognize that everyone will be affected if bus service is reduced. RIPTA underwent an efficiency study, proving it is not a mismanaged agency but simply one operating at the true cost of a basic, functioning transit network. Rhode Island should lead by example and invest in improving, not dismantling, its transit system.

Celeste Weidenann, a Hopkinton resident and graduate student at the University of Rhode Island, spoke on behalf of her fellow students, particularly international students, who could not attend the hearing. Many graduate students, especially those from other countries, do not have access to cars and cannot afford housing within walking distance of campus. She shared the example of a friend from Ghana who holds a Ghanaian driver's license but is unable to obtain a U.S. license quickly due to the lengthy process. Without access to RIPTA service, her friend would be unable to get to campus, which could jeopardize her student visa and lead to deportation. Celeste emphasized that this is not an isolated case; many international students depend on public transit to pursue their education. Higher education in Rhode Island, particularly its universities and community colleges, rely on international students, and those students, in turn, rely on the bus. She urged decision-makers to fund RIPTA and support the students who have worked hard to be here and deserve the opportunity to stay.

Keisuke Inomura, a Kingston resident and University of Rhode Island employee, lives with his family of five, with none knowing how to drive. He is concerned about the proposed elimination of Route 69, which currently connects URI to Galilee. He explained that the service area could be divided into two sections—a more densely populated northern portion and a sparsely

populated southern portion. While the southern segment had lower ridership and a longer route, he questioned whether the entire line needed to be cut. He urged RIPTA to consider preserving at least part of the route, especially the section that serves the northern area with higher demand. He suggested that service hours, which currently run as late as 12:30 a.m., could also be adjusted to improve cost efficiency. He asked RIPTA to evaluate options that would retain some level of service on Route 69, particularly the portion between URI and Wakefield Mall, which is heavily used by students.

Aneiya Sanger, co-director of the Providence Student Union and a high school student at Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, has been using public transportation for as long as she can remember. For many, transit is not a convenience but a necessity. If bus routes are cut, it will directly impact students' ability to get to school, after-school programs, and jobs. Not all students have family members who can drive them, and for some, the bus is their only option. Service cuts will lead to increased student tardiness or absenteeism, ultimately harming academic performance. Many students rely on part-time jobs to save for college or support their families, and without transportation, those opportunities will be lost. Speaking directly to Governor McKee, she urged the state to see transit as an investment in Rhode Island's youth and future, and called for reliable, accessible public transportation for all residents.

Vanessa Flores-Maldonado, Executive Director of the Providence Youth Student Movement, grew up riding the LA Metro bus system and believes RIPTA could learn a lot from systems like that. Ridership peaked when the R-Line was free, and she emphasized how vital that service was in helping her get where she needed to go.

Providence Youth Student Movement is constantly helping youth access resources, jobs, and more by providing bus passes. She warned that while ridership is reportedly down, it's not due to lack of need, but to resources not being properly allocated. Vanessa emphasized the importance of supporting both those who rely on public transit and those who choose to use it. Investing in public transportation is ultimately an investment in public safety and in Rhode Island's future. She noted that people should be able to take the bus to Newport without paying a toll, and that when the system works, everyone benefits.

Directing her final remarks to Governor McKee, she said, "You don't like young people. You don't like people of color. You don't like low-income people. You don't like people who don't own their homes. I don't know what we did to you, but for the love of God, fund RIPTA."

Jennifer Romans Medeiros, a Warwick resident and lifelong RIPTA rider, described public transit as a lifeline she has relied on since childhood. She rides Route 4 daily, along with Routes 3, 56, and 57, to get to work and meetings across Providence. She chose her home in Warwick specifically because it was near a bus line, a selling point emphasized by her real estate agent. Working in the nonprofit sector, she noted that RIPTA is economically essential, especially given her chronic medical condition, which has periodically prevented her from driving. She uses the bus not only for work but also to socialize, attend events, access healthcare, and even to visit the cemetery where her late husband is buried.

She stressed that cutting weekend service on Route 4 and others would be "absolutely crushing," calling it both an economic and public health crisis. With Rhode Island already struggling with healthcare access, she warned that reducing transit service would further prevent people from reaching doctors, mental health services, and support programs like AA meetings. She urged Governor McKee and other state leaders to reconsider the proposed cuts and expressed strong support for RIPTA delaying any decision, allowing time to raise political awareness and secure the necessary funding to maintain the current level of service.

Amber Blaylock, a Providence resident, is concerned about the proposed service cuts. As bad as the cuts seem now, the actual consequences will be even worse due to the compounding effects of reduced frequency and reliability. She lives between two bus stops, the R-Line and Route 1, and although both reach many of the same destinations, she overwhelmingly uses the R-Line because it runs more frequently. That convenience creates habits, and when service is reduced, people break those habits and turn to other modes of transportation. This leads to a downward spiral: fewer riders, more service cuts, and eventually a system used only by those with no other option.

Amber highlighted how decreased frequency will make transfers more difficult and time-consuming, discouraging use altogether. She recently moved to Rhode Island and has been unable to find a primary care provider in Providence, finally securing an appointment next March at a distant location. She hopes to take the bus to get there, but if service is cut, she'll have to ask her parents for help, a luxury many riders do not have. She noted that others, particularly students and low-income workers, depend on RIPTA daily to reach school, work, and healthcare.

She criticized the logic of making cuts based on current funding, warning that doing so will only shrink revenue and ridership further. Public transportation should be treated not as a business but as a vital public investment, like roads. Finally, she condemned the fact that concerned citizens had to plead with a board lacking the full authority to fix the funding gap, while Governor McKee, who holds the power to fund RIPTA adequately, was absent and unaccountable.

Roberta Blaylock, a Providence/Cranston resident, just moved with her family to Rhode Island from a rural area in Pennsylvania. One of their top priorities when relocating was to live in a walkable area with reliable transit access. They chose Rhode Island specifically because they could take the bus to museums, WaterFire, the beach, and other destinations, activities that support the local economy and enhance quality of life without the stress and expense of driving and parking. They deliberately ruled out areas without adequate bus access. From a financial and lifestyle perspective, public transportation is essential to them. She is opposed to the service cuts. She echoed a previous speaker's suggestion to mark service cuts as temporary on RIPTA's schedules, as well as add the governor's phone number to direct public pressure toward state leadership.

Ian Nesbitt, a retired Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy with a 24-year military career and eight deployments aboard cruisers and destroyers, spoke out strongly against RIPTA's proposed service cuts. He attended the hearing at the urging of his son, who regularly rides the bus. Ian expressed both admiration and frustration, impressed by the respectful, unified turnout of over 100 community members, but deeply disappointed by the state's handling of the proposed cuts.

He criticized the process, noting that 59 bus lines would be impacted with less than a month's notice, calling it a "clown show." He emphasized that critical decisions like this should have involved public hearings and planning six months in advance. While he personally has access to a car, he said the cuts disproportionately will hurt those who don't.

Ian urged those in attendance to channel their energy into action by contacting their state legislators, organizing meetings, and pushing elected officials to advocate for public transit funding. He closed by saying he served for his son and for the community and called on everyone to strengthen democracy by holding leaders accountable.

Meridith Hossfield, a Providence resident who grew up in Cranston, shared her deep reliance on public transit and concern over proposed service cuts. She reflected on her teenage years taking the 22, 31, and 92 buses to get to school at The Met and to her internship near Roger Williams Hospital. Now, she primarily uses the R-Line, which is slated for cuts, and describes it as essential to her daily life and overall quality of living in Rhode Island.

Meridith commutes to work in Boston but chooses to live and spend her earnings in Rhode Island because of the state's bus accessibility. She doesn't own a car, partly by choice, and depends on the R-Line to connect to the train to Boston. This not only avoids contributing to Boston traffic and emissions but also keeps her and others safer by eliminating the need to drive while fatigued.

She expressed pride in Rhode Island's traditionally robust public transit system, noting how it enables travel across the state to places like Bristol, Portsmouth, and Newport. Cutting service will undermine the state's livability, economy, and environmental goals.

Meridith concluded by thanking RIPTA staff and urging Governor McKee to invest in public transit and the people who depend on it, rather than making the state less accessible for workers and residents.

Imani Stewart, a Providence resident, urged state leaders to properly and permanently fund RIPTA, emphasizing that her daily life depends on public transit. She relied on the bus as a college student and continues to depend on it to commute to her job in Warren via Route 60. That route is already strained due to traffic and the ongoing Washington Bridge crisis. Proposed service reductions will worsen delays and overcrowding, potentially forcing riders to stand on buses travelling on the highway.

Imani criticized proposed changes to Route 92, which she described as "devastating." The route is set to be split, with the East Side portion removed and merged into a new, infrequent Route 91 that will not operate on weekends. Sunday service on the remaining 92 would run just once every 55 minutes.

These changes represent more than just minor schedule adjustments; they will create serious disruptions for thousands of riders. Reduced frequency means longer waits, more crowded buses, missed connections, and riders left behind at stops. For those without access to a car or rideshare options, the consequences will be severe.

Although she is directly affected in Providence, Imani expressed concern for riders in communities like Westerly and Richmond, who are facing the complete elimination of weekday service. She underscored that buses are not a backup plan; they are the only plan for many Rhode Islanders.

Imani concluded by calling on decision-makers to reconsider the proposed cuts, arguing that public transit is vital to residents' ability to access jobs, education, healthcare, and community. Rhode Island deserves a transit system that works for everyone.

Allison Rich, an Exeter resident, and lifelong public transit rider, voiced her frustration over the proposed service cuts. Having grown up in New York City and later living in Boston and Cambridge, she has relied on public transportation her entire life. Since moving to Rhode Island in 1998, she has experienced repeated threats to eliminate bus routes—particularly while living in Chepachet, where every few years the local bus line faced cancellation, prompting public outcry and media involvement.

Seeking more reliable service, Allison eventually moved to South County, where she believed Routes 65 and 66 would be secure. Now, with Route 65 facing elimination, she expressed deep disappointment, calling the proposed changes both frustrating and unsustainable.

Relying on gas tax revenue to fund public transportation is ineffective and outdated, especially as more vehicles transition away from fossil fuels. Nearly every public transportation system in the country operates at a loss and questioned why Rhode Island's response to budget shortfalls appears more drastic than in other states.

She raised concerns about decision-makers' connection to the system, questioning whether RIPTA board members or state leaders, particularly Governor McKee, actually ride the bus and understand its importance in daily life.

Despite her exhaustion after a long day of work, Allison remained determined to continue advocating against the cuts, vowing to contact elected officials after the hearing. She urged leadership to reconsider the proposed service reductions.

Charles Feldman, a Providence resident, is affiliated with organizations like Oasis and NAMI, relies on the bus. He has not driven since experiencing a health crisis in 1978. As a peer specialist working with individuals facing mental illness, he highlighted the challenges they face, including difficulties accessing Medicaid, SNAP, housing, and other essential services—especially for those whose lives have been disrupted by disability through no fault of their own.

Charles emphasized the importance of public transit for people with low or no income and advocated for reviving calls to tax the wealthy to better fund social services, following Massachusetts' example. He stressed that many physically disabled individuals depend on paratransit services like RIde, and he hoped those services would not face cuts despite policies requiring coverage within certain distances of bus routes. Charles concluded by underscoring the need to protect these vital supports for vulnerable populations.

Lane Demaske, representing over 700 graduate assistants from the University of Rhode Island, emphasized the importance of Routes 69 and 64. She explained that these routes are essential for accessing healthcare, banks, groceries, food banks, social services, and connecting to the South Kingstown community. Route 69, the southernmost bus line, is especially vital, as alternatives like rideshares are prohibitively expensive, sometimes costing \$50 to travel 4.6 miles. Route 64 serves as the main connection between URI's main campus and its Bay Campus, which supports the university's blue economy and graduate programs. These lines also provide critical housing access for students, professors, and union members. Lane urged Governor McKee to recognize the value of maintaining these services.

Paul LaBon, a Providence resident, shared his lifelong connection to RIPTA and public transportation. Growing up in Woonsocket in a family of mill workers, he relied on Route 54 to commute to school and work. After a successful career as a global consultant, he returned to Rhode Island due to health reasons and became an author, writing a book with practical solutions to statewide issues, including transit.

Paul highlighted how RIPTA subsidizes large corporations like Bally's Casino by providing free bus service for customers who then go and spend money at their casino. He suggested charging businesses like Bally's for bus access and implementing parking fees at underused facilities like Wickford Junction, which is frequently used by out-of-state URI students parking for free. Free parking at the Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center benefits high-income Boston commuters unfairly.

Paul urged RIPTA leadership to engage more directly with their drivers and riders instead of relying on costly consultants, recommending town halls and staff spending time on buses to better understand rider needs. He offered his expertise as a consultant and emphasized his commitment to improving Rhode Island's transit system. His book, which includes a chapter on RIPTA, is available on Amazon.

Pat Ford, Coalition Radio, criticized RIPTA for providing free shuttle service (Route 1636) to a private soccer stadium while proposing major service cuts elsewhere. Pat called for

transparency and questioned how RIPTA can justify slashing essential public routes while funding service for an exclusive, high-cost event.

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 friend's uncle who uses a walker. With reduced service, he would be forced to walk more, often in sweltering heat or freezing cold. 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.

Alana Deluty, a South Providence resident, emphasized that while individual stories are powerful, they shouldn't be necessary to justify the value of public transit. A reliable public transportation system is essential to a thriving society, just like public schools or fire departments, and should not need to be defended case by case. She expressed surprise that Peter Alviti continues to hold his position, noting that in her own workplace, such a level of performance would typically lead to serious accountability.

Wren Fang, a resident of the East Side of Providence, emphasized the essential role public transit plays in daily life, particularly for individuals who cannot drive. Wren regularly relies on Route 92 to travel to the West Side and connect to Kennedy Plaza, transferring to Route 1 to reach destinations like Market Basket. Wren is concerned that proposed service reductions to Route 92 will significantly limit their mobility and access to social, commercial, and essential activities. Transit is not just a personal necessity but a vital component of a thriving city, enabling access to opportunity and supporting the local economy. Citing a successful frequency increase on Route 72 that led to more than doubled ridership, Wren warned that it goes the other way too; reducing service will cause ridership to plummet further. Wren described the lack of funding support as not just neglect, but an active threat to Rhode Island's urban infrastructure and the people who depend on it.

Deanna Coleman, a Providence resident, questioned whether drivers have ever been forced to grovel before the state legislature to justify the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on roads.

With no further comments, the hearing ended at 7:41 PM.

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: COLE AS'SUDE

Address: [REDACTED] PROVIDENCE, RI 02907

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

As a YEAR-LONG RESIDENT OF THIS CITY, I CAN SAY THAT THE CUTS TO RIPTA WILL HAVE A SEVERELY DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON MY QUALITY OF LIFE. IN A TIME WHERE UBER TRIPS CAN \$30 ONE-WAY AND CARS ARE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS (NOT ACCOUNTING FOR THE INTEREST INVOLVED IN AUTO LOANS), A \$6 RIPTA DAY PASS IS A GODSEND. THE RIGHT TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SHOULD NOT BE DENIED TO THIS CITY'S PEOPLE. IT ONLY SERVES TO PUNISH THE LABORERS, THE PARENTS, THOSE WHO ARE UNHOUSED AND NEED TO STAY COOL. STRIPPING POOR & LOW INCOME PEOPLE OF UPWARD MOBILITY IS A SHORT SIGHTED DISPLAY OF GREED. IT WILL ONLY PUNISH BUSINESSES & INSTITUTIONS, EVEN THOSE THAT AREN'T ALREADY ON A RIPTA ROUTE. THE MOBILITY OF THE CITY BUSES IS WHAT MADE ME WANT TO LIVE HERE, AND IT'S SAD TO SEE SUCH POLICIES THAT SERVE TO ALIENATE DECENT TAYPAXING CITIZENS SUCH AS MYSELF.

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: Meredith Hassfield

Address: [REDACTED]

Providence, RI 02906

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

I am a Rhode Islander who relies on RIPTA to travel through the state. I commute to my job in Boston on the R line, which I use to get to the train stations. The money I make in Boston goes to Rhode Island businesses. Because I take the bus and the train, I avoid accidents from distracted driving and don't contribute to traffic. I also take the bus to Newport, Portsmouth, Bristol, and other towns. I otherwise wouldn't be able to get to because I don't own a car. I contribute to their economies. I am one of thousands of commuters whose quality of life in Rhode Island will significantly decrease if these changes go into effect. Don't make Rhode Island unlivable. Invest in RIPTA, invest in our community.

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: Denise Ramirez

Address: [REDACTED]

Providence, RI 02908

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

I ride RIPTA daily - I took RIPTA to get here today.
I take RIPTA to the train station to get to work.
I take RIPTA to go to the doctor and the grocery store and to meet with my friends. Through these routines, I have met other regulars who are also on their way to work, on their way home, or just living their lives. These budget cuts are not just an inconvenience - it clips our wings and limits our ability to live fullness, saddles us with additional expenses in an increasingly expensive world, and tells that we do not matter in the eyes of our local government. As someone who relies on the bus for transportation, I structure my life around the routes and schedules so I am able to get where I need to be, as do the other bus riders I know. These budget cuts are going to leave us scrambling to restructure our lives just to be able to get to work or get home now. These budget cuts are going to uproot and will destabilize our diverse riders everyday lives.

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: Vincent Basherville Jr.

Address: _____

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

- The people making these cuts, do they ride the bus? Do they understand what they are doing to the people affected?
- What happens to drivers? They lose their job!
- Longer wait time means more opportunity for danger.
- I want to live life more. I don't have a car, too poor to get one. These cuts make me not want to go out and live life, or it makes it harder to
- Uber/Lyft is sooo expensive
- Young, old, able, disabled take the bus. We will all suffer from the cuts.