



RIPTA Public Hearing – Proposed Service Changes
South Kingstown Town Hall, 180 High Street, Wakefield
Wednesday, July 30, 2025
12 PM – 1:30 PM

RIPTA staff in attendance: Christopher Durand, Edward Brown, Cristy Raposo Perry, Ken Vinacco, Joe Philbin, John Chadwick, Greg Harris, Christel Chavez, CJ Headley, Jim Vincent, and Nicky Mudryy, and Sara Furbush

Elected Officials in attendance: Representative Teresa A. Tanzi, South Kingstown Town Council Vice President Michael K. Marran, South Kingstown Town Councilor Patricia A. Alley, South Kingstown Town Councilor Jay G. Wegimont

On Wednesday, July 30, 2025, forty-six (46) members of the public attended. Twenty-five (25) made oral comments. Three (3) 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 Edward Brown followed with an overview of proposed service changes.

Oral comments were provided as follows:

Bill Brooks, South Kingstown resident and a member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Washington County, spoke on behalf of the organization to express concerns about the lack of public transportation in the region. The organization assists less fortunate residents with various needs, such as heating and electricity, but is unable to help them with transportation, which is a major barrier, particularly in rural areas like Charlestown. As residents move farther from areas like Westerly or Narragansett, public transit becomes nearly nonexistent, leaving many people isolated in their homes without access to vehicles. RIPTA's Flex On Demand service is a promising and efficient solution for rural areas. He praised the program's ability to schedule door-to-door pickups and drop-offs and argued that it made more sense than running nearly empty buses multiple times a day. He and his fellow advocates urged RIPTA to expand the Flex On Demand service throughout Washington County, rather than reduce it, emphasizing its potential to provide essential mobility for residents who currently have none.

John Boyette, a South Kingstown resident, has been riding the bus for 20 years and is strongly opposed to the proposed service changes. John is disabled and does not own a car; he relies on public transportation to get to work. He would also use the bus to attend church, but it is outside the Flex Zone.

The proposed service changes will severely impact people with disabilities and mental health challenges, making it harder for them to travel to medical appointments, get to work, and go shopping. Route 69 is essential for many riders commuting from Providence to go to places like Shaw's, Walgreens, and Stop & Shop. Cutting routes will have a significant negative effect on the local economy.

Jenn Boyette, a South Kingstown resident and the wife of the previous speaker John, expressed her strong opposition to the proposed service cuts, particularly to Route 69 and Flex 203. She shared that she and her husband had taken the Flex bus to attend the hearing, and she regularly uses it herself to commute to work, attend medical appointments, and go grocery shopping. She emphasized that losing this service would be devastating for their daily lives.

Joe Paradise, a South Kingstown resident and Manager, Transportation & Parking at the University of Rhode Island, voiced his strong opposition to the proposed service cuts on behalf of the University of Rhode Island and the broader South County community. The cuts will severely impact countless residents in South County and students at URI, particularly Route 69, which is heavily used by students and staff as their primary means of daily transportation to the main campus.

Many international students rely heavily on Route 69 to access groceries, pharmacies, and to commute between campus and their homes. The proposed changes to Route 66 will also have a significant impact. It's already overcrowded with riders; many are often standing all the way from Providence. Reducing Route 64 from nine trips to just two per day will affect access to the Bay Campus and many other destinations along that corridor.

He urged RIPTA to maintain and improve current service levels rather than reduce them.

Samantha Mear, a South Kingstown resident and a full-time graduate student, spoke in strong opposition to the proposed service cuts. A public transit rider for over 15 years, she explained that RIPTA is essential to her daily life, enabling her to attend school, work, and serve her community in Providence. She emphasized that for her and thousands of others, the bus system is not optional—it is vital.

Eliminating routes will cut people off from education, jobs, medical appointments, and communities. She criticized the state's neighborhood impact assessments for failing to capture the real human consequences, such as drivers facing layoffs and residents losing access to critical services. She shared her own recent experience of delayed connections between routes and described meeting a newly enrolled CCRI student who feared they wouldn't be able to attend classes in the fall due to the cuts.

She called the situation a disaster and urged state leaders to act boldly and find funding, arguing that reducing service was not just about transit, it was about eliminating access to opportunity. Without RIPTA, she will not be able to go to grad school this fall, nor will she be

able to work where she does. The future of Rhode Islanders depends on maintaining and expanding public transportation, not cutting it.

James Theroux, a Narragansett resident of the Scarborough area along Route 69, expressed his perspective on the proposed transit cuts. He acknowledged that in his area, he does not observe many riders on the bus and often sees large buses running nearly empty throughout the day. While he sympathized with those who rely on public transit, he believes that if budget cuts were necessary, adjustments could be made by eliminating or modifying underused portions of routes rather than removing entire lines.

He suggested that services like RIPTA's Flex On Demand might be a more efficient alternative for areas with low ridership, offering a better solution than running full-sized buses through sparsely populated neighborhoods. He concluded by encouraging decision-makers to find a balanced approach that will work for everyone.

Kira Homola, a South Kingstown resident and student at the University of Rhode Island, emphasized the importance of RIPTA service for the 17,000 students, 40% of whom live on campus. Routes 64, 66, and 69 serve the campus and provide critical access to the surrounding community.

Service cuts will disproportionately impact students and low-income individuals. The \$10 million deficit is just 1% of what the state spends on roads. She questioned whether the state is ready for the expected thousands more cars on campus because of the proposed reduced bus service. Kira had difficulty getting to the hearing due to already limited service and stressed that many international students rely on the bus for essential trips like medical appointments and grocery shopping.

Andrew Convey, a South Kingstown resident and a recent graduate of South Kingstown High School, expressed concern that the proposed service cuts would jeopardize his ability to attend college. He had planned to take advantage of the Rhode Island Promise program at CCRI, which offers free tuition for the first two years if students enroll immediately after high school. However, without access to Route 69, he stated he will have no way to get to campus, as his family cannot afford another car. Losing access to public transportation will ruin his life trajectory, derail his future and limit his opportunities.

Anthony Diebold, a South Kingstown resident, questioned why Route 69 can't be combined with Route 66, as it was in the past. The two routes were previously connected and asked what the true impact would be of simply running a longer route. He is concerned that cutting Route 69 will disconnect people from essential services like grocery stores and medical care. The proposed cuts will disproportionately impact low-income residents and URI students.

Representative Teresa A. Tanzi voiced her strong opposition to the proposed service cuts, stating it made her physically ill to witness the hardship it will bring to the community and the state as a whole. She emphasized that the General Assembly had fought hard to support and stabilize RIPTA, and she credited organizations like Save RIPTA and advocates such as Liza

Burkin for rallying public support. Representative Tanzi also applauded RIPTA's significant progress last year in addressing service concerns, recruiting and training new drivers, and maintaining service levels. She believes the agency had been on the right trajectory toward increased service and frequency and a more robust transit future.

She criticized state leadership for failing to secure the additional \$10 million in funding that RIPTA desperately needed, noting the disparity in how funding requests are treated, for example, how the Department of Transportation regularly receives \$100 million without scrutiny. She highlighted that these cuts won't just impact current riders but will have a broad and exponential ripple effect—students unable to get to college, workers losing reliable commutes, and increased traffic and parking congestion affecting everyone.

Representative Tanzi warned that the cuts would undermine public confidence in the transit system, making it harder for individuals to rely on or dream of a future that depends on access to transportation. Even if routes were restored in the future, people might not feel secure enough to depend on them for school, work, or daily life. In a state as small as Rhode Island, the focus should be on expanding and strengthening public transit, not shrinking it. She urged the public to stay vocal and engaged, reminding them that their voices matter and that Rhode Islanders need RIPTA.

Kai Maffucci regularly uses Route 69 to get to school, voiced frustration over the proposed cuts. He pointed out how unacceptable it is that students might lose the ability to get to school, saying many people rely on the bus for education, medical appointments, and daily needs. He doesn't own a car and has to borrow his parents' vehicle when necessary, noting that many others are in the same position. He warned that eliminating service would add pressure to infrastructure by putting more cars on the road. While he acknowledged the need for budget adjustments and possible fare changes, he urged against service cuts that harm those who rely on transit most.

Renee Picillo, a Hopkinton resident, spoke on behalf of a 53-unit low-income elderly housing complex located in a remote wooded area with no nearby shopping options. She described the community as home to veterans and hardworking individuals who had lost their homes due to various hardships.

She shared the story of a resident named Anna, who had to relinquish her driver's license after her car broke down and could not be replaced. Anna relies on the only available bus, Flex 301, which comes just once a week, on Fridays, to take residents to Stop & Shop. With the cancellation of this route, residents like Anna would have no access to groceries or essential services.

Renee stressed that Flex 301 is the only transportation option available. She urged decision-makers to find a solution, emphasizing that the residents frequently change due to the nature of elderly housing, but the need remains constant. Walking several miles to a grocery store is not a viable option for residents, especially with the area's terrain.

Fil Eden, a South Kingstown resident, spoke about the essential role RIPTA plays in the education system, as he **represents an educators' union** of 1,700 staff. Many educators, including international staff at URI, rely on the bus and that the university could not function without them. There are severe housing challenges in the area; graduate assistants can barely afford to live locally and can't realistically take on the added burden of owning a car. CCRI is already facing enrollment issues, and these cuts would further harm educational communities. An increase in cars will worsen traffic, make it harder to safely exit his driveway, and degrade air quality. He also raised concerns for K–12 students, especially those struggling with mental health, saying the loss of transit options could leave them even more isolated.

Scott Schnur, a Wakefield resident and employee at the University of Rhode Island, is opposed to the proposed cuts and the impact it will have on his life, his family, colleagues, and broader community. He shared that he regularly rides Route 69 bus to work, especially in the winter. He often rides it with his three-year-old son, who loves the bus and points it out every time it passes on Main Street. The potential loss of this service saddened them both, but Scott emphasized that the consequences extended far beyond his household.

He described seeing colleagues and students on the same route and expressed particular concern for a student who was being forced to find a new lease just weeks before the academic year due to proposed bus cancellations. This student, an international Ph.D. candidate, was too afraid to attend the meeting in person despite holding a valid visa. Scott read her written statement aloud, revealing how she relies entirely on RIPTA due to the high cost of living and lack of a personal vehicle. With Route 69 eliminated and Route 64 reduced from nine to just two round trips, she fears being cut off from essential services—grocery stores, banks, and her route to campus. Without these buses, she will be left with unsafe walking conditions and unaffordable rideshares.

Scott stressed that many low-income and individuals with disabilities depend on public transit as their only connection to food, healthcare, education, and employment. He warned that eliminating bus routes will increase pollution, undermine the state's climate goals, and harm vulnerable populations. Calling the cuts short-sighted and damaging to Rhode Island's future, he proposed solutions such as taxing nonresident property owners who enjoy the state's resources but do not contribute to its infrastructure.

He concluded by affirming his belief in Rhode Island's potential. He had chosen to move to Rhode Island even before securing his current job, motivated by hope for a better life for his family. He urged RIPTA to reject austerity and to find bold, forward-looking solutions that would support, not abandon, the communities that rely on public transportation.

Jamie Barrett, a Wakefield resident, shared that she has low vision and, by state law, will never be eligible for a driver's license. She moved to the URI area specifically because of its accessibility and transit options, especially Route 69. When choosing where to live, her top priorities were access to doctors, dentists, grocery stores, and reliable bus service. She lives in

Wakefield and, since she is low-vision and not legally blind, she does not qualify for many services available to those who are, making public transit even more critical. Jamie warned that people with similar conditions will face increased isolation if service is cut, as they depend on the bus to remain connected and independent.

South Kingstown Town Councilor Jay G. Wegimont expressed gratitude for the strong community turnout and shared outrage over the devastating proposed cuts to Rhode Island's mass transit system. A proud rider of Route 65x to Providence, Wegimont noted that the bus is already full by the time it reaches the Park & Ride in East Greenwich. He regularly relied on the 66 to URI and the 69 to get him home. Recently, he recounted a moment when the 66 unexpectedly dropped him off at URI instead of continuing west. The driver told him the route had ended, contradicting what he'd been told. He recalled getting off the bus, but sitting here today and hearing everyone's stories, he can't help but imagine that becoming permanent and how devastating that would be."

Wegimont drew on his experience living in New York, where robust public transit—like Metro-North, subways, and buses—made car-free living not only possible but practical. He thanked RIPTA's CEO for attending and emphasized that everyone in the room loves and supports RIPTA. "If we could," he said, "we would elevate RIPTA to the level of the MBTA or Metro-North"—a level that would reflect the pride and value it deserves.

He stressed the unique importance of Route 69 for South Kingstown residents, calling it the only east-west connection in the area. Its elimination will impact fishermen commuting to Galilee, URI students, and professionals, like a law student who recently emailed him, who depend on the bus to get to Providence. Wegimont described seeing fishermen headed to work, people shopping at Stop & Shop, and others waiting up to two hours to return—all depending on the 69.

Speaking on behalf of the people of South Kingstown, and as a member of the South Kingstown Town Council, Wegimont called for creative problem-solving to close RIPTA's \$10 million deficit. He stressed the urgency of meeting Rhode Island's *Act on Climate* goals and reducing emissions, a state mandate, and asked what kind of example was being set by cutting transit in light of those obligations.

He urged continued public advocacy: write letters, speak out, don't let this issue fade from view. Public transit must be protected, not dismantled.

Maggie Beinish, a Newport resident and a Ph.D. student in oceanography and former president of the graduate student union, spoke in opposition to the proposed service cuts. Many graduate students, including herself, do not own a car and rely on RIPTA to get to work and class. Route 64, which connects URI's Bay Campus and Main Campus, is essential for students and staff traveling between the two. She expressed that being low-income in Rhode Island is already difficult, but losing access to transportation will make it significantly worse, especially when it came to getting to and from work.

Liza Burkin, Board President of the Providence Streets Coalition and the Save RIPTA campaign, addressed the audience with gratitude and urgency. She thanked the community for showing up and emphasized that many of them were bus and bike riders. She apologized for not having been more active in South County but encouraged everyone to get involved by visiting PVDstreets.org and following the coalition on social media to stay connected and amplify their voices.

Burkin shared how the proposed cuts will affect her personally. Though she lives in Providence, her mother lives on Old Boston Neck Road in Narragansett, and the bus route that allows her to visit is proposed for elimination. Her brother, who is expecting a child and moving to Boone Street without a car, also depends on public transit. Furthermore, her brother needs bus access to Wickford to visit their sick father in Boston. She called the situation devastating, not just for herself, but for everyone in the room.

She stressed that although RIPTA leadership was present and listening, the ultimate responsibility, and power to stop the cuts, lays with Governor McKee. Liza stated that he caused the crisis and can fix it. She pointed out that the projected RIPTA deficit had already been reduced from \$17 million to \$10 million and criticized the state's spending priorities, calling out large sums spent on highway expansion and unnecessary projects while transit needs go unmet. It is unfair and inequitable. All Rhode Islanders deserve bus transit.

Liza urged everyone to contact Governor McKee and make their voices heard, emphasizing that public transit was a right and that the community deserved better.

Alana Delvty, a Providence resident, argued that the \$10 million RIPTA deficit is smaller than what RIDOT recently spent on a landscaping project near the airport exit, underscoring a misalignment in spending priorities. Public transit is not a welfare service, it's a necessity. A lack of reliable transit contributes to brain drain, making Rhode Island less attractive to talented individuals. She cited online Reddit discussions where people consistently criticize the state's poor transit system and mentioned that Hasbro has considered moving to Boston, partly due to the lack of public transportation. Alana concluded by saying that Rhode Island has the potential to be the "Singapore of New England" if it invests in RIPTA. With a strong, well-funded system, many residents could be convinced to give up their cars.

Susan Marcus, a Wakefield resident and member of RI Transit Riders, shared that she is not a frequent bus rider. She lives in a place where she must drive and is fortunate enough to afford a car. However, as an urban-minded person, she expressed a strong appreciation for public transit. She noted that when she travels to Providence for meetings, she prefers to take the bus, but not if it takes all day to get there.

Susan emphasized that the hearing should be about *expanding* RIPTA service, not reducing it. She praised Chris Durand and the team for their progress over the past year, particularly for

hiring and training more drivers. She pointed out that it once seemed possible to close RIPTA's funding gap with just 1% of RIDOT's budget.

Even though she doesn't use the bus daily, she urged everyone to care deeply about what happened to RIPTA. Service cuts will lead to more traffic, road expansion, pollution, and failure to meet the state's legally mandated 2030 climate goals. Public transit should not only be seen as a service for the disabled or low-income riders, but as a public good for *everyone*.

Joanne Costanza, a South Kingstown resident, encouraged attendees to connect with existing organizations to advocate for public transit rights. She suggested joining regular demonstrations in South Kingstown and incorporating messages about the importance of transportation. She also proposed making extra signs to share with others and highlighted the group *South County Resistance*, which can be found on Facebook, to get involved.

South Kingstown Town Councilor Patricia A. Alley expressed her appreciation for the strong community turnout, emphasizing that everyone's voices mattered and could truly make a difference. She encouraged RIPTA to think creatively, suggesting that smaller, flexible transit solutions—like the Flex bus—should be considered as alternatives to traditional fixed-route service.

Drawing on her experience serving on the Senior Advisory Council and other local organizations, Allie highlighted the ripple effects that transit cuts will have on real people. She described how individuals will struggle to get groceries or attend doctor's appointments, and warned that, in many cases, the lack of access to care will lead to emergencies requiring rescue services. She emphasized that eliminating public transportation will not solve these problems, it will worsen them, leading to broader societal breakdowns. She called for a fresh perspective, one grounded in empathy and a deep understanding of the people who rely on public transit every day.

Andrew Lambson, a Wakefield resident who lives with his dad, shared that he is disabled and has been riding the bus for 22 years. He takes Route 69 every Tuesday to visit his mother and also relies on the bus to get to his job at Marshalls. He emphasized the need to maintain bus service for people like him who depend on it for daily life and independence.

Dr. William Preston shared a powerful personal story about how RIPTA transformed his life. At age 44, with only a high school diploma, he was able to pursue higher education because of access to public transit. Thanks to RIPTA, he became a doctor, bought a home, paid taxes, and helped thousands of students, moving from subsidized housing to full independence.

He emphasized that without RIPTA, none of that would have been possible. He criticized the proposed cuts as shortsighted and unjust, pointing out that working-class people are always the first to bear the burden. He called out the inequity of regressive policies, such as gas taxes that disproportionately impact low-income workers, and demanded that wealthy residents contribute their fair share.

Dr. Preston argued that taxing multimillionaires could easily generate the \$10 million needed to close RIPTA's funding gap, money he said the ultra-wealthy "wouldn't even feel." He urged leaders to stop targeting the most vulnerable and instead invest in public transit to create a more just and supportive community, a place where people without cars could live with dignity and opportunity.

South Kingstown Town Council Vice President Michael K. Marran stated that the \$10 million RIPTA deficit amounts to less than one-tenth of one percent of the state budget. He emphasized that this is not a separate issue, it's directly connected to the Climate Act, affordable housing, and the needs of the people. He pointed out that new and surplus affordable housing units are located along the routes at risk of being cut, questioning the purpose of such housing if transit access is eliminated. Marran also noted that upcoming housing developments for URI students will require reliable transportation. He called on the governor to recognize that achieving these goals depends on supporting public transit.

With no further comments, the hearing ended at 1:30 PM.

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COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

S. Kingstown
12 pm
July 30, 2025

Name: Ka. Maffucci

Address:



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

The 69 is profitable and crucial.
Please keep it alive, even if measures
need to be taken.

Ideally RI should be able to fund
it in the first place. So little money
is needed, keep fighting!

marketing@ripta.com

S. Kingstown
July 30, 2025
12pm

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Rural Ride

Flex 301

Name:

Renee Picillo

Address



Hopkinton, RI 02833

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

* Saugatucket Springs is an Elderly Town Home
53 unit establishment for housing.
There are residents who have no
transportation - who have surrendered
their licenses or can not afford
their own vehicles. Some permanently
some for a season. The RIPTA
brings them grocery shopping, banking
etc. ^{some} People that need wheelchair
vehicles or lift who can't utilize
stairs anymore.

We are a very rural community
where the only groceries are ~~over~~ miles
away.

Many elderly do not & are unable to
order online due to technology comprehension
issues.
Find a solution please

marketingcripta.com

S. Kingstown
12pm

July 30, 2025

COMMENT SHEET



RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Name: LEILA GILL

Address: [REDACTED]

HOPKINTON, RI 02833

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

IT ISN'T A MATTER OF "FUNDING". IT IS A MATTER
OF WILL. AND WILL IS A MATTER OF WHAT YOU CARE
ABOUT. WHERE THERE IS WILL, A WAY WILL BE
FOUND.