

Chris O'Brien

From: Hayley <buckeyhayley@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 7, 2021 11:57 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: SUBJECT: Wednesday, 4/7 Hearing on Budget Article 1, Section 18 (Extension of Bonds)

Dear House Finance Committee Members,

My name is Hayley, I live in Providence and I use RIPTA as my primary way of getting to work, volunteering, night classes, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other errands.

I'm very concerned about the loss of a central bus hub where I can make timely transfers and connections to get where I'm going. Breaking up transfer locations means that it will take me even longer than it already does to get where I'm going by bus.

I'm especially upset that RIDOT will use the 2014 Mass Transit Hub Infrastructure Bond funds to dismantle and deconstruct the central bus hub in Kennedy Plaza. This was not what voters like me intended when I voted in favor of that bond.

Please amend Article 1, Section 18 by inserting the following two sentences beginning on line 6 of as follows:

"Per the 2014 Mass Transit Hub Infrastructure Bond ballot question, funds may only be utilized to fund enhancements and renovations to transit hub infrastructures. No bond funds may be utilized to dismantle or otherwise deconstruct the state's primary transit hub in Kennedy Plaza."

Here is some of my detailed personal experience as a daily RIPTA rider:

I live and work in Providence, and regularly take RIPTA to work and other destinations. I don't have a car, so I walk, bike, take the bus--or some combination of the three--for commuting and all errands. I am very grateful for RIPTA and wish that much more of my taxes and other government money would go to funding public transit. We live in a state small enough that there really is no reason for public transit not to be the automatic, go-to, simplest option for ALL people in this state to get somewhere.

Taxpayers voted to fund a better bus system throughout the state, so it seems glaringly unethical for RIDOT and the state government to repeatedly threaten to spend that money on something that would not only NOT improve public transit throughout the state (or even just in Providence), but would actively worsen the transit system. I'm not in the legal field, but I have to wonder if this RIDOT plan did occur, could someone sue? Because this plan seems completely inappropriate and irrelevant to what we voted to do. Let me emphasize, too, people ride the bus in order to get to work, volunteer, run errands, and contribute to our local economy. (There are some subconscious and conscious biases about people taking RIPTA--I know because I've heard them voiced.) Plus, Kennedy Plaza was already rebuilt only a few years ago.

It's really difficult, especially during the pandemic, to hear about job loss numbers as well as initiatives to address jobs and job training, when the state and RIDOT do so much to solely prioritize one type of commuting--driving in private/individual vehicles. If we as a state are going to claim we care about the environment, public health, jobs, the economy, supporting small businesses, access to nature, mobility justice, racial justice, social justice, education, being age-friendly...we should immediately stop considering this "RIDOT Proposed Multi-Hub Bus System", immediately allocate much more funding to public transit, and immediately take direct steps to de-incentivize driving/riding in private/individual vehicles. I was a first-generation, low-income college grad, and I cannot emphasize enough how helpful it is to not own a vehicle;

owning a car is not an option for so many people, yet RIDOT acts like bus riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists aren't "real" commuters worthy of funds or safe infrastructure.

There are many important rides I've taken on RIPTA that enable me to do things. I took RIPTA to the DMV to get a Rhode Island state ID. I took RIPTA to a place in Warwick for pre-employment drug screening. I take RIPTA to volunteer at a clinic. There are also many places I would take RIPTA if a line went there--for example, Rhode Island Disaster Medical Assistance Team (RIDMAT)/Medical Reserve Corps' headquarters is located at 50 Barnett Ln, West Greenwich, RI. There is no way for me to get from Providence to RIDMAT headquarters via public transit, so I have been unable to get credentials there to begin volunteering--in this pandemic!

There was a recent article in the Woonsocket Call detailing how difficult it is for the many people in Woonsocket who don't own cars to get to the grocery store; I know this is also the case for people who don't own cars in many neighborhoods, towns, and cities across RI. **Perhaps talking to bus riders about their needs, experiences, and gaps would be a better use of time, money, and energy than breaking up Kennedy Plaza.**

When I imagine the state "breaking up" Kennedy Plaza, many of my experiences come to mind. For example, I work full-time on South Main Street, and have taken many night classes at CCRI. So many times I have finished work by 6pm, walked to Kennedy Plaza, and caught busses to CCRI--I have done this to get to the Providence campus, the Lincoln campus, and the Warwick campus. I was so delighted and relieved that RIPTA could take me to all these places, because no way could I justify taking an Uber/Lyft to and from class multiple nights per week. I would take the bus (R-Line) to Canal Street in the morning, walk to work at South Main Street; walk to Kennedy Plaza after work to catch a bus to one of the CCRI campuses, take the bus back to KP after class, then take the R-Line home late at night. When I took the bus to Lincoln in particular, I would get to Kennedy Plaza and have 2 options for a bus line (54 and 51) to take to CCRI Lincoln; being in the centralized KP allowed me to quickly see if a bus was running late, and I could hop on whichever bus arrived first. Therefore, centralized KP allowed me to get to class on time.

I also regularly take the bus to Garden City for doctor's appointments, which I usually schedule to be early on weekday mornings, in order to get them done before work. I would take the R-Line to KP, then again at KP I would have 2 options for bus lines (21 and 22) heading to the Garden City area. This experience was especially notable because I saw many students, teachers, and professionals heading to school & work on these bus lines. Luckily, centralized KP allowed the students, teachers, and me to see if a bus might be running late, and this enabled us to board whichever bus arrived earliest.

It is important to make getting to class and work on time as easy as possible. Many doctor's offices charge significant fees for lateness or cancellation, as they have very busy schedules, so it is important to enable people to get to their appointments on time--make getting places on public transit as easy as possible.

Rhode Island needs to START prioritizing public transit. Start de-incentivizing private car ownership, which contributes to congestion, pollution, inefficiencies, **consumer debt and massive expenses as private vehicles cost hundreds or thousands to fix**, road rage, traffic accidents & deaths (RI has so, so many). **If we're talking about precious/valuable public real estate, maybe take a look at how much space our massive highways take up.**

Thank you for your time and consideration of bus patrons.

Sincerely,
Hayley Buckey

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