

# **Special Legislative Commission to Study Transit Service in the State of Rhode Island**

## **Summary Report and Recommendations**

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## OVERVIEW

On May 25, 2004 the Rhode Island General Assembly authorized, by Resolution, the creation of a Special Legislative Commission to Study Transit Services in the State of Rhode Island. This Resolution was a response to the perennial financial problems faced by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) and the Commission was charged with identifying ways to optimize the functionality of a legacy transit system. When the Commission was established in March 2006, however, numerous current events had combined to dramatically alter the Commission's perspective on transit. These events included: rising energy costs, traffic congestion, shifts in demographic trends, urban design renewal and the extension of commuter rail service. Taking these factors into account, the Commission realized that the attempt to maintain the legacy transit system was not going to be adequate to meet future transportation needs and expectations.

Commission members strongly opposed decreasing RIPTA services or limiting RIPTA's growth potential. All members concluded that restructuring, reinvestment and creative financing would enable RIPTA to become Rhode Island's Mobility Manager. Transforming RIPTA into the State's Mobility Manager calls for the Authority to serve as a major resource in the solution of Rhode Island's transportation problems rather than as a limited service provider.

The following recommendations are intended to guide RIPTA's transformation from an agency perpetually struggling to balance a budget into a public transit system able to respond to rising energy costs, make transit an integral part of community design statewide and provide mobility options that meet the different needs of a diverse population. More detailed recommendations begin on page 11.

### **Recommendations to Transform RIPTA Into Rhode Island's Mobility Manager**

- Provide predictable and long-term dedicated funding sources for a statewide public transit system.
  - Reduce the reliance on the state gasoline tax as a primary source of state funding to support operating expenses of public transit providers.
  - Establish local and/or regional public transit districts within areas of redevelopment or new development that have the authority to collect fees. These fees would provide financial support for new and expanded transit services within the district boundaries.
  - Provide additional state and local funding to cover the operating expenses of RIPTA, thereby freeing up federal funding for capital investments to improve and expand services.
- Update RIPTA's enabling statute to reflect its mission and programs and to provide for the type of public transit system the state should invest in and maintain. This investment should be guided by the proposals in this report to improve and expand public transit services and not solely by the criteria of federal funding programs. Ensure RIPTA riders are represented on RIPTA's Board, as it is the sole decision making authority for implementing the transit proposals in this report.
- Require RIPTA, RIDOT and Statewide Planning to develop a public transit strategy for Rhode Island, that maximizes financial investments and connects all forms of transit such as pedestrian, bike, rail, ferry, bus, etc. Utilize Transportation 2025, the state's long-range transportation plan. However, this strategy should provide shorter-term recommendations that are more detailed and take into account current and projected conditions.

- Establish new transit connections to other modes of public transportation including connections to commuter rail stations both in Rhode Island and just across state lines, ferry terminals and airports.
- Plan public transit services and connections as the defining element of new construction and redevelopment rather than as an auxiliary part of communities.
- Invest in new technology and equipment to provide efficient, accurate and informed scheduling of services, and data-driven decision-making.
- Identify new revenue sources such as those used by other states. The table on page 9 highlights the major sources of state funding for transit systems across the country.

## **Introduction: The Work of the Transit Commission**

On March 9, 2006 the Special Legislative Commission to Study Transit Service in the State of Rhode Island (Commission) initiated a series of meetings to identify how the state could optimize RIPTA's existing public transit services given the Authority's perennial budget constraints. A consideration of RIPTA in the context of several significant events, however, changed the Commission's focus. Instead of focusing on optimizing existing transit service, the Commission recognized that it needed to concentrate on how to build a public transit system for the future, one that could respond to the following factors:

- Rising energy costs and traffic congestion;
- Designing urban spaces and communities with public transit as the core element;
- Providing mobility options for the elderly, disabled and low-income populations while attracting new riders that do not depend on public transit to participate in their community;
- Connecting public transit services to the commuter rail stations that are being developed.

On March 13, 2006, the Governor's Institute on Community Design held a Transit Workshop during which local, state and national leaders discussed transit-oriented design and Rhode Island's future transit needs (see Appendix B for workshop agenda). Not only did the workshop bring fresh perspectives to the discussion of public transit, it demonstrated a strong desire and the leadership to reinvigorate Rhode Island's public transit system.

The Commission began its meetings on March 21, 2006 and continued to meet through May 2007 (see Appendix A for schedule and agendas). Its meeting schedule allowed for testimony from transportation and planning specialists and representatives from the Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs, the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, the Governor's Commission on Disabilities and the American Public Transportation Association. The presenters provided a wealth of knowledge, including information on how RIPTA evolved into a statewide public transit provider. RIPTA officials also testified about the obstacles the Authority is trying to navigate in order to deliver a statewide transit system that meets people's needs. From the first meeting, it was clear that the discussion would need to focus on how to reinvigorate RIPTA and expand its statewide services.

The Commission learned that while RIPTA annually faces budget constraints, the services that it has been able to maintain are award winning. In addition to national recognition, RIPTA has also improved some of its services and implemented new programs to attract new riders even during difficult fiscal years. Ridership increased 26.5% over the past three years and is up 6.64% as of March 2007. This success inspired discussions on how to continue investing in successful services while transforming RIPTA into broader, more diverse public transit system.

The Commission learned that improving the public transit system can spur economic development and generate wealth in surrounding areas. It also learned that although expanding services requires a large upfront capital investment, many state and local governments across the country are providing that capital in order to reinvigorate their communities and position public transit more prominently. Once a public transit system is expanded the additional revenues generated by new services help support the long-term operating expenses to run those services.

There is not a single public transit system in the country that makes a profit. By its very nature, "public" transit is a service that requires support from local, state and federal governments, as it is in their best interest to protect and improve the social networks of communities.

The Commission was co-chaired by Senator Daniel Connors (Co-Chair) and Representative Edwin Pacheco and was comprised of representatives from the following agencies and organizations: the Department of Transportation, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, the Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs, and the Governor's Commission on Disabilities.

### **Public Transit: An Award Winning System in Rhode Island**

When people think about Rhode Island's current public transit system they may envision a system that is stalled in what seems to be a continuous cycle of funding shortfalls, fluctuating ridership and a never-ending battle to convince people to give up their automobile. However, RIPTA has been recognized nationally as one of the most innovative and creative public transit systems in operation today. Some of these national awards include:

- American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Public Transportation Outstanding Achievement Award for having the best Paratransit system (RIde Program) in the nation;
- APTA Welfare-to-Work Transportation Program Award for having one of the top ten Jobs Access programs in the nation;
- Five (5) APTA Adwheel Awards for transit marketing and public relations campaigns;
- PARI Independent Living Center Leadership Award;
- 2002 Urban League of Rhode Island Community Service Award;
- Newport Convention and Visitors Bureau Tourism Award, given by the Governor for providing public transportation services that support Newport County tourism.

In recent years, RIPTA has made significant strides, not only to expand its services and ensure a safe, reliable public transit system. Some of RIPTA's accomplishments include:

- Coordinated partnerships with institutions of higher education, which reduced parking and congestions problems, brought 125,000 new riders per month to RIPTA, and new revenue of \$1.5 million annually;
- Implemented new information and signage campaigns, including federally funded intermodal information signage program at 12 major transit centers, new and replacement bus stop signage program and new and replacement bus shelter program;
- Developed new emission reduction program;
- Introduced ultra low sulfur fuel for buses;
- Initiated new general overhaul program for RIPTA's bus fleet.



RIPTA has created a system that strives to achieve its mission: "To provide safe, reliable and cost effective transit service with a skilled team of professionals responsible to our customers, the environment, and committed to transit excellence."

However, RIPTA's legislative mandate does not promote these outcomes, making it difficult for the statewide public transit provider to advocate for increased state investments and participation in expanding the system. The legislative purpose of RIPTA, pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws 39-18-3, is "to own and operate a mass motor bus, water, or rail passenger transportation system. Whenever any operator of a mass motor bus, water, or rail passenger transportation system files with the public utilities administrator a petition to discontinue that service, and if it is determined that it is not in the public interest to discontinue that service, the authority is authorized and empowered to acquire all or any part of

the transit property, or any interest therein, of the system.” RIPTA is authorized to acquire failing systems and somehow continue to operate those systems to meet the mobility needs of the people. Adapting old systems even in the face of new challenges, RIPTA is hindered from providing the public with improved mobility options.

The Commission, therefore, set out to determine what improvements and investments are necessary in order to expand the State’s public transit system so that it is able to serve people’s needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Legs, Loops and Links**

At its March 9, 2006 meeting, the Commission was presented with a working paper that had been drafted by the Senate Policy Office, entitled *Legs, Loops and Links*. This paper allowed the Commission to think about public transportation differently, and in the context of the factors which are present today:

- Rising energy costs and traffic congestion;
- Designing urban spaces and communities with public transit as the core element;
- Providing mobility options for the elderly, disabled and low-income populations, while attracting new riders who do not depend on public transit to participate in their community;
- Connecting public transit services to the commuter rail stations that are being developed.

In June 2005, The Senate Policy Office was privileged to find itself with a group of young people who wanted to gain insight and experience in the policy process. Three of these “students” had significant experience as public transit users, and the public transit system in Rhode Island was once again forecasting serious financial difficulty. Serendipity: here was a capacity for fresh thinking and a problem, which requires fresh thought.

The group was given very little top-down direction. Other than establishing the topic, only two requests were made. First, to look at transportation historically. Do modes of transportation change over time? Second, to consider transportation in Rhode Island holistically, and be responsive to the diversity of what is taking place.

So, what happens when a group of very bright, creative young people come together and think for a month about the future of public transit in a jurisdiction? A proposal for: 1) a reconfigured system, and 2) a new attitude.

#### **-- Key Concepts --**

- **LEGS**- Walkability in areas served by public transportation. Safe, comfortable sidewalks in interesting areas. Sidewalks that are in poor repair, dark, and feel dangerous: how can public transit succeed if walking is unpleasant?
- **LOOPS**- Circulation around a community or geographic area. A bus on a circuit, stopping at a commercial center, a park, a library, a university, a hospital, looping to the commercial center and connecting to other public transit.
- **LINKS**- Connection between places in sequence. A commuter train or bus from suburb to center city, ties to other modes of transportation, intercity rail and air, and to major employment, civic, and entertainment centers.

Rhode Island has: walkable places, places that can be served by circulation loops, and loops that can be linked as places are connected. A premier example is the Gateway Center in Newport, a walkable city, where local buses connect with commuter and intercity buses, and trolleys connect with ferry service. LEGS, LOOPS, and LINKS.

Is the current way of thinking about public transportation a dead-end? For a decade, the picture for RIPTA has been bleak. Perennially RIPTA has faced tough choices of seeking increased subsidies, reducing service, or creatively using funding streams and demonstration grants. The question has been how to keep the present system going, even at a diminished level.

What are the possible consequences of thinking about public transportation in terms of three propositions: 1) walking is “the best exercise”, 2) Rhode Island is a mosaic of villages, neighborhoods and central places, and 3) places in Rhode Island need to be connected? A combination of imagination, creativity and resources has allowed Rhode Island to reinvent its public transportation system multiple times. The necessary elements of this combination are appearing in Rhode Island today and must be capitalized upon, in order to reinvigorate and rethink how people and places are connected.

Link and loop transportation presents a revolutionary shift in how individuals view public transit. Long seen as an auxiliary part of the community, public transit was designed to aid the activities and people within a city; one-dimensional and isolated in its purpose. Link and loop-styled transportation no longer sees transit in this supporting role, but in a defining position, giving form to communities and shaping the lives of its citizens. The legs, loops and links concept should be carefully considered as a means to incorporate all forms of transportation in a way that enhances the larger system and makes people’s use of commuter rail easier. An opportunity such as this only comes around so often, as illustrated in the transportation timeline, and should be strategically designed to meet the needs of future generations.



## **Financing Public Transportation**

Nationally, many regional transit agencies are faced with financial shortfalls and the need to develop innovative financing mechanisms to support transit development. Fiscal obstacles may be created by revenue shortfalls in the general government or within the transit property, changes in federal financing formulas, increases in construction, maintenance, and operating costs, and shifts in population and development patterns. In addition there are needs for transit services to be developed in areas where the infrastructure does not exist or to increase services beyond existing capacity on popular routes.

Rhode Island is in a particularly unique situation when it comes to operating a regional transit agency: the region in this case is the entire state and the mode of travel is comprised of buses, trolleys and vans, not trains. RIPTA itself has examined funding alternatives and various branches of government have considered financing options. Non-profit think tanks and service agencies have supplied concepts for further study. However, more has to be done to develop and implement unified transit policy, goals, and financing strategies.

Some of the financing strategies that have been used by regional transit agencies include:

- **State Infrastructure Banks (SIBs)**- This strategy operates as a revolving loan fund that may provide a wide range of financial assistance in addition to loans. The purpose is to attract new funding into transportation, to encourage innovative approaches to transportation problems, and to help build needed transportation infrastructure. Federal law provides that each designated state may transfer up to ten percent of certain Federal dollars, match those funds with state funds, and deposit them into a State Infrastructure Bank. Challenge: There are restrictions when using Federal funding as to the type of expenditures. Some states have created revolving funds at the state level however; an initial source of funding must be identified.
- **Interagency Partnering and Pooled Financing**- This strategy is often used by smaller agencies seeking debt financing on an independent basis. Several small agencies partner together to achieve greater leverage in the markets. Opportunity: This approach has been achieved, to a certain extent, for projects dealing with education or health, through the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC).
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**: This strategy is a special financial tool that can generate money for development in a specific geographic district. They are also called TIDs (Tax Increment Development). TIFs were created so that local, often specifically municipal governments could issue bonds to finance infrastructure improvements, undertake land assembly, and provide incentives to lure private investment to specific areas. Challenge: The establishment of TIF areas for transit would probably require specific legislation, and might be met with resistance or even opposition from property owners and municipalities: TIF is not a common tool in Rhode Island.

Other possible sources and tools for financing might include: examination of alternative funding sources such as Housing & Urban Development grants or Historic Preservation grants (as the system ages); requirements and regulations in existing programs or laws to encourage transit-oriented development (TOD); programs to generate private investment; multi-modal planning and funding; federally-backed grant anticipation notes; and policies to increase ridership and promote transit. The table on the following page provides an overview of the major funding sources for each State's transit services.

**Table 3.1 Major Sources for Overall Transit Funding (1)**

State	General Fund	Gas Tax	Motor Vehicle/Rental Car Sales Tax	Registration/License/Title Fees	Bond Proceeds	General Sales Tax	Interest Income	Others
Arizona	0.5%							99.5%
Arkansas			100%					
California		X			X	X		X
Connecticut		X	X	X			X	X
Delaware		X		X				X
District of Columbia	80%			.	20%			
Florida		X	X	X				
Georgia	100%							
Idaho								100%
Illinois	X				X			
Indiana						100%		
Iowa			X					
Kansas		100%						
Kentucky	100%							
Louisiana								100%
Maine	22%				78%			
Maryland	33%		36%	17%	10%			4%
Massachusetts	3%				23%	59%		15%
Michigan		X	X	X				X
Minnesota	X		X					
Missouri	100%							
Montana		19%		81%				
Nebraska	37%							63%
Nevada							100%	
New Hampshire	50%							50%
New Jersey	32%	X				X		X
New York	9%					X		X
North Carolina								X
North Dakota				100%				
Ohio	100%							
Oklahoma	69%	31%						
Oregon	X	X						X
Pennsylvania	X		X		X	X		X
<b>Rhode Island</b>		<b>90%</b>			<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>
South Carolina		100%						
South Dakota								100%
Tennessee		100%						
Texas	X							X
Vermont								100%
Virginia		X	X			X		X
Washington			X					X
West Virginia	100%							
Wisconsin		X		X				
Wyoming							X	100%
Alabama	These seven states do not use state funds for public transit							
Alaska								
Colorado								
Hawaii								
Mississippi								
New Mexico								
Utah								

Notes: (1) A percentage figure is shown when the share or contribution of a particular source could be discerned. Where the exact funds, tolls, or other share cannot be computed, an "X" is placed to illustrate the state's reliance on that source.

<sup>2</sup> "Other" includes state highway funds, trust funds, miscellaneous revenues, fees, taxes, lottery types of assessments.

## **RIPTA: Rhode Island's Mobility Manager**

Members of the Commission, as well as invited speakers, provided a number of recommendations about the type of public transit system that Rhode Island could have, and the improvements which would need to be made in order to achieve this new transit system. In order for RIPTA to become Rhode Island's Mobility Manager, it must transform from being a limited service provider to being a state resource to solve transportation problems.

### ***The Vision for a New Public Transit System includes:***

*Existing programs that have been successful.*

- *Fixed route bus service*
- *Trolley service*
- *Flex bus service*
- *Paratransit*

*New connections to other modes of transportation.*

- *Rail*
- *Water*
- *Air*

*Informed, data driven decision-making.*

- *Coordinate Flex and Ride Program*
- *Intelligent transportation systems*
- *Intermodal Integration*

*Expanded service areas.*

- *Support urban development*
- *Improve pedestrian connections and safety*
- *Streetcars in Providence*

In order to achieve this vision some basic improvements can be made. These improvements include development of bus hubs, continuation and expansion of maintenance facilities and programs, restructuring and reinvestment in the bus system, and driver training. Some of these improvements are well underway; others were proposed as a means to support projects that are in the planning and design phases.

### **Basic Improvements**

Bus Hubs: The development of bus hubs within urban communities and areas where dense development is planned provides a central location for transit services, and the necessary ridership to support those services. Bus hubs developed or renovated to date include:

- Kennedy Plaza
- Pawtucket Transit Center
- Gateway Center in Newport
- Transit Center at Woonsocket Depot

Maintenance: RIPTA has successfully developed and sustained a comprehensive maintenance program in order to maximize the life and reliability of its bus fleet. This maintenance program should continue and expand in areas where necessary. This program includes:

- Developing and maintaining new facilities;
- Improving reliability of the bus fleet;
- Rebuilding program to utilize existing fleet;
- Supporting clean air initiatives.

Restructuring and Reinvestment: Many of the fixed routes have become so popular that there are demands for certain bus routes to operate above capacity. If these routes were reconfigured, and investments were made to support their popularity, ridership could continue to grow. The routes and programs that could be restructured include:

- Newport
- Providence Link Trolleys
- Warwick
- East Providence
- Providence's North Side
- Woonsocket
- U-PASS Program

Driver Training: Create a new, Authority-wide training system and policies to empower drivers, reduce burnout, and facilitate customer service within the system.

Information and Safety: Create a transit system that is reliable, informative and safe by installing a sign at each of the 5,000 RIPTA bus stops detailing route and schedule information for that stop and real time information at key stops. Additionally, there is a need for more shelters. Every bus passenger is a pedestrian by necessity; therefore RIPTA should work with communities and developers to create walkable environments around transit routes and with RIDOT to create sidewalks and safe crossings on state roads.

Paratransit Operations: A new Paratransit facility has been approved for construction that will allow RIPTA to maintain, store, and fuel 140 paratransit vehicles inside. This facility will also be the location of the Ride scheduling and administration sections and RIPTA's administrative departments. Customer Service and Senior identification services will also be housed in this new facility. Design of the building will begin in Spring 2007 with construction complete in 2010.

### **Decision-Making**

In order to achieve this expanded role, the decision-making of the Authority must be data-driven, performance oriented and focused on attracting new riders. These efforts will result in substantial increases in passengers per hour, using these new methods. RIPTA must be capable of not only managing its services but also identifying opportunities to expand in successful areas, or to restructure in areas where service is inefficient. This will require:

- Automatic passenger counting systems;
- Passenger surveys;
- New fare boxes;
- New scheduling software- for both fixed route and Paratransit services;
- ITS improvements.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) have proven to be extremely useful for making service decisions about a public transit system. The types of equipment used and the results associated with this equipment include:

- Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)
  - Integrated Global Positioning Systems
  - Enhanced On-Time Performance
  - More Accurate Data Collection
  - Improved Paratransit and Flex Operation
- Improved Customer Communication
  - Real Time Info: Phone, On-Line, & Key Bus Stops
  - Improved Web Site
  - Mapquest for Transit
- Scheduling and Dispatching Software
- Video Surveillance
- ADA Compliance

RIPTA has planned a number of ITS improvements including:

- Electronic Fare Program- to improve customer boarding and provide more accurate revenue and data (July 2007)
- RId e Paratransit Software- improve scheduling and customer experience (Fall 2007)
- RId e Vehicle Video System – improve customer safety (retrofit 140 vehicles 2008)
- Automated Passenger Counters (APC)- provide more accurate passenger data (15 additional in Fall 2007)
- Trolley Demonstration Project- demonstrate ITS capabilities in a visible setting, by providing computer aided dispatch, text base data messaging, automatic route and schedule adherence, automatic traffic signal preemption, automated bus stop announcements, and real time customer information

### **Evaluation of RId e Program**

Many Paratransit customers could use Flex service program in addition to, or instead of, current Paratransit services. Coordination of Flex and RId e services would optimize operating costs, as well as capital investments. There are four communities currently testing this approach by coordinating these services. The communities are Tiverton (which cannot support both RId e and Flex services), Narragansett, West Warwick, and Westerly.

The Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA) is committed to assuring high-quality and flexible transportation services for elderly and disabled adults. The Department has a long history of working to provide these services through the RId e program. In the past several years there have been dramatic changes in the program including: 1) shifts in structure (from a private independent vendor acting as broker to RIPTA; to a wide variety of companies providing transportation services; to only three companies with RIPTA doing the great majority); and 2) increases in the per ride costs (up 50% between FY '04 and FY '05). These changes are part of larger system and fiscal issues, but have caused a significant strain and inflexibility in DEA's ability to welcome new riders into the system. One unfortunate fact has been that as several ethnic and minority meal sites came online the Department has struggled, and in some cases has been unable to provide them with appropriate transportation support. These pressures require that the state take a fresh look at the system and evaluate:

- Cost-effectiveness of moving to regional vendors;
- Program effectiveness of moving to regionalized drivers;
- Feasibility of rider cost participation;
- Service bundling with fixed system (e.g. rider would move from fixed to Paratransit for selected destinations);
- Regional destinations (e.g. persons in South County could be transported to Providence Medical appointments only on selected days);
- Needs-Based Transportation (access to RIde would be limited to persons with some level of physical or other limitation rather than age-based).

### **Evaluation of Flex Services**

Flex service is a general public service available for any trip purpose where the vehicle does not leave a defined zone. Flex provides mobility options for underserved communities in areas where fixed route service is not feasible. Flex has also proven to be one the best services for people with disabilities because it provides both a scheduled service, as well as point deviation from fixed routes. Flex provides access to shopping, medical, work and other services. The goal of providing transit options to disabled populations is to keep people active in their community with the ability to fully participate in activities, work, etc. A majority of the disabled population is elderly. In order to sustain a first class system with first class access, user contributions based on level of income should be evaluated. How can a transit service be provided with no user contribution? With contributions based on levels of income, RIPTA can provide a better service to Flex riders, and attract new riders to the program.

In addition statewide Flex service should be evaluated. Having a Flex zone in every community could reduce dependence on RIde, allow seniors to age in place, and provide options for affordable housing locations, as well as servicing persons who do not drive.

### **Service to New Areas**

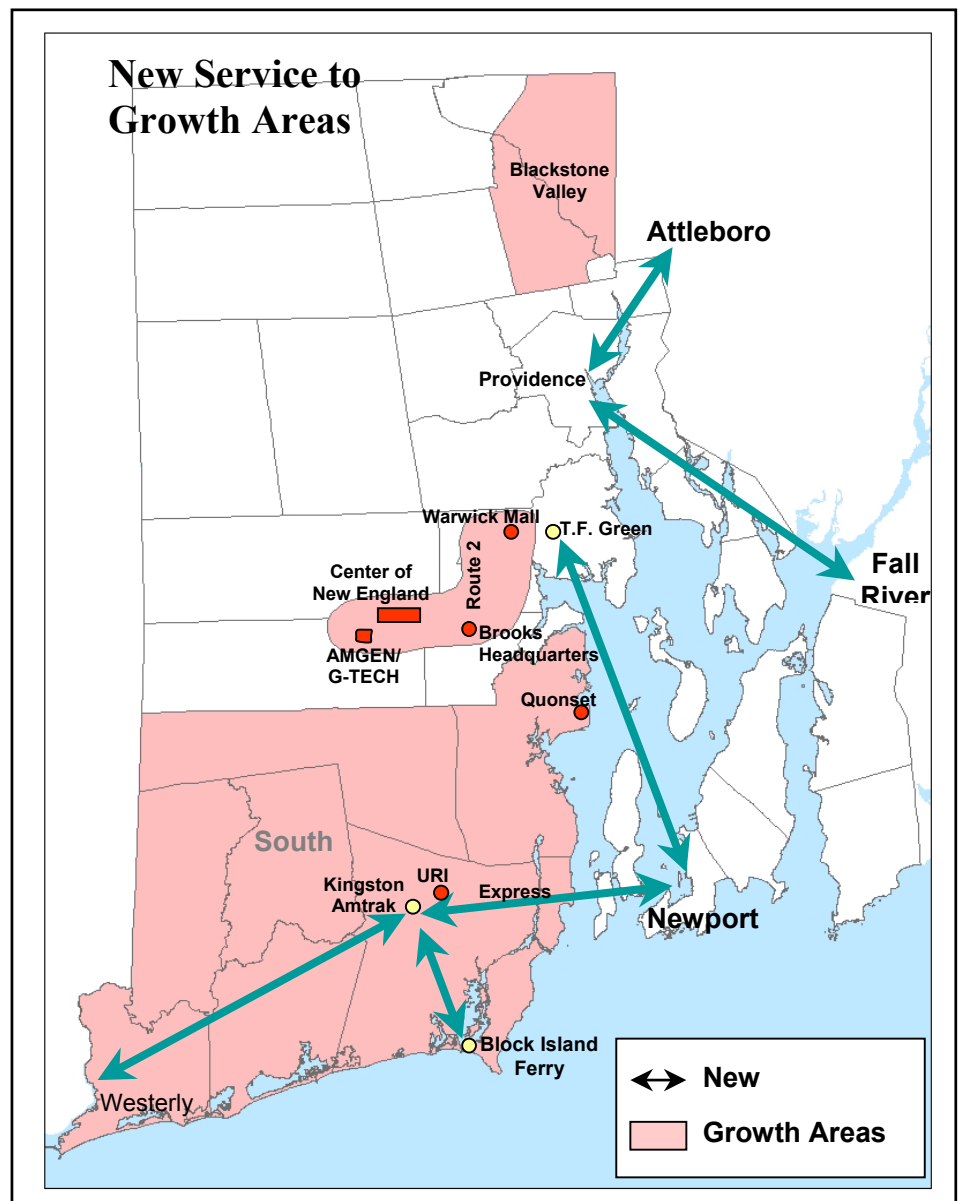
There is a considerable amount of commercial and residential development planned and underway in areas that are underserved by public transit. As the plans for these areas are developed and/or significant redevelopment occurs, efforts should be made to incorporate RIPTA services in a defining position within the developments. These areas include:

- Route 2, Warwick
- Brooks Headquarters
- Center of New England (off Route 95, Coventry)
- South County
- Blackstone Valley
- Westerly one round trip

### New Connections

As bus hubs are developed outside of Providence's urban core, commuter rail is extended, and other public transit services are introduced in suburban and rural communities, the concept of linked and looped transit services becomes more realistic. Some of the key public transit connections that need to be made in order to support link and loop transportation include more non-Providence focused services. These services include the following new connections:

- Airport to Newport
- Quonset, URI (Amtrak) to Newport express
- Block Island Ferry Connection
- State line connections to neighboring bus systems at Attleboro, Fall River, and Westerly



## Through Routing

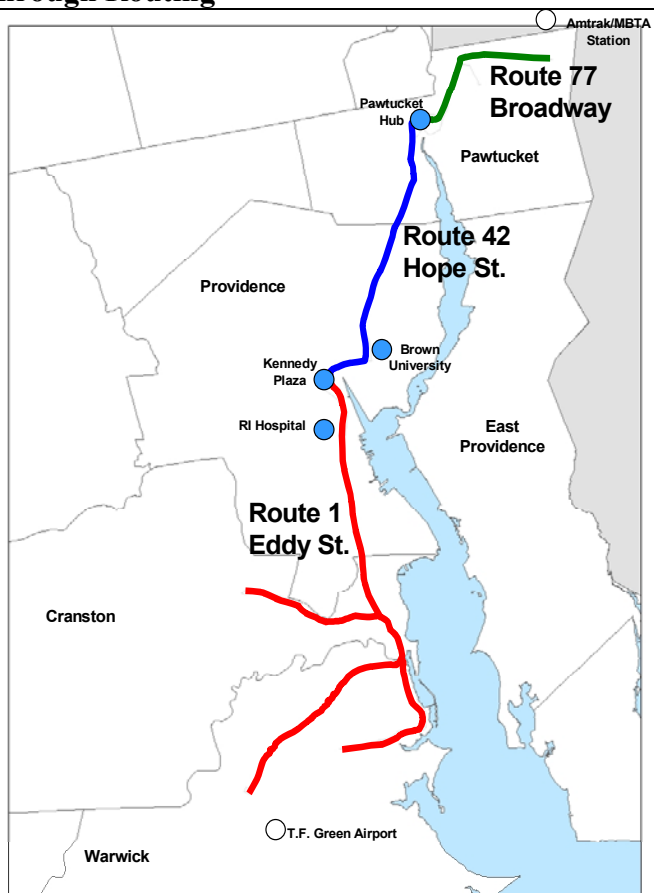
### Through Routing Reducing the need to transfer

Where RIPTA Started-  
3 Different Routes

- Route 1 Eddy St.
- Route 42 Hope St.
- Route 77 Broadway

Where RIPTA is Today-

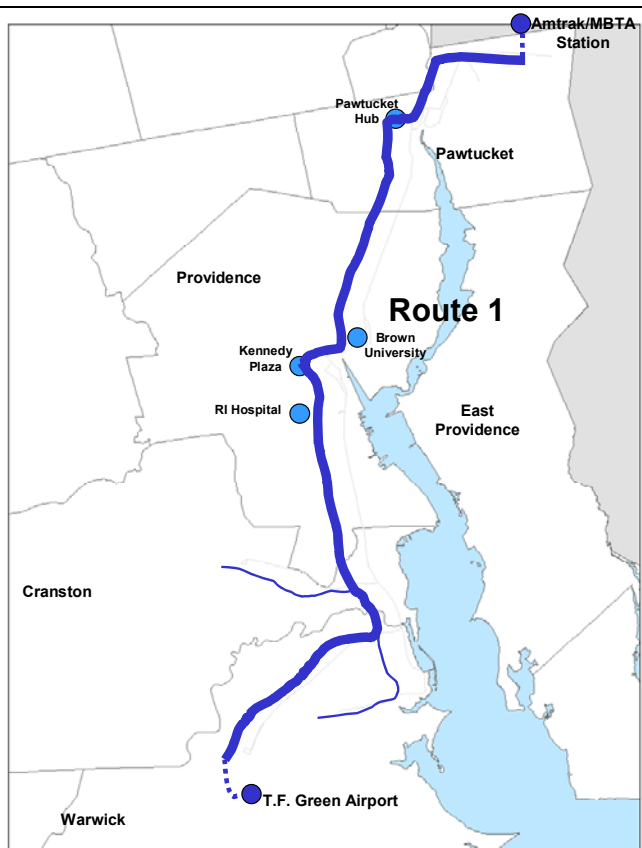
All buses travel end to end on  
the entire corridor



### Through Routing Reducing the need to transfer

Where RIPTA is headed-

- One route – simple and easy to understand
- Regularly scheduled trips at the same time each hour
- T.F. Green and South Attleboro station added to route





## **Transportation 2025**

Transportation 2025, Rhode Island's long-range transportation plan, was adopted on August 24, 2004 by the Statewide Planning Council. The plan strongly supports the transformation of RIPTA into Rhode Island's Mobility Manager. The plan provides goals, objectives, strategies and performance measures for Rhode Island's public transit systems. The Chief of Statewide Planning, John O'Brien, presented Transportation 2025 at the April 11, 2005 Transit Study Commission meeting. Some of these adopted elements are as follows:

### **Transit Goal:**

Provide a safe, robust, and convenient network of buses, trains, and ferries with seamless intermodal connections and encourage carpools and vanpools to increase access to employment and commerce, provide a viable means of transportation, improve the environment, and reduce auto congestion and dependency.

### **Transit Objectives:**

- Increase transit ridership.
- Increase carpooling and vanpooling.
- Maintain transit vehicles, equipment, and facilities.

**Transit Strategies** (listed in no particular order and does not include all strategies in the plan):

- Give RIPTA the responsibility of "mobility manager" in Rhode Island. Include transit, paratransit, park-and-ride lots, vanpools, carpools, and other shared-ride alternatives as options to the single-occupant automobile. RIPTA could be the "one-stop shop" for information on intercity bus and rail, commuter rail, water transportation, and supporting bicycle and pedestrian modes for tourism and recreational travel. Pursue means to tie the various modes more closely, including shared ticketing and trip chaining opportunities.
- Focus on comfort, convenience, and reliability when improving transit. Implement service that reduces overall door-to-door travel time. Integrate scheduling, including centralized dispatch for real-time dispatching capability, through a PC-based Global Positioning System (GPS) program. Integrate vehicle location systems for both fixed-route and paratransit, to enable timely intermodal connections. Improve the flow of data from transmittal of manifests to carriers, to actual data on trips provided and transmitted back to RIde from billing and statistical purposes. Automated data collection should provide for less manual effort at the driver level. Automate all transactions, including fare collection, through an automated data collection system and a fare media reader system. Review and institute where feasible a cash-less fare collection system.
- Work with private employers to provide incentive programs (parking cash-out credits) for public transit usage, bicycle usage, carpooling, and other alternatives to single occupancy vehicle usage. Encourage private sector and government participation in EPA's Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative and Best Workplaces for Commuters.
- Improve public transportation to and between suburban communities. Circumferential transit routes and routes facilitating reverse commuting are essential to serve employers who are located in the suburbs and inner-city, lower-income people who need jobs.

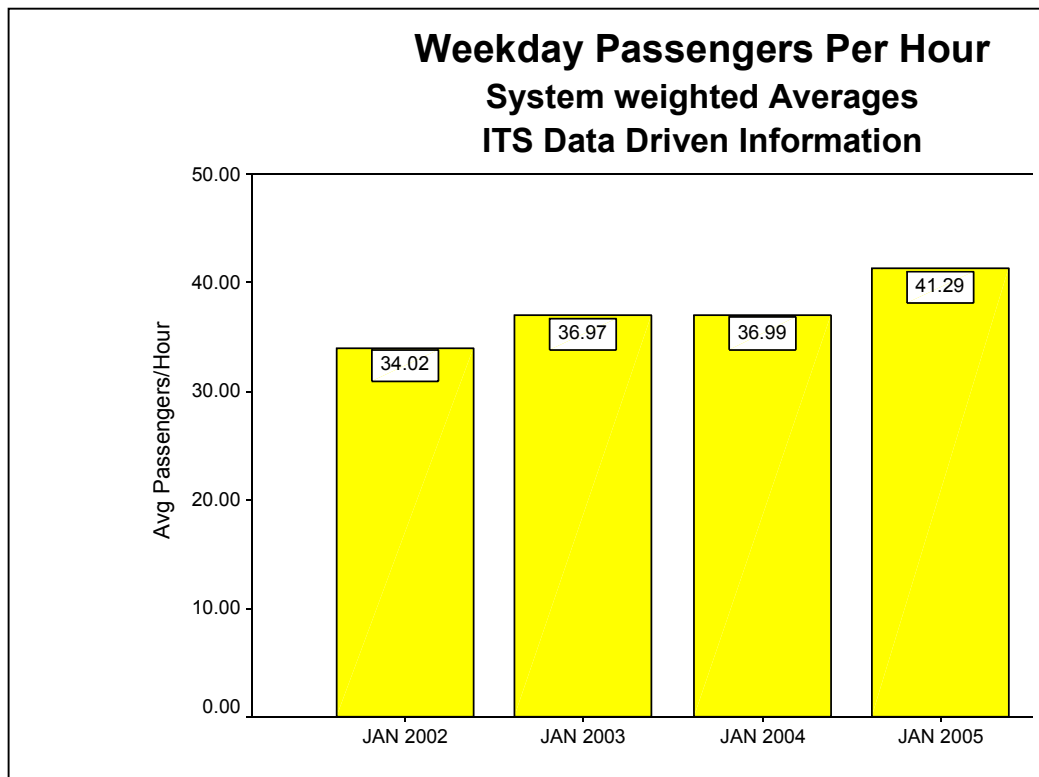
- Work with towns in suburban and rural areas to expand demand response and flex route systems to improve access by poor, elderly, and mobility-impaired residents to jobs, medical facilities, and social services.
- Encourage communities to promote walkability through their zoning and land development ordinances by zoning for a pedestrian scale of development, by including requirements and/or incentives for linking new development to adjoining developments via sidewalks or pathways and transit stops (as applicable), and limiting/reducing the number of driveways along a roadway to improve pedestrian safety.
- Recruit one new college or university per year for five years for RIPTA's University Pass Program.
- Develop a program for state government, as a major employer leading by example, to encourage alternative modes... Promote greater use of financial incentives, similar to those provided by the private sector. Develop a telecommuting policy as an option to reduce travel demand.
- Give greater priority to implementing systems for the prioritization of traffic signals to reduce bus travel time in congested corridors.

In addition, there are performance measures that have been adopted in Transportation 2025. These measures are as follows:

- Increase transit mode share of work trips from 2.5% in 2000 to 2.8% in 2010 and 3.0% in 2020;
- Increase carpool mode share of work trips from 10.4% in 2000 to 10.6% in 2010 and 10.9% in 2020;
- Increase bus ridership from 19.1 million in 2000 to 19.5 million in 2010 and 20.0 million in 2020;
- Increase RIPTA's number of passengers, per hour of fixed route service, from 34.1 in 2003 to 35.0 in 2010. Increase number of passengers, per hour of Ride service, from 3.01 by 3% per year;
- Increase the Mean Distance Between Failure (MDBF) of RIPTA's fleet from 3539 miles in 2003 to 3800 in 2010;
- Maintain 100% ADA compliance for transit system;
- Begin commuter rail service in Warwick and Wickford by 2007.

MODE SPLIT	2000	2010	2020
DRIVE ALONE	80%	79%	78%
CARPOOL	10.4%	10.6%	10.9%
WALK / WORK @ HOME	6.1%	6.4%	6.6%
TRANSIT	2.5%	2.8%	3%
OTHER	1%	1.2%	1.5%

However, it is important to note that many of these performance measures have already been surpassed, due to the factors that are present and which have been discussed, most notably rising energy costs. As illustrated below, ridership has increased at a faster rate than projected, and this does not reflect the growth in ridership since the most recent spike in gasoline prices in the spring of 2006.



### **National Perspective**

Considering the number of recommendations provided by members of the Transit Study Commission related to improving and expanding the public transit system in Rhode Island, representatives from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) were invited to discuss how other states have been able to maintain and expand their public transit services. The following information was presented by Robert Healy Jr., Director of Government Relations for APTA, on April 25, 2006, and provides a summary of how transit is funded in other states, along with the support public transit has gained at the national level.

APTA is a non profit international association of more than 1,600 public and private member organizations including transit systems and commuter rail operators; planning, design, construction and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions; transit associations and state departments of transportation. APTA members serve the public interest by providing safe, efficient, and economical transit service and products. More than ninety percent of the people using public transportation in the United States and Canada are served by APTA member systems.

In the United States, some \$41.3 billion was spent on transit in the most recent year for which statistics are available. Of this total, approximately \$13.2 billion was for transit capital investment and \$28.1 billion was for annual operating costs. While the federal government paid for almost 40% of all capital spending, federal assistance covered only about 5.8% of operating costs nationally. On capital spending, about 47% of transit costs were paid by local government and about 13% of costs were paid by state

government. Nationally, on the operating side, state government paid about 24% of all operating costs, local governments paid about 29% of costs, and fares and other transit systems earnings covered more than 41% of operating costs.

In general, it appears that financing for Rhode Island's transit system follows many of these patterns, except that it derives very little of its annual operating support from local government, and it uses slightly more of its federal funding for operating costs, under the federal law that permits the use of federal capital funding for preventive maintenance. While the percentage of state funding for transit operating costs is slightly above average – largely from the state fuel tax – the fact that so little of Rhode Island's operating costs are paid by local government means that the percent of operating costs covered by state and local government is below the national average (43% v. 53%).

APTA has found that predictable funding for public transportation is critical to adequately addressing transit capital and operating needs. The relatively long lead-time for the procurement of rolling stock or development of transit capital projects requires advance planning and a predictable funding source. As a result, transit agencies generally develop multi-year capital budgets, and annual operating budgets which must include wages, health benefits, fuel costs, and other unavoidable and growing costs. Advance planning, in the form of state and local transportation implementation plans, has been a requirement since enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991.

The guaranteed funding provided under recent federal laws, both The Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA 21) and the more recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), have helped to make better use of federal funding and to leverage additional funding at the state and local level. In a 2002 report entitled *The Benefits of TEA 21 Funding Guarantees* by Jeffrey Parker, the author states that “TEA 21's funding guarantees provide the stability and predictability necessary to reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance and deliver consistent service levels.”

### **State Transit Funding Sources**

Transit funding at the state level, and really at the state, local or federal level, comes principally from a limited number of the same sources. According to the most recent study the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) entitled *Characteristics of State Funding for Public Transportation* (see page 9), the most common funding sources for transit at the state level are general funds (19 states), gas taxes (15 states), motor vehicle/rental car sales taxes (9 states), bond proceeds (8 states), registration/license/title fees (8 states), and general sales taxes (7 states). Other sources for state transit funding include lottery funds, tolls, trust funds, and other types of assessments. Funding sources employed by local, county, or municipal government include many of the same mechanisms, and also property tax revenues.

### **Growth of State Transit Funding**

According to the same BTS report, funding programmed for public transportation at the state level has more than doubled since 1995, growing by some \$4.8 billion. Between 2000 and 2005, state funding grew by \$2 billion. Ten states, including Delaware and Maryland, increased funding by 100% to 350% between 2000 and 2005. I note Delaware and Maryland, because like Rhode Island and New Jersey, all are east coast states with state owned and operated transit agencies.

In fact, between 2000 and 2005, state funding for public transportation grew substantially in all of those states except Rhode Island. In Delaware, state transit funding grew from \$35.7 million in 2000 to \$72.6

million. In Maryland state funding grew from \$273.8 million to \$727.4 million, and in New Jersey, state funding grew from \$509.2 million to \$910.6 million. In contrast, state funding for transit in Rhode Island declined from \$36.8 million in 2000 to \$34.8 million in 2005. Nationally, state funding for transit grew at a less dramatic pace than many of these states, but still it grew from \$7.5 billion in 2000 to \$9.5 billion in 2005.

### **Federal Funding**

As noted previously, the growth of federal funding in recent years and the predictability of federal funding under funding guarantees in recent federal surface transportation bills have helped to spur the growth of state and local transit funding, and investment in the transit infrastructure generally. The Federal transit program has grown from just over \$3 billion in 1990 to more than \$8.5 billion in 2006. Federal funding is authorized to grow to more than \$10.3 billion in 2009.

In the SAFETEA-LU bill that was approved last summer, Congress committed itself to increasing investment in the transit and highway infrastructure. It includes funding for new programs and increases support for underserved areas. Funding for the rural transit formula program grew by more than 70% in 2006, and many states are struggling to come up with the local matching funds to take advantage of increases in the federal program. It established a new program for smaller rail, bus rapid transit (BRT), commuter rail, and streetcar projects, and it encouraged coordination between transit agencies and health and human service agencies that need transportation services for their clients.

APTA believes that transit can help reduce our dependence on imported oil, help reduce traffic congestion, and give people access to jobs, education, healthcare, and other important services. Transit stations have become a magnet for economic development and revitalization in many of our cities. Transit helps address many of our national goals and objectives.

### **Profile of RIPTA: A Legacy System**

When RIPTA was established in 1964 by the General Assembly, to safeguard the public interest in transportation, the first action of the newly formed Authority in 1966 was to acquire the failing United Transit Company and protect the bus routes the company had supported. Since that time, RIPTA's successes and failures have been determined as a result of its founding purpose and reliance on federal funding.

Since Congress passed the first Federal Aid Road Act in 1916, Rhode Island's transportation systems have relied heavily on federal dollars, not only to construct new systems of transportation, but also to maintain the systems in operation. This reliance on federal funding has required the state's transportation agencies to adhere to federal guidelines related to social equity and environmental health. Therefore, RIPTA is responsible for providing the critical freedom of mobility to those populations that are unable to purchase or operate private means of transportation. RIPTA is also charged with adhering to strict air-pollution regulations that require fuel-efficient vehicles and policies to decrease traffic congestion and personal vehicle miles traveled. Are these purposes aligned with how RIPTA actually functions and do they provide RIPTA with the capabilities necessary to capitalize on opportunities that are present? Furthermore, do they provide an adequate basis for securing RIPTA's future?

RIPTA, in partnership with other agencies and organizations, operates a number of services with funding support from the state and federal government. These services include:

## Standard Transit Services

- **Fixed Route Service**  
Statewide bus service on designated routes with a fixed schedule.
- **Park n' Ride**  
Strategically located parking lots, either privately or state owned, that are free of charge to anyone who parks a vehicle and commutes by transit or in a carpool.
- **Flex Service**  
Designed for suburban and rural communities this service offers the option of reserving a ride or picking up the Flex vehicle at one of its regularly scheduled stops (currently there are Flex Zones in Narragansett, Westerly, Woonsocket, West Warwick, Kingston and Island Park/Tiverton). Every Flex zone has a connection to fixed route service in order to link to other areas of the state.
- **Commuter Resource RI (formerly Express Travel Program)**
  - Tax Benefits - Purchase your bus pass using pre-tax dollars through the WageWorks and Commuter Checks programs.
  - Downtown Parking \$2.50 – Carpool parking program at Providence Place Mall Garage for as little as \$2.50 all day.
  - Carpools - RIPTA's AlterNetRide software on [www.ripta.com](http://www.ripta.com) can be used to find carpool companions.
  - Parking Cash Out – Enables employees to exchange employer-paid parking benefit for cash
  - Guaranteed Ride Home twice a year if you miss your regularly scheduled ride
  - Assistance to Corporations with transportation planning, shuttle services for employees and the development of commuting information.
- **Rack n' Ride**  
All of RIPTA's forty-foot buses have bike racks, attached to the front of the bus, where each bike can be loaded and unloaded independently.
- **Providence LINK Trolleys**  
RIPTA's trackless trolleys run on compressed natural gas, a clean fuel. LINK's two routes -the GREEN LINE and the GOLD LINE - are conveniently located along nearly 20 parking lots and popular city attractions.

FY 2005 Ridership	
Fixed Route Bus	20,093,519
Providence LINK Trolleys	799,811
Providence/Newport Ferry	42,274
Flex Services	349,911
Statewide RIDE Senior/ Disabled Transportation Program	689,991
<b>Total Ridership</b>	<b>21,975,506</b>

## Seasonal Transit Services

- **Providence/Newport High Speed Ferry**  
The ferry stops at Conley's Wharf (the Providence Pier is located at 180 Allens Ave.) and Newport's Perrotti Park and runs daily from May 16th through October 16th.



- **Beach Bus Express**  
Each summer RIPTA offers express service to South County Beaches from Woonsocket, Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, North Providence and Cranston. Fares are \$3.50 roundtrip and non-refundable tickets must be purchased in advance.
- **Newport Enhanced Summer Service**  
From Memorial Day weekend through Columbus Day weekend RIPTA enhances its service in Newport, increasing access to the city's seasonal attractions.
- **Ozone Alert Program**  
Ozone Alert Days occur when ozone levels are likely to be unhealthy and unsafe. Under this program, the DEM forecasts Ozone Alert Days and RIPTA provides free service on its routes (except for special services such as the Beach Bus and the Newport/Providence ferry).

### **Pass Programs**

- **University Pass**  
Funded by participating colleges and universities, the University Pass (U-PASS) Program allows students at participating schools to use their student ID as a bus and trolley pass anywhere in RIPTA's statewide system during the academic year.
- **RItE Care Bus Pass**  
RIPTA provides monthly bus passes to approximately 25% of RItE Care/RItE Share members identified by the RI Department of Human Services as eligible. These passes enable heads of households and their dependent children to access reliable transportation to medical services and preventive healthcare, including visits to doctors, hospitals and labs.
- **Passes for People with Disabilities and Seniors**  
Low-income persons with a disability, or aged 65 and above, may ride free of charge with a *RIPTA No Fare ID Pass*. All other persons aged 65 and above, or with a disability, pay full fare during RIPTA peak hours of service on weekdays and pay half fare at all other times upon presentation of a *RIPTA Senior/Disabled Reduced Fare ID Pass* or a *Medicare ID Card*.
- **Keep Eddy Moving**  
A new initiative, sponsored by RIDOT, for commuters to help reduce congestion and keep traffic moving in the Project Area while I-195 is relocated. It offers eligible commuters, who would be driving into the Project Area, discounted transit and carpooling incentives for carpools registered with RIPTA's Express Travel.

### **Department of Elderly Affairs Service Categories**

- **Special Medical**  
Transportation is generally available on weekdays for doctors' appointments, kidney dialysis, and cancer treatments.
- **Adult Daycare**  
Several DEA-licensed centers provide frail and functionally challenged adults, including those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, with care and supervision in a safe environment. Services include therapeutic, recreation, and health services, and respite for caregivers.

- General medical- transportation on weekdays for doctors appointments as well as nutritional support by providing transportation to meal sites.
- The InSight program for the visually impaired

#### **Size and Age of RIPTA Fleet**

<u>Type of Bus</u>	<u>Amount.</u>	<u>Average Fleet Age</u>
Flex	24	5.4 yrs
Fixed Route	216	6.8 yrs.
Trolley	20	6.4 yrs.
Vans	111	4.0 yrs.

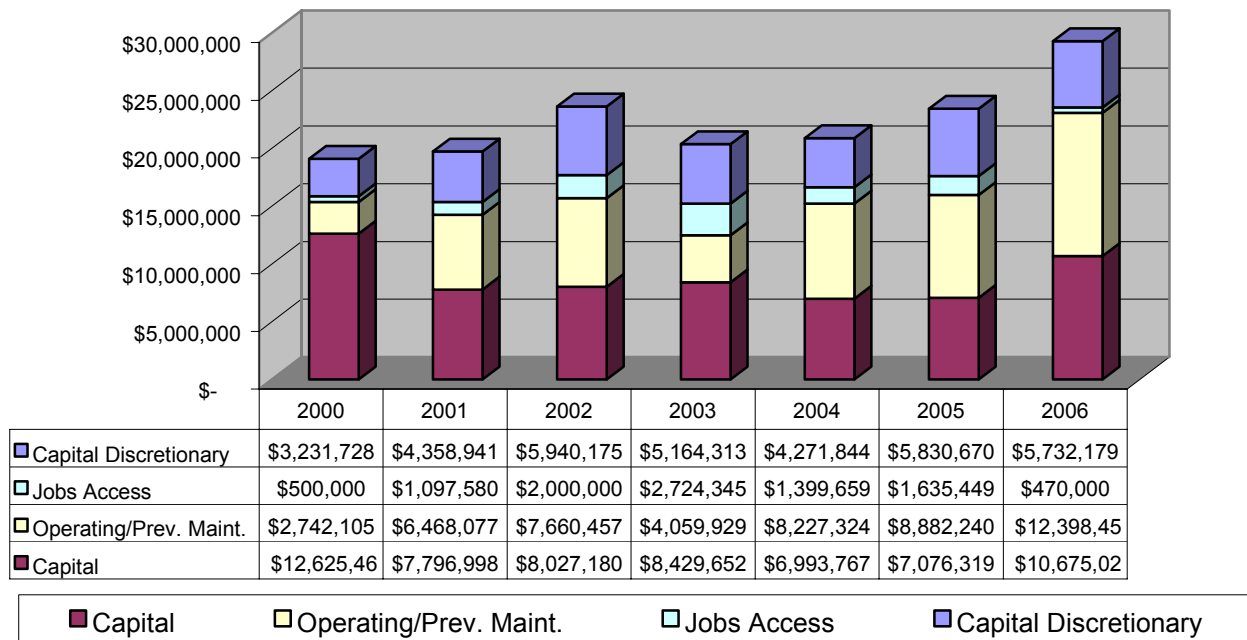
#### **Federal Funding Support to Rhode Island**

Five major federal transit programs provide funding to RIPTA. Funding from these programs can be categorized into four types of funds:

- Capital – used to purchase buses, vans and other non-revenue/support vehicles; building renovations and expansion projects; office, computer and shop equipment; fare boxes.
- Operating/Preventive Maintenance – used to cover service provided under a number of programs (including the non-urbanized areas of the state) and for preventive maintenance of the fixed route bus fleet.
- Jobs Access/Reverse Commute – used to expand service to welfare-to-work clients and to provide transportation to employment centers; funding obtained by RI’s Congressional delegation specifically for these services
- Capital Discretionary – funds obtained by RI’s Congressional delegation as specific project earmarks in the annual federal appropriations process to supplement the capital program described above.



### Federal Transit Funding Overview



Since federal fiscal year 2001, RIPTA has used a significant portion of its urbanized area formula funds provided by the federal government to perform preventive maintenance on the bus fleet. RIPTA has consistently redirected the maximum amount of federal funds allowed to preventative maintenance thereby sacrificing capital projects in the budget. The table below illustrates the amount of funds that have been redirected, which would have otherwise been used for capital investments such as new buses, fare boxes, etc. This re-allocation is a result of inadequate state funding, provided for operating purposes, that would traditionally cover the expense of preventive maintenance programs.

Federal Fiscal Year	Urbanized Area Formula Funds	Preventive Maintenance Allocation	Percent of Total
2001	\$ 13,346,526	\$ 6,000,000	45 %
2002	\$ 14,694,788	\$ 7,152,000	49 %
2003	\$ 11,640,610	\$ 3,672,000	32 %
2004	\$ 14,371,940	\$ 7,840,000	55 %
2005	\$ 7,840,000	\$ 7,840,000	52 %
2006	\$ 9,520,000	\$ 9,520,000	43 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 91,104,231</b>	<b>\$ 42,024,000</b>	<b>46 %</b>

## **APPENDIX A**

### **The Special Legislative Commission to Study Transit Services in the State of Rhode Island Meeting Schedule and Agendas**

#### **March 21, 2006**

- Overview of 2002 RIPEC Report: Rhode Island at the Crossroads  
Presentation by Kenneth Payne, Senate Policy Office
- Overview of Working Paper: Legs, Loops and Links  
Presentation by Kenneth Payne, Senate Policy Office.
- Presentation of Thesis Research by Taryn Sabia, Graduate Architecture Student at RISD

#### **March 28, 2006**

- System expectations—Transportation 2025  
Presentation by John O'Brien, Chief, Statewide Planning Program
- Mobility Services for Elderly Populations  
Presentation by Corinne Russo, Director, Department of Elderly Affairs
- Mobility Services for Disabled Populations  
Presentation by John MacDonald, Governor's Commission on Disabilities

#### **April 4, 2006**

- Conditions of Rhode Island Public Transit Authority—current and prospective
  - Physical and operating systems- Presentation by Al Moscola, RIPTA General Manager and Henry Kinch, RIPTA Assistant General Manager
  - Financial status- Presentation by Annemarie McMahon, RIPTA Director of Finance

#### **April 11, 2006**

- Strategic Planning and Management of RIPTA  
Presentation by Mark Therrien, Supervising Planner of RIPTA

#### **April 25, 2006**

- American Public Transportation Association  
Presentation by Robert Healy, Director of Government Relations

**April 10, 2007**

- Review of Draft report from May 2006 and discussion of meeting schedule.

**April 24, 2007**

- *Growing Smart with Transit*, A report of the Transit 2020 working group  
Presentation by Garry Bliss, City of Providence

**May 1, 2007**

- Update of RIPTA activities and future projects  
Presentation by Al Moscola, Henry Kinch and Mark Therrien of RIPTA

**May 8, 2007**

- Discussion of revised Commission report and draft legislation to update the purpose and duties of RIPTA.

