

Dear Chair Solomon and Committee members,

4/6/2026

My name is **Joe Cole**, I live in **Scituate**, I have been employed at RIPTA for nearly 41 years, and throughout this time, in my opinion, having the director of the DOT involved presents a clear conflict of interest and I am here/writing in support of Bill H8127.

For decades, Rhode Island maintained a clear division of responsibility between its transportation and public transit agencies. RIDOT managed highways, bridges, and road infrastructure. RIPTA operated the state's public transit system — primarily fixed-route bus service and door-to-door transportation for riders with disabilities — and played a central role in statewide transit planning and connections to rail and other modes. Coordination between the two agencies was imperfect, but the separation was intentional. Each had a defined mission, distinct leadership, and accountability aligned with its core purpose.

That separation was undone in 2023.

That year, the General Assembly passed legislation that changed RIPTA's governance structure so that the RIDOT director automatically became chair of RIPTA's board. The rationale was alignment — the belief that placing transit under the Department of Transportation would improve coordination, efficiency, and oversight.

In practice, it subordinated the state's public transit system to an agency whose institutional mission, incentives, and culture are oriented toward roads, not toward moving people efficiently, equitably, and reliably through cities. **The result? The most devastating service cuts in RIPTA's history.**

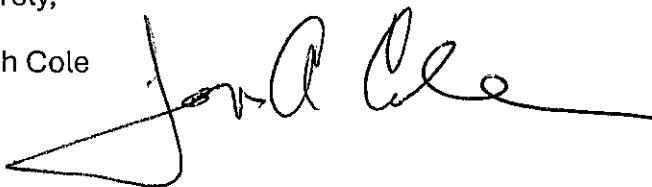
The core failure is not who sits at the top of RIDOT, but how transit decisions are structured in Rhode Island — a framework the legislature fundamentally altered just a few years ago, with damaging results.

With 8127, we can rectify this mistake and ensure RIDOT's participation on the Board of RIPTA without its control. We can also strengthen the RIPTA Board by restructuring it to include direct representation from riders, transit operators, and community stakeholders.

As a transit rider and supporter, I am relying on you to support this simple solution for RIPTA.

Sincerely,

Joseph Cole

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Cole", written over a horizontal line.