

Dear House Finance Committee

This is Barry Schiller writing on behalf of RI Transit Riders to support amending bill H5393 about establishing that maintaining sidewalks on state highways is the responsibility of the state. Many bus routes are along state highways, so it is important for us to have good sidewalks to safely access to the bus stops, and RIDOT indeed has the resources and the expertise to maintain them.

We can understand why sidewalk snow/ice removal is excluded, but the current system for ensuring timely ice/snow from such sidewalks is not working. Even with the relatively low snowfall the last few winters there are times when sidewalks are dangerously blocked for days after the storm, Even worse, some commerces pile up snow from their private parking lots onto the public sidewalks, leaving them blocked even after most snow has melted. This is not satisfactory as we need to be able to access the stops after snowstorms, and so do all other pedestrians, including those unable to drive, school children, those walking for health or leisure, and even some motorists who cannot park by the door and need to walk to their destination. The reality is that the existing system is one in which nobody is really in charge of ensuring these sidewalks are cleared.. Rules about requiring local property owners and commerces are often not enforced as few municipalities want to fine or annoy their residents and businesses. Vacant lots and overpasses can also be problematic. We have tried for years to get this problem addressed to little avail.

Therefore we call on the Committee to amend the bill to require the Department of Transportation to convene a stakeholder process that includes municipal government, police, Public Works Departments, RIPTA, transit, senior and/or disability advocates, snowplow operators, and vendors of sidewalk clearing equipment, to address this issue and report back to the Assembly by April 1, 2026 - after next winter's snow season.

RIDOT has a robust Office of Highway Safety that includes pedestrian concerns, and has the staff to carry out such a process. DOT does a good job of ensuring roads are quickly cleared of snow for motorists, we believe they also have some responsibility to ensure safe travel for all users of state roads including pedestrians. As the bill is now written it sounds as if those who walk are of no importance - I don't think the sponsors intended that, thus I urge support for this amendment.

We thank the Committee for its attention to this matter.

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cc Patricia Raub, Amy Glidden, co-Chairs, RI Transit Riders