

Dear House Finance Committee

This is Barry Schiller writing on behalf of RI Transit Riders to support bill H5467 which restores RIPTA's proportion of the gas tax to what it was when the state began to automatically adjust the gas tax to inflation, and it addresses the need for RIPTA's share of the gas tax to keep up with inflation. thus helping address RIPTA's long term deficit..

RI Transit Riders strongly believes this is justified. First of all, just as RIDOT has to deal with rising prices every year, so does RIPTA. The failure to increase RIPTA's gas tax, a fixed amount per gallon, even as its purchasing power diminishes, has contributed to its recurring deficits. The resulting prospect of service cuts every year is demoralizing to transit riders, it makes it more difficult to plan ahead, and discourages anyone thinking of using transit. Unlike most other places, RI has chosen to support its transit system primarily from the gas tax so we have to get this right.. We appreciate that this bill is not a one-time fix, but by keeping RIPTA updated with inflation it will help all future budgets.

Second, we feel it was a mistake to disregard transit when the gas tax indexing began. To the contrary, our climate and housing crises suggest a need to encourage more transit use, including to serve energy efficient walkable neighborhoods that could help meet housing needs without households having to maintain many expensive motor vehicles to get around, and without building energy-intensive sprawl which paves over the countryside.

Third we note that though RIDOT's share of the gas tax would be reduced to previous percentages, it does have the possibility of a new source of revenue by restoring the truck tolls.

Fourth, we observe the RIDOT has been prioritizing expensive major highway capacity expansions (e.g., on I-95 north in Providence, on Routes 195, 146, 37,..) while transit largely languished. We feel it's legitimate to start to bring things back more into balance, and support our transit system, not just to maintain service but to start to seriously implement the state-approved Transit Master Plan, a blueprint for a first class system that can help meet the state's mobility, environmental, and economic goals..

Finally, on a related point, we urge that the Governor's budget proposal for new registration fees on hybrids and electric vehicles, in effect a gas tax replacement for EVs, be amended to similarly allocate the revenues to RIPTA the same proportionate share as it gets from the actual gas tax. Otherwise RIPTA will be more and more underfunded as EVs come on.

We know the Finance Committee faces lots of demands so we much appreciate your consideration of these points.

Barry Schiller, for RI Transit Riders
cc Patricia Raub, co-char, RITR