

Via Electronic Mail

May 21, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Room 35, State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF **Supports** House Bill No. 5470 – 2026 Bond Referenda

Dear Chair Abney:

The Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill No. 5470, which would place a ballot question before voters in November, 2026, authorizing the state to issue \$100 million in bonds to support implementation of the state's Transit Master Plan (“TMP”). We offer our enthusiastic support for this bill.

CLF is a member-supported non-profit advocacy organization working to protect public health and the environment and build healthy communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England. CLF supports policies that increase public transportation services and ridership and help to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reduction mandates of the Act on Climate.

After reviewing the initial budget proposal for FY 2026, CLF was disappointed to see that critical funding for the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (“RIPTA”) was not included. H-5470 is a necessary course correction which would give Rhode Islanders the option of funding the implementation of the TMP, also known as Transit Forward RI 2040, which would increase ridership and decrease carbon emissions.¹

The TMP makes five broad recommendations to increase RIPTA ridership, which is needed to lower the number of personal carbon-producing vehicles on Rhode Island’s roads:

- Improve Existing Services
- Expand Services to New Areas
- Develop High-Capacity Transit
- Improve Access to Transit
- Make Service Easier to Use

According to Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management’s published Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, Rhode Island’s transportation sector accounts for over a third of Rhode

¹ *Transit Forward RI 2040* - Rhode Island Transit Master Plan: <https://www.ripta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TFRI-Recs-Briefing-Book-Final-201230.pdf>.

Island's greenhouse gas emissions.² That is untenable. The Act on Climate, which sets enforceable climate emissions reduction requirements, mandates that Rhode Island achieve greenhouse gas emissions of 45% below 1990 levels by 2030, 80% by 2040, and net-zero emissions by 2050.³

These targets can only be achieved by substantially reducing the number of personal carbon-producing vehicles on Rhode Island's roads. One of the best tools in Rhode Island's toolbox to meet this target is to substantially increase RIPTA ridership by providing transportation alternatives that are accessible to all Rhode Islanders. RIPTA is already relied on by low-income communities, people with disabilities, and the elderly, making bus lines lifelines for Rhode Islanders without cars. Thriving public transit is also a key element of economic development, enticing companies, development, and jobs.

I'm a regular RIPTA rider myself, and while I genuinely love taking the bus, there is ample opportunity to improve services and make RIPTA a viable alternative to driving. Aspects like increasing bus frequency and improving bus shelters would aid existing riders while attracting new ones. The TMP is a visionary and data-driven plan that has already been vetted by the public and adopted by the state.

It is critical that the General Assembly add this project to the ballot next fall and properly serve the public by ensuring our public transit system is convenient, equitable, and connected. We therefore ask that you support House Bill No. 5470.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Erin Ritter
Program Coordinator, Rhode Island
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Committee on Finance
Representative David Morales
Representative June Speakman
Representative Susan R. Donovan
Representative Michelle McGaw
Representative Arthur Handy
Representative Jennifer Stewart

² *Greenhouse Gas Emissions Survey* – Quick Facts: <https://dem.ri.gov/environmental-protection-bureau/air-resources/greenhouse-gas-emissions-inventory>.

³ R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-6.2-9.



Representative Rebecca Kislak
Representative Leonela Felix
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation