

Brian Rice

RIPTA Budget

Testimony

House Finance Committee

5/21/2025

Hello, thank you for having me. My name is Brian Rice, I'm here on behalf of the Save RIPTA Coalition. as a citizen of Rhode Island, and nearly daily user of RIPTA's transit and paratransit service.

There are thousands of Rhode Islanders like me who depend upon RIPTA for transportation every day, whose options otherwise are extremely limited. Not just for work, school, for appointments, for errands but also to go out, to socialize, to experience all that our beautiful state has to offer.

And truly I am grateful for the impressive work that has been done expanding public transit access over the past several years.

The Transit Forward Plan started in 2020 has implemented new expanded routes expanded transit hubs and put into motion ambitious initiatives to integrate RIPTA's bus service with AMTRAK and with MBTA's commuter rail.

A previous driver shortage has been overcome by increasing wages, training, and benefits for new and existing drivers.

New innovative programs have been put into place like the Kingston Flex on Demand system, where passengers can use their phones to request service in real time

And of course the Ride Pilot Program which has expanded para transit program which as expanded door to door para transit transportation for those with disabilities to now work outside the bus corridors to encompass the entire state.

This is of particular importance to me, as someone with a disability that cannot drive. And for many in similar situations this opens up so many possibilities of not only where we can travel but where we can live.

All of this progress would be wiped away, and these new exceedingly popular expansions, initiatives, and programs would be the first on the chopping block if we as Rhode Islanders and you as members of the General Assembly do not correct Governor McKee's egregious oversight in not fully funding RIPTA.

The Governor himself as a campaign promise pledged to Rhode Islanders that he would expand and improve public transit in our state.

Lest he forget that promise, we at Save RIPTA are promoting a series of bills proposed in conjunction with forward thinking Representatives and senators to offer a number of options to make good on this crucial initiative

**(\$32.6 Million Budget Allocation (Rep. Alzate [H6020](#) / Sen. McKenney [S342](#))**

Closes RIPTA's FY26 operating deficit to prevent mass layoffs and service cuts.

**Rideshare Sales Tax Reallocation (Rep. Morales [H5405](#) / Sen. Britto [S419](#))**

Allocates the current 7% sales tax collected on all Uber/Lyft rides to RIPTA's operational budget. Estimated annual revenue: \$10-\$15M.

**Commuter Transportation Benefits Act (Deputy Speaker Hull [H5304](#) / Sen. Bissaillon [S382](#))**

Requires any company with 500 or more employees to provide bus passes to employees as a pre-tax transportation fringe benefit, to generate more revenue for RIPTA via its Wave to Work program. Estimated annual revenue TBD.

**Transit Master Plan Bond Referenda (Rep. Tanzi [H5470](#) / Sen. Vargas [S446](#))**

Puts forward a bond for \$100M Capital Improvements for Implementation of the Transit Master Plan. Capital assets would include infrastructure for high capacity transit lines, bus stop improvements and safety, updated technology, and more.

**Motor Fuel Tax – 30% Allocation to RIPTA (Rep. Stewart [H5467](#) / Sen. Zurier [S46](#))**

Increases the share of annual gas tax revenue allocated to RIPTA to 30% of the total share. When the gas tax was first set at 32.5 cents per gallon, RIPTA was allocated 9.75 cents per gallon, which was a 30% share. As the gas tax has increased to 38 cents per gallon due to inflation, RIPTA's share has remained 9.75 cents per gallon, or about a 26% share.

### **Motor Fuel Tax – Two-year Inflation Rate (Rep. Tanzi [H5468](#) / Sen. Zurier [S47](#))**

Would change how the gas tax is impacted by inflation. Currently, the tax is only evaluated and increased against inflation every two years using the previous year's inflation rate. The bill would adjust that so the increase would take into consideration the rate of inflation over the full two years, increasing the total amount of gas tax collected, and thus the amount RIPTA receives if the first bill passes.

### **Rideshare Surcharge (Sen. Kallman [S92](#))**

Would introduce a 75 cent surcharge on all Uber/Lyft rides. Fifty percent (50%) of the surcharge collections would be deposited in a restricted account to be used for street infrastructure improvements in the municipality where the fare originated, and fifty percent (50%) of the surcharge collections would be deposited in a restricted account to be used as funding for RIPTA.)

The tools are all there for the General Assembly and the Governor to do what is necessary. Everyone can feel the tough economic times that are already here, and the looming specter of rising costs.

In a time where buying or even owning a car is becoming increasingly costly. Public Transit is a necessity. For the people of Rhode Island, and the very will being of the state.

Thank you