

May 21, 2025

House Committee on Finance  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903**Acadia Center Support H6020 RIPTA Budget Allocation and H5470 Transit Master Plan Bond Referenda**

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Finance Committee,

Acadia Center appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Save RIPTA coalition's legislative package. Funding our state's public transit system in both the short- and long-term is critical to our state's economy and the quality of life of Rhode Islanders, particularly the most vulnerable; it is also critical to meeting our state's climate commitments. In our written and verbal testimony, Acadia Center will highlight our support for House Bills 6020 and 5470 for tackling the climate crisis and meaningfully reducing carbon emissions in the transportation sector. House Bill 6020 addresses RIPTA's \$32.6 million budget shortfall in 2026, while House Bill 5470 authorizes a bond referenda for \$100,000,000 to provide funding for the implementation of the state's transit master plan, Transit Forward RI 2040.

The Act on Climate requires statewide emissions reductions of 45% below 1990 levels by 2030, 80% by 2040, and net zero emissions by 2050. Transportation pollution accounts for the largest source of emissions in the Northeast and in Rhode Island, at over 40% of the Northeast's total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 36.6% of all economy-wide emissions in Rhode Island<sup>1</sup>. As outlined in Rhode Island's most recent greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory, "The over 918,000 passenger cars, trucks, and motorcycles registered in the state produced 64.9% of transportation emissions and were responsible for 20.6% of overall emissions." Numerous state plans identify the importance of reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) and investing in mode shift in order to curb transportation emissions, with transit as a key strategy. These include the Governor's 2021 Clean Transportation and Mobility Innovation Report, the EC4's 2022 Climate Update, the RI Department of Transportation (RIDOT)'s 2023 Climate Reduction Strategy, and the Division of Planning's Long Range Transportation Plan, Moving Forward RI 2040, which is currently undergoing an update.

In 2022, in partnership with DEM, Acadia Center conducted a high-level state decarbonization analysis, modeling policies outlined in the EC4's 2022 Climate Update<sup>2</sup>. This analysis assumed a significant expansion of RIPTA ridership including full funding for transit master plan implementation<sup>3</sup>. Even with this generous assumption, this analysis projected that Rhode Island was not fully on track to meet the Act on Climate's 2030 reduction mandate of 45%.

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<sup>1</sup> RI Department of Environmental Management. 2022 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Inventory. December 2024.  
[https://dem.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur861/files/2024-12/ghg-inventory-2022-f\\_1.pdf](https://dem.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur861/files/2024-12/ghg-inventory-2022-f_1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Acadia Center. "Rhode Island Energy Policy Simulator Publicly Released." 6 February 2023.  
[https://acadiacenter.wpenginpowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/RI\\_EPS\\_ResearchNote\\_2\\_2\\_23\\_Final\\_V2.pdf](https://acadiacenter.wpenginpowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/RI_EPS_ResearchNote_2_2_23_Final_V2.pdf)

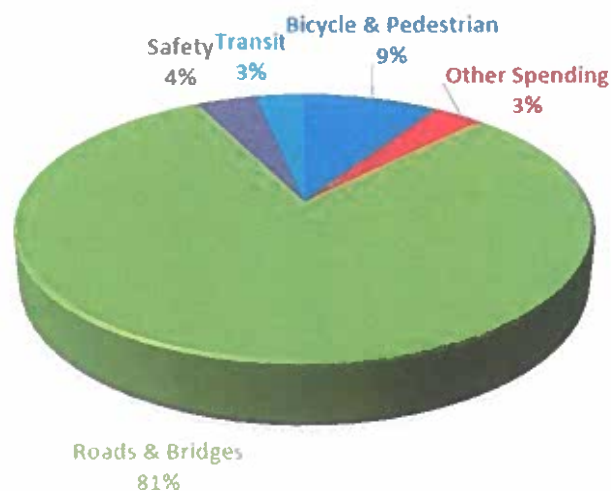
<sup>3</sup> RI EC4. Rhode Island 2022 Climate Update – Technical Appendix— Table X: List of Actions Analyzed in the RI Energy Policy Simulator "Customized Emission Modeling Scenario for the 2022 Update". 14 December 2022. Page 113.

Further, in its 2023 Carbon Reduction Strategy, RIDOT's transportation emissions forecast demonstrated that a much more aggressive shift to reduce VMTs and modal shift is needed to come close to achieving the Act on Climate targets. It is true that the current development of the 2025 Climate strategy will further refine modeling to identify implementation strategies to meet our Act on Climate. However, we also know that the plan to reduce emissions from transportation will continue to emphasize the need to reduce VMTs and invest in mode shift and thus will rely on a robust statewide public transit system.

Rhode Island's transportation planning presents a vision for a multimodal transportation network that does not align with ongoing transportation investments and implementation. By and large, state agencies are not acting on recommendations, prioritizing projects, or investing in strategies to reduce VMTs and invest in mode shift. In another example of these misaligned priorities, the most recently released draft of the state's federal transportation funding program<sup>4</sup> continues to ignore emissions reduction as a performance target (p. 38) and prioritizes highways as the primary mode of travel (p. 51). Despite continued reference in this document to a multimodal transportation network, and the importance of expanding transportation options, the actual allocation of spending by mode and priority area tells a different story (p. 51-52).

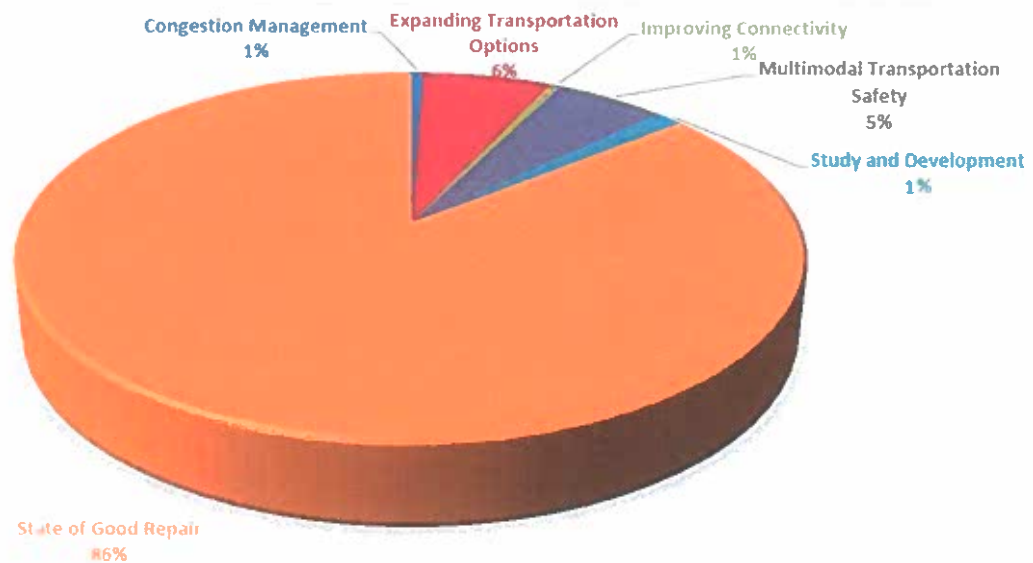
Summary of FFY 2026-2029 transportation investments, May 2025 draft

**Figure 2-2: Capital Spending by Mode**



<sup>4</sup> RI Division of Statewide Planning. State Transportation Improvement Program FFY 2026-2035. DRAFT May 2025. [https://planning.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur826/files/2025-05/5\\_STIP%2026-35%20TAC%20Supplement\\_attachment.pdf](https://planning.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur826/files/2025-05/5_STIP%2026-35%20TAC%20Supplement_attachment.pdf).

Figure 2-3: Spending by Priority Area



This is why the General Assembly's action to support the state's public transit system is so critical. Time is running out to establish the policies and make the investments necessary to achieve significant emission reductions from the transportation sector. Without urgent action to reduce vehicle pollution, the state's climate targets will be unattainable. Funding Rhode Island's transit network is central to the state's plans to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) and invest in mode shift in order to curb transportation emissions. Acadia Center urges the General Assembly to address RIPTA's current budget shortfall and to allow the people of Rhode Island to vote on funding its statewide transit system with House Bills 6020 and 5470.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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