

May 21, 2025

Dear Chairman Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing today to urge you to **support bills H6096 and H6020 to keep RIPTA buses in Kennedy Plaza and fund RIPTA**. Many Rhode Islanders rely on RIPTA for daily transportation to work, school, appointments and entertainment.

We, the riders, feel our voices are being ignored. Next Wave, the company trying to move the bus hub out of Kennedy Plaza, held focus groups. On the day I went to the Civic Center, literally no one wanted the bus hub moved away from Kennedy Plaza and I heard and saw many people upset that "Keep Kennedy Plaza" was not an option. One option considered was underground and someone wrote "Put cars underground, not people." and I agree. Putting people underground doesn't sound safe from a pedestrian standpoint.

We were promised Next Wave will listen to public input on the hub location, but their promises have been continually broken. Next Wave made a map of where bus riders want to go, showing that the biggest cluster of bus rider destinations is just south of Kennedy Plaza, not near the proposed new sites. Everyone goes to Kennedy Plaza and gets off there where they can walk everywhere. It's conveniently located to schools, shops, restaurants, Westminster Street, The Arcade, Waterplace Park, The Providence Place Mall, the Providence Public Library, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum and other attractions. The train station is not as convenient. The parcel of land is a smaller footprint than Kennedy Plaza, it's a long, cold, windy, walk uphill or riders have to take a bus - with only one hour free transfer- from the train station to change buses to get to where they're going. In that time, their transfer is likely to expire, costing the rider more money. With all the traffic on the road, it takes longer to ride the bus than it does to walk. It would be a massive inconvenience for people commuting to and from work to have to change lines.

We, the riders, are the users with knowledge and experience. Many of us who ride RIPTA do so because we do not own cars or have driver's licenses for whatever reason. We rely on this network, which is one of the best I've seen in spite of the awful hub and spoke model, to get around. I am a RIPTA rider. I do not have a driver's license and specifically moved to the 1 line because it is the most convenient and fastest way for me to get around. I can go to work in downtown Pawtucket or to Kennedy Plaza or Eddy Street to the hospital district. I usually stop at Kennedy Plaza when I need to shop at the mall, attend an ice skating show at the ice rink (stopping for hot chocolate along the way), an event in Kennedy Plaza or visit the Providence Public Library. When I ride RIPTA I see a number of elderly people and in the afternoons, students riding the bus home or to work after school. In the late afternoons and evenings, I see commuters coming from work getting on at Kennedy Plaza and mainly getting off after the East Side Tunnel. These are the riders. These are the places people want to and need to be.

Also, RIPTA does not have the money to fund the new bus hub. Moving the hub out of Kennedy Plaza is very expensive. RIPTA board was told in December 2022 it would cost \$200-250 million. Rhode Islanders can't afford to spend or borrow that money. If Next Wave builds a new hub as planned, they will have a guaranteed profit margin with little incentive to control costs. This does not sound like it is to the benefit of the riders. The Next Wave deal to move the hub out of Kennedy Plaza is a bad use of money on an expensive project that riders don't even want.

RIPTA keeps talking about service cuts which prevent people far from the city center and differently abled people from leaving home. The economic impacts of that loss would be catastrophic. Hundreds of

good paying union jobs would be lost, countless numbers of working people who rely on RIPTA would be forced to use expensive alternate means, or just lose their jobs or be unable to access essential services entirely. We do not shut down highways when money to fix them is tight, we should not slash public transportation either. Without the necessary funds to address RIPTA's \$32.6M budget shortfall in 2026, the essential services it provides—such as access to employment, healthcare, and education—will be at risk. It would also take a toll on the mental health of the elderly and differently abled and non-drivers not to be able to go out and about like normal people.

Ensuring that RIPTA riders' needs are addressed means funding RIPTA should be a priority. It is not just a matter of supporting an agency—it is a matter of supporting the people of Rhode Island and their ability to thrive.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Robin Alario

Oak Hill, Pawtucket