

To Chairman Abney and Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Thomas Dresser and I am a group leader of the Rhode Island chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby, (RICCL) a national, bi-partisan, not-for-profit, climate advocacy group with over 600 members state wide. RICCL supports House Bill H6020 which allocates an additional \$32.6 million to RIPTA Operations to address the deficit in the Governor's 2026 Budget.

The RIPTA Operations budget funds essential resources for delivering transit services: bus drivers, fuel, maintenance workers, and other vital staff and ongoing costs. If the budget gap is not addressed RIPTA will be forced to lay off as many as 300 employees, reduce services drastically, hike fares, and take other actions all of which disproportionately affect low-income communities and individuals who rely on public transit to get to work and live their daily lives.

From a climate perspective increasing the use of mass transportation is required to meet the state's Act on Climate goals. Rhode Island state law requires that greenhouse gasses be reduced to 45% below 1990 levels by 2030 and to net zero by 2050. Transportation constitutes 40% of these greenhouse gas emissions.

RIPTA has shown itself to be a good place to invest public funds. RIPTA's new CEO, former CFO Christopher Durand, is well respected by both the RIPTA board and the rider advocacy community. When faced with a shortfall in its operations budget last year, Governor McKee and the legislature avoided devastating service cuts by providing \$10M in Federal grant money and \$5M in general funds. The money was well spent: RIPTA increased driver pay and is now able to attract and retain qualified staff. Threatened cuts in routes were avoided. Service performance improved, and some routes were even expanded.

RIPTA needs a stable source of ongoing funding to avoid ad-hoc fixes in the future. RIPTA is funded in large part by gas tax revenue, which have been declining over the years as cars become more fuel-efficient. There are opportunities to increase gas tax revenues as well as the share that RIPTA receives. Allocation of sales tax revenues or adding a user fee on ride services such as Uber and Lyft are other potential sources of additional revenue. Commuter transportation benefits programs for the state's largest employers would also help.

Rhode Island spends significantly less per capita on transit compared to other states; according to Federal Transit Agency data, the Ocean State spends about \$19 per person, while Delaware, which also has a single, state-wide system, spends about \$100.

Rhode Island is facing difficult fiscal challenges this year. A convenient, frequent, robust transit system is essential infrastructure in Rhode Island for our economic progress and reaching our climate goals. Funding the operations budget, which keeps the buses running, is crucial to maintaining the existing levels of service for those who rely on it.

Please support House Bill 6020 which allocates the needed \$32.6 million to RIPTA Operations.

Thank you for considering our input.

Thomas Dresser, Group Leader RI CCL, Newport, RI 02840

The last bill within the Save RIPTA campaign's package is a \$100 million bond referendum that would fund elements of the Transportation Master Plan such as improved bus shelters and stops, access to stops (ramps, crosswalks), and passenger facilities (bathrooms, indoor waiting areas).

Unlike the other bills, the bond focuses on RIPTA's capital expenses, rather than its operational funds. Capital funds pay for large, often one-time expenses, like the building of a bus station or purchase of an electric bus, while operational

spending pays for the salaries of the workers that keep the agency going.

The bill was introduced at the end of February but hasn't had any hearings so far. If passed, it would place the \$100 million transit bond on the ballot in November 2026.