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April 8, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Finance
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: 2026 H 7502 - RELATING TO HIGHWAYS –SIDEWALKS

Dear Chairman Abney:

I write on behalf of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT or “the Department”) to express serious reservations regarding S 2042, AN ACT RELATING TO HIGHWAYS – SIDEWALKS. This bill would require that the maintenance of all sidewalks along state highways, with the exception of snow and ice removal, be the responsibility of the state.

Below, we have provided our most recent assessment of the financial impacts associated with S 2042 if enacted. This legislation would transfer maintenance responsibility for over 3,090,595 linear feet (approximately 585 miles) of sidewalk from municipalities to the State, requiring an estimated \$37.58 million in new annual state funding.

Updated 2026 Fiscal Estimates

RIDOT's Planning Division has updated the fiscal projections for the proposed transfer of sidewalk maintenance responsibilities. These estimates are categorized into two distinct areas: routine maintenance and a robust capital rehabilitation program. The updated estimate for annual maintenance/spot repairs, in addition to 3% inflation, also reflects the increase in construction costs.

Category	2025 Estimate (FFY26)	2026 Updated Estimate (FFY27)
Annual Capital Project Spend	\$26,000,000	\$26,780,000
Annual Maintenance/Spot Repairs	\$8,750,000	\$10,800,000
TOTAL Annual Budgetary Need	\$34,750,000	\$37,580,000.

Analysis of Funding Requirements

- 1. Annual Operational Impact (\$37.6 Million):** To execute a robust sidewalk program, including elements such as curbing, ADA pedestrian ramps, stormwater and drainage repairs or enhancements, plantings and other aesthetic enhancements, as part of the projects included in the STIP, RIDOT requires \$26.78 million annually for major capital projects (rehabilitation) and \$10.8 million to handle localized spot repairs (e.g., uplifting, cracking).
- 2. Personnel Requirements:** Effective implementation would require a dedicated unit within the Maintenance Division and additional Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), on-call contractors, and consultants to manage the nearly 600 miles of sidewalk and 30,000 curb ramps.

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Core Assumptions

These estimates are based on RIDOT's 2016 ADA Transition Plan and the following criteria:

- Rehabilitation of every sidewalk to a standard 5-foot width.
- Maintenance of the existing footprint only (no new expansion).
- Exclusions: Costs do *not* include Right-of-Way (R.O.W.) acquisitions, utility pole relocations, or major drainage system expansions.

RIDOT has never assumed responsibilities of this scope, and no existing state funding mechanism supports this program, as it is ineligible for federal reimbursement. A program of this undertaking will require an entire new section within the current RIDOT Maintenance Division. This new section will be responsible for performing an initial evaluation of the overall health and condition of the existing nearly 600 miles of sidewalk in the state, consultants to perform this analysis, additional skilled workforce FTEs, and on-call contractors to assist with repairs. Additionally, this bill would require a new section within our Planning Division to take on the task of implementing a new sidewalk program. Without a dedicated and separate funding source for the additional \$37.58 million annually to support these new efforts, the impacts to all future capital projects could be severe, setting the implementation of this program up for failure.

Moreover, the Governor's FY27 budget proposal would increase RhodeRestore funding to \$10 million and expand eligibility to include sidewalks along state roads where RIDOT and the municipality reach a mutual agreement. This will allow municipalities to access state resources for sidewalk improvements without the wholesale transfer of maintenance responsibility contemplated by this bill. Taken together, these initiatives reflect a collaborative, locally-driven approach to pedestrian infrastructure that is both fiscally responsible and responsive to the needs of Rhode Island communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information and for your diligence in reviewing these pieces of legislation. Please let me know if any further information is needed.

Sincerely,



Robert Rocchio, P.E.

Interim Director, Rhode Island Department of Transportation

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee
The Honorable Mary Ann Shallcross Smith
Nicole McCarty Esq, Chief Legal Counsel