



April 14, 2026

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

RE: H8178 - Concerns

Dear Chairman Abney and Committee Members:

On behalf of the American Council of Engineering Companies of Rhode Island (“ACEC-RI”), I write to express serious concerns regarding H8178, which would increase the annual allocation of available proceeds in the Rhode Island highway maintenance account to the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (“RIPTA”) for operating expenditures from ten percent (10%) to twenty percent (20%), effective July 1, 2026. Under existing law, five percent of available proceeds were allocated through June 30, 2025, and ten percent beginning July 1, 2025; this bill would double the current allocation level.

ACEC-RI supports strong and reliable public transit options in Rhode Island. A balanced transportation system requires meaningful investment in transit, and we recognize the important role RIPTA plays for riders, employers, and communities across the state. Our concern is not with the laudable goal of supporting public transit. Rather, it is with the funding source chosen in this bill and the unintended consequences that may follow from diverting an even greater share of highway maintenance account revenues away from core road, bridge, and infrastructure needs.

The highway maintenance fund exists for a reason. By law, funds are directed through the transportation improvement program process to provide the state match for federal transportation funds in place of borrowing. Expenditures are limited to projects appearing in the State’s transportation improvement program. The law also expressly provides that the Department of Transportation is to allocate necessary funding to programs designed to eliminate structural deficiencies in the state’s bridge, road, and maintenance systems and infrastructure. H8178 would require that twenty percent of available proceeds instead be allocated annually to RIPTA for operating expenditures.

That shift raises real concerns for the engineering and transportation community and public safety and overall quality of life for Rhode Islanders in general. Rhode Island continues to face substantial needs with respect to road and bridge maintenance, system preservation, and long-term capital planning. Redirecting a larger portion of highway maintenance revenues to transit operations will reduce resources available for badly needed maintenance and rehabilitation work, delay projects, and make it more difficult to keep pace with existing infrastructure demands. It will also impede the State’s ability to maximize federal matching opportunities and responsibly manage transportation investments over time, given the statute’s existing use of these funds for the State match for federal transportation dollars.



There is also a broader policy concern. Using a highway maintenance revenue stream to fund growing operating expenses creates tension between two important transportation priorities rather than solving the underlying funding challenge. Public transit deserves sustainable support, but that support should not come at the expense of the preservation and maintenance of roads, bridges, and related infrastructure that are already in need of significant investment. A funding approach that pits transit against highway maintenance risks unintended consequences for the state's overall transportation network.

For that reason, ACEC-RI respectfully urges the Committee to oppose this bill as it is currently written. We would welcome a broader discussion about sustainable transportation funding that supports both public transit and critical highway and bridge maintenance without undermining either. Rhode Island should not be forced to choose between maintaining essential public transit options and preserving the core infrastructure on which residents, businesses, emergency services, and commerce rely every day.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. J. Holt", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Ryan J. Holt
Executive Director
American Council of Engineering Companies of Rhode Island
RJH@TheHoltFirm.com

CC:
Members of the House Finance Committee