

SAVE RIPTA

March 5th, 2025
House Committee on Labor
State House
Providence, RI 02903
Bill- H5304

Dear House Committee on Labor,

The Save RIPTA Coalition would like to extend its support of Deputy Speaker Hull's Commuter Transportation Benefits Act (H5304); this act would establish the Commuter Transportation Benefit chapter. Employers with five hundred (500) or more employees would be required to establish a pre-tax commuter transportation fringe benefit program, requiring the option for employees, if they choose to receive a bus pass paid for by the employer.

The Save RIPTA Coalition is a broad coalition of community organizations, labor unions, legislative champions and everyday Rhode Islanders who call upon our state to save and expand the capacity of the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) to actually get Rhode Islanders where they need to go with affordable, convenient, environmentally responsible and reliable public transit.

Rhode Island is struggling to keep businesses, people and investments in our state. When looking at why that is, one of the reasons is not having better public transit and not having to rely on automobiles as the only way to get to work, school, the store, restaurants, appointments etc. Public transit is something we as a state need to look at as a necessity to thrive, to bring and keep people in our state who want to stay here, and to actually grow our economy.

When thinking about how to get there we need to be inventive in finding real long-term solutions and investments in maintaining and building our public transit system into the future. H5304 is one of the ways we can get there. Right now there are many businesses who already voluntarily participate in the "Wave to Work" program through RIPTA — these include universities and both larger and small businesses like Amica, Brown University, the City of Providence, Water Rower and many more. These companies have seen the benefits of providing bus passes for their employees through the ability to maintain and hire a more diverse field of workers without transportation being a deterrent to their employment.

Rhode Island's largest 25 companies employ more than 100,000 people (Source: Providence Business News), yet very few offer transit passes to employees as a fringe benefit. If even a

fraction of this population took transit, it would have a profound impact on RIPTA ridership, carbon emissions, and highway congestion. By providing employees with reliable and affordable transportation options, employers can attract and retain a more diverse and skilled talent pool, particularly from areas that may be underserved by car-dependent infrastructure.

We urge you to support and pass H5304 the Commuter Transportation Benefits Act as one step in the right direction for our state to really invest in public transit for all Rhode Islanders. Let's prioritize RIPTA as an essential piece of state infrastructure that gets people where they need to go and drives our economy and community forward.

Thank you for your consideration,

Nicole O'Loughlin
Save RIPTA Coalition