



Rhode Island House of Representatives

*Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study Student
Transportation Needs and System Costs*

Final Report

April 16, 2025

**Report Submitted to the
Rhode Island House of Representatives and
the Rhode Island Senate**

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Commission Members

Representative Terri Cortvriend	Co-Chair	House Appointee
Senator Linda L. Ujifusa	Co-Chair	Senate Appointee
Representative Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.	Member	House Appointee
Representative Michael W. Chippendale	Member	House Appointee
Senator Samuel D. Zurier	Member	Senate Appointee
Senator Jessica de la Cruz	Member	Senate Appointee
Angélica Infante-Green	Member	RI Department of Education
Paul Bourget	Member	RI Association of School Committees
James Erinakes	Member	RI School Superintendents Association
Peter Alviti	Member	RIPTA Board Chair
Matthew Taibi	Member	Teamsters Local 251
Ashley Deckert	Member	RI Department of Children & Families
Lilian Cordero Gagnon	Member	Student

(The Commission would like to thank the following designees for their work on the Commission: Dr. Mario Carreño, RIDE; Emily Copeland, RIASC; Ana Riley, RISSA; Christopher Durand, RIPTA; Mike Burk, RI DCYF)

Executive Summary from Co-Chairs Rep. Terri Cortvriend and Sen. Linda Ujifusa

Dear Speaker Shekarchi and President Ruggerio:

We are pleased to provide you with the findings and recommendations of the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study Student Transportation Needs and System Costs (the "Commission").

This thirteen (13) member Commission included dedicated professionals from various field including professionals from Rhode Island Department of Education, RI Public Transit Authority, the RI Association of School Committees, The RI School Superintendents Association, Teamsters Local 251, and RI Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Pursuant to its enabling legislation, 2024—H7615 Sub A, and 2024—S2523 Sub B, the Commission was convened to conduct a comprehensive study on the issues with student transportation and to evaluate and determine the transportation needs of students, the most cost-effective way of providing transportation services, whether transportation costs should be incorporated into the education funding formula's core foundation amount, and what changes, if any, need to be made in RIGL Title 16, Chapter 21.1.

Accordingly, the Commission heard related testimony and discussed various topics including: an overview of the Statewide Transportation System; Statewide Transportation System: Potential Savings Opportunities; Children and Youth Experiencing Foster Care and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); School Transportation: Driver and Vehicle Requirements; Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority update; Statewide Transportation System: Private School Costs; Independent and Catholic schools: Voices of parents for student transportation; a presentation on transportation to public schools; and navigating school transportation in Rhode Island.

This final report is a culmination of eight (8) hearings that began in August 2024 and ended in April 2025. It contains information presented by various witnesses who testified before the Commission, as well as presentations made, which the Commission has studied.

It is clear to us as Co-Chairs that the statewide student transportation system in Rhode Island is not efficient, and the significant cost to municipalities is not sustainable. The recommendations in this report could potentially help to address these issues in different ways.

We would like to express our gratitude to all members of the Commission for their willingness to take part in these discussions, and we appreciate the investment of the time, talent and expertise that they graciously provided.

Sincerely,



Representative Terri Cortvriend
Co-Chair



Senator Linda Ujifusa
Co-Chair

Background

Background: The statewide student transportation program was created in 2009 to help districts provide **out-of-district transportation** for students attending public and non-public schools within their transportation region, special needs students, homeless students, and foster youth with greater service and cost efficiencies. Transportation is provided to students who attend private, parochial, and charter schools, as well as career & technical education centers and other approved programs. This program maximizes the sharing of buses when possible to achieve service and cost efficiencies.

In-district transportation includes all schools within a municipality and *is not* part of the Statewide System. For example, residents of East Providence who attend East Providence High School ride on buses managed by the East Providence School District.

This program is primarily funded by participating school districts but managed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE). Payments from the participating districts are deposited into a restricted receipt account within RIDE for payment to the vendor providing the transportation services. For those districts participating in the statewide contract, the transportation costs for transporting students to out-of-district, non-public schools within the resident district's transportation region, as defined by RIGL 16-21.1-2, are provided through the education categorical aid provided pursuant to RIGL 16-7.2-6(e).

Pursuant to the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, districts are required to provide transportation for homeless students to and from their school of origin if it is in the student's best interest, regardless of the point of origin. Also, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act requires that students placed in foster care be bused to their district of origin if it is the best interest of the student. Similarly, federal law also dictates the transportation of special education students regardless of transportation districts or state boundaries. State law governs the transportation of private, charter, and career and technical school students within regional districts as defined by RIGL 16-21.1-2.

Proposed Commission Findings

The following sets of proposed findings from various Commission members are based on their comments from topics that were raised or discussed during Commission meetings:

Rhode Island is one of a small number of states that provides unrestricted, fully-subsidized student transportation for children in private and parochial schools. Transportation costs have risen due to increased distance traveled and the number of destinations served.

According to RIDE, the total cost for the statewide transportation system in FY 2025 exceeds \$40M, with a significant increase in ridership, particularly among homeless students, who represent an increase in ridership of 600% since 2015.

Public school districts have difficulty budgeting for statewide transportation since rates are not determined until well past the typical municipal budget cycle.

Rhode Island does not provide direct funding for homeless students but does provide funding for private school transportation.

Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that the best interest of students in the care of DCYF be prioritized, frequently resulting in the student being able to remain in their home school regardless of where they are placed.

According to RIDE, Federal law mandates LEAs transport homeless students, but Rhode Island does not currently provide state funding for this expense, creating a financial burden for public school districts as these costs are unbudgeted and unplanned for LEAs.

According to RIDE, LEAs collectively spent over \$7M in FY 2024 to transport 950 homeless students. Other states, such as Massachusetts provide funding to help LEAs with these costs.

By reducing the size of the transportation zones, the state could potentially eliminate 30 buses which would save taxpayers approximately \$3.5M per year.

There are a variety of vehicle options to transport students to schools. Rhode Island allows 8-passenger vans to transport students, in addition to buses. Massachusetts permits up to 11-passenger vans. Current legislation to expand the allowable number of students has been passed by the House of Representatives.

Rhode Island schools currently use over 150 vans to help transport students, which are more cost-effective when there are few students on a route.

Expanding vehicle options could potentially save LEAs approximately \$750K annually by replacing 25 minibuses with vans where feasible. For statewide transportation, the cost difference between a van and a minibus is approximately \$26,000 per year.

Some parents with children attending schools outside of their home district sign their children up for statewide transportation, but the student may elect not to use the system. RIDE stated that they plan and contract for these “ghost riders” which adds to the cost of the statewide system when those students who were signed up to ride, opt not to ride. More district education and communication are needed according to RIDE.

According to RIDE, both in-district and out-of-district transportation need additional drivers throughout the school year. Current law treats experienced out-of-state bus drivers the same as a new driver by requiring the 10-hour training course.

To drive a school bus in Rhode Island, individuals need to take a 10-hour course at CCRI and pass a driving test at the RI DMV. Other states such as Massachusetts have longer course requirements than Rhode Island. (i.e., 30 hours as compared to 10 hours). This additional out-of-state training is not recognized in Rhode Island.

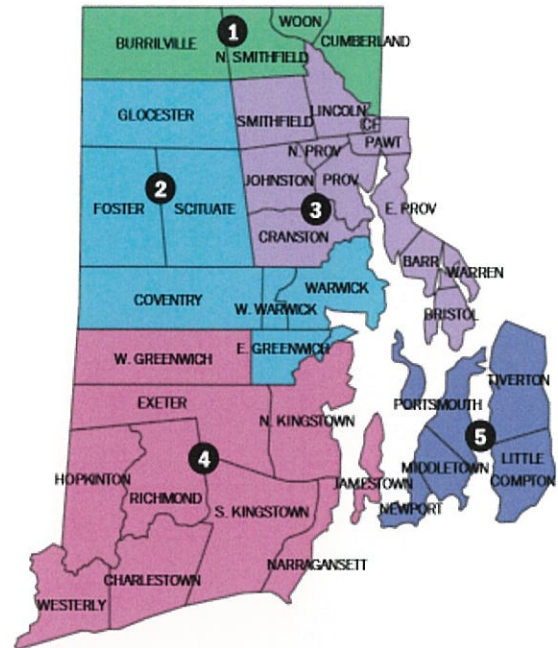
Rhode Island’s licensing requirements do not recognize out-of-state training programs, limiting the available driver workforce. Allowing experienced out-of-state drivers to operate while completing required RI courses could potentially reduce costs and improve service.

According to RIDE, originally established in 1977 when the state had ten career and technical education centers (CTEs), existing regions do not reflect the current distribution of CTE programs. Rhode Island Schools now offer over 250 CTE programs in virtually every high school, making the existing regions outdated.

Existing Regions

Regional Boundaries determine transportation eligibility
RIGL § 16-21.1-2.

- Special Ed – Required by Federal. Regions do not apply.
- Homeless – Required by Federal Law. Regions do not apply.
- Foster Care – Required by Federal Law. Regions do not apply.
- Private, Charter and Career & Tech (PCCT) – State Law only. Regions apply



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Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE “Statewide Transportation System – Existing and Potential Regions”

Eighty-five percent of private school transportation comes out of Region 3, placing a financial burden on public schools in this region, particularly Bristol-Warren at the southern end, resulting in some of the highest transportation costs in the state.

The majority of students attending Davies Career and Technical High School come from Central Falls. The commission agrees with RIDE that it should not disrupt this transportation arrangement.

According to RIDE, buses for CTE and private school students often run half-full due to large, inefficient regions. More compact transportation regions would improve efficiency while maintaining student access.

The average distance of statewide transportation routes for CTE and private school students is seven miles, with several routes exceeding 20 miles each way.

The Commission reviewed six options for new regions, and has come to consensus that more compact regions would be more advantageous than fewer large ones. Any state savings could potentially be used to create a homeless student transportation fund to help LEAs.

The idea of exploring how local districts provide transportation to private and career and technical schools in-district, and mixing that with the statewide system is very complicated. Unlike other findings which would require legislative change, this opportunity could occur, provided all the key stakeholders discuss and review an implementation plan.

From a suggestion arising from the Student Transportation Commission, the System Manager, TransPar, will prepare a comprehensive report for RIDE that will evaluate the feasibility of combining in-district transportation with out-of-district transportation, and the potential savings possibilities. The report is due by December 31, 2025.

Proposed Commission Recommendations

The following sets of proposed recommendations from various Commission members are based on topics that were raised or discussed during Commission meetings:

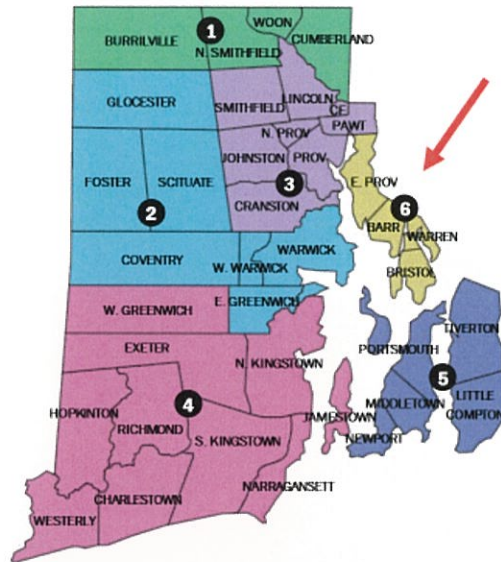
1. Suggest increasing the number of students allowed to be transported by van from 8 to 10. Bill [H5420](#) was passed by the House of Representatives on March 25, 2025. Bill [S636](#) was heard and held for further study by the Senate Education Committee on April 2, 2025.
2. Align Rhode Island's certification process with other states to recognize experienced out-of-state drivers.
3. Address bus driver shortages by implementing a model to allow already certified CDL drivers from neighboring states to complete an expedited, 3-hour, Rhode Island focused required coursework program at CCRI, and receive a temporary RI school bus driver license which will be valid for 120 days from its date of issuance. [H5882](#) was heard and held for further study by the State Government and Elections Committee on March 13, 2025. Bill [S397](#) was heard and held for further study by the Senate Education Committee on April 2, 2025.
4. Explore the possibility of the 3-hour, and existing 10-hour training programs being offered as on-line courses.
5. Avoid use of these temporary license holders to break union strikes.
6. Suggest that RIDE educate, and communicate to families, the process of how to decline transportation service after signing up to reduce the incidence of "ghost riders".
7. * Encourage the Department of Education to study and possibly develop regulations creating a distance cap within 9 smaller regions where the same rules apply to all within a city or town, for private schools, to reduce excessive transportation costs while maintaining reasonable student access.
8. * Reduce the number of long-distance routes by implementing smaller, more compact transportation regions which creates a benefit for most districts.
9. * Suggest potentially removing Bristol/Warren, East Providence and Barrington from Region 3 and evaluate the opportunity to create its own region.

10. * Potentially shift East Bay communities to a new region to avoid cross-bridge bus routes, reducing costs and inefficiencies.
11. * Right-size the regions that were defined in statutes approximately 50 years ago. Develop a phase-in of the program over 4 years by “grandfathering” in students already enrolled in private school in order to be the least disruptive to individual student education.
12. * Plan next steps if key stakeholders and local municipal leaders agree to Option 3, with a grandfather clause, then to Option 6 in two years.

Option 3

Creates a new “East Bay” region

- Attempts to balance the regions, by shifting East Providence, Barrington, and Bristol-Warren into new region 6.
- Could reduce 270 PCCT students or approximately 11 buses. Estimated savings of \$1.1M
 - Similar to option 2 but prevents new riders from becoming eligible for region 5 service.
 - This region still provides access to 13 private schools and 14 CTE programs.



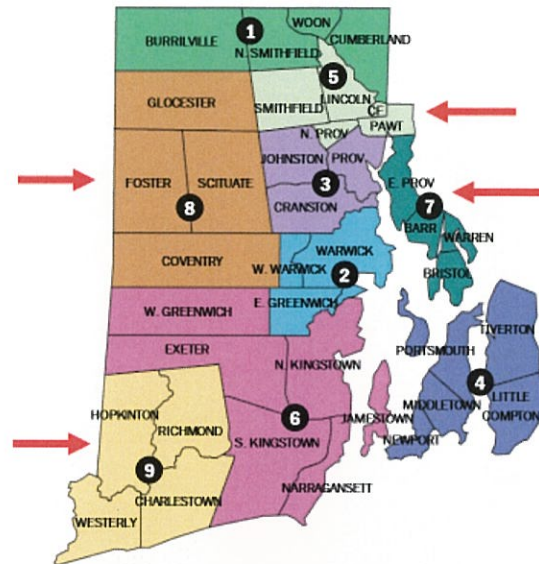
Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE “Statewide Transportation System – Existing and Potential Regions”

* Plan next steps if key stakeholders and local municipal leaders agree to Option 6 with a four-year grandfather clause for existing students. [H6236](#) was introduced and referred to the House Finance Committee on April 11, 2025. [S972](#) was introduced and referred to the Senate Education Committee on April 16, 2025.

Option 6

Creates 9 smaller regions.

Region	CTE Programs	Private Schools
1	29	7
2	31	18
3	35	32
4	21	7
5	32	9
6	19	8
7	14	13
8	26	3
9	28	1



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RHODE ISLAND

Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE “Statewide Transportation System – Existing and Potential Regions”

13. Determine if any savings are realized, then potentially, those dollars could be used to establish a transportation fund for homeless, foster and special education students to help districts with unbudgeted expenses.

* There was consensus from the commission members present on all recommendations listed, with the exception of the * items which Representative Joseph Solomon expressed concerns. While he appreciates all of the suggestions, he feels that any potential savings realized through these measures would be passed on to parents and families who ultimately are going to have to transport their children to school in those districts.

Suggested future topics for consideration:

- Consider removing the requirement that private vans use for student transportation have a “School Bus” sign on the roof.
- Explore flexible transportation; taxis, etc.
- Conduct a feasibility study of combining out-of-district with in-district service.
- Develop future suggested regulatory improvements.

Appendix A-Meeting Agendas

These documents have been posted in the Student Transportation Commission section of the Joint Commission tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:

<https://rilegislature.gov/commissions/pages/commissions.aspx>

1. *August 28, 2024 Agenda*

- Election of Co-Chairs
- Introduction of Members
- Discuss Enabling Resolution

2. *October 9, 2024 Agenda*

- Election of Co-Chair
- Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE: **Statewide Transportation System Overview**

3. *November 7, 2024 Agenda*

- Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE
 - **Statewide Transportation System – Potential Savings Opportunities**
- Mike Burk, RI Department of Children, Youth and Families
 - **Children and Youth Experiencing Foster Care and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**

4. *January 13, 2025 Agenda*

- Walter R. Craddock, Administrator, RI Division of Motor Vehicles
 - **School Transportation -Driver and Vehicle Requirements**
- Christopher Durand, Chief Executive Officer, RIPTA
 - **RIPTA Update**

5. *February 10, 2025 Agenda*

- Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE
 - **Statewide Transportation System – Private School Costs**
- Brian Cordeiro, President of the Independent Schools Association of Rhode Island (ISARI), William F. Klements, M. Ed., Assistant Superintendent of Catholic Schools
 - **All Our Students: Amplifying the Voice of Parents for Student Transportation**
- Ana Riley – Superintendent, Bristol-Warren Regional Schools, Jeannine Nota-Masse – Superintendent, Cranston Public Schools
 - **Public Schools Presentation**

6. *March 3, 2025 Agenda*

- Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE
 - **Statewide Transportation System – Existing and Potential Regions**
- Group Discussion of Potential Legislative Priorities

7. March 17, 2025 Agenda

- Richard Capriolo, Area General Manager-RI, First Student, Inc. and Blake Smith, Area General Manager -FirstAlt
 - **Driving Progress: Efficient Transportation & Policy Updates for the Road Ahead**
- Kyle DeVivo, CEO, DATTCO
 - **Navigating School Transportation in Rhode Island**
- Dr. Mario Carreño, Chief Operations Officer, RIDE
 - Regions Discussion Follow Up
- Roundtable discussion of findings and recommendations

8. April 7, 2025 Agenda

- **Draft Final Report discussion with findings and recommendations**

Appendix B - Enabling Legislation, Written Testimony, Materials and Presentations

These documents have been posted in the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study Student Transportation Needs and System Costs section of the Joint Commissions tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/pages/commissions.aspx>

2523 SUB B

7615 SUB A

AGENDA 011325

AGENDA 021025

AGENDA 030325

AGENDA 031725

AGENDA 040725

AGENDA 082824

AGENDA 10.09.24

AGENDA 11.07.24

Alejandro and Marina Soubotin written testimony

Alexandra Kanaczet written testimony

All Our Students Amplifying the Voice of Parents for Student Transportation

Allan E Low Jr written testimony

Alternate Billing Options

Amanda Andrews written testimony

Amy Thomas written testimony

Andrea Krupp written testimony

Ann Wang written testimony

Anna Karnaukh written testimony

Ariana Ramos written testimony

Asabe Poloma written testimony

Bonnie Cook written testimony

Brenda Fonseca written testimony

Brian Ramos written testimony

Brook Williams Ross written testimony

Burrillville School Department written testimony

Burrillville School Superintendent written testimony

C. Maynard written testimony

C. Welch written testimony

Carolina Corona Jamiel written testimony

Casandra Aldsworth West written testimony

Cathy Baker written testimony

Ceileidh Siegel written testimony

Cherly Lemay written testimony

Colin Stilwell written testimony

Coral Brown Gibney written testimony

Corrie & Andrew Mook written testimony

Cost Proposals

Courtney Halvorsen written testimony

Coventry Public Schools written testimony
D & N Rodrigues written testimony
D Breggia written testimony
D. Legassie written testimony
David & Nelly Rodriguez (2)
David Aucoin written testimony
David LaBorde and family written testimony
David Phillips Way written testimony
DCYF Presentation on ESSA to Legislative School Transportation Commission
Deborah B. Karel
Denise LaBorde written testimony
DMV - School Transportation Presentation 25.01.10
Domenic F Fusco Jr. written testimony
Dot Sampaip written testimony
Driving Progress Presentation 3.13.2025
E. McCabe written testimony
E. Sullivan written testimony
East Providence School Committee Resolution
Elizabeth Comire written testimony
Elizabeth Potenza and family written testimony
Erin & Bradford Knight written testimony
Ernest Sonyi written testimony
ESSA DCYF RIDE Joint Guidance May 2019
ESSA Transportation Guidance 2019
Esther Howe written testimony
FY24 Displaced Review
Gabrielle Torphy written testimony
Grace Dugan written testimony
Heidi Urish Pavia written testimony
Himanshu Gosar written testimony
Holly Dunsworth written testimony
Holly Jaquez written testimony
Homa Dashtaki written testimony
J. Giardino written testimony
Jacalyn Ruggeri written testimony
Jack Ryan written testimony
James Verinis written testimony
Jane Manaras & Joe Morris written testimony
Jenna Parker written testimony
Jennifer Brinton written testimony
Jennifer DeOliveira, Good Shepherd School written testimony
Jennifer Farrelly written testimony 0312025
Joan Panichas Milas
Jocelyn Auld, Meadowbrook Waldorf School written testimony
Joseph McIntyre written testimony
Kate Bosch written testimony
Kate Hoffman written testimony
Keith R. Kline written testimony
Keri Kilty writted testimony

Keri Kilty written testimony
 Kevin Hoffman written testimony
 Kevin Welsch written testimony
 Kimberly Splendorio written testimony
 Kris Hopkins written testimony
 Kristina Boving written testimony
 Kyra Little written testimony
 Lasalle Academy, Brother Dennis Malloy, FSC written testimony
 Laure Gustafson written testimony
 Lenix Ramos written testimony
 Lincoln School Committee Resolution
 Lisa Hollister written testimony
 Louis Sposato written testimony
 Louise Barba written testimony
 Lura Lauf written testimony
 Lynn Obrebski written testimony
 M. & S. Scimeca written testimony
 M. Danks written testimony
 M. Shallcross Smith written testimony
 M. Verlezza written testimony
 M. Whittier written testimony
 Martha Perkins written testimony
 Martuscello Meadowbrook Bussing Support Letter
 Melanie Waterman written testimony
 Melissa Chimento written testimony
 Melissa Tilley written testimony
 Michael Cichy written testimony
 Middletown Letter Legislative Comm Student Transp 02072025
 Middletown Public Schools written testimony
 Mike Verlezza written testimony
 Monsignor Clarke School written testimony (2)
 Monsignor Clarke School written testimony
 Nadine Soubotin Kent written testimony
 Navigating School Transportation in Rhode Island (3.17.25)
 Nelly Rodriguez
 Niyoka Powell written testimony
 North Kingstown School Dept. Resolution
 NSSC Resolution -Funding for Private School Transportation by State and Local Education Agencies
 Patricia Willner written testimony
 Pierson_Transportation_Testimony_20250210
 Piya A. Sarawgi written testimony
 PPSD written testimony
 Predictability
 PrivateBusAgreement Example 2024-2025
 R.I. student transportation costs are bigger'n Dallas. A study commission can fix that. • Rhode Island
 Current
 Rachel Normandin written testimony
 Rebekah Pharo written testimony
 RI League of Cities and Towns written testimony

RI Scholarship Advocates written testimony
Richard J. Lapierre written testimony
RIDE Phase 1 Contract, Performance & Efficiency Assessment 8.2021
RIPTA Presentation
Robert J Eddy written testimony
Robert Pavia written testimony
Sarah Robichaud written testimony
Savings Study -Executive Summary FY12
Sean B written testimony
Sean Obrebski written testimony
Shayna Cohen written testimony
Sophia Carpenter written testimony
Sophie Glenn Lau, Lincoln School written testimony
Statewide Transportation System - Private School Costs
Statewide Transportation System Overview 10.09.2024
Stephen Lemay written testimony
Steven and Alysia Walsh written testimony
Tamarah Faust written testimony
Terri Lacey written testimony
The Cost of Student Transportation A Regional Perspective
The Medeiros Family written testimony
Thomas J. Moretti written testimony
Thomas V. Ward (and Carol) written testimony
Tim Handford written testimony
Toni Akin written testimony
Tony Wood written testimony
TPG Evaluation-Phase 1 Report
Transportation 11.07.24
Transportation 3.3.25
Veronica Grullon written testimony
Victoria Smith Breitbach written testimony
W. Berdy written testimony
Walter Valencia written testimony
WILLIAM M. DAVIES, JR. CAREER & TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL written testimony

Appendix C – Snapshot of Commission Recommendations

Received from the Rhode Island Department of Education on March 7, 2025.

OPPORTUNITY

The Statewide Transportation Commission proposes a series of cost-savings measures that saves the State and Districts approximately



\$7M
annually

These changes provide the maximum benefit to taxpayers with a minimal impact on students.

Changes **do not** impact student safety.

Endorsed by:

- League of Cities and Towns
- RI Superintendents Association
- RI School Committees Association

The Statewide Transportation Commission (STC) was created by the General Assembly and is tasked with identifying opportunities to reduce transportation costs. In Fiscal Year 2025, out-of-district transportation costs exceed **\$40M**, and annual in-district transportation expenditures were more than **\$140M**. Over the last seven months, the STC met with a variety of stakeholders to discuss and review a series of cost-savings options for the State and local districts. Review the Commission's full report [here](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislative Changes

Proposed Savings

10-Passenger Vans ([Bill 636/5420](#))

\$750K

Provides flexibility with smaller vehicles.

120-Day Temporary License ([Bill 397/5882](#))

\$1.5M

Addresses workforce shortages

Modern Transportation Regions (Bill XXX)

\$3.5M

Eliminates 30+ buses

RIDE Regulatory Changes

Offer excess statewide seats to districts for in-district service

\$1.5M

TOTAL ANNUAL SAVINGS

\$7M

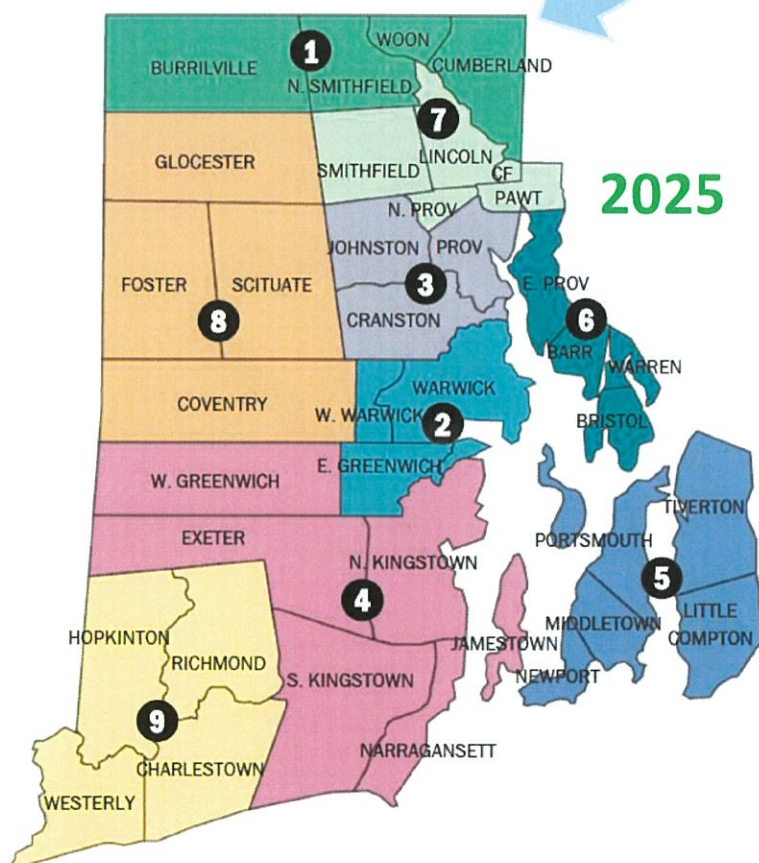
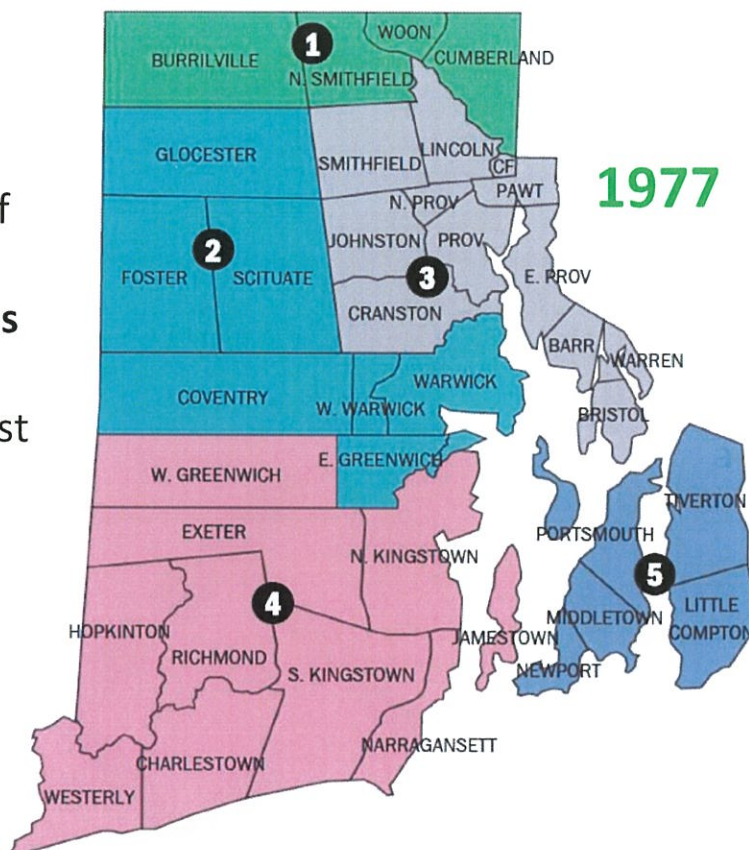
NEXT STEPS

- Establish a Homeless Student Transportation Fund reallocating savings to help districts with unbudgeted expenses.
- Conduct a feasibility study of combining out-of-district with in-district service
- Develop future regulatory recommendations



Current Regions

- Based on the 10 state-owned Career and Technical Centers of 1977
- Results in many **20+ mile routes each way**
- Buses are half empty due to vast regions
- Increases costs to State and Districts
- \$0 State funding for federally mandated homeless student transportation
- \$5M for Private School student transportation



Proposed Regions

- Reflects that RI now has 250 CTE programs
- **Preserves private school subsidy**
- Maintains CTE choice, but with more compact regions
- **Eliminates over 30 buses**
- Impacts *less than* 1.2% of CTE students and 2.8% of Private School students, who would be held harmless

