

2016 Annual Review

RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY



**Respectfully Submitted to Governor Gina Raimondo
&
Rhode Island General Assembly
May 2016**

During the last year, the senior management staff at the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) has continued to review and implement numerous process improvements throughout the agency, and we would like to share an overview of these changes with you. These efforts have resulted in cost and operational efficiencies, and have assisted us in maintaining our fiscal prudence. We continue to improve various aspects of the Authority in an effort to provide a safe and efficient transit system for the citizens of Rhode Island, as well as for visitors to our State. This report will highlight some of the improvements that have been made during the last year.

I. Budget/Finance

RIPTA's initial budget for FY 2016 forecasted a deficit of \$812,327.00, with the assumption the State of Rhode Island would assume our debt service. As of March 2016, we are now forecasting a surplus of \$80,864.00. Our senior staff has remained fiscally responsible, with very prudent spending and efficient management. As a result, our year-to-date total expenses are currently 4.3% under budget, which equates to \$3,016,902.00. Additional factors have assisted us in reducing our forecasted deficit.

During the fall of 2015, the United States Congress passed legislation authorizing funding for transportation for the next five (5) years. This legislation, entitled the FAST Act (Fixing America's Surface Transportation), provided dedicated funding for both infrastructure improvements as well as transit-related issues.

One component of this legislation is specific to paratransit services as they relate to allowable reimbursement under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The FAST Act allows a transit agency to use 20% of existing federal dollars allocated for ADA to offset operational costs. Prior to the FAST Act, the allowable reimbursement was limited to 10%. To qualify for this reimbursement, agencies must meet goals in sensitivity training as well as transportation assurance for job opportunities.

RIPTA's policies relating to our ADA service qualified us to apply more federal dollars to offset our ADA costs. This allowed RIPTA to address the FY 2016 shortfall, which resulted from the State's unexpected shift in policy as it relates to non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT). We will determine if we should continue to



use 20% of our funding for paratransit services by assessing what impact this would have on our capital programs.

RIPTA also conducted a comprehensive Fare Study during the last year. This study resulted in a modest fare increase to monthly passes and other fare products, but our base fare of \$2.00 remained unchanged. These fare increases went into effect on March 1, 2016. The study coincided with legislation passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly allowing RIPTA to replace its no-fare policy for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities with a new reduced-fare policy. As a result of this change, individuals in this population will pay \$0.50 per trip (a one-quarter fare) commencing July 1, 2016.

II. Safety/Security

Safety and security of both our passengers and our employees continue to be a primary focus of this agency. During the past year, substantial efforts were made to ensure the safety and security of our passengers as well as our employees.

One major non-visible safety improvement made to our 2016 fleet was the replacement of drum brakes to safer disc brakes. Disc brakes provide higher performance for the bus and also greatly reduce stopping distances. Along with superior performance, disc brakes also provide financial efficiencies to our maintenance division.

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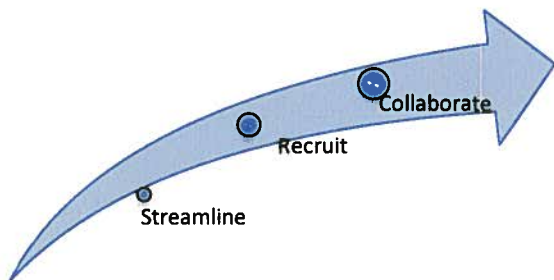
Disc brakes allow for a longer use cycle, as well as being less labor intensive to remove and change, all of which will improve our preventative maintenance program, from both a cost and operational perspective.

Another significant safety improvement to our 2016 bus fleet is the use of one singular front windshield that is not bisected by a stanchion. This will reduce the number of ‘blind spots’ that our bus operators have to negotiate throughout their workday.

Our Marketing Division also developed and released a safety video that identifies a number of safety concerns expressed by both our drivers and passengers who navigate and use our system regularly. Our Marketing Division has been partnering with a number of high schools and other institutions throughout the State to show this video and educate the public in order to provide a safer environment for everyone using the RIPTA system. **A link to the video is: www.ripta.com/be-safe-featuring-jon-hope.**

We are also testing a “Protran audio/visual alert” system which will give pedestrians an alert when a bus is making a turn. Studies have determined that a great deal of bus collisions occur when the vehicle is turning. The Protran system, which is currently being used at the Cleveland Transit Authority, has resulted in a dramatic reduction in bus/pedestrian accidents.

III. Human Resources



Our Human Resource Division continues to streamline process improvements related to recruitment, disability management and our benefits administration. Over the past year, Human Resources instituted improvements in the management of retirement and other employee benefits, continued to promote an employee health initiative and aggressively embarked on job recruiting for the Authority. RIPTA has now partnered with the New England Institute of Technology and community leaders to recruit and retain qualified employees. We are in the process of rolling out a training initiative in collaboration with Safety and Security to attract and retain employees who otherwise might not be able to afford to acquire a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL). CDLs are very important because RIPTA mandates that 90% of its employees have a CDL. A recent nationwide trend has revealed the lack of qualified CDL drivers. This shortage combined with an aging workforce requires Human Resources to think creatively and proactively to address staffing issues at RIPTA.

We continue to improve the progressive discipline process in an effort to achieve a uniform and fair process related to imposing necessary discipline. We also continue to

improve our responsibility and processes in disability management – thereby minimizing wrongful decisions that could negatively impact RIPTA. In addition, our Human Resources staff continues to work to curb unnecessary dependence on outside firms being hired to conduct routine services, such as certain maintenance tasks. Human Resources are constantly assessing the skilled labor we have to make sure that there is collaboration between departments and that we use our workforce to maximum benefit.

IV. Ride Program

Our Ride program, the state's paratransit service for persons with disabilities, continues to improve process in all areas as it provides lifeline services in a cost-efficient, dependable manner to the State's elderly and disabled populations. Human services transportation is a key component in reducing overall health care costs, and our Ride program will continue to work with all partners and stakeholders to provide and develop the most efficient delivery system to our client base. Last year, the Ride program made a number of process improvements in an attempt to reach this goal.



Lifeline service for the State's elderly and disabled populations.

By implementing data-driven management techniques, Ride staff has improved the efficiency of the program, maximizing the deployment of drivers by creating shifts where drivers work peak service times with time off in between. Perhaps, most

importantly, we continue to make great strides in improving customer service. We use GPS to track on-time performance and to determine if there are any issues that particular vehicle operators need to correct. In order to make sure that all policies are administered equitably, Ride management has compiled a Customer Conduct Policy book to ensure no variances in interpretation of ADA responsibilities and Ride rules.

Ride staff also had an application developed for phones, other mobile devices and desktop computers. The “app” allows customers to check scheduled pickup times, and approximately 20% of our Ride customers have registered to use it to date.

V. Planning Department



Our Planning Division continues to make improvements in all areas related to scheduling, on-time performance, and the overall efficiency of the entire transit system. During the last year, Planning conducted a lengthy comprehensive Fare Study that involved an in-depth review of our fare technology, as well as future technology available, to allow for integration with the MBTA system. This study also reviewed RIPTA’s price points, as well as researching and reviewing many reduced fare bus pass programs.

Several other planning initiatives were undertaken during the last year. Below are highlights of those initiatives:

1. **Federal Compliance/Triennial Review**

Every three years, agencies receiving Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds undergo an assessment of compliance with federal requirements called the “Triennial Review.” RIPTA’s latest Triennial took place in August 2015. The agency was tested for compliance in 17 areas, determined by examining a sample of grant management and program implementation practices and capped by a weeklong site visit by a team of federal review specialists. We are pleased to report that at the close of the visit, our

Region I FTA office stated that RIPTA had the fewest number of issues of any transit agency in Region I reviewed this year.

That said, we have identified three areas for process improvements: facilities maintenance planning and documentation; Civil Rights monitoring; and monitoring of contractors (such as Goodyear Tire) with safety-sensitive employees.

In an effort to ensure FTA compliance going forward, we have instituted a quarterly meeting of 10 employees involved in the compliance process so they can regularly share new information and assess progress. This compliance committee will break off into sub-committees, who will focus on their areas of experience. These sub-committees will be responsible to monitor and implement all relevant changes to FTA regulations and also assume responsibility to remain up-to-date on all relevant changes to FTA regulations.

2. Service Planning

The Planning Department has made several improvements in the last year to improve route performance, including:

- Improved monitoring of on-time performance through use of the Automated Transportation Management System (ATMS) and creation of an On-Time Performance Committee comprised of drivers and planning staff.
- Creation of a monthly “Performance Dashboard” to more closely monitor route performance by previous month and year comparisons based on several metrics. Use of a “dashboard” would make the information easier to understand by the public and could be shared in reports or online.
- Bus Stop Realignment Program - Planning staff continues to review all routes to realign bus stops to meet spacing guidelines. To date, more than 1000 bus stops have been removed, greatly improving system performance.



3. Rhode Island Bus Stop Design Guide

The Rhode Island Bus Stop Design Guide will create a series of standard bus stop typologies that will be used to guide RIDOT roadway projects. These typologies will set a threshold for the level of investment RIPTA expects at bus stops around the State. These standards will incorporate ADA compliance, signage standards, bus stop safety considerations, and minimum thresholds for levels of infrastructure investment.

4. Quonset Transit Development Plan

The Quonset Business Park is one of the most strategically important and fastest growing job centers in Rhode Island. Due to the spread-out nature of the park, inconsistent shift times, and high dispersion of worker home locations, it is difficult to cost-effectively serve the park with public transportation.

In January 2016, the RIPTA Board awarded a contract to conduct a RIPTA Quonset Transit Market Analysis and Service Plan. The consultant team will help



RIPTA, in partnership with the Quonset Development Corporation, review the demographic layout at the Park and help RIPTA identify creative means of serving this key destination. Findings from this report will be used to guide future transit and alternative transportation proposals to the Park -- such as expansion of vanpools and potential "Fixed Route" or Flex services.

5. Transit Signal Priority Expansion Plan

With the success of RIPTA's first deployment of Transit Signal Prioritization (TSP) on the R-Line, RIPTA is eager to expand this technology to realize further benefits of improved service efficiency and passenger travel times. TSP uses wireless technology which enables an approaching bus to "hold" a green light, so trip

performance is improved in dense traffic corridors. RIPTA will now be managing a study to identify other bus routes and segments that may yield the greatest benefits of TSP investment.

VI. Major Capital Projects

RIPTA is leading three major capital infrastructure projects in Newport and Providence – totaling over \$25 Million – to improve and expand transit facilities for our riders.



1. Newport Gateway Exterior Repair and Resiliency Project

The Gateway is a major hub in the system, with 600,000 annual boarding's. The “sail-shaped” canopies that covered the exterior passenger and pedestrian areas were largely destroyed by “Super Storm Sandy” in 2012. In partnership with the City of Newport and local stakeholders, RIPTA is leading a \$6.6 Million project to restore overhead protection for the hundreds of thousands of people who pass through the Newport Gateway Center and make the structure more resilient to future storms.

“RIPTA is leading a \$6.6 million project to restore overhead protection for the hundreds of thousands of people who pass through the Newport Gateway Center each year.”

The project's features include replacement of overhead canopies with permanent roofing, as well as improvements to surface runoff at the site through low impact drainage practices. These modifications will minimize the impact on Newport's sewer system and mitigate against flooding in future storms. Because of the facility's importance to the State's tourism industry, this project will give special attention to design and aesthetics, while also bringing the facility up to industry standards for an

intermodal hub – including improvements in lighting, signage, and other features that will make it easier for the public to make their transit connections.

2. East Side Bus Tunnel Improvement Project

Built in 1914 for streetcar use, the “East Side Tunnel” is located at the base of Waterman Avenue on South Main Street in Providence, with stops at RISD and Brown University. The Tunnel is a critical element of the State’s transit network, with 6,000 passengers daily using the tunnel on 327 bus trips. The Brown University stop is the sixth highest performing stop statewide. Despite its importance, the Tunnel’s last major maintenance project was in 1992. RIPTA has been awarded a discretionary State of Good Repair grant from the FTA to make \$2.2 million in critical repairs and safety improvements to the Tunnel. Issues identified for improvement include passenger boarding areas, drainage, security, safety and structural integrity.

a. Downtown Providence Enhanced Bus Project

RIPTA is taking the lead to implement a \$17 million Enhanced Transit Corridor in Downtown Providence. The project utilizes \$13 million in TIGER VI funds, which had previously been awarded for the construction of a streetcar. The revised proposal, which has been approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation, is better aligned with the goals of the community, city, and state -- including RIPTA’s plan to pursue a multi-hub system in downtown Providence.



Service for the Downtown Enhanced Transit Corridor will run along Exchange, Dorrance, and Eddy Streets, providing quick and reliable transportation between Kennedy Plaza and two new intermodal transit hubs planned for the areas around the Providence Train Station and the Hospital District, while at the same time connecting key office, retail, entertainment, and institutional destinations both within and beyond the Downtown core.

May 1, 2016

The project will provide service frequency on average of every five minutes during peak hours. It will connect Rhode Island's largest employment hubs and its world-class institutions to the Downtown core and adjacent neighborhoods, while passing directly through the LINK District, the City's key redevelopment area made available by the recent relocation of Interstate 195.

Under the direction of the Executive Board at RIPTA as well as the Chief Executive Officer, the aforementioned internal process improvements as well as projects highlighted in this report, help show the vital and varied role the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority plays in our State. We provide access to crucial lifeline services - all with the goal of building a cohesive and comprehensive public transit network that helps grow Rhode Island's economy while also protecting the environment. We will continue to pursue those goals aggressively. We thank you for your continued guidance and support as we move this agency forward into the future.

Sincerely,



Raymond B. Studley
Chief Executive Officer
Rhode Island Public Transit Authority



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