



Rhode Island Public Transit Authority  
**COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS**

# PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

July 3, 2012





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### A. Outline/Questions for Stakeholder Interviews



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) is conducting a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) of its operations. This thorough analysis of our state's transit services will identify strengths as well as opportunities to create the best transit network possible for RIPTA customers within RIPTA's available budget. The goals of the COA are to improve RIPTA's customer travel experience by reducing travel time, improve service frequencies and connections where possible, and to introduce new and innovative transit options. Successful implementation of the COA will result in improved transit services for Rhode Island.

The project will aim to maximize the impact of taxpayer funding for transit by gaining better knowledge of travel demand, improving the efficiency of services, and directing transit investment to where it is most needed.

During this study, the following issues will be addressed:

- Who are RIPTA's current and potential customers?
- How is the overall system performing and what are areas for improvement?
- How can RIPTA best serve its markets within its operational and financial capacities?

The COA will be conducted in two phases:

**1. Phase I: Determine Needs and Opportunities/Effectiveness of Existing Services**

The Nelson\Nygaard project team will conduct a comprehensive analysis of demographics and market demand, will review the strengths and weaknesses of existing services, and will develop potential opportunities for service improvement. A summary of the needs and opportunities identified will be prepared.

**2. Phase II: Develop and Evaluate Service Improvements/Develop Recommendations**

The project team will develop alternative service scenarios that represent different options for improving service. These alternatives will be analyzed based on ridership, costs and other factors, providing a thorough and transparent basis for developing recommendations. Recommendations that represent the most effective potential changes and match stakeholder desires and expectations to the extent possible will then be developed. Finally, the project team will develop a plan to implement these recommendations and provide RIPTA with implementation assistance.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT GOALS

RIPTA is committed to active engagement with the public during completion of the COA in order to meet the following goals:

- Gain meaningful input on the effectiveness of existing services and unmet customer needs;
- Conduct the COA in an interactive and collaborative public process; and,
- Ensure transparent decision-making.



The intention is to garner public input from many perspectives, by reaching out to existing customers, integrating with other ongoing transportation and community projects, and meeting with key stakeholders to best understand how to implement and advance identified goals. In particular:

- RIPTA believes that public involvement for this project should be a part of local and statewide discussions that are ongoing as part of a multitude of other initiatives. COA outreach will focus on bringing project information to a variety of local meetings that may be transportation or community focused, rather than hold large public meetings specifically on the COA.
- Project documents will be produced in a simple and easy-to-read format and shared on the project webpage.
- The project team will develop periodic briefing papers and fact sheets in clear language for a variety of stakeholders.

In order to meet these goals, RIPTA and its consulting team have developed this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) which includes the three basic elements:

### **Stakeholder Outreach**

- Interviews with key RIPTA stakeholders and interest groups with knowledge of RIPTA's system and/or customer needs
- Technical Advisory Committee
- Bus Operator Interviews
- Briefings to the RIPTA Board and RI General Assembly

### **Public/Customer Outreach**

- Rider Surveys
- Non-User Surveys
- Public Meetings
- Participation in Other Transportation & Community Meetings
- Public Outreach at High Ridership Locations

### **Supporting Materials and Other Concerns**

- Project Webpage
- Project Fact Sheets
- Email Communication and Other Notices
- Media Outreach
- Materials for Environmental Justice and Title VI Populations
- Accessible Meeting Locations

While this plan outlines a set of approaches and topics, it is a flexible and evolving document. The team will work with RIPTA to update the PIP periodically, assess successes and/or challenges associated with the outreach and consider suggestions for changes or improvements.

Finally, RIPTA has indicated a desire to have their Planning, Marketing and Commuter Resources Departments involved and supportive of this Public Involvement Plan. RIPTA staff will work closely with the project team and will be provided with project materials to share as part of regular outreach efforts, other project meetings, and to share at special events.



## 2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

### STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH STRATEGIES

For the COA to be successful, it will be critical to identify stakeholder opinions and issues, to address those issues openly, and to work to find common ground.

The major stakeholders for this project include RIPTA itself, state agencies and leaders, local municipalities, and representatives from business, tourism, , non-profit, and student groups. Several strategies will be used to gain input from these different stakeholders, to obtain their opinion on service needs and other transit opportunities. RIPTA operates as a statewide transit agency and it will be important to reach out to stakeholders from the greater Providence Metropolitan area, as well as from Newport/Aquidneck Island, the East Bay, South County and Blackstone Valley.

#### **Stakeholder Interviews**

In order to identify key issues and opportunities at the outset of the project, the NelsonNygaard team will conduct stakeholder interviews with individuals and groups that have a stake in RIPTA service. The individuals listed in Table 1 were invited to share their opinions and ideas in a COA stakeholder interview.

Some interviews are proposed in “focus group” format, others are proposed for select individuals. However, in these cases, the individual will be encouraged to invite others to join in at their discretion. For example, in Newport, the Director of Planning would be the primary interviewee, but would be encouraged to invite representatives from the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, GoNewport Visitor’s Bureau, Newport Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce, or others. An outline and proposed set of questions for these interviews are included in Appendix A.

None of the interview responses and results will be attributed to specific individuals or organizations. Nelson\Nygaard has used this approach in other studies and found that it encourages individuals to provide forthright and open opinions. All interview results will be summarized in general format, highlighting issues and opportunities identified.

#### **RIPTA Transportation Division Interviews**

RIPTA’s Transportation Division is on the “front lines” of RIPTA and represents an important resource in terms of gaining knowledge on the successes, failures and opportunities related to existing services. The project team will work with RIPTA’s Director of Transportation to identify appropriate personnel to meet with to gain their perspective on existing services. These interviews are anticipated to include:

- Bus Operators and Flex Operators
- Superintendent Newport Garage
- Two fixed-route Street Supervisors

**TABLE 1 | PROPOSED STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

STAKEHOLDER GROUP		PROPOSED INTERVIEWEES
1.	RIPTA Board and City of Warwick	Scott Avedisian, RIPTA Board Chair and Mayor of Warwick
2.	Regional Planning Entities	Kevin Flynn, Associate Director, RI Statewide Planning
3.		Jeff Broadhead, Washington County Regional Planning Commission
4.		Tina Dolen, Aquidneck Island Planning Commission
5.	RI Dept. Human Services	Amy LaPierre, Chief of Family Health Systems
6.	Private Business	Blue Cross/Blue Shield Aram Garabedian, Owner, Warwick Mall
7.	Municipalities serving as RIPTA hubs	Providence: Bob Azar Acting Director of Planning & Development
8.		Newport: Paige Bronk, Director of Planning
9.		Pawtucket: Michael Davolio, Director of Planning
10.		W. Warwick: Fred Presley, Director of Planning
11.	URI	Vernon Wyman, Assistant VP Business Services, URI
12.	UPass participant	Carol Chase, Johnson & Wales Transportation
13.	Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy	Focus Group: Chris Wood, Executive Director; Frank LaTorre, Downtown Improvement District; Lynne McCormack; Providence Arts, Culture & Tourism
14.	Persons with Disabilities	Focus Group: Accessible Transit Advisory Committee
15.	Rider representatives	Focus Group including RIPTA Riders, CTC, Sierra Club, RI College Congress, Youth in Action, etc.
16.	RI Public Expenditure Council	John Simmons, Executive Director

*\*Note: Interviewees were encouraged to invite staff or group representatives to participate at their discretion.*

### Technical Advisory Committee

The project team will work with RIPTA to identify and invite individuals to participate in a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Members will include representatives from state agencies, business, local human service providers, municipalities, riders, regional planning agencies and other interested stakeholders. A list of invited TAC members is shown in Table 2.

The TAC will meet approximately every six to eight weeks through the study timeframe. Approximately four meetings and will be used to review study progress, discuss ongoing technical work, help review potential improvements, and obtain feedback on the project recommendations.

### Presentations & Briefings for Key Decision-Makers and Local Officials

RIPTA anticipates providing periodic briefings at key milestones and decision points throughout the study. These presentation will be made as requested, and are assumed to include:

- RI General Assembly (two briefings assumed)
- RIPTA Board (four briefings assumed)

**TABLE 2 | PROPOSED TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

AGENCY/GROUP		PROPOSED REPRESENTATIVE
1.	RIPTA Board	Ms. Maureen Martin, Board Member
2.	ATU 618	Mr. Paul Harrington, Business Agent
3.	Office of the Governor	Honorable Lincoln Chafee, Governor
4.	RI Senate	Senator Teresa Paiva Weed, Senate President
5.	RI House	Representative Gordon Fox, Speaker of the House
6.	RI Dept. of Transportation	Mr. Steve Devine, Chief, Intermodal Planning
7.	RI Statewide Planning	Mr. Kevin Flynn, Associate Director for Planning
8.	RI Airport Corporation (RIAC)	Mr. Tim Pimental, Air Service Marketing & Landside Operations
9.	RI Economic Development Corp.	Mr. William Parsons, Managing Director
10.	Aquidneck Island Planning Commission	Ms. Tina Dolen, Executive Director
11.	Washington County Regional Planning Commission	Mr. Jeffrey Broadhead, Executive Director
12.	Municipalities	Mr. Bob Azar, Acting Director of Planning & Development, Providence
13.		Mr. Michael Davolio, Director of Planning, Pawtucket
14.		Mr. Paige Bronk, Director of Planning, Newport
15.		Ms. Jeanne Boyle, Director of Planning, E. Providence
16.		Mr. Peter LaPolla, Director of Planning, Cranston
17.		Mr. Tom Kravitz, Planning Director, Town of Burrillville
18.		Mr. Elaine Colarusso, Town of East Greenwich and Statewide Planning Council TAC
19.		Metro Area/Private Business
20.	Student/Youth Representative	Sterling Clinton, Project Director, Youth in Action
21.	Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)	Mr. Will Potter
22.	Tourism	Mr. Evan Smith, President & CEO, Discover Newport
23.	RI Sierra Club/RIPTA Riders Group	M. Abel Collins, Program Manager
24.	Coalition for Transportation Choice	Mr. Jerry Elmer
25.	College Student Representative	TBD



## **PUBLIC/CUSTOMER OUTREACH STRATEGIES**

Another critical effort of the COA is to gain input and opinion from existing RIPTA riders, as well as other members of the public who do not currently use the system, but who may be viewed as “potential users.”

The methods for this engagement are described in this section. They include customer surveys, maintenance of a project webpage on the RIPTA website; production of project fact sheets and information materials; email notices and communication; media outreach; coordination with ongoing projects; and outreach to environmental justice and Title VI populations.

### **Surveys**

#### **Passenger Surveys**

To develop a better understanding of how RIPTA's riders are using existing services and the types of changes they would like to see, the project team will survey passengers on all existing RIPTA fixed routes and Flex routes. The surveys will be conducted to determine where passengers are traveling to and from, who they are, how and why they currently use the service, and the types of improvements they would most like to see. The survey questions will be developed in collaboration with RIPTA staff.

Passengers will be surveyed on weekday services, producing approximately 250-350 usable surveys (depending on route ridership), per route, on all routes. The survey will be pre-tested with a small group of riders and administered on-board RIPTA services by a survey team. The survey will be available in English and Spanish. Results will be processed and summarized for each route individually and for all routes combined.

Passenger surveys will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will be conducted over the summer of 2012, in order to capture seasonal riders in Newport and South County beach services. The second phase will be a more comprehensive survey effort in September, designed to capture the student population.

#### **Non-user Surveys**

Non-users can be hard to reach, as they do not have a direct relationship with RIPTA. Due to the difficulty in collecting data using telephone surveys, the project team will focus on surveying non-users via intercept surveys at key locations (for example, downtown Providence, the Warwick Mall, special events, etc.) and via the web. The non-user survey will also be available in English and Spanish.

To direct people to the web survey, we will use RIPTA's email list, RIPTA's Facebook page, Twitter, and press releases. We will also conduct outreach to community groups and networks that reach transportation, disability, public health, environmental justice, low income, seniors and Title VI populations to publicize the online survey.

#### **Public Meetings**

Up to five public meetings will be held towards the end of the study to bring proposed scenarios to the public, and gain feedback. It is anticipated that these meetings would be held in:

- Providence
- Newport
- University of RI, South Kingston
- Blackstone Valley (either Pawtucket or Woonsocket)
- East Bay



### Participation in Other Transportation & Community Meetings

RIPTA is committed to providing regular project updates and briefings on the COA at existing neighborhood and community meetings. Since not all stakeholders have the time to attend a meeting solely focused on the COA, RIPTA staff will provide regular briefings at a variety of stakeholder group meetings. Community groups will be able to request a briefing via the project website and RIPTA will reach out to the following groups:

- Keep Space RI
- Regional Planning Agency Meetings
- Neighborhood Association Meetings
- Community Development Agency Board Meetings
- Greater Kennedy Plaza Board Meetings
- Providence Foundation Monthly Meetings/Chamber of Commerce Meetings
- State Planning Council
- Others, as appropriate.
- RI Statewide HUD Challenge Planning Study
- RIPTA/City of Providence Community Planning Challenge Grant Study
- Kennedy Plaza Enhancement Efforts

### Outreach at High Ridership Locations

In order to receive input at key decision points and to gain access to a large number of existing riders, periodic outreach efforts may involve setting up information tables at high ridership locations. These efforts would be supported and staffed by RIPTA Marketing and/or Commuter Resources staff, and would involve setting up an information table or display during peak periods at Kennedy Plaza, the Pawtucket Visitor's Center, Newport's Gateway Center or other locations. Riders would be invited to provide comment on specific proposals, or to answer questions on ridership habits.

## SUPPORTING MATERIALS

### Project Webpage

The Nelson\Nygaard team will supply RIPTA with content in order to support a special project webpage to be hosted on the existing RIPTA website. As envisioned, this webpage would include, at minimum:

- Study purpose and overview
- Project documents (for all major tasks, including route evaluations)
- Fact sheets and other informational materials
- Periodic project updates
- Interactive elements such as a link to the online survey and a sign-up for a project email list
- An email address to which comments may be sent and logged for team review

Project websites are important tools for people who can't attend meetings. Individuals can review documents and provide comments through emails and letters to the project team. The Nelson\Nygaard team anticipates providing initial webpage content on study purpose and overview by July 1, 2012.



### **Project Fact Sheets**

RIPTA and the project team will develop project fact sheets a key milestones to be distributed on the project website and at other events. This material will provide important background information on the project to interested participants, as well as provide information to those who are unable to attend in-person briefings. It is assumed that four fact sheets would be prepared over the course of the COA, at key milestones such as:

- Fact Sheet #1: Overview of COA Goals, Results of Market Analysis, Needs Identified
- Fact Sheet #2: Results of Route Evaluations, Major Theme & Opportunities Identified
- Fact Sheet #3: Scenarios to be Evaluated
- Fact Sheet #4: Public Feedback & Final Recommendations

### **Email, Communication and Notices**

The project team will use a number of methods for communicating with the public about project and website updates. In addition to the website, the team will develop an electronic database with contact information for those who have requested additional information, signed up online, written a comment letter or talked with a staff member. The database will contain emails and postal addresses (when they are available). The database will be updated regularly. (Emails are not used for purposes other than sharing project information. Individuals can unsubscribe from the list on request.)

In addition, the Project Team will continue to use the following communication strategies:

- Post meeting information on the website and including it in emails to the database. (For example, the website will reflect any upcoming briefings on the COA.)
- Share meeting and project information with community groups and municipalities.

### **Media Outreach**

RIPTA will provide regular updates to the media to increase outreach on the project. The team will develop media advisories/press releases for the web survey, major document releases and other events of interest.

### **Environmental Justice and Title VI Populations**

As noted above, the project team will conduct meaningful outreach with EJ and Title VI populations as part of this project.

The Project Team will make significant efforts to reach these environmental justice populations in Rhode Island, as identified by the 2010 Census. This outreach will include:

- Provide information to city, community and neighborhood groups on the project, on meetings and on how to participate;
- Provide interpreters for RIPTA meetings, on request;
- Brief public health, economic development and other agencies about the project because they can play a key role in connecting with harder-to-reach populations.

### **Accessibility**

RIPTA will conduct all of its meetings in accessible locations and will provide accommodations on request for participants.



# 3 TIMELINE FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES

RIPTA Comprehensive Operations Analysis  
 Timeline for Public Participation Activities

	May				June				July				August				September				October				November				December				January				February					
	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	4	11	18
<b>PHASE I DETERMINE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING SYSTEM</b>																																										
1 Conduct Kick-Off Meeting/Fieldwork																																										
2 Develop & Implement Stakeholder Outreach Process																																										
Stakeholder Outreach																																										
Conduct Stakeholder Interviews																																										
Conduct Technical Advisory Committee Meetings																																										
Conduct Bus Operator Interviews																																										
Briefings to RIPTA Board and RI General Assembly																																										
Public/Customer Outreach																																										
Riders Surveys																																										
Non-User Surveys																																										
Participation in Other Transportation and Community Meetings																																										
Public Outreach at High Ridership Locations																																										
Public Review of Service Scenarios																																										
Supporting Materials/Concerns																																										
Project Webpage																																										
Project Factsheets																																										
Email and Other Notices																																										
Media Outreach																																										
3 Produce Overview of Existing System And Services																																										
4 Determine Needs And Opportunities																																										
5 Conduct Comprehensive Analysis of Existing Services																																										
Collect, Compile, and Process Ridership Data																																										
Conduct Route Evaluations																																										
6 Produce Summary Of Needs And Opportunities																																										
7 Develop Service Guidelines/Policies																																										
<b>PHASE II DETERMINE IMPROVEMENTS</b>																																										
8 Develop Alternative Service Scenarios																																										
9 Analysis of Alternatives																																										
10 Develop Recommendations																																										
11 Develop Implementation Plan																																										

■ = Major project tasks  
■ = Public participation tasks

TAC1 = Overview of study, overview of system, results of market analysis (presurvey results)  
 TAC2 = Update on needs and opportunities, results of route evaluations and service redesign principles  
 TAC3 = Service redesign scenarios  
 TAC4 = Public input and recommendations

BR1 = Overview of study, overview of system, results of market analysis (presurvey results)  
 BR2 = Results of route evaluations, service redesign principles, and service scenarios  
 BR3 = Public input and recommendations



## **APPENDIX A: OUTLINE/QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

*Notes: All questions are intended to be open-ended and as a way to start a conversation rather than to elicit specific answers.*

*Also, none of the responses provided will be attributed to specific individuals or organizations in published summaries.*

### **Introduction**

1. Describe purpose of meeting: to discuss current perceptions on area transit, transit opportunities, issues, and challenges. Information intended to identify issues that will need to be addressed in the subsequent analysis.
2. Present study objectives:
  - Improve RIPTA service within available resources
  - Use existing resources more effectively
  - Reconfigure service to better match current demand
  - Make service simpler, faster, and more direct
  - Implement innovative new services
  - Improve service for existing riders
  - Attract new riders
  - Improve integration of bus service with other modes
  - Develop a program that the public and key stakeholders will embrace→ ***Focus is on improvements to the EXISTING RIPTA services***
3. Describe process:
  - Identify demographics and travel trends
  - Compare RIPTA services with those provided in other similar areas
  - Evaluate effectiveness of existing services
  - Develop potential service improvements
  - Evaluate potential service improvements
  - Recommend service improvements→ ***Note that there will be ongoing public outreach throughout the effort.***

### **Stakeholder Interview Topics**

1. What is your organization's interest/involvement in transit service?
2. What do you consider to be greatest transit issues/challenges for your employees, customers, clients, organization, etc.?
3. What does RIPTA do best?
4. What could or should RIPTA do better?
5. What do you consider to be greatest transit issues/challenges for the state?
6. Are there new types of service that you believe should be examined?
7. Are there particular areas in which transit needs to be improved?
8. What should major considerations be in reconfiguring transit service (i.e., cost-effectiveness, ridership increases, provide basic level of service, social equity, traffic reduction, economic development, etc.)?