



COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #1

LOCATION OF MEETING: RIPTA BOARD ROOM, PROVIDENCE

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: JULY 25, 2012, 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Bob Azar, City of Providence
Jenn Bailey, Discover Newport (Alternate)
Jeanne Boyle, City of East Providence
Jeffrey Broadhead, Washington County Regional Planning Commission
Mike Burns, City of Pawtucket (Alternate)
Linsey Callaghan, RI Statewide Planning
Sterling Clinton, Youth in Action
Elaine Colarusso, Town of East Greenwich
Beth Cotter, RI House of Representatives
Steve Devine, RI Department of Transportation
Paul Harrington, ATU 618
Tom Kravitz, Town of Burrillville
Peter LaPolla, City of Cranston
Frank LaTorre, Downtown Providence Improvement District (Alternate for Dan Baudoin)
Kelly Mahoney, Office of the Governor
Maureen Martin, RIPTA Board Member
Charles Odingbe, RIPTA
Amy Pettine, RIPTA
Tim Pimental, RI Airport Corporation
Will Potter, RI College Student
Angie Stabile, Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)
Mike Walker, RI Economic Development Corporation

PROJECT TEAM/CONSULTANTS:

Geoff Slater, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting
Anne Galbraith, ASG Planning
Regan Checchio, Regina Villa Associates

OTHER ATTENDEES:

Tom Cute, ATU 618
Greg Harris, RIPTA
Randy Wunschel, City of Pawtucket



PURPOSE/SUBJECT:

This was the first meeting of the Advisory Committee for the RIPTA Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA). The agenda included a project overview, a transit market review, a report on stakeholder input and service design principles.

HANDOUTS: Agenda, Project Overview

Welcome and Introductions

Amy Pettine, Project Manager for RIPTA, opened the meeting and invited those present to introduce themselves (see Attendance). She thanked the group for their participation in the Advisory Committee, noting it was comprised of various groups and geographically diverse. She said that Advisory Committee members should be vocal and active participants in the Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) process, offering a range of perspectives. She then introduced Charles Odingbe, CEO of RIPTA.

Mr. Odingbe welcomed participants and said he was pleased with the turnout. He noted that the COA project is about service improvements, not budget adjustments, with goal being to ensure RIPTA services meet the needs of the changing RI community as effectively as possible. The COA will also help RIPTA to provide explanations for why certain service is provided, or not.

Mr. Odingbe then reviewed his expectations for the Advisory Committee members:

- To remain open-minded
- To be prepared to think in a counter-intuitive way
- To take on the responsibility to gain a better understanding of the analysis
- To provide feedback to the planners, but not to do their work
- To ask tough questions
- To be ready to make tough choices
- To see rider effectiveness and efficiencies as a bottom-line goal (while mitigating negative impacts)

Mr. Odingbe added that the economic viability of the region is dependent on transit.

Project Overview, Schedule and Work-to-Date

Ms. Pettine then reviewed the agenda, noting that the Project Overview and Draft Market Review had been distributed to the Committee prior to the meeting. She reviewed the project timeline (see Agenda), noting that there would be five Advisory Committee meetings over the course of the study (concluding in mid-winter). Ms. Pettine noted that the next meeting will focus on the different route evaluations and customer surveys.

Ms. Pettine noted that there would be many opportunities for public participation and input in the process including through the Technical Advisory Committee process, stakeholder interviews, customer surveys, other surveys for non-users, public meetings, legislative briefings and other outreach.

To date, the project team has completed its data collection, a statewide market review and stakeholder interviews.



Stakeholder Input-to-Date

Anne Galbraith, ASG Planning, provided a summary of the stakeholder interviews that had been completed to date. Interviews had been conducted with state agencies, municipalities, universities, focus groups, the Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy and RIPTA itself.

Ms. Galbraith reported the stakeholders' perception of the things RIPTA does well including providing convenient transit with limited resources, bringing commuters into downtown Providence, meeting "unfunded mandates" and partnerships with other organizations. (See PowerPoint presentation for a complete summary.)

Ms. Galbraith then summarized the feedback on existing services, as well as suggestions on new services to meet unmet needs. Comments about overcrowded buses and the need for more service were the most frequently expressed. Others desire better coordination between routes along the same corridor, or more coordinated transfer opportunities. Many stakeholders saw the need for service standards and gave suggestions on how to make these decisions on where service is most warranted.

Ms. Galbraith summarized stakeholder input within specific regions of the state, and noted that these will be taken into consideration as part of the study team's evaluation of potential opportunities. Other input also included She also summarized feedback on bus stop location and consolidation, shelters, improvements to RIPTA marketing and fares. Stakeholder comments also concerned issues of accessibility and safety.

Geoff Slater, Project Manager for Nelson\Nygarrd asked if there were other concerns that hadn't been mentioned.

A participant suggested looking for closely at the schools. She noted that due to the lack of coordination between school and RIPTA schedules, some students who use RIPTA end up being chronically late (such as Alverez High School on Adelaide), She also suggested meeting to discuss afterschool service.

Tom Cute, ATU 618, suggested Transit 2000 had already looked at many of these suggestions, but were abandoned due to funding cuts. Ms. Galbraith said that purpose of the COA was to see where existing resources would be most effective and to direct resources to bus service in these areas. There is no intention to cut or add more service as part of the COA.. Mr. Cute said that in many cases, the new routes were not given enough time to build service. Mr. Slater said that it usually takes 6 months to a year before the market is known.

Maureen Martin, RIPTA Board, suggested the project team interview more representatives of labor.

Frank LaTorre, Downtown Improvement District, suggested adding shuttle service for special events downtown.

Paul Harrington, ATU 618, suggested reaching out to organizations and businesses that benefit from mass transit. He emphasized that these leaders need to take a role in the process. He asked Greg Harris, RIPTA, if ridership has been increasing. Mr. Harris said that it has increased 10%.

Tim Pimenthal, RIAC, suggested an pursuing a fare agreement between RIPTA and MBTA Commuter Rail so passengers do not need to buy two passes. Ms. Pettine said they are looking to see if an integrated fare product could be designed, but there are technical issues due to different farebox systems.



RI Transit Market Review

Mr. Slater then reviewed the existing transit market to see where demand is the greatest. He emphasized that the character of the development is important. He noted that the market review consists of five components:

- Population and employment patterns
- Demographic characteristics
- Service to major activity centers
- Overall transit demand by area
- Regional travel flows

Mr. Slater noted the most transit supportive areas are in the Providence metro area. Most RIPTA routes are already focused where demand is the highest, but a significant amount of service is also provided to areas where demand is lower. He added that the greatest density of jobs are in the Providence metro area, and along the I-95 and I-295 corridors. RIPTA's does a good job of serving metro area jobs, but other major employment areas are also served, although sometimes only peripherally.

Mr. Slater noted certain population groups tend to have higher transit needs than the general population: low income individuals; older adults; youths; persons with disabilities, households without autos and minorities. He then examined how these population groups were distributed geographically.

Mr. Slater concluded that, considering all factors, transit demand is highest in the Providence metro area. It is also high in Woonsocket and Newport. Beyond those areas, there are only limited pockets with high demand for transit: Cumberland, Smithfield, Greenville, Barrington, Bristol, Narragansett and Westerly.

Bob Azar, City of Providence, asked if this analysis is based on actual ridership demand. Mr. Slater said it is based on census data, not actual travel demand. He said the route evaluations, which are the next step in the analysis, will show actual ridership.

Tim Pimental asked if the data shown reflected demand between Fall River and Providence. Ms. Pettine noted that Massachusetts data is not included in the statewide model that was used for this analysis.

Mr. LaTorre asked if there was a more detailed breakdown of the Providence figures. Ms. Pettine said that was available via the full Market Review report, which is posted on the project website.

Jeff Broadhead suggested the team review a recent transportation study of the Route 1 Corridor in South County. Ms. Pettine asked for a copy of the study.

Mr. Slater noted that most areas with the highest transit propensities have extensive service coverage, but additional coverage should be examined in Cranston and North Providence. In Rhode Island, the largest volumes of trips have historically been to and from Providence, and this continues to be the case today. However, recent growth has been outward, and there is increasing demand for service to other places.

He noted that there are opportunities for service to some new areas, and better service between some communities, for example:

- A Warwick transit hub to provide strong ties between Warwick and Providence and facilitate local travel
- Additional service coverage in Cranston and North Providence
- Additional fixed-route service in Woonsocket
- Service to the southern half of the I-295 corridor, particularly in the Smithfield to West Warwick area
- New service to emerging areas such as Quonset



Making Service Less Productive/A Transit Parable

Mr. Slater explained that in many cases, COAs recommend putting original routes back the way they were and unwinding changes made over the course of many years. As a general transit planning principle, direct routes with well-spaced stops tend to do very well. When routes are extended or deviated on side trips, and when stops are added, ridership may increase, but the cost per customer may also increase. In other words, as service becomes more complicated, costs are higher and routes are less productive.

Linsey Callaghan, RI Statewide Planning, asked about extending a route to serve a facility such as a hospital. Mr. Slater said it was important to see if the change makes sense and weigh the costs and benefits.

Mr. LaTorre asked how far people will walk to a bus stop. Mr. Slater said that ¼ mile is the typical rule of thumb, but people will walk further on better designed routes, for example. Ms. Pettine noted that the Elmwood service has 10 stops in a mile and RIPTA is working to consolidate stops to improve service.

Service Design Principles

Mr. Slater then outlined some service design principles:

- Simple is better than complicated.
- A few good choices are better than many mediocre choices.
- Routes should serve well-defined markets.
- There should be a hierarchy of routes to service different markets (BRT/Rapid Bus, Urban Radial, Urban Crosstown, Suburban Local, Express, Lifeline).
- Major transit routes should operate along arterials.
- Transit service should be focused around landmarks.
- Routes should be symmetrical.
- Routes should operate along a direct path.
- Service and schedules should be based on repeating patterns.
- Services should be well-coordinated.
- Routes should not be too long.
- Service levels should be set based on service guidelines.
- Service design should consider scheduling implications.

Next Meeting and Next Steps

Ms. Pettine noted that the next meeting will focus on an overview of existing RIPTA services, individual route evaluations and the results of the customer and non-customer surveys. The next meeting is anticipated to occur at the end of September.