

# Better Transit for a Better Rhode Island



## 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY





***“There were parts of 2022 that were challenging, but I am proud of where we are,”*** said Scott Avedisian, Chief Executive Officer. ***“At not one point did we let challenges stop us from innovating, building, and striving to provide Rhode Islanders with the top-quality public transit service they deserve.”***

# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

The year 2022 brought distinct challenges for the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). As a team, we reached many milestones and delivered on initiatives we've promised. As an agency, RIPTA continued to build momentum - strengthening partnerships with different local, state and government entities. We are moving into the future with our eyes set on the horizon and a vision of better public transportation for all.

As so many public and private sector businesses have experienced in a post-pandemic world, the employment landscape continues to evolve and change. With ongoing and unprecedented labor shortages, the staffing difficulties we are facing are not unique to just RIPTA. Knowing the driver shortage has affected multiple industries—from public transit to commercial trucking -- gives some context to the problem but offers no easy solutions. However, we continue to address the problem with a systematic and multifaceted approach, including aggressive job recruitment and hiring campaigns. We want to thank Local 618 of the Amalgamated Transit Union and its President, Nick DeCristofaro, for working with us and coming to an agreement that allows us to enlist the service of recently retired drivers. I do believe that we all came together when needed to provide safe, timely and reliable transportation to the people we serve.

RIPTA remains fiscally sound and well managed with revenues and expenditures in line with budgeted projections. Ridership is continuing to recover post-pandemic; we are seeing gradual monthly improvements and remain optimistic that our passenger numbers will make a full recovery. Our \$147 million annual budget currently still relies on federal COVID relief funding, and we are exploring potential future revenue streams.

RIPTA continues to pursue the vision of its Transit Master Plan, successfully securing more than \$30 million in discretionary grants and focusing on long-term funding to not just maintain existing transit service, but to significantly enhance it.

As you will see in this report, we continue to look ahead and work collaboratively on several new projects. From the electrification of our fleet to help support the state's goal to reduce carbon emissions, to launching new free-fare pilot programs to make RIPTA even more accessible, we are committed to providing all riders with a plethora of travel options.

We have many exciting projects in the works, and we invite the public to take the ride with us in the coming year.



# Budget

Despite some revenue shortfalls, the approximately \$147 million annual budget is expected to be balanced in both FY 2023 and 2024 thanks to large appropriations of federal relief funding.

Thus far, the Authority has received more than \$129 million in federal assistance to aid transit agencies with preparing for, responding to, and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ridership for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, was 41% lower than pre-pandemic levels. Because the reduced demand has hampered passenger revenues, RIPTA continues to rely on federal COVID relief funding to balance the budget.

Those financial losses are expected to continue, and federal relief funding is expected to be exhausted within the next two years. At that time, At that time, RIPTA will need new revenue sources to maintain levels of service.

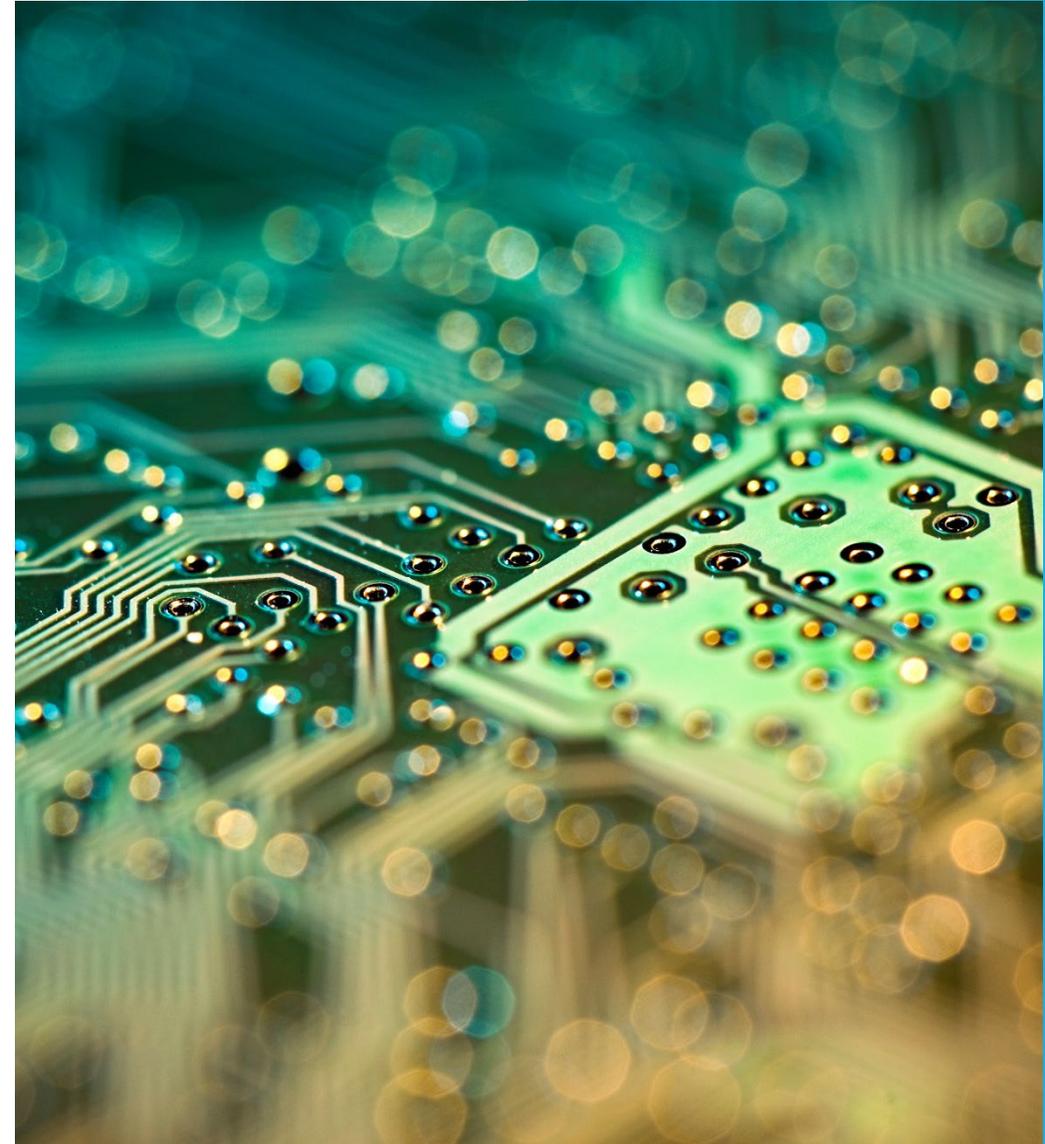
# Cyber Security

RIPTA continues to invest in cyber security – building its Information Technology team and constantly updating safety protocols to ensure “best practices” are in place. The Authority also continues to cooperate with lawmakers and all proper authorities as lessons are learned from a data breach that occurred in August 2021.

It is little comfort that federal agencies and other transit authorities, including New York’s MTA, have suffered data breaches and cyber threats are ever present. RIPTA is focused on continually working internally to tighten its cyber security. A network security specialist has been hired to monitor the network, review security alerts, and implement new network safeguards as needed. RIPTA has also instituted technological changes such as upgrading its firewall, limiting communication between servers, and restricting user access to certain accounts. Falcon software from CrowdStrike was installed on all devices to block, prevent, and report any malicious activity.

In addition, RIPTA has purchased licensing for encryption for its email as well as its cloud storage. Also, all employees’ devices are encrypted to prevent unauthorized access to files. All network communications are on different pathways to prevent unauthorized movement around the system.

RIPTA is working hard to anticipate threats and prevent them before any security breaches occur. In cybersecurity, ‘phishing’ is a type of attack where a malicious entity tries to gain access by sending messages that appear to be coming from a trusted source. RIPTA is using that same technology to test users’ ability to spot malicious email messages, and all employees are required to participate in cybersecurity training.



# Electrification



**R-Line**



**Newport**

Some of RIPTA's most exciting projects in the past year have involved the **electrification of its fleet**, as the Agency continues its **commitment to clean public transportation** while also supporting the State's goal to **reduce carbon emissions**.



**In-Line Charging Station**

# Electrification

## Newport Fleet

In August, RIPTA announced that a new federal grant would enable it to electrify the portion of its fleet that services Aquidneck Island with the future procurement of 25 new clean-energy electric buses and recharging infrastructure.

U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and Congressmen Jim Langevin and David Cicilline jointly announced a new \$22,370,800 federal grant under the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability & Equity (RAISE) program had been granted to RIPTA.

“This federal funding will help accelerate RIPTA’s transition to a clean energy future, curb pollution, and also help pump the brakes on climate change,” said **Senator Reed**.



## Inline Charging Station

RIPTA is nearing completion of its first inline charging station on Broad Street in Cranston. The station can charge up to three electric buses simultaneously and will support the busy R-Line and its new fleet of all-electric buses. The roughly \$6.7 million project is being constructed by BOND Civil & Utility Construction, Inc. and is expected to be completed by the end of this year. It is funded largely by a Volkswagen settlement fund, with the remaining money coming from the Federal Transit Administration.

“The new electric charging station furthers our Administration’s commitment to cleaner air quality and zero-emission, sustainable energy,” said **Governor Dan McKee**. “Projects like this also build on our momentum in ensuring Rhode Island is at the forefront of the green economy.”



“Electrifying these buses is important for the environment, but it is also part of our state’s commitment to equity. A zero-emission R-Line means a reduction of thousands of metric tons of greenhouse gases being emitted in Providence and Pawtucket,” **Lt. Governor Sabina Matos** said in August when RIPTA unveiled the first of the bright green and white buses. “This is just the start of our commitment to providing all of Rhode Island with clean, reliable, and affordable public transportation.”

# Electrification

## R-Line

Some of RIPTA’s most exciting projects in the past year have involved the electrification of its fleet, as the Agency continues its commitment to clean public transportation while also supporting the State’s goal to reduce carbon emissions.

In August, the transit authority announced that it had received the first of 14 New Flyer Xcelsior CHARGE NG™ 40-foot battery-electric buses which will service the R-Line, RIPTA’s most frequent and highest-ridership route. The deployment, expected to take place early in 2023, will create RIPTA’s first fully electric route which will lower emissions on this key corridor. The R-Line runs from the Cranston-Providence line on Broad Street through to Pawtucket and passes through many low-income and diverse communities that have been affected by air pollution. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, a 40-foot electric bus can save up to 135 metric tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) annually, which is what a traditional 40-foot clean diesel bus would emit per year.

RIPTA was able to make the investment in the electric buses with confidence based on data it has collected over the past few years via a pilot program that allowed it to test the efficiency and performance of electric buses. That pilot started in 2019 when RIPTA leased three all-electric buses, thanks to funding the State provide from its share of Volkswagen settlement funds.

With the support of Rhode Island’s congressional delegation, RIPTA has received approximately \$44 million in federal grants for electric bus acquisitions or the accompanying necessary infrastructure.



# Ready to Drive Your Career Forward?

We're always looking for  
qualified candidates!

- Paratransit
- Utilities
- Operations
- Mechanics
- Administrative
- Internships

## ***Labor Challenges***

RIPTA has taken a multi-faced approach to solving the driver shortage that has affected so many sectors of the transportation industry.

It continues an aggressive recruitment drive with its Human Resources Department attending and hosting job fairs and collaborating with any agencies or schools that might provide a labor stream. It has also worked with the drivers' union, Local 618 of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), to negotiate a new wage structure that will set the starting wage for drivers at \$21.28 per hour. (All drivers start in RIPTA's paratransit division, which uses smaller vehicles and provides service for persons with disabilities.) In addition, RIPTA recently reached an agreement with the ATU that will allow the company to offer work to recent retirees.

RIPTA recognizes that it can be difficult to recruit drivers for public transit. Although employees receive a robust benefit package, there are challenges to the job. Driving for the public is not always easy, applicants must have a commercial driver's license, and there are very specific federal regulations for the workforce, including a strict drug-free policy.

Faced with this historic labor shortage, RIPTA made the difficult decision in the fall of 2022 to decrease service frequency on 19 routes to reduce missed trips and align service with the current labor force. No routes were eliminated, and the Authority plans to reinstate service levels as soon as manpower permits. Moreover, by the end of the year, we were providing nearly 1 million passenger trips a month.



## ***Ridership Initiatives***

Despite labor challenges, RIPTA used creativity and community partnerships to make 2022 a year of innovative service initiatives that brought new opportunities to riders. These include a free-fare pilot program on our busy R-Line, exploring hop-on hop-off service in Newport, and also looking at the feasibility of expanding the paratransit service area for people with disabilities.

**R-Line Fare Free**

Pilot Program

**Ride Free  
Central Falls**

Pilot Program

**No Fare Program**

Pilot Bus Pass Program

**Hop-On  
Hop-Off**

Newport Bus Service

**Wave to  
Work**

Employee Benefits Program

**Paratransit  
Expansion Study**

Feasibility Study

# Ridership Initiatives *Pilot Programs*

## **Fare Free R-Line**

In September, RIPTA launched its free fare pilot program for the R-Line, its busiest and highest ridership route connecting Providence and Pawtucket. The year-long pilot not only opens ridership for passengers, but it also presents a unique opportunity to study the benefits and potential drawbacks of free transit service in Rhode Island. It is being funded by \$2.5 million from the state to make up for lost revenue. Complementary paratransit service will also be fare free for passengers during the pilot.

## **Ride Free Central Falls**

Launched in March, this pilot allows passengers to board for free in Central Falls when using a Wave smart card or mobile app. This pilot is testing the effectiveness of using geofencing technology to promote the use of public transportation.

## **No Fare Bus Pass Program**

At the end of the year, RIPTA started another pilot program which looks to remove financial barriers for low-income persons who rely on public transportation. The six-month program distributes 600 bus passes to agencies that service low-income, including unhoused, individuals. This program is intended to reach some low-income individuals who do not qualify for RIPTA's existing program which grants free bus passes to low-income individuals who are also either seniors or have a disability. RIPTA is working with the Rhode Island Association of Community Action Agencies, along with Mathewson Street United Methodist Church and other organizations to distribute pilot program bus passes fairly and equitably throughout the state.



# Ridership Initiatives



## **Newport Hop-On Hop-Off Service**

At the beginning of the summer, RIPTA launched a free Hop-On-Hop-Off bus service for two major routes in Newport including a brand new Route 68. This new route is in line with Transit Master Plan goals, which looks to enhance public transit opportunities in our state.

The promotional service ran through the end of October and was funded by Discover Newport and the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island. It was not only a creative solution to relieve summer traffic congestion in Newport but was also designed to provide some key connections for residents. One of the routes gave access to local beaches and included stops at the Rhode Island Department of Human Services offices, the Newport County YMCA and Newport Mental Health. “Partnerships such as these can play a key role in public transportation,” Avedisian said. The Right Reverend W. Nicholas Knisely said the Diocese was happy to support the program, noting “the beauty of this program is that it connects people with the beaches and attractions of Newport while also reducing traffic and the accompanying pollution.” Evan Smith, President and CEO of Discover Newport added, “Other American cities utilize similar programs which have helped them improve circulation and congestion challenges.”



## **Wave to Work**

Easy access to transportation can often be an impediment to people connecting with the right jobs, and RIPTA this year created a simple way for employers to offer transit benefits to employees. RIPTA launched “Wave to Work,” a program which allows employers to arrange for their employees to use RIPTA’s statewide transportation system by using Wave, RIPTA’s smart fare system. The employer can choose to subsidize part or all of the transit benefit with pre-tax dollars.

The first company to participate in this new program is Greystone Inc., a local manufacturer located in Lincoln, Rhode Island. Greystone, Inc.—a global leader in the production of high-volume precision machined and plated components for the automotive, aerospace, medical and industrial markets – is subsidizing the entire cost of monthly passes for their employees.

# Ridership Initiatives

## Paratransit Corridor Study

RIPTA was asked by the General Assembly to study the feasibility of expanding paratransit service throughout the state. Currently, paratransit service for persons with disabilities is provided within three-quarters of a mile of fixed-route service in accordance with federal regulations.

RIPTA held virtual meetings and took public feedback into consideration, and also weighed costs and benefits in order to draft a report for State lawmakers.

Senators Alana DiMario and Lou DiPalma have been strong proponents of looking at how public transit can better serve people with disabilities.

The \$75,000 study was funded through RIPTA's share of the RI state gas tax.

According to the report, extending paratransit statewide would bring the percentage of Rhode Island residents with access to paratransit service from 78% today to 100%, and would particularly benefit eight Rhode Island towns that are currently unserved: Charlestown, Foster, Hopkinton, Little Compton, New Shoreham, Richmond, Tiverton, and Westerly.

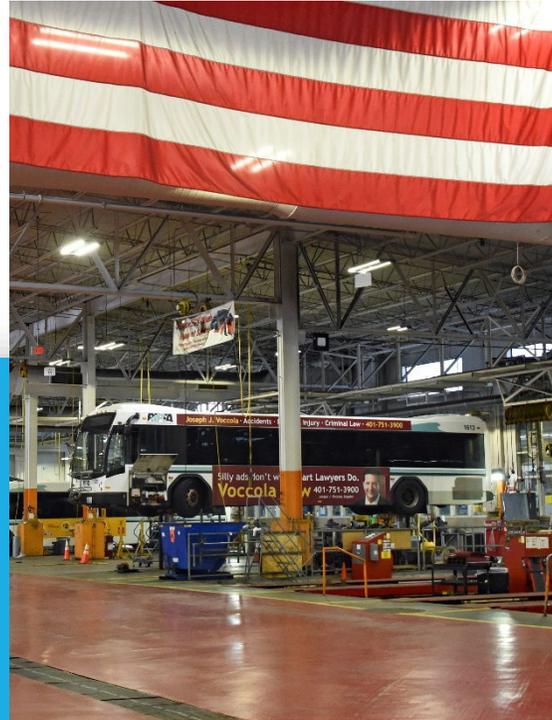
Service would have to be implemented over a multiyear period, with up-front investments in additional paratransit vehicles and drivers and a scaling up of operating funds. It is estimated that an additional 64,200 paratransit trips would be taken annually in the extended service area.



# Capital Projects



***East Side Bus Tunnel***

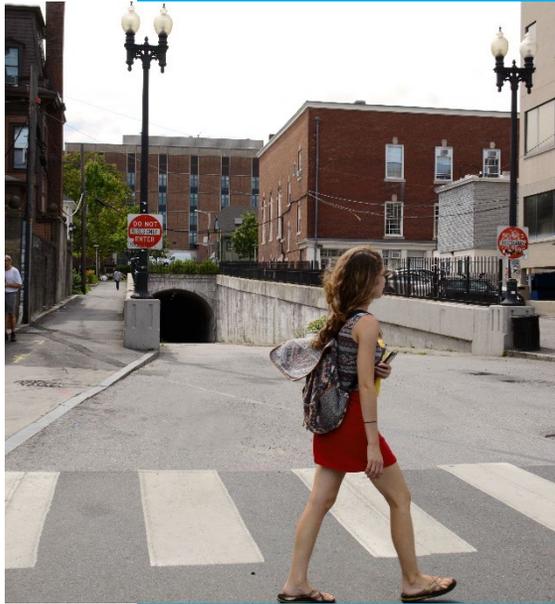


***John H. Chafee  
Transportation Maintenance  
and Operations Center***



***Pawtucket-Central Falls  
Transit Center***

In addition to our investments in electrifying our bus fleet and building the necessary accompanying infrastructure, RIPTA has other major capital projects underway.



## **East Side Bus Tunnel Interior & Exterior**

The 109-year-old tunnel cuts beneath the steep slope of College Hill and, for decades has made it easier for trolleys, and then buses, to travel from North Main Street to Thayer Street on the East Side of Providence.

It is the only transit tunnel in the state and will soon be undergoing a much-needed renovation which will cost an estimated \$15 million. The work will include structural upgrades along with drainage, lighting and safety improvements. The funding includes Federal Transit Administration discretionary and formula grants and work is expected to begin in the spring of 2024.

Part of the project will include the restoration of the historic bus shelter at the base of the hill on North Main Street. RIPTA's planning division is also soliciting public input to improve passenger amenities at the waiting areas there and also at the top of the tunnel on Thayer Street.



## **John H. Chafee Transportation Maintenance and Operations Center**

A lot of work gets done in RIPTA's huge Chafee Maintenance Facility where buses and state highway trucks are repaired and maintained.

Over the past year, RIPTA has invested in some much-needed maintenance on the 95,000 square foot building itself. The HVAC system was upgraded, part of the roof was replaced, and the fire alarm and CO detection systems were upgraded as well. This roughly \$6 million project was supported by Federal Transit Administration and Rhode Island Capital Plan Funding.

The facility is named in honor of the late John H. Chafee – former Governor, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of the Navy – who created RIPTA during his tenure as Governor.

# **Capital Projects**



“The opportunities this transit hub will create for Pawtucket and Central Falls are bountiful. It will truly show that our two cities are desirable places to live, work, and play,”  
said **Pawtucket Mayor Donald R. Grebien.**

# ***Pawtucket- Central Falls Transit Center***

The \$63 million multi-modal transit center that is nearing completion on the Pawtucket-Central falls line will offer MBTA commuter rail service and robust bus service from RIPTA.

The state recently allotted \$5 million to allow the project to include the construction a passenger facility at the hub.

The proposed facility, which is expected to be designed in 2023, would include restrooms for passengers and employees, a sheltered waiting space for passengers, and a RIPTA customer service presence.

Construction would likely take place in 2024-2025.

## ***Capital Projects***





# Community Outreach

RIPTA has the privilege of making lives better in communities across Rhode Island, through the ongoing work of our Statewide Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council and through the generous spirit of our employees. As we have learned during natural disasters and throughout the pandemic, RIPTA has much to offer to help the people of Rhode Island. Outreach efforts in 2022 include everything from toy drives to t-shirt sales to benefit a local non-profit.

# Community Outreach

## Stuff A Bus Food Drive



For the ninth year in a row, RIPTA held a pre-Thanksgiving food drive partnering with Ocean State Job Lot and local radio stations. This year RIPTA collected about 754 pounds of food for We Share Hope, an anti-poverty agency that distributes food and other essential items to 39 communities through Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. RIPTA thanks Ocean State Job Lot, iHeartMedia and Commute with Enterprise for being great community partners and helping those in need.

## Thanksgiving Dinner



On Thanksgiving Day, RIPTA teamed up with Iggy's RI and Bishop Hendricken High School to provide transportation to a free Thanksgiving dinner. Participating in the luncheon was Speaker of the House Shekarchi, Mayor Frank Picozzi, and State Representative Joseph Solomon Jr.

## Annual Toy Drive



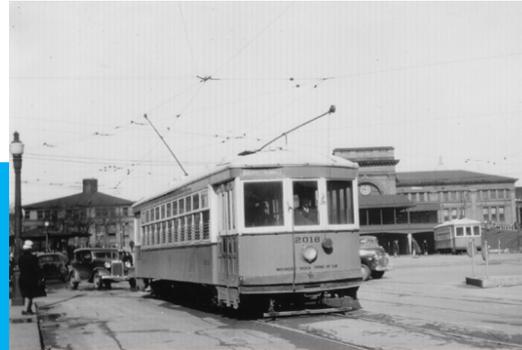
More than 1,000 toys were collected from generous fans at a number of Providence Bruins games. The toys were delivered to Hasbro Children's Hospital. RIPTA also participates in other local toy drives in partnership with local college teams who, along with their fans, offer enthusiastic support.

# Community Outreach



Thanks to a collaboration with the kitschy Providence store, Frog and Toad, and Rhode Island artist Dan Freitas, RIPTA promoted a pedestrian safety message while also making people smile. Freitas took the automated warning message, “Caution, Bus Is Turning,” and immortalized it on fun-t-shirts that will benefit charity. Available at Frog & Toad on Hope Street, proceeds for the shirt sales will help House of Hope CDC purchase bus fare for clients who need transportation assistance. It’s a win-win situation and RIPTA appreciates the generosity and creativity of all involved.

## ***Frog & Toad Collaboration***



When RIPTA heard about the historical documentary made by Cranston resident David Goldenberg, it wanted to help promote the film for its interesting look at how trolleys and streetcars spurred the growth of the Edgewood neighborhood. Not only is the film well done and as entertaining as it is informative, it also shows how public transportation still plays a key role in where people choose to live.

Visit [RIPTA.com/EndofTheLine](http://RIPTA.com/EndofTheLine)

## ***End of the Line: The Tracks That Shaped Our RI Streetcar Suburb***



One border of the Oakland Cemetery abuts Broad Street at the Cranston-Providence line, right near where RIPTA will be building the new in-line charging station for electric buses. After the cemetery made the news for its run-down condition, a local church responded by organizing a community cleanup effort. RIPTA employees and staff from the construction sub-contractor joined in, raking leaves and carting away bags of trash.

## ***Oakland Cemetery Clean-Up***

# Community Outreach

## **Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)**

Under the leadership of a new chair and vice-chair, the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) has continued meeting every month to provide RIPTA with constructive feedback on programs and services. Throughout the year, several RIPTA department leaders have presented to ATAC on how their operations impact passengers with disabilities. Committee members have also shared their unique perspectives, reporting to RIPTA about their specific mobility challenges and experiences using public transportation. ATAC members have also been active participants in important studies including the update of the Rhode Island Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan and the Statewide Paratransit Expansion Study.



## **Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council**

Since 2018, Rhode Island's Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council (Coordinating Council), which is led by RIPTA, has pursued a vision of accessible, coordinated statewide mobility for all Rhode Islanders. This year, the Council played a lead role in updating the Rhode Island Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan (Coordinated Plan). This planning project will influence transportation spending for older adults and individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island over the next five years and is now nearing completion.



# Awards

RIPTA's professional performance, both service-wise and administratively, has earned professional recognition and the agency has also won awards for its community efforts.

They include:

- **Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association Award** for Excellent Transportation Plan for *Transit Forward RI 2040*, RIPTA's long range master plan.
- **Distinguished Budget Presentation Award** from the Government Finance Officers Association.
- **Pawtucket Foundation Award** for making a significant contribution in supporting development in Pawtucket and Central Falls.
- **Hospitality Hero Award** from the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau for RIPTA's Pineapple Pass program. A collaborative effort with the Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training and the Rhode Island Hospitality Association, the program enabled the hospitality association to provide bus passes to restaurant and hotel employees. Now in its second year, the program has provided transportation to more than 500 employees.
- *Rhode Island Monthly* magazine named RIPTA as one of five recipients of its **Common Good Award** for its past year's work encouraging employees to participate in philanthropic community endeavors.





Rhode Island Public Transit Authority

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