

RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY
2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



Better Transit for a Better Rhode Island

Message from the CEO

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority is pleased to present the 2023 End of Year Report highlighting our achievements, challenges, and plans. Through it all, RIPTA remains committed to providing efficient, sustainable, and inclusive public transportation services.

Our dedication to addressing labor challenges underscores the crucial role our employees play in delivering quality transit services. We extend our gratitude to our hardworking staff for their commitment and dedication.

The success of our initiatives, outreach, and programs - particularly the Hop-On Hop-Off Newport promotion - have been pivotal in increasing ridership while reducing traffic congestion.

Our commitment to sustainability is evident in the strides we have made in electrification. The Electric Bus In-Line Charging Station, a pioneer in the Northeast, and our Action Plan for Electrification and Service Growth mark significant milestones in our mission for sustainable transit.

Despite financial challenges, we remain devoted to providing accessible transit services to those who need it most.

As we navigate the coming year, we acknowledge both challenges and opportunities on the horizon. With your continued support, RIPTA remains committed to providing the quality public transportation services Rhode Islanders want and deserve.

Thank you for being part of our journey.

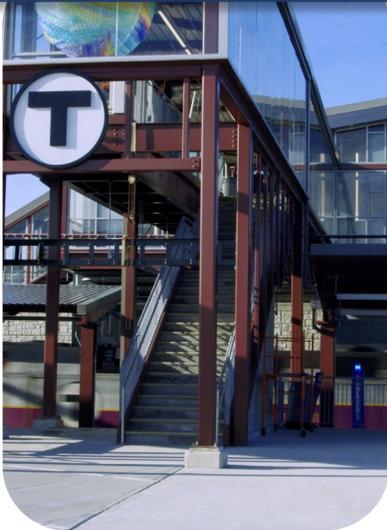
Sincerely,

Scott Avedisian,
Chief Executive Officer



New Transit Centers

Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center



Intermodal Connections

On January 23, 2023, RIPTA officially moved its Pawtucket transit hub from Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue to the new intermodal transit center at 300 Pine Street, improving connection options for passengers. RIPTA recorded 97,916 passenger boardings here in 2023.

Community College of Rhode Island



Site Improvements

RIPTA partnered with CCRI to enhance bus stops on its Warwick campus. Featured improvements include four bus stops - each sized to fit 40-foot buses - and dedicated bus only lanes. New bus shelters will be installed in early 2024.

Dorrance Street Transit Center



Future Plans

On January 17, 2023, Governor Dan McKee announced that RIPTA was requesting proposals nationwide for the joint development of a new, modern transit center in Providence. Public outreach on this project will begin in 2024.

This past year, RIPTA made significant strides in enhancing Rhode Island's transit infrastructure. The Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center, operational since January 23, 2023, marks the strategic move of RIPTA's Pawtucket transit hub to connect passengers with rail. Additionally, RIPTA collaborated with the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) to improve bus stops on its Warwick campus, featuring four bus stops equipped for 40-foot buses and dedicated bus lanes. With the issuance of a nationwide Request for Proposals, RIPTA also gained momentum this year towards creating a new transit center that will benefit riders, the City of Providence, Rhode Island's economy and the environment. Looking forward in 2024, RIPTA and Next Wave Partners will launch a robust public engagement process to gather input on the design of the new transit center.

Electrification

Electric Bus In-Line Charging Station

The Electric Bus In-Line Charging Station project is part of Rhode Island's Zero Emissions Fleet Transition, utilizing Volkswagen settlement funds to improve air quality and introduce electric buses to RIPTA's fleet. This cutting-edge charging station, located along the R-Line – RIPTA's most frequently-used route connecting Providence, Cranston and Pawtucket – can charge up to four electric buses simultaneously while they are in service. The charging station, the first of its kind in the northeast region, also features driver restrooms and other site enhancements such as an on-site snow-melt system. With construction now complete, the charging station will power RIPTA's first electric fleet – fourteen (14) New Flyer Xcelsior XE40 battery electric buses, all of which will exclusively serve the R-Line.

Action Plan for Electrification and Service Growth

To help determine the next phase of decarbonization efforts, RIPTA commissioned the Action Plan for Electrification and Service Growth (APEG). This study envisions how RIPTA can achieve a fully zero emission transit fleet across several scenarios outlined in Transit Forward RI 2040. This includes more frequent service for longer hours, the introduction of services to areas not currently offered, and the creation of high frequency and high-capacity transit networks. All of these will require additional vehicles, operators, mechanics and other support staff, and new facilities and infrastructure. This year, RIPTA – with contracted assistance from AECOM and Cambridge Systematics – completed this roadmap which will guide the Authority on its path toward fleet decarbonization.



A Greener Rhode Island

RIPTA's path to fleet electrification began in May 2018, when the State of Rhode Island allocated nearly \$10 million of its Volkswagen settlement funds towards replacing older diesel buses slated for retirement with new all-electric, zero-emission buses. This year RIPTA reached two key milestones in its mission for sustainable transit through construction of the region's first Electric Bus In-Line Charging Station and completion of an Action Plan for Electrification and Service Growth. RIPTA's proactive approach solidifies its position as a leader in sustainable transit solutions.



4,757

MILES

Together, Bike to Work participants biked 4,757 miles - that's equivalent to 2,174 gallons of gas saved and a 4,100 lb. reduction in carbon emissions.

4,586

CAR TO BUS

4,586 visitors parked in the Newport Gateway Center Parking Garage and hopped on a RIPTA bus, taking advantage of the discounted parking promotion with a RIPTA Rider Receipt.

Ridership Initiatives

Hop-On Hop-Off Newport Returned for Second Season

The success of the summer-long free Hop-On-Hop-Off bus service in Newport has been instrumental in reducing traffic congestion, prompting the decision to implement this partnership for another season. Launched at the beginning of summer, the promotion - funded by Discover Newport and the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island - not only creatively alleviated summer traffic in Newport but also provided vital connections for residents. With routes granting access to local beaches and stops at essential locations like the Rhode Island Department of Human Services offices, Newport County YMCA, and Newport Mental Health, the initiative proved to be a strategic solution.

RIPTA recorded 153,386 passenger trips on Route 67 between May 26 and October 31, 2023. On Route 68, 15,462 passenger trips were recorded between June 17 and October 31, 2023.

Bike to Work Commuter Challenge

In recognition of National Bike Month, our Commuter Resource RI team launched a "Let's Ride RI Commuter Bike Challenge." This is the first time that RIPTA has celebrated Bike to Work Month since the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighty-eight commuters swapped their car ride for a ride on two wheels during this challenge. Biking and taking the bus can be a winning combination for people who want to ride part of the way to work and then take public transportation. All fixed-route buses are equipped with bicycle racks.



Pilot Programs

Fare Free R-Line

Ride Free Central Falls

MBTA Cross Fare Promotions

No Fare Bus Pass Program for Low Income Residents

Fare Free R-Line

From September 2022 through September 2023, RIPTA suspended fare collection on the R-Line, our most frequent and highest-ridership route. During the pilot, customers in RIPTA's Ride paratransit program also rode for free when their trips started and ended within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of the R-Line. This pilot project was implemented at the direction of the Rhode Island General Assembly, which allocated \$3.25 million in one-time federal America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

Throughout the pilot, the R-Line outperformed the RIPTA system overall in terms of ridership growth. However, the growth in ridership was mostly attributed to existing riders taking more trips, taking shorter trips, and favoring the R-Line over other nearby routes since it was free. Given the annual cost of this pilot and RIPTA's current budget outlook, it is not financially feasible for RIPTA to continue this program. Despite revenue replacement funding from the state, RIPTA lost roughly \$5.1M in fare revenue over the course of the pilot. RIPTA continues working to strengthen its fare benefit programs and partnerships to ensure that all Rhode Islanders can afford to take the bus, regardless of income.

Pilot Programs

Ride Free Central Falls

Launched in March 2022, this pilot allowed passengers to board for free in Central Falls when using a Wave smart card or mobile app. The pilot, which was extended through December 2023, tested the effectiveness of using geofencing technology to promote the use of public transportation. In May 2023, the geofence was expanded to include bus stops at the new Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center. The opening of the new transit center adjacent to the pilot focus area provided an opportunity to incentivize riders to take multi-modal trips from the Pawtucket and Central Falls areas to Boston, Massachusetts.

MBTA Cross Fare Promotions

To help promote the new Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center, riders with MBTA monthly passes could board RIPTA buses at no cost from January through July 2023. This allowed riders the option of taking the bus to work or the MBTA train coming home, depending on the most convenient schedule option for the traveler. This promotion was redeemed 5,210 times during that period.

No Fare Bus Pass Program for Low-Income Residents

RIPTA launched a new pilot program to provide Photo ID Wave smart cards (bus passes) to 775 low-income and unsheltered individuals in need of transportation assistance who did not qualify for any existing transit benefit program. RIPTA launched this pilot in partnership with twelve human services providers, including homeless-serving organizations and Community Action Programs. Many people experiencing homelessness took advantage of the pilot program to access support services. Going forward, we are committed to helping our partner agencies secure the resources needed to fund Wave smart cards for low-income and unhoused individuals after the pilot ends. RIPTA will continue funding the pilot until May 1, 2024, as we transition management of the program to the partner agencies.



Capital Projects

East Side Bus Tunnel



Improved Infrastructure

In 2023, RIPTA's Project Management team finalized design and engineering for interior improvements to the 110-year-old tunnel. Construction is scheduled to start Spring 2024.

John H. Chafee Maintenance Center



Modernization

2023 saw the continued replacement of remaining vehicle lifts in the Chafee building. By the end of 2024 all lifts will have either been replaced or completely rebuilt.

Bus Stop Improvements



Passenger Experience

RIPTA is preparing to launch a new bus shelter improvement program which involves the replacement of all existing shelters and doubling the total number of shelters statewide. RIPTA began surveying its 3,500-plus bus stops throughout the state to assess their quality and condition.

New transit centers were not the only capital projects RIPTA made significant advancements on this year. In addition to gaining momentum on the Dorrance St. Transit Center and making major bus stop enhancements at CCRI, RIPTA made headway on improving its transit infrastructure at the East Side Bus Tunnel and its John H. Chafee Maintenance & Operations Center.

In terms of infrastructure improvement, RIPTA's Project Management team finalized the design and engineering for the 110-year-old East Side Bus Tunnel. Part of this project includes the restoration of the historic bus shelter at the base of the hill on North Main Street.

Additionally, RIPTA issued a Request For Proposals for the design of a new passenger amenity building at the new Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center. With the contract awarded, public outreach will begin in 2024 followed by construction.

Overall, these capital projects showcase RIPTA's commitment to enhancing transit services, connectivity, and improving the passenger experience.



Safe Streets for All \$5,000,000 Award

This highly competitive grant award will enable RIPTA to coordinate development of safety action plans for cities and towns across Rhode Island. These action plans will feature holistic, well-defined strategies to prevent roadway fatalities and serious injuries to all users including motorists, cyclists, transit riders, and pedestrians. Once these are complete, participating communities will be able to request implementation funding on their own from USDOT to progress on the documented strategies and install measures. 32 of RI's 39 municipalities have signed on to this partnership opportunity.

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center Equity and Accessibility Implementation \$70,000 Award

Age-Friendly RI, in collaboration with RIPTA, secured one of seven \$70,000 grants from NADTC to pilot a vehicle sharing program in Newport County in early 2023. The pilot leveraged an underutilized van from Looking Upwards, a nonprofit agency that serves adults with developmental disabilities, by providing free on-demand trips to older low-income Newport residents. Once the pilot formally ended, Looking Upwards and Age-Friendly RI secured additional funding to continue the service. RIPTA and NADTC staff presented the program at the National Rural Transit Assistance Program Conference.

Low/No Grant Fund \$5,000,000 Award

This grant award will enable RIPTA to replace aging diesel buses with 25 hybrid-electric buses. These new buses will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality in environmental justice communities, and enable RIPTA to attain operational and maintenance efficiencies.

Converting the FY 2025 diesel bus order to hybrid buses will reduce RIPTA's greenhouse gas emissions substantially. The 25 hybrid buses will be deployed on low-speed urban core routes, many of which operate in known areas of persistent poverty and/or historically disadvantaged communities with reported high rates of asthma.

Grants

RIPTA has an excellent track record in winning federal discretionary grants. These grants are critical financial resources, affording RIPTA and other transit agencies nationwide the opportunity to sustain core agency functions but to also look to the future and see possibilities that will better serve the public moving forward.

RIPTA is pleased to have received nearly \$60 million in formula funding and discretionary grants in 2023. Without this type of federal support, we would be far more limited in our capacity to maintain our current assets while also helping Rhode Island to achieve key economic and environmental goals - including those outlined in the 2021 Act on Climate.



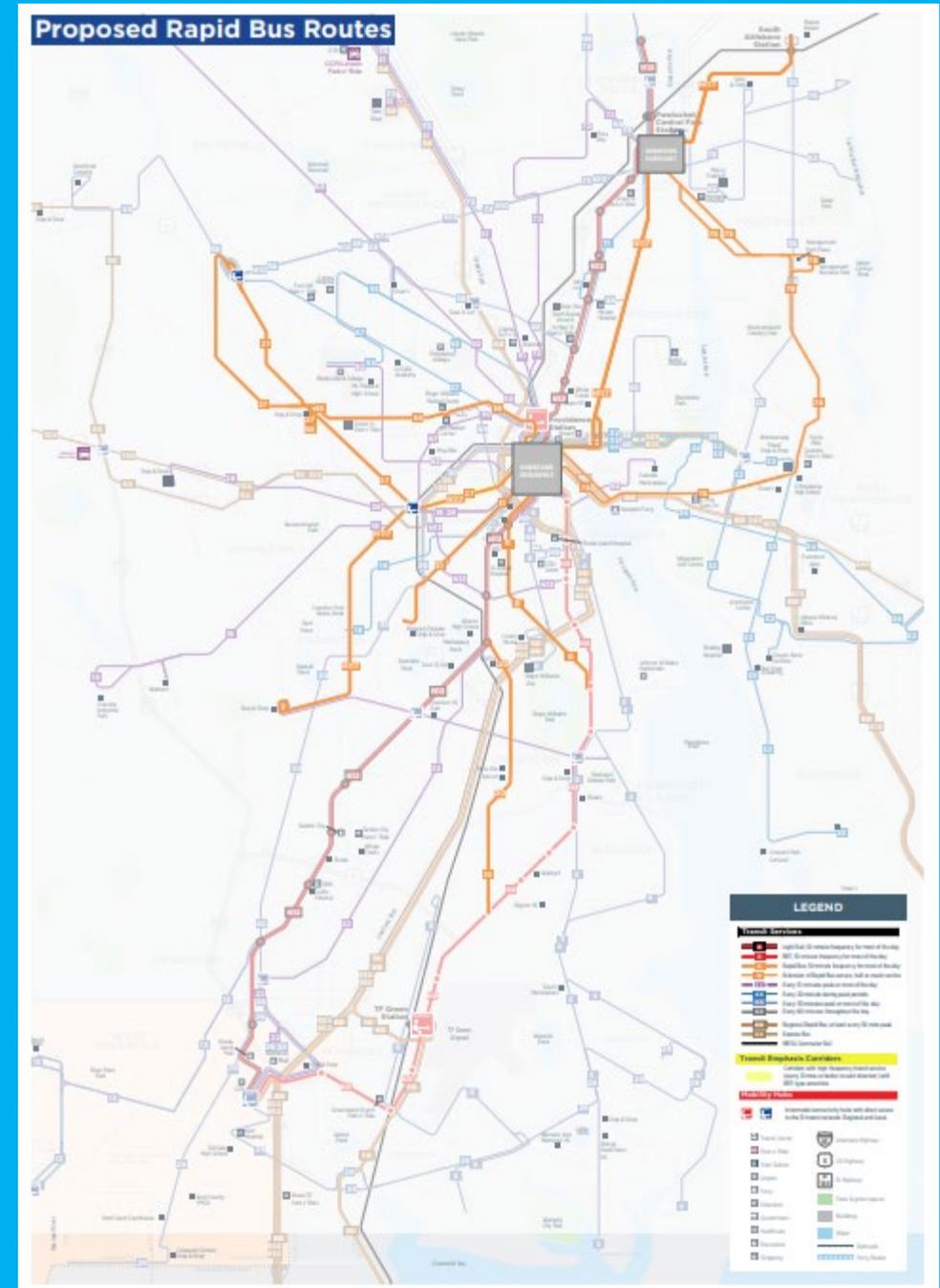
Grants



RAISE 2023 – Rapid Bus Network Expansion Planning: \$8,492,000 Award

The project will complete planning, project development, and engineering for an expanded Rapid Bus Network. The expanded Rapid Bus Network will upgrade an existing R-Line Rapid Bus route and will transform seven additional high-ridership routes into a faster, more frequent, and more reliable network. The expanded network corresponds to the existing and proposed routes in the Transit Master Plan.

- R Broad Street (the southern leg of our existing Rapid Bus Line)
- 20 Elmwood Avenue to Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport
- 27 Broadway/Manton Avenue
- 31 Cranston Street
- 56 Chalkstone Avenue
- 78 Beverage Hill Avenue
- 117 Dyer/Pocasset and Hope/Benefit (a combination of existing Route 17 and the northern leg of Route 1)



Service Expansion

Recent transit service expansions by RIPTA exemplify its commitment to enhancing connectivity and accessibility within its financial constraints. With the initiation of the Foster Park-N-Ride Service in April 2023, Route 10X was extended to reach a new Park-N-Ride lot in Foster, addressing the transportation needs of an underserved rural town. Additionally, RIPTA expanded services on both 282 Flex and Route 14 in response to community requests for enhanced coverage and seamless intermodal connections. These strategic expansions align with RIPTA's Transit Master Plan, ensuring that transit services are not only reaching new areas but also catering to diverse passenger needs, thereby fostering a more connected and inclusive public transportation network across the state.



Route 14 (West Bay)

In June 2023, RIPTA deviated Route 14 to serve the Wickford Junction Train Station, thus improving intermodal connections.

Route 10x

In April 2023, RIPTA began serving the rural town of Foster. Route 10X (North Scituate Park-N-Ride) was extended to serve a new Park-N-Ride lot in Foster, located across from the Foster Police Department. With the help of House Minority Leader Michael W. Chippendale, Senator Gordon E. Rogers and town officials, a lot on Howard Hill Road was cleared for this new transit service. As RIPTA continues to expand transit service to underserved areas, we are simultaneously enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities. Since this Route 10X service expansion was to a new area, RIPTA's Ride paratransit service was also expanded to Foster, thus improving mobility choices for passengers with disabilities.

282 Flex

This Zone was extended to serve Dino's Park-N-Shop in Chepachet upon request.



Community Transportation



Rides Toward Work

RIPTA continued using funding from the FTA's Human Services Coordination Research (HSCR) grant program to address a transportation gap. Collaborating with the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP), RIPTA has successfully facilitated transit access for RI Works clients, helping them overcome employment-related transportation barriers. Since 2021, participants in the CCAP RI Works Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program have taken 1,895 trips through this unique and successful partnership.

Coordinated Plan

The Rhode Island Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan) was approved by the Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council in March 2023 and will be in effect for five years. All state projects selected for FTA Section 5310 funding, which is for Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities, must be included in the plan. Elements include a summary of existing transportation services, maps detailing gaps in service and areas of need, plan strategies, and a recommended action plan. Priority strategies are to increase transportation service offerings; pursue additional funding; and strengthen coordination among providers, funders, and advocates, among others.

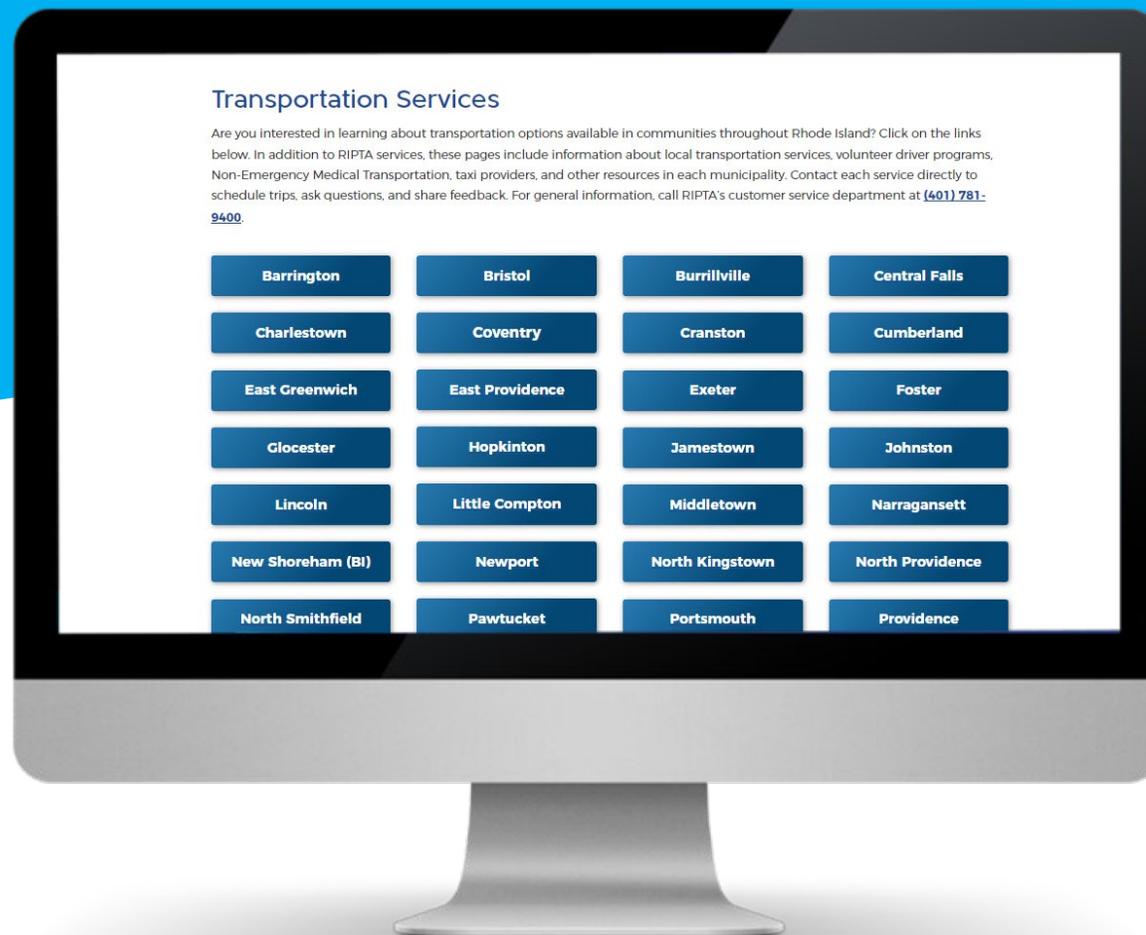
Community Vans

In 2023, RIPTA purchased accessible vans on behalf of rural municipalities and organizations utilizing a combination of FTA Section 5311 rural formula funds and CARES Act funds. Through this partnership, RIPTA hopes to expand options for rural residents and improve connections between underserved locations. Partners, including Burrillville, Coventry, Hopkinton, Little Compton, New Shoreham, Wood River Health and Looking Upwards, will be responsible for maintaining, insuring, and operating the vehicles once they arrive in 2024.

Community Transportation

Community Transportation Pages

In Spring 2023, RIPTA launched a new resource for transportation information on the its website featuring Transportation in Your Community. These pages list all publicly available options by municipality, making it easier for older adults, people with disabilities, and others to find trip planning information from multiple transportation providers in the state. Riders may access the information online by clicking on the Transportation in Your Community map icon on the homepage or by following the drop-down menu under the Riders tab. From the main Transportation in Your Community page, the blue buttons labeled for each Rhode Island municipality link to local information such as senior transportation, RIPTA routes, taxis, and volunteer driver programs.





Labor Challenges

A critical national shortage of licensed commercial drivers is dealing a difficult blow to numerous industries, in particular public transit agencies. As the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) states: *Public transit providers across North America face a shortage of operators and mechanics, a crisis that has strained budgets and forced agencies to reduce service.*

In light of this, RIPTA continues to take an all-out approach to tackle the problem. It is constantly recruiting new hires through job fairs, networking and more. It is competing with private sector industries, and it is also faced with an aging workforce where retiree numbers are increasing.

This unfortunate scenario is being played out at transit authorities across the country. In a special report on the driver shortage, APTA describes the situation as “widespread and severe.” It notes that of 190 public agencies surveyed, 96% reported that they were experiencing a serious workforce shortage and 84% said the shortage is affecting their ability to provide service.

Still, RIPTA is persistent in looking for solutions. In November 2022, RIPTA and Local 618 of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) reached an agreement increasing the starting wage of drivers in the paratransit division to \$21.71 per hour. The paratransit division, called Ride, is where all new drivers start at RIPTA, so this effectively increased the starting wage for operators as of July 1, 2023. Furthermore, RIPTA offers commercial driver’s license training to new hires to ensure their continued success.

Even when faced with the impending loss of critical federal aid, RIPTA is committed to continue working with the ATU to re-examine the wage structure for all drivers and look at any other factors that will help recruit new operators.

Community Outreach

Through the continuous efforts of our dedicated employees, RIPTA has the honor of positively impacting communities throughout Rhode Island. In 2023, our outreach initiatives ranged from organizing toy drives to showing our support for the LGBTQIA+ community at the Rhode Island Pride Illuminated Night Parade. These endeavors reflect RIPTA's unwavering dedication to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.



Martin Luther King Jr. Day Clean-up

Over 150 volunteers participated in a community cleanup around the Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center. The diverse group of participants, including RIPTA employees, came together to honor Martin Luther King's legacy through this day of service.



Pride Month

Despite the rain, RIPTA employees adorned in vibrant "The Bus is for All of Us" t-shirts marched in the Illuminated Night Parade for the first time. This engagement underscored RIPTA's dedication to fostering a diverse and inclusive community.



Stuff A Bus Toy Drives

RIPTA partnered with local businesses for multiple toy drives to help brighten the holiday for so many youngsters. We are grateful to the community and RIPTA employees who make these events a success through their generosity.



Travel Training

RIPTA attended eighteen "Students Transition to Adult Readiness" events around the state speaking to over 900 students and support staff. RIPTA instructed students on how to use public transit, helping them become independent young adults.

Community Outreach

Photo ID Road Trips

RIPTA's Commuter Resource RI (CRRRI) and Customer Service teams combined their efforts to provide specialized assistance to seniors and people with disabilities, offering personalized guidance on navigating RIPTA services.

These monthly statewide Photo ID Community Site Visits – or Road Trips - allow residents in both rural and urban areas to access transit information and apply for the Reduced Fare Bus Pass Program without having to travel to RIPTA offices in Providence.

CRRRI presented the Senior How To Ride Guide, addressed queries, and engaged in one-on-one trip planning sessions. Subsequently, Customer Service was on site to process Photo ID Wave smart cards for qualified seniors and passengers with disabilities.

Staff visited over 30 senior centers, housing authorities, and senior expos speaking to over 340 people.

25 Road Trips are currently scheduled for 2024.



Outreach



Citation from Representative Thomas E. Noret

Customer Service and Commuter Resource team members received citations for their work in the community, which included processing Photo ID Wave smart cards for seniors and people with disabilities.

Finance



Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Award

For the 11th year in a row, RIPTA received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for its FY 2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.

Intermodal



Smart Growth Award

This Grow Smart RI Award highlighted impressive projects statewide, with RIPTA, RIDOT, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and RIDOT earning the Outstanding Smart Growth Project awards for the Pawtucket-Central Falls Transit Center.

Awards



Budget

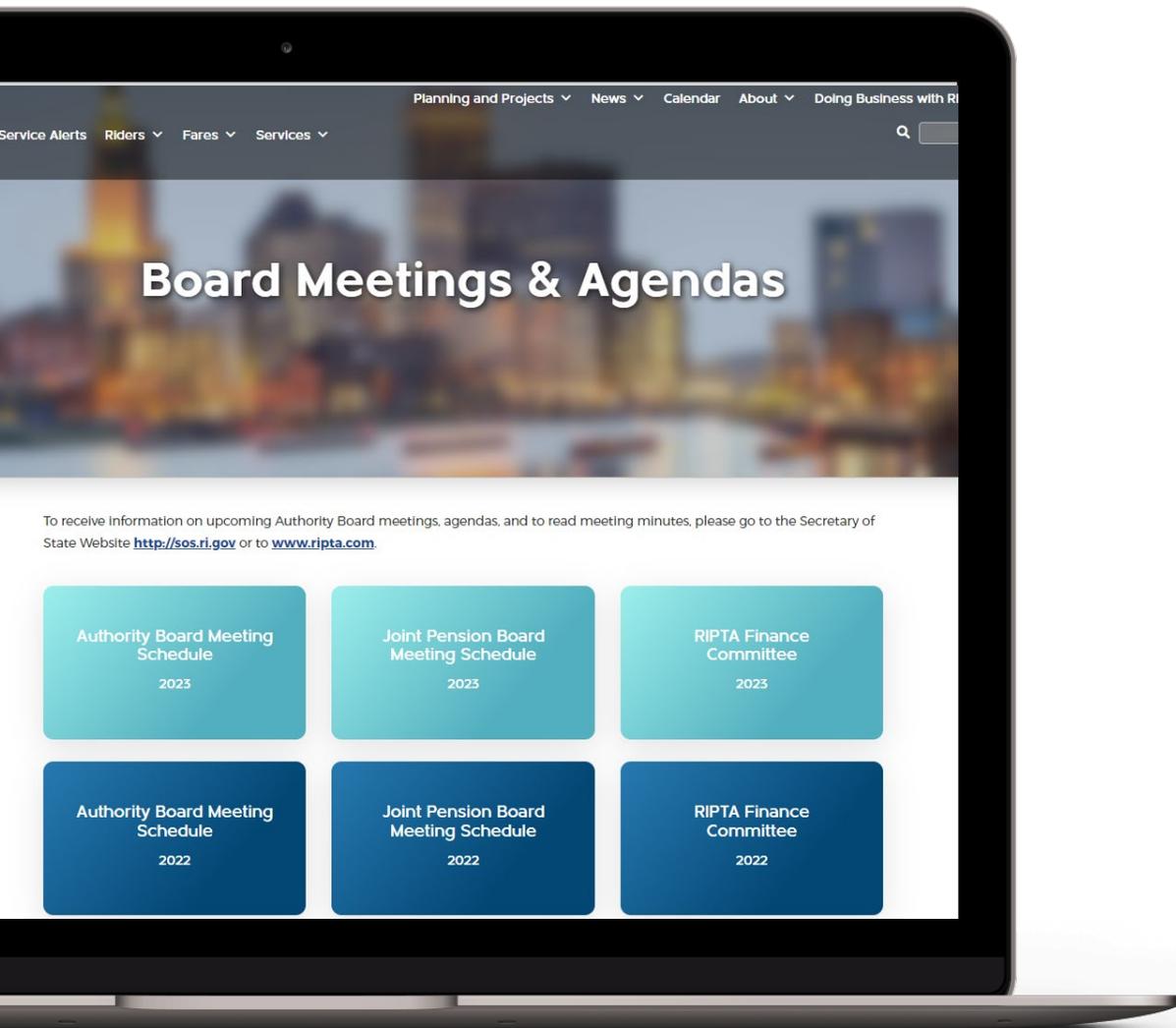
Continued support from the federal government has enabled RIPTA to log a balanced budget of approximately \$144 million for FY 2024. Moving forward, however, there will be serious funding challenges as the transit authority expects to exhaust all federal COVID-19 relief funding in FY 2025.

RIPTA is looking at finding efficiencies wherever possible, but the ultimate solution will be to find new, sustainable revenue sources to allow the agency to provide the best transit service possible across the state.

Currently, approximately 43% of RIPTA's budget is covered by federal funding (including COVID-19 relief revenue that will be depleted in mid 2025), 33% is state funding, and about 17% is from passenger fare revenue.

RIPTA is not anticipating any major increases in operating expenses. It is seeing a slow, but steady, increase in ridership as it continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

A key focus in the coming months will be to continue to work with Local 618 of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) to come up with a new salary plan for drivers as the biggest challenge facing the agency is having enough operators to maintain current service levels and prevent forecasted service cuts.



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*Michelle Wilcox's term ended December 2023. James Lombardi and Vincent Masino were appointed on Friday, January 16, 2024.