



Quarter 2:
December 2022 - February 2023

What is the R-Line Fare-Free Pilot Program?

RIPTA is currently piloting fare-free service on the R-Line, which is Rhode Island's most frequent and highest-ridership bus route. The R-Line fare-free pilot is intended to increase transit ridership and improve access and mobility for low-income people. It is also an opportunity to advance the State's mobility, climate, and social equity goals.

How will we assess the benefits and impacts of the fare-free pilot? Fare-free service is proven to increase the number of people using transit and the number of trips they take. However, fare-free service may not be a one-size-fits-all approach for achieving transit agency and community goals. Monitoring changes will inform our understanding of the long-term investment required to provide fare-free service.

Using data from RIPTA vehicles, we will monitor ridership and service reliability on the R-Line, other nearby bus routes, and systemwide. Through surveys and interviews, we will also see if there are changes in customer satisfaction or travel patterns, or to the safety and security of riders and bus operators.

This project was supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number SLFRP0136 awarded to the State of Rhode Island by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Evaluation Metrics

The R-Line Fare-Free Impact Study will evaluate a broad range of impacts to understand how the fare-free pilot affects riders, RIPTA, the environment, and the community at large:

-  **Access, Mobility, and Equity:** The study will monitor ridership and analyze changes in travel mode, trip purpose, and customer satisfaction, all with an eye towards social equity.
-  **Financial Health:** To understand the overall financial impact, the study will examine changes in fare revenue and operating resource requirements.
-  **Operational Efficiency:** To understand how the pilot impacts operations, the study will analyze changes in on-time performance, crowding, and bus operator satisfaction.
-  **Community Benefits:** The study will speak directly with riders and local businesses to understand how fare-free service does and does not provide community benefit.

Key takeaway: In the second quarter of the pilot, much of the R-Line's performance remained the same as it did in the first quarter. The R-Line continues to outperform the system in terms of ridership.

Paratransit ridership in the R-Line zone increased at a rate **two times** greater than the systemwide rate, or by about **240 more trips per month**.

On-time performance on the R-Line was about the same compared to last year, while systemwide on-time performance increased by only 1% compared to last year.

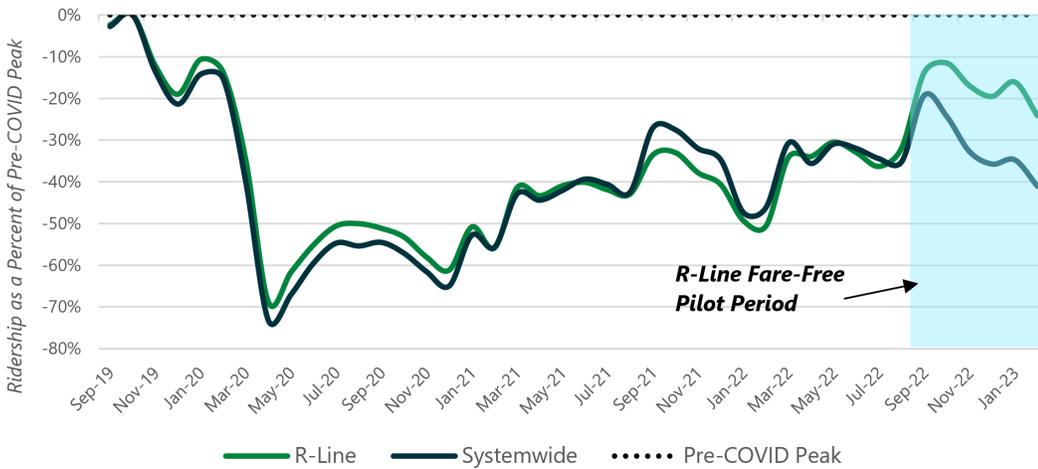
If the R-Line riders during the pilot had been paying the \$2 bus fare, **RIPTA would have earned about \$400,000 each month**. This is the annual equivalent of almost 5% of the entire RIPTA fixed-route bus operating budget.

\$400,000 per month

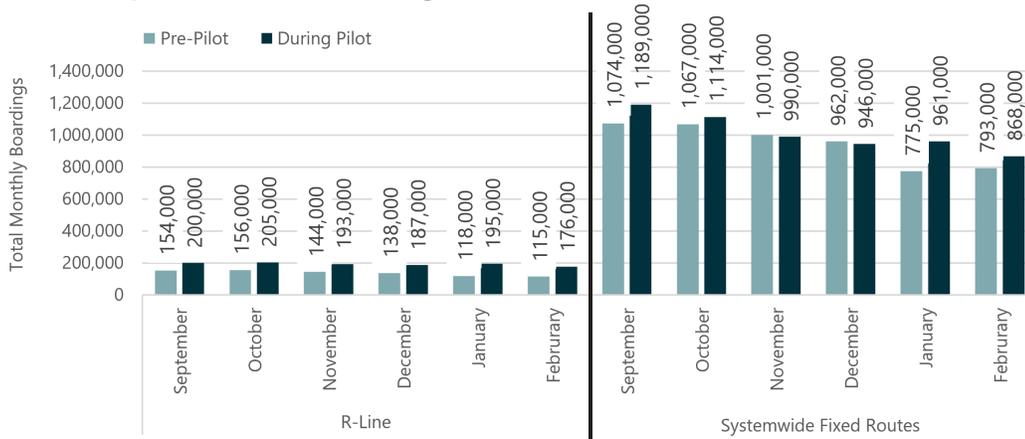


R-Line ridership **increased by 40% compared to last year**, which is a greater increase than systemwide fixed-route ridership, which grew by 7%.

Monthly Fixed-Route Ridership, Pre-COVID to Current



Ridership Pre-Pilot vs. During Pilot



What's next?

The R-Line Fare-Free Pilot Program will continue through August 2023. During this period, the fare-free impact study team will continue to collect data, and will be surveying community organizations and speaking with employers along the route. In addition, the study team will prepare for a second survey on rider travel behavior changes in early May, and other outreach activities along the route.

Stay tuned for future updates.