

RI ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, April 3, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

In attendance: Chairperson Heather Schey, Benny Bergantino, Jean Bousquet, Myles Brawn-Husband, Liza Burkin, Justin Cartright, Kerry Clark, Vincent DeJesus, Rachel Ferreira, Deanne Gagne, Dylan Giles, Barbara Henry, Mona Hussein, Diane LeSuer, Olivia Lozier, Crystal Martin, Jeff Mello, Richard Moreau, Janice Musco, Grace Pires, James Rajotte, Brian Rice, Jenaya Smith, Angelina Stabile, Mark Susa, Paula Vinacco.

RIPTA: Ella Ackerman, Zachary Agush, Brooks Almonte, Steve Fiorentini, Paul Harrington, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Jamie Pereira, Joseph Solomon.

Call to Order: Chairperson Heather Schey called the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) meeting to order at 4:03 PM. She presented hybrid meeting guidelines and noted that participants would have an opportunity to ask questions after each topic is presented.

Myles Brawn-Husband made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 6, 2025 meeting. Rachel Ferreira seconded the motion, and all were in favor. Minutes were approved.

Olmstead Plan Update: James Rajotte, Director of Strategy and Innovation for the RI Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS), presented on the state's Olmstead Plan. He outlined the planning process, described the first draft, and shared feedback on next steps.

James explained that the Olmstead Supreme Court ruling made it illegal to segregate people with disabilities, and the priority continues to be moving people to the least restrictive settings, allowing them to live independently in their communities. An executive order required Rhode Island to draft an Olmstead Plan by February 2025 with input from an external advisory group. They looked at key social determinants, including transportation and housing, and developed recommendations. Throughout the planning process, they engaged with more than 400 people with disabilities through surveys, meetings, and interviews. The project management team is currently refining the draft plan and will release a second version soon. In the next fiscal year, the team will evaluate and report on the state's progress.

A discussion followed, focusing on topics including:

- Barriers to obtaining secure employment. (As an example, one participant noted that vocational trainers may not have experience working with clients who are completely blind).
- The importance of the public transit system for people with disabilities.
- Concerns about potential transit service cuts.
- Medicaid eligibility and accessibility of services.

Joelle Kanter agreed to share the draft plan and related links with the committee. James will also follow

up with information on action plans and opportunities for community engagement.

RIPTA updates followed:

- Ride Anywhere pilot study: RIPTA is working with Nelson\Nygaard consultants on the pilot study, focusing on cost estimates and demand projections. The team will present a draft to ATAC next month and submit a final report to the General Assembly by June 1st.
- Wave fare capping for Ride service: Brooks Almonte said that customers who already use Wave payment for Ride automatically have fare capping on their accounts, allowing them to track their spending towards a day pass (\$12/day) and monthly pass (\$140/month). One rider said she's experienced delays when calling Ride customer service to check on her fare capping status. This can be an issue if Wave payment isn't deducted immediately. Customers who experience issues with digital Wave cards are advised to send in screenshots.
- Ride Reveal app upgrades: The app test group met last week, and RIPTA appreciates how instrumental volunteers have been in identifying issues. Testing is still needed for push notifications, color contrast, and a will call message. MTM/Reveal is working towards a May 1st launch date for the new app, and RIPTA is putting together marketing materials.
- Ride paratransit van purchase: RIPTA's board approved the purchase of 25 new Promaster 3500 Cutaway vans from Model 1 to replace 2019 Ford Transits. ATAC members had the opportunity to test the new vans a few months ago.
- Travel training network: RIPTA staff continues to finalize new travel training materials to share with partner organizations later this spring. They include videos, slide modules, and a pocket guide.
- Follow up: March ATAC meeting discussion: Following a recommendation to learn from similar committees that advise other transit agencies on disability issues, several RIPTA staff members participated in a hybrid MBTA Riders' Transportation Access Group (RTAG) meeting.

Discussion

- Heather Schey asked anyone interested in advocating for funding during Save RIPTA lobby days to contact her. She encouraged older adults and people with disabilities to get involved.
- A Ride customer mentioned that she has consistently been getting picked up very early before work on Tuesdays. Brooks agreed to look into this.
- Another Ride customer said that drivers have been arriving early, hoping passengers will be ready. Heather reminded the group that riders are not required to board until the beginning of their pickup window. Drivers are instructed to wait. She also added that people should contact Ride with concerns about specific trips so they can address them immediately.
- Another rider mentioned specific cab companies that are chronically late. Brooks said that Ride does not track taxi locations, so it's important for customers to call. Ride periodically audits taxi companies and has had to suspend a few, so they are currently down to a few providers.
- A rider with a visual impairment said that Ride drivers call his name when they arrive, but he

wasn't sure about the protocol for cabs. Heather suggested that he should ask Ride to put a note in his file asking taxi drivers to announce their arrival. Brooks confirmed that taxi drivers are expected to assist Ride passengers as well.

- Another rider mentioned a similar issue with a taxi that waited and left without announcing they were there to pick her up. Some taxi drivers have said that they don't get notes from their dispatchers letting them know that riders have visual impairments. This is a safety issue, and Brooks will talk to dispatchers about this. Joe Solomon also said that when customers call Ride about these issues, complaints are added to a dashboard to track and address them.

The meeting adjourned at 5:33 PM.