



Department of Administration
Division of Statewide Planning
www.planning.ri.gov

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Draft Meeting Minutes
October 24, 2024 @ 5:30PM

RI Department of Environmental Management
235 Promenade Street, 3rd Floor - Room 300
Providence, RI

1. Call to Order

- John Flaherty, Chair called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM.

Members Present

Mr. John Flaherty (Chair)	Grow Smart RI
Ms. Karen Slattery (Vice Chair)	RI Department of Environmental Management
Mr. Mason Perrone (Secretary)	RI Division of Statewide Planning
Mr. Alex Berardo	RI Association of Railroad Passengers
Mr. Ernest Carlucci	Construction Industries of Rhode Island
Mr. Michael Cassidy	Public Member
Ms. Pamela Cotter	RI Department of Transportation
Ms. Carmen Diaz-Jusino	RI Foundation
Mr. Derek Hug	ACEC of Rhode Island
Ms. Sarah Ingle	RI Public Transit Authority
Mr. Jack Madden	Public Member
Mr. Nikolas Persson	Rhode Island Airport Corporation
Ms. Chelsea Siefert	Quonset Development Corporation
Mr. Chris Waterson	Waterson Terminal Services, LLC
Mr. Jeffrey Wiggin for Ms. Lori Caron Silveira	Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority

Members Absent

Ms. Karen Capaldi	Equality Construction Works
Ms. Randi Belhumeur	RI Department of Health
Ms. Bari Freeman	Bike Newport
Mr. Philip Hervey	Town of Barrington
Mr. Bruce Iannuccillo	RP Iannuccillo Construction
Ms. Jessica Lance	Providence - Department of Planning and Development
Ms. Alicia Lehrer	Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Ms. Mary Maguire	AAA Northeast
Mr. James Moran	City of East Providence
Ms. Dinalyn Spears	Narragansett Indian Tribe
Mr. Michael Walker	Commerce RI
Ms. Denyse Wilhelm	Governor's Commission of Disabilities

Staff Present:

Division of Statewide Planning
Meredith Brady, Associate Director
Benny Bergantino, Principal Planner
Lori Cassin, Chief Implementation Aide
Roberto Echevarria, Principal Planner
Asher Eskind, Principal Planner
Liza Farr, Supervising Planner

Presenters:

Zachary Agush, RIPTA
Mason Perrone, RIDSP

2. Chair's Report

Mr. Cassidy presented Ms. Siefert with a framed Providence Business News article stating that she was named Providence Business News' Government "Woman to Watch" at this year's Women in Business awards.

3. Public Comment

- No Comments

4. September 26, 2024 Meeting Minutes – for Action

- **Ms. Cotter made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the September 26, 2024 meeting. Ms. Ingle seconded. Motion carries approved unanimously. Mr. Waterson, Mr. Persson and Ms. Siefert abstained.**

5. Metro Connector Study – for Information

- Mr. Zachary Agush, RIPTA introduced RIPTA's Metro Connector Study, also known as the High-Capacity Transit Alternatives Analysis. This planning effort will explore options for bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail transit (LRT) connecting regional activity centers, neighborhoods, and major transportation hubs in the communities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, Cranston, and Warwick while supporting state goals related to climate, sustainable growth, public health, and economic development in an equitable manner. The development and implementation of high-capacity transit is a key recommendation in Transit Forward RI 2040 and focuses on two corridors with very high ridership demand: Central Falls to CCRI-Warwick and Downtown Providence to TF Green International Airport. The final deliverable of this study will be locally preferred alternatives (i.e., mode, routing, station locations, etc.) for both corridors.

Questions/Comments from the TAC:

- Mr. Flaherty commented for additional context he wanted to remind members that the Metro Connector was one of the elements of Transit Forward RI 2040 completed in 2020 and the process RIPTA is engaged in now is due to a \$1,000,000 grant they received. Mr. Agush responded on the analysis they received \$900,00 from the USDOT Rebuilding America Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity and some additional funds from the UPWP and IJJA. Mr. Flaherty questioned if analysis is completed by summertime will they apply for implementation funding. Ms. Agush said the project should be completed in August/September 2025 and presented to RIPTA's board for approval. If approved, they would present the project to the city councils and the State Planning Council for formal approval and then pitch the project to FTA.
- Mr. Berardo questioned the corridors posed on the map of the study area stating they are not identified as separate corridors, one from Central Falls to CCRI and the other Downtown Providence to TF Green Airport. He questioned in the Central Falls area are the two alignment alternatives to be posed against

each other or is there an opportunity to make North Main a common truck route and have two corridors in Central Falls. Mr. Agush said they are so early in the process everything is being looked at. They are not leaning towards one alternative over another. Everything is still on the table. Mr. Berardo asked if there is any sense of what kind of amortization period you are looking at for the alternative mode whether BRT or LRT? Mr. Agush responded that they are working with their consultant on Horizon 2050 to be in alignment with the Long-Range Transportation Plan and updating the core elements to Transit Forward RI 2040 that is part of the UPWP project, so they will be in line with everything else that is at the state level being updated.

- Mr. Hug stated earlier in the presentation Mr. Agush mentioned that having these two corridors would free up resources from other routes to have more frequent services. He questioned how that works, is there an assumption that the money for these two lines is going to come for another source freeing up additional money? Mr. Agush answered that it is important to stress that everything in the transit master plan is part of a much larger operational fund conversation, but if there are already existing resources for these two routes it allows for better strategically placed resources elsewhere instead of doubling them.
- Ms. Slattery commented that the numbers shown in the presentation for the reduction of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and emissions when the Transit Forward RI 2040 Plan is fully implemented statewide are really big numbers. She questioned how do they expect to achieve these numbers through electric buses, increase ridership, etc.? Sarah Ingle responded she thinks the number is mode shift only and fleet electrification would add close to 20,000 in GHG emissions reduction. Mr. Agush said they did a magnitude of scale study on what fleet decarbonization through the lens of implementing the TMP last year, so they have some idea as to the result so some assumptions on service was used in the report. He said until they move forward with the actual planning, the numbers are still high level, but they will have a much better sense of what that entails in the not so distance future.
- Mr. Flaherty questioned what entity was used for the data that was part of Transit Forward RI 2040 for the greenhouse gas reductions? Mr. Agush said there are many different ways to calculate transit emissions reduction and there are different formulas. The one they used is endorsed by the Transportation Research Board (TRB). They actually published a new version of the formula in those measurements, which will be utilized on this project and the numbers will be updated in Transit Forward RI 2040 updates in this coming year.

Note: Mr. Cassidy left meeting at 6:00PM and Ms. Siefert left meeting at 6:09PM.

6. SWIFT Scoring and E-STIP Viewer Demo – for Information

- Mr. Perrone, RIDSP provided an overview of the Statewide Intake Framework for Transportation (SWIFT) that is being developed to assist in the project intake process during STIP solicitations that occur during a STIP rewrite. It is an ESRI based application that assists applicants to create project assets, submit project details, and have them geoprocessed against the goal areas outlined in the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). While the goal areas identified and scored against are based on the LRTP, the scoring weights associated with those various goal areas are still in draft form and the purpose of this presentation is to welcome the TAC to help make suggestions as to the best way to weigh these various scoring criteria. Concurrently, staff from RIDOT and RIDSP have also been working on a new E-STIP Viewer application that is ready for deployment. This online tool helps municipalities and members of the public to easily find STIP project details in a one-stop platform that is updated more regularly than past applications. Mr. Perrone presented the SWIFT platform and demonstrated the E-STIP Viewer to the TAC.

Questions/Comments from the TAC:

- Mr. Hug questioned under E. Strengthen Communities - Project increases speed over 30 mph or traffic volumes in an EJA area? Mr. Perrone responded if it's a local roadway with a lower roadway speed and the project increases those speeds higher and creates a situation where capacity could be raised that is

something that we would probably associate negative points with.

- Ms. Ingle commented that there is a lot of information and a lot of factors to the criteria without a lot of vision and clarity. She believes it needs more work and she is in favor of something that's a little clearer and simpler. She knows there isn't much time, so she has two questions: What is the process for cleaning this up and what role will the TAC have in the STIP solicitation process? Mr. Perrone responded that the first priority is making sure the criteria that we plug into SWIFT are really the right ones and the second is trying to wrap the whole process around the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) since that is how the scoring is supposed to operate in the first place. He said that is what they tried to accomplish; however, they are stuck on what they can do with the process and are happy to get the TAC involved in discussion when scores get in. He said we do not want a machine to make all the decisions for us, so the TAC will still have the ability to look at the projects and make recommendations on the projects that will be included in the STIP.
- Mr. Flaherty questioned if there was a possibility to seek volunteers from the TAC in November/December to serve on a subcommittee to work with staff to dig into the criteria to come to some conclusion and bring it back to the full TAC in December. Mr. Perrone said it is a good idea, but he needs to check on timing first since that is a concern. Mr. Perrone said he is available for further conversation. Ms. Ingle said she appreciates his willingness to accommodate individual questions, but she thinks the committee idea is interesting since it is little more collaborative and makes it more public. She thinks this needs another look before it is finalized. Mr. Perrone said he would brainstorm the best way to do it in a time sensitive manner.
- Mr. Flaherty questioned the timeline of the solicitation process. Mr. Perrone answered the rewrite itself has to be done and finalized by September 30th the end of the federal fiscal year. He said mid-February solicitation to get the projects in, score them and get them into the system for whatever funds are available and out for public comment so they can come back to the TAC for recommendations.
- Ms. Slattery questioned if it is possible to solicit projects without having the scoring quite ready? Mr. Perrone said that is almost where we are heading. He said there is scoring in there now so we could make sure it works and come back and adjust those scores afterwards with some kind of manual scoring which will be time consuming.

7. Assistant Chief's Staff Report – for Information

- Mr. Perrone provided the following information for the staff report:
 - Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) progress – We've closed survey one and are working on survey two. That is our last step in outreach before we start assembling the components of this plan through the winter months. We're going to bring an update on what we've heard so far to the next meeting on December 5th.
 - Complete streets progress - The consultant is drafting the plan. Updates to come.
 - Public Participation Task Force progress – The first meeting is scheduled for November 1st.
 - Asher Eskind attended a peer exchange in Detroit last week for freight planners. Asher and Benny Bergantino will be attending the Freight Academy hosted by The Eastern Transportation Coalition in June as they prepare to take over freight planning duties from Josh O'Neill.
 - Ms. Brady informed the committee in September she attended the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations annual conference in Salt Lake City. RIDSP will be hosting next years conference in Providence, so if anyone would like to share ideas or participate, please let her know. The conference will be September 15 – 18, 2025.
 - Mr. Hug announced that in April 2026 the Institute of Transportation Engineers will be having their District One meeting in Newport at the Marriott Newport. It encompasses all in New England, New York, New Jersey, and parts of Pennsylvania.

8. Public Comment

- Ms. Rachel Rebello, RI Attorney General Office, (Remote Comment) commented on behalf of the Office of the Rhode Island Attorney General emphasizing the importance and utmost necessity of accounting

for and prioritizing compliance with the state's Act of Climate Emissions Reductions mandates in regard to the SWIFT and implementation of the STIP. The Act on Climate requires that the state and its agencies reduce emissions to 45% below 1990 levels by 2030, 80% below 1990 by 2040 and achieve net zero levels by 2050. Failure to do so could have disastrous consequences for the well being of the state and its residents. Furthermore, as RIDOT has stated in its previous plans, transportation is RI's costliest and most carbon intense energy sector, accounting for 40% of statewide energy expenditures and 36% of our greenhouse gas emissions. So as such, it is imperative that RIDOT, RIDSP and the TAC utilize every available resource strategically to ensure that state projects and other transportation projects are implemented and selected to further the state's Act of Climate Emissions Reductions mandates. State projects should contain project level GHG analysis so that the public and RI agencies can gauge progress towards meeting the state's Act of Climate mandates.

- Ms. Liza Birkin, Providence Street Coalition (Remote Comment) commented that she was happy to see the SWIFT process under way and that STIP solicitations are coming up. She thinks it's great to bring GIS capabilities to the online application process. She thanked the committee members who emphasize greater opportunity for public comment around the SWIFT criteria, since it is imperative that we get the process right. She shares the same deep concerns about the language around congestion mitigation solutions as well as social equity benefits and thinks they need to be better defined before we just assign scores and weights to them. She was glad to see the proposed criteria around sidewalks near schools, street trees and ADA compliance and hopes that they make it into the upcoming solicitations, since we should not wait on these. She was also glad that it was clarified that increasing speeds in EJ communities would be a penalty, not a benefit. Lastly, she thanked Rachel Rebello, RI Attorney General Office for emphasizing the necessity of project level GHG analysis stating other states and MPOs are doing it with available tools, and it is absolutely imperative that we do it going forward.
- Mr. Camron Fredier stated that his interest is uniformly getting sidewalks in urbanized areas. He commented that his analysis of the scoring criteria is that it is incomplete to limit the building of sidewalks to proximity of schools. He said there are services like Walk Score a walkability analysis tool used in the real estate sector that could be used in planning to determine where sidewalks are needed. Mr. Fredier said his other concern is congestion management and that the only solution is alternative driving, so he would ask the TAC to implement the bicycle master plan and the transit master plan as they are viable alternatives to driving. Also, the scoring for project providing pedestrian or transit infrastructure improvements the RIPTA bus route within ¼ mile of the project should be changed to ½ mile to be in line with FTA scoring. He hopes the biggest concerns in the next STIP solicitation would be safety and mitigating requirements.

9. Announcements

- Mr. Flaherty announced that in June 2025 a national conference for Congress for the New Urbanism will be held in Providence, RI that he believes will have a pretty hefty transportation component. He said they are also doing something in collaboration with a nonprofit called Strong Town that will be interesting.
- Ms. Ingle announced this coming Sunday, October 26th is the Monster Dash, a 5K run or walk in Providence that goes through the RIPTA bus tunnel at College Hill. She said this is exciting because after probably ten years the tunnel is finally in the last few days of being modernized and the participants will be able to run/walk through it.
- Ms. Cotter announced RIDOT received a \$95.5 million infra grant towards the Washington Bridge.
- Ms. Brady announced the American Planning Association Conference is in Springfield, MA this year and you can register at SNEAPA; however, registration ends tomorrow October 25th. The conference is November 6th thru 8th, and they have some really interesting items on the agenda.

10. Adjourn

- Ms. Cotter made motion to adjourn, Ms. Ingle seconded. Motion carries approved unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:05PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mason Perrone
Secretary