

# Status and Funding Report

## TRANSIT Subcommittee

FY 2018-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Annual Update

August 23, 2017

RIPTA

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### Members

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## **INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL ISSUES**

The TRANSIT Subcommittee convened to review and rank 13 projects received through the FY18-27 TIP solicitation according to the TIP Guiding Principles outlined at - [http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/tip/fffy17\\_25/Overview%20TIP%20Guiding%20Principles.pdf](http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/tip/fffy17_25/Overview%20TIP%20Guiding%20Principles.pdf). Statewide Planning received \$116,698,000 in 13 project requests through the solicitation process. Projects considered by this subcommittee included (but were not limited to) capital and operational investments in all variations of TRANSIT projects.

The committee prioritized projects as high, medium, and low.

State agencies met to consider alternatives for funding high priority projects in the TIP. A specific recommendation was put forward to remaining committee members. There being consensus, the following projects have been programmed in the draft TIP.

- Kennedy Plaza
- Transit Corridor Development

### **HIGH PRIORITY**

#### **Pawtucket/Central Falls Transit Center – Current Project Amount Requested: \$24M**

The Cities of Pawtucket and Central Falls are jointly requesting \$24M for a number of public infrastructure improvements to link the Intermodal HUB to the local street and pedestrian network, and to ensure that all modes of transportation can access the future station in an attractive, safe and efficient manner. The additional infrastructure improvements are proposed over the next 5 years, and includes 3R work on the streets leading to and from the intermodal HUB in both communities. This request is aimed toward ensuring the transit projects are completed and integrated successfully in both cities.

TIP Guiding Principles: Mobility Benefits, Economic Development, Supports Local and State Goals, Safety and Security, Equity

Notes: The Committee determined this is a high priority project given the level of investment related to both commuter rail and bus service coming in the near future. The Committee had questions related to possibly phasing as well as alternative sources of funding. It was unclear from the large list of improvements proposed, what were the critical path items to address prior to the intermodal HUB opening. Also, the Committee was interested in whether the cities were planning to pursue additional funding sources, such as the creation of a local assessment district.

#### **Kennedy Plaza – New Project Amount Requested: \$2.68M**

The City of Providence is requested funds to consolidate bus service in Kennedy Plaza, including associated improvements to the streets and spaces within and surrounding the Plaza.

The Committee determined this is a high priority project. The City’s proposal for Kennedy Plaza maintains a transit-rich environment in the Plaza while supporting the City’s vision to transform Kennedy Plaza into a more vibrant, safe and attractive mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly urban center. RIPTA proposes to achieve a balance between the benefits and impacts of bus activity while maintaining appropriate levels of transit service and improving convenience and safety for transit passengers and other pedestrians. To that end, the project will:

- Better match transit facilities in Kennedy Plaza to existing and anticipated future levels of demand for passenger service.
- Concentrate transit operations in a smaller area to reduce walking time for transferring passengers.
- Enhance safety of transferring passengers and other pedestrians by reducing the number of conflict points between pedestrians and vehicular traffic.
- Minimize the number of streets used by transit to simplify bus operations and enhance pedestrian safety.
- Maintain the opportunity for a future extension of transit lanes along Washington Street to the east, to enhance east-west bus travel from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Minimize bus layovers in Kennedy Plaza.

TIP Guiding Principles – Mobility Benefits, Cost Effectiveness, Economic Development, Supports State and Local Goals, Safety and Security, Equity

**Transit Corridor Development – Current Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$5.35M**

RIPTA proposes to expand the capacity of RI’s transit infrastructure by investing in a combination of projects, guided by the LRTP 2040 and the Transit Master Plan including: fixed guideway corridors; expanded dedicated right of way; expansion of transit signal priority.

The Committee ranked this as a high priority project, recognizing that increasing transit usage in our state is tied to reliability, convenient and competitive alternatives to auto travel. Providing transit with priority, and tying those investments to environmental and economic development goals, advances state’s goals to reduce congestion, derive economic value from transit investment and increase mode share.

Notes: Given specific projects may be identified through the LRTP and Transit Master planning process, it is recommended that this project be programmed with long term transit project funds identified through RhodeWorks, beginning in FY21.

TIP Guiding Principles – Mobility Benefits, Cost Effectiveness, Economic Development, Environmental Impact, Supports State and Local Goals; Safety and Security; Equity

**State Employee Transit Pass Program – GovPass – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$330,000 annually**

RIPTA is requesting funds to advance the recommendation of the State Employee Commuter Reduction Plan to advance a transit subsidy for state employees. Currently, nearly two dozen private employers, along with all major private colleges and universities, as well as the City of Providence and federal employees enjoy free or subsidized transit through RIPTA programs. RIPTA and others have long advocated that a program such as GovPass, could greatly advance the state's goals for VMT reduction, particularly given the size of the state workforce. If a program were coupled with review of state parking policies, participation may be higher.

Notes: The Committee ranked this as a high priority project, recognizing the opportunity to greatly increase transit ridership through this program. The Committee recommended, dependent on resources, that this program be scaled up or down accordingly, and could be phased in over time. It was also suggested that any state employee pass program include consideration of commuter rail usage as well. The timing of this program should coincide with increased transit activity near the state offices area that will result from the development of the Providence Intermodal Transportation Center, greatly expanding service options for employees.

TIP Guiding Principles – Mobility Benefits, Cost Effectiveness, Economic Development, Environmental Impact, Supports State and Local Goals, Safety and Security, Equity

### **MEDIUM PRIORITY**

**Quonset Business Park Flex Transit Service – New Project**

**Quonset Business Park Transit Access Pilot – New Project**

**Amount Requested: \$410,000 annually**

Both RIPTA and the Quonset Development Corporation submitted projects to advance recommendations of the “Quonset Transit Market Study and Service Plan” completed in November 2016. The joint RIPTA, RIDOT, QDC effort evaluated a range of transit and alternative commuting modes and determined a Flex Service from QDC to CCRI Warwick, and connect to other bus routes would best serve the needs of employers and current and future employees in the Park.

Notes: The Committee ranked this as a medium priority project. Enhanced transit services to the Quonset Business Park has been recognized as a critical linkage in our state's transit system, the challenge was how to best connect given the location of the park, demographics of employees, parking and traffic conditions, and range of shift times as well as the range of communities where workers live. The recently completed study carefully evaluated these factors and recommended an approach that balances cost effectiveness and strives to build a transit service that can expand in the future.

The Committee asked if the QDC or businesses in the park might contribute to the cost of operating this service. This could be done through a direct service subsidy or by enrolling in RIPTA's EcoPass program to encourage ridership through no-fare service for employees in the Park.

TIP Guiding Principles – Mobility Benefits, Cost Effectiveness, Economic Development, Environmental Impact, Supports State and Local Goals, Safety and Security, Equity

**Green Fleet Transition Project – Current Project**

**Amount Requested: \$35.9M**

RIPTA is working on a green fleet transition project to transform the state transit vehicle fleet by replaced current buses with low or no emission vehicles as they reach the end of their useful life. Fully funding this request will align with RIPTA's fleet replacement program to transition to a green fleet by 2034.

Notes: The Committee recognizes the environmental benefits and impact a green transit fleet will have on helping advance the state's emission reduction goals. It is also noted that while a higher capital cost, a reduction in fuel costs may also provide RIPTA additional operational savings which could be invested in higher levels of service.

Given the cost and long-term nature of the proposal, the Committee recommends looking to the results of the Green Fleet Study to develop a strategy that would potentially request additional funds to pay the incremental cost of a green vehicle over the base cost for vehicles already programmed in the TIP. There may also be opportunities for alternative sources of funding, including the RI Infrastructure Bank.

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**RIPTA Facility Modernization – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$4.3M**

RIPTA requests \$4.3M to modernize its maintenance facility on Elmwood Avenue. The building is now 16 years old and is in need of major repairs. RIPTA has allocated funding to make improvements, but given the limited funding available, repairs do not begin until FY19 and continue incrementally for a five-year span.

Notes: The Committee recognizes RIPTA's need to maintain assets, particularly to comply with FTA's recent rules on asset management. Identifying funds in the near-term would allow RIPTA to make repairs sooner, reducing maintenance repairs and ensuring the safety of its assets. The Committee recommends RIPTA look for opportunities to identify near term funds through reprioritization of projects, working with RIDOT and Statewide Planning. RIPTA is also pursuing borrowing funds from the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank in order to make the repairs sooner with repayments made when future funds become available.

TIP Guiding Principles – Cost Effectiveness

**LOW PRIORITY**

*The following low priority projects are not listed in any priority order.*

**Quonset Commuter Rail Feasibility Study – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$80,000**

The Quonset Development Corporation requests \$80,000 to conduct a feasibility study to evaluate future investment in commuter rail to the Quonset Business Park. Given the proximity to existing rail infrastructure, the growing employment base and success of the Air Show service demonstrate a need

to advance consideration further, particularly as other South County locations advocate for service as well.

Notes: The Committee recognizes the large employment base and expanded options transit would create for job seekers and continued growth of the Park. Like other rail expansion requests, ridership as well as constructability needs to be evaluated within the context of an overall strategy to advance rail infrastructure and operations. The Committee supports QDC's request to advance the recommendations of the RIPTA/RIDOT Quonset Transit Development Plan and begin pilot bus services to the Park. The Committee also recommends to further evaluate a future rail investment as part of the upcoming Transit Master Plan.

TIP Guiding Principles – Mobility Benefits, Economic Development, Environmental Impact, Supports Local and State Goals, Safety and Security, Equity

**South Kingstown Commuter Rail Feasibility Study – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$40,000**

The Town of South Kingstown requests \$40,000 to conduct a feasibility study of the commuter rail options in South Kingstown, both at Kingston Station and a proposed station at URI (see URI TIP application). The study would include an assessment of the land use and environmental constraints of both options, consideration of the regional impacts of both stations, and recommendations for the regional commuter rail stations, including any land use changes that would be required.

The Committee appreciates the volume of Amtrak ridership at the Kingston Station and the possibilities related to expanding commuter rail service in South County. Kingston Station and any potential URI spur must be carefully evaluated to determine the best way to maximize transit options with consideration to land use and comprehensive planning needs. Given the scale of future operations is beyond the existing commuter rail agreement and the level of investment required, the Committee recommends that connections via rail to South County be evaluated as part of the Transit Master Plan. This analysis can determine how to make these connections, which mode is most appropriate and prioritize this need within the context of an overall state transit program.

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**Weekend Train Service to Wickford Junction – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$0**

The Town of North Kingstown is requesting to expand train service to Wickford Junction to include weekends. The Town advocates for this service to improve connectivity to South County on the weekends to better serve events and attractions, as well as support the TOD efforts around the Station.

The Committee identified this as a low priority and suggests that the existing TIP line, Transit Operations, is dedicated to supporting rail services. RIDOT will take this request under advisement as they manage current operating resources for rail service. The Committee further suggested that the Transit Master Plan will include an evaluation of existing and future bus and rail service levels, and this expansion of service could also be evaluated at that time. RIPTA also noted, that any increase in service

to Wickford may also result in increased bus services to connect passengers from the Station to weekend events and attractions and those costs should be considered as well.

**URI/South County Intermodal Station/Commuter Rail Spur and Extension – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$43.4M**

URI is requesting funds for the design and construction of a rail spur from the Northeast Corridor Mainline onto the URI campus along Plains Road. This project would provide a direct rail connection to URI to increase state and regional connections. The spur would end at a new terminal adjacent to the parking areas on the western edge of campus. URI would build structured parking to support this new Intermodal Facility/Mobility Hub. This project is supported by URI’s recently completed Transportation and Parking Master Plan to meet the goal of a strong regional connection to the campus.

The Committee recognizes URI’s goal to connect to the regional transportation network. However, given the cost of the project, it is unclear if building a rail spur is the mode appropriate to meet this goal, particularly within the context of other state priorities and limited resources. The Committee recommends reevaluating this proposal as part of the upcoming Transit Master Plan and determine if there are alternative solutions to address this connection and if a higher level investment is needed, where it fits within a state prioritization of future transit investments.

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**Woonsocket Commuter Rail Feasibility/Alternatives Analysis – New Project**  
**Amount Requested: \$1M**

The City of Woonsocket is requesting \$1M to conduct a feasibility and alternatives analysis along with an Environmental Analysis to pursue the reestablishment of passenger rail services to Boston, Providence and Worcester.

The Committee referred to previous work conducted through past planning studies to pursue a rail investment from the Woonsocket area. Given the uncertainty of ridership and the prioritization of this project relative to other potential investment, the Committee recommends evaluating how to best connect these centers through the upcoming Transit Master Plan and then to determine the appropriate level of public investment to meet those needs.

TIP Guiding Principles – Mobility Benefits, Economic Development, Support State and Local Goals, Safety and Security

**GENERAL COMMENTS OF THE TRANSIT COMMITTEE**

- Transit Master Plan will address the feasibility and priority of several proposed projects.
- Two high priority projects, State Employee Pass Program and Quonset Flex Service would require operational dollars on an annual basis.
- Pawtucket/Central Falls and Kennedy Plaza, also two high projects, are time sensitive given the transit investment currently advancing in these areas.