



PRESS RELEASE

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RIPTA Riders Demand “Don’t X Out Public Transit”

Nationwide rally day aims to highlight the importance and need for safe, reliable public transportation across America

Providence, Rhode Island- Public transportation supporters gathered in Kennedy Plaza and across the country to speak out against proposed cuts of more than one third to federal funding for public transportation and all surface transportation programs. Transit supporters have designated today as “Don’t X Out Public Transportation Day” as a way to address a proposal currently in the U.S. House of Representatives to drastically cut highway and public transportation funding.

If enacted, these cuts will profoundly impact RIPTA riders who depend on these systems to get them to and from work, while also penalizing commuters looking for alternatives to congested roads, and vulnerable communities like the elderly, young, and disabled. The proposed cuts would result in an estimated 15-20% reduction in service and hamper Rhode Island’s ability to create and sustain jobs.

“At this critical juncture, what we don’t need in addition to dwindling local operating funds, is a decline in federal support to keep our systems in good repair. Any decreases in federal support will be devastating to RIPTA and most other systems to say the least,” said Charles Odimgbe, CEO of RIPTA.

Abel Collins, a member of RIPTA Riders and the program manager of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Sierra Club, added that “immediate action is needed at both the state and federal level to revive the economy, and one of the best ways to do it is by investing in public transportation. We need more transit, not less.”

RIPTA Riders, a new independent grassroots group that worked with the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 618, and RIPTA itself to organize the rally in Providence, says cuts this drastic will mean significant job loss and a diminished quality of life for thousands of Rhode Islanders. It is estimated that 614,000 public transportation jobs across the United States could be lost over the next six years if a funding cut this extreme takes place.

The rally featured many speakers supporting RIPTA including Paul Harrington, president of ATU 618, John Flaherty, spokesman for the Coalition for Transportation Choices, and Barry Schiller, former RIPTA Board member and long-time transit advocate who spoke on the desirability of building up RIPTA ridership and some ways to do this.

“Imposing a cut of up to 35% to federal transportation investment would be reckless. With our economic recovery on life support and no signs of a thaw in the unemployment rate, this is the wrong time to be disinvesting in our ailing transportation system,” said John Flaherty. “With RIPTA’s ridership continuing to

increase, public transportation is helping more Rhode Islanders to lower their household transportation costs. Fortunately, Rhode Island has leaders in the U.S. Senators who recognize the importance of transportation. Both Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse hold positions on key Senate committees that are pushing back against draconian cuts to our nation's transportation system."

The national rally day and call to action highlighted the severe effects cut of more than one third to federal transit funding would have. Rallies and events took place across the country today to show Congress America supports investment in public transportation. According to the American Public Transportation Association for every one dollar invested in public transportation, four dollars in economic returns is generated- and every \$1 billion invested in public transportation creates or supports 36,000 jobs.

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