

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RIPTA Riders Group protests proposed cuts to transit service

Downcity, Providence- Dozens of Rhode Island citizens outraged by the service cuts that have been proposed for the state's public transit system came together to protest the proposals outside Providence City Hall near to where a public hearing was being held to gather public input on the reductions. If the cuts go forward as planned, 39 routes will suffer reductions in service, and 9 routes face elimination entirely.

"These are the most drastic cuts ever proposed for RIPTA, and it's going to hurt working Rhode Islanders who won't be able to get to and from their jobs" said Barry Schiller, a longtime transit advocate and former member of RIPTA's Board. Studies show that more than 60% of transit users are using public transportation to get to work or school. Second shift workers would be particularly hard hit by the cuts, because it is proposed that bus service end at 10:00 rather than 11:00 as it is on many routes now.

Randall Rose a member of the RIPTA Riders Group, which is a self-organized group of concerned citizens who have come together to protect RIPTA, added that "RIPTA provides critical service to our most vulnerable communities; the disabled, the elderly, our youth, and the working poor. Any cuts will hurt those least able to afford it."

The transit agency is being forced to consider such deep service cuts, because of a structural deficit problem it faces as its funding source, the gas tax, declines and its operating costs rise with the price of fuel. "RIPTA's current funding mechanism is like a vice squeezing on both sides" said Abel Collins, program manager for Sierra Club Rhode Island, who advocates for transportation choices, "as gas prices rise, people drive less and demand for public transportation increases, but with less gas being sold as a result, RIPTA's funding dries up just when the cost of diesel is going through the roof."

The RIPTA Riders Group is calling for Rhode Island's political leaders to find a new stable funding source for public transportation that will ensure RIPTA's viability. Another member of the all volunteer citizen's group, Julian Park, added that "RIPTA needs to be a priority in the statehouse. Public transportation is not just important for our economy and social justice. It's important for our environment and public health, too. Buses mean fewer cars on the road and less pollutants in the air, and they mean more active lifestyles where we're not always stuck behind the steering wheel."

The RIPTA Riders Group members were collecting signatures on a petition in support of RIPTA, which they plan on taking to the Governor and General Assembly to demand a real solution for RIPTA's funding crisis. The group says that no amount of service cuts, efficiency savings, or labor givebacks will solve the problem because the transit agency's revenues will continue to decline. "The only thing that would be gained by these cuts is time, and it would only be gained at the expense of Rhode Islanders who are already disadvantaged. It's not fair and it's not good for Rhode Island" said Rose.

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