

Narragansett
Friday, September 3, 2004
12:00 pm - 2:00 pm

On Friday, September 3, 2004 at Noon, at the Narragansett Town Hall - Council Chambers, twenty-nine (29) members of the public attended including three (3) public officials. Eighteen (15) made oral comments, and two (2) made written comment.

Oral Comments were provided as follows:

Representative Matt McHugh talked about growing homeless problem in the area and would like to look at tolls as way to increase transit funding. He suggested we choose Charlestown for meeting location in the future.

Representative Peter Lewiss expressed concern for people in communities not served by RIPTA. He questioned whether they were being considered in data for cuts. He stated service down to Washington County is important to residents of Washington County and the Washington County Caucus and advocated for summer service to Misquamicut Beach. He also mentioned that RIPEC looks at license and registration fees as ways for funding transit.

Representative John Patrick Shanley stated service in Washington County is underutilized. He was contacted by 4 constituents - 2 are disabled - who use Route 66. He discussed the URI parking changes and how that combined with RIPTA cuts to URI service would negatively impact students. Also, cuts to ADA service concern him. He stated that cutting ferry service might be way to save some work trips. He felt the process for amending budget needs to be looked at.

Donald Gibson III was concerned about loss of trolley and Route 66 service. Why doesn't RIPTA buy 5 year old buses? He stated that South Kingstown is developing and more service is needed, especially at Fiddlesticks and Quonset Point.

Steve Farrell was impressed by senior management and stated he had never seen the fleet in better condition. Has RIPTA thought about cutting inner city service? Has RIPTA thought about incorporating Route 64 into Route 66? Why hasn't anything been done with RIPEC report? He expressed concern about the ongoing deficit situation and stated that supplemental funding is needed. He also stated that he is adamantly opposed to cuts.

Mark Therrien answered: Productivity is higher on inner city service. We will consider incorporating Route 64 into Route 66.

Mary Willner stated that she is one of a larger group that goes from Jamestown to Newport on Route 64. She also stated that nobody knows how to use Narragansett Flex. Comparing the cost of a bus ride to bridge toll, she thinks bus service makes financial sense.

Anna Prager expressed pride in RIPTA and stated that as RIPTA's former board chair she knows that funding is needed from somewhere else. She stated that the RIPEC report was not accidental and that RIPTA asked them to suggest ways to improve funding. She described a systemic funding problem and stated that revenue is not keeping pace with expenses. She also stated that RIPTA needs long-term, dedicated revenue like other transit authorities and wants to expand, but can't without additional funding. What's going on with committee to study transit funding? She asked legislators to please find out and stated its now up to government to find ways to expand RIPTA.

Bob Votava stated we don't have a long-term funding program because public transit lacks a constituency. Who is lobbying for RIPTA? He also stated that after speaking with new board chair, he realized service is not meant to run like a business. He understands ridership figures are a point of contention. Can we cut a few bucks anywhere? Also, stated that he doesn't want Route 66 cut.

Al Moscola answered: RIPTA saves money anyway possible including delaying implementing smart fareboxes and rehabilitation of 1999 buses.

Jean Barry introduced herself, the Basic Needs Network of Westerly and the WARM Shelter. Submitted petition. She spoke about the number of teenagers in Bradford that can't get to work and need transit. She also stated that she understood the bottom line is funding and that people need to get in touch with Senators Reed and Chafee to help. She ended her testimony with 2 stories supporting the importance of public transit.

Frank Heppner spoke on behalf of the Friends of Kingston Station. He also chairs a department at URI. He stated that cutting the 64 presents huge problems for station. ISTEA funded the Kingston Station revitalization and it will be difficult to get additional federal funding because the station will no longer qualify as an intermodal hub. Also, he feels that the new traffic changes at URI present an opportunity for RIPTA.

Abraham Verghese discussed how he commutes from home in South Kingstown to work in Newport on Route 64 express. He stated that his trip is crowded everyday, taking 35 monthly pass holders to Newport. He feels these trips should not be cut. Why don't more people use transit? He also feels that more service is needed with more flexibility especially if we want to serve tourists. He feels we should publicize more and that students will be negatively impacted by these changes.

Kathleen Rubinstein of VNS Home Health Services and Washington County's Children's Coalition spoke about a gap analysis conducted by the coalition which identifies transit need in the county. Especially in the southern part of the county, she feels transit is needed to transport people to social services. She stated that there is little service even to health centers right now and Flex misses certain areas used by low income people, working people and URI students. She feels that the buses are not family friendly and the needs of children with disabilities are being ignored. Also, she suggested that we look at alternate fuel sources.

Jack McCabe described bus service to Kingston Station twenty years ago as pathetic. He tries to encourage people to use the 64 at 12:35 pm from the station to travel to Newport. He feels we could increase ridership by reducing the trip time between the station and Newport. He also feels that Rhode Island can find the \$1.9 million needed.

Peter Stelljes feels we need to be more rider friendly. Does RIPTA management get free bus pass? Are all employees required to ride the bus? Why not add to the bridge tolls? Also, what about bus passes being sold illegally in the low income bus pass program?

Karen Mensel discusses Senior/Disabled Program and RIte Care bus pass program.

Keith Marshall asks how much RI transit gets in state funding compared to other states. He feels we need more marketing.

Ken Kemp stated that he lobbied to get the 64 established and it has established strong regular ridership.

Written Comments were provided as follows:

Richard Evans submitted a suggesting the Flex system be marketed better. He states that in general people do not know enough about RIPTA service and that we should a new strategy to better meet needs. Mr. Evans also asks for more information on RIPEC.

Jean Barry submitted a petition on behalf of the Basic Needs Network and two hundred and twenty (220) people, which requests RIPTA keep the Westerly fixed and flex service at its current levels. The petition also requests the expansion of Westerly Flex into Bradford.

RIPTA staff in attendance included:

Al Moscola, Henry Kinch, Mark Therrien, Karen Mensel, Ed Scott, Nicole Langlois, Ann LeClerc, Ed Brown, David Pearsall and Kevin Carmody.

Narragansett
Friday, September 3, 2004
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

On Friday, September 3, 2004 at 6 pm, at the Narragansett Town Hall - Council Chambers, twenty-four (24) members of the public attended including two (2) public officials. Eleven (11) made oral comments, and three (3) made written comment..

Oral Comments were provided as follows:

Councilman David Crook asked whether this presentation was give at the State House.

Alfred Moscola responded no and added that RIPTA is being hurt most by the increasing cost of healthcare and fuel.

Henry Kinch added that the legislature has known about RIPTA's funding problem for a long time and that we give the State House the same information presented at public hearing.

John Holly was concerned about the elimination of Route 64 because he uses it everyday for work. Speaking on behalf of riders and non-riders, he noted that the top 9 lines could affect 360,000 people (passenger trips???)

Evelyn Wheeler asked several questions: Is the ferry self-sufficient? Can you quit the ferry business and ask DOT to add the CMAQ money to the bus system? Can you cut back on slow trips? What about using smaller buses? Do we provide cell phones for drivers? Is your financial statement available? Are the employees who are not Local 618 administration? What is the possibility of providing incentives to employers for transit use? What is the discount for senior riders? Can RIPTA work with courts to enhance visibility? She also stated that she is retired and volunteers in Newport, which she can not continue to do if Route 64 is eliminated.

Mark Therrien answered: The ferry is not self-sufficient and DOT cannot transfer federal CMAQ money to bus system. He stated that RIPTA has cut back on some slow bus trips (down to 8-10 passengers per trip) and to cut further means cutting lifeline services. He stated that using small buses was not feasible in some areas because peak trips carry more passengers than a van can hold. Regarding cell phones, RIPTA did provide drivers with Nextel radio phones while we were transitioning to a new radio system. The phones are currently being phased out. He state RIPTA's funancial statement is available and that RIPTA consists of Local 618, Local 808 and approximately 33 non-represented administrative positions. He discussed the new legislation that provides employer incentives, which was passed in the last session of the General Assembly. The reimbursement for senior bus trips is about 65¢ per ride. RIPTA's Express Travel team would work with the courts on promotion.

Amelia Crook was concerned about the loss of services especially because not many people have cards in the area

Sammy Deeb discussed the consistent ridership on Route 64 express to the Naval Warfare Center. He stated that 64 express has 33 subscribers and that the bus was full yesterday and requested that RIPTA look at ways to give the 64 express a separate line. He also stated that with higher gas prices he feels ridership will increase.

Cindy Jizmagian submitted written comments.

David Winter stated that riding to Newport for \$1.25 was a good deal and suggested that we raise the rates until other, more permanent ways could be found to fix the funding situation.

Mark Therrien answered: revenue went down last time we raised rates, but we will revisit zones versus one statewide rate.

Leslie Mills spoke on behalf of her brother who is unable to drive to work. She asked if Narragansett Flex could take him to the URI Bay Campus. What about a fuel surcharge? Would people pay more?

Mark Therrien answered: Flex does not currently go to the Bay Campus, however, RIPTA would consider it.

Anna Prager discussed how farebox recovery pays for only 30% at best and that the rest must come from federal or state sources. She encouraged everyone to call their legislators and reiterated the need for a long range plan.

Councilman David Crook stated that 30% of the Narragansett population is seniors and that service reductions would negatively impact students as well as seniors. He stated that the service is needed and will help in the long run. He also mentioned that transit funding from the gas tax is a Catch-22 and the ultimate solution rests at the State House.

Councilwoman AnnMarie Silveira asked whether RIPTA could reduce the number of trips on Routes 64 and 14? She stated that Route 66 is necessary for many URI students. Has RIPTA looked into LNG or hybrid technology? Are Newport trolleys efficient?

Mark Therrien answered: trolleys in Newport, especially those running to mansions are very efficient. He added that Route 66 is often overcrowded. He again mentioned that RIPTA will review the Route 64 express service to the Naval Warfare Center.

Al Moscola discussed the possibility of using hybrid bus at RIPTA and went on to state that RIPTA has money for one hybrid. He also discussed how reducing trip frequency loses passengers due to inconvenience.

Errol Rowe asked if it was possible to lock in diesel price with supplier.

Al Moscola answered: RIPTA works with Sprague Energy and does not lock in because it can waste a lot of money. He stated RIPTA is not allowed to pass a surcharge on to customers.

Written Comments were provided as follows:

Rhandi Husted-Jensen requested that Route 64 not be eliminated on Sundays and holidays.

Cynthia Jizmagian requested that Route 64 remain because it helps people get to work, medical appointments, and personal business. She also mentioned that she uses Route 66 on occasion.

Sammy Deeb submitted a petition on behalf of thirty-six (36) users of Route 64 Express service to NUWC requesting the service not be cut. The petition cites 15 average daily riders including one disabled person and three without other transportation.

RIPTA staff in attendance included:

Al Moscola, Henry Kinch, Mark Therrien, Karen Mensel, Ed Scott, Nicole Langlois, Ann LeClerc, Ed Brown, David Pearsall and Kevin Carmody.

