

Warwick
Wednesday, September 8, 2004
12:00 pm – 2:00 pm

On Wednesday, September 8, 2004, at the Warwick City Hall Council Chambers, sixty-five (65) members of the public attended, including one (1) public official. Twenty-nine (29) made oral comments, and thirteen (13) gave written comments, including one (1) public official.

Oral Comments were provided as follows:

Representative Eileen Naughton asked that all Board members be required to read the entire transcript of all hearings. She stated that the talk has been about cuts, not about how to provide the best possible transit system that responds to the needs of the people.

Eileen Ryan stated that she relies on the bus for socializing and quality of life, and takes buses throughout the state. She does not want to lose any bus service, particularly on Saturdays.

Bonnie Abols, who works for the Ocean State Center for Independent Living, asked that RIPTA not cut any service. People rely on the bus.

Almas Kalafian stated that she has relied on public transit her entire life due to a vision impairment. She began using RIde a few years ago when she lost the remainder of her vision. The definition of RIde is to provide safe and secure rides to fragile people. The drivers are a godsend. She is willing to pay higher taxes for transportation. She urged support for RIPTA and RIde and asked that no cuts be made. She asked that a letter from **Representative Joseph McNamara** be read into the record.

Tim McCormick read the letter from **Representative Joseph McNamara**. Rep. McNamara strongly objected to the decrease in service in Warwick and Cranston both as a state representative and as a member of the riding public. He stated that the cuts will cause significant hardship on many people, the environment, and on economic opportunities available to Rhode Islanders. Effective transit service must be frequent and reliable. It is estimated that 50% of RIPTA's riders use the bus to get to work. Cutbacks will discourage use and adversely affect seniors and people with disabilities in disproportionate numbers. He stated that Rhode Island should strengthen public transit with funding adequate for expansion. He has sponsored legislation to establish a Blue Ribbon Commission to study transit in the state, and is hoping that a multi-year financial plan for an intermodal transit system will be developed. He believes that the state should properly fund transportation, not cut services.

Aime Bureau stated that she will lose her job if Route #29 is cut.

James Agnew, a Warwick resident, stated that he hadn't been on a bus in twenty years until this past winter when he had to use it. He said that the bus has always been on time, and he considers the \$1.25 fare a bargain. He complimented RIPTA. He stated that he will fight for what bus service Warwick has. He said Warwick doesn't have great service, but right now it can get you where you need to go. Route #29 is a lifeline. If Route #3 is cut on Saturdays he will have difficulty getting to work in Providence. If Warwick residents can't get to Providence, what good is all of the Providence service? He asked about the late night service on Thursdays to the colleges, and about the \$700,000 the Department of Elderly Affairs owes RIPTA. **Henry Kinch** and **Tim McCormick** answered that DEA has paid all but \$140,000 and that the colleges pay for the Thursday night services.

Carmin Ginolfi stated that buses are a necessity everywhere in the state. Eliminating routes would be a disaster.

Theresa Boucher uses Route #29. She had moved to a location where she would have bus service because she relies on it for all her transportation. She asked that the service not be cut.

Mary Madden, President and CEO of the Trudeau Center, which serves over 1,000 people with developmental disabilities, opposed the route reductions. The loss of both RIPTA and Ride service will affect many people who won't be able to get to work, resulting in a loss of independence and income.

Mike Delvecchio relies on bus service and stated that he hopes the Governor's office finds the funding needed to keep the service. He also stated that service should be improved and expanded through the whole state.

Brian Wallin, Director of Marketing and Public Relations for Kent Hospital, read a letter into the record opposing the loss of Route #29 and associated ADA service. Access to the hospital is vital for the community, and only this route serves it. The hospital also has a continuing partnership with the Knight Campus of CCRI, including a new program to expand educational opportunities for students interested in a career in nursing. Access between the two sites and with other areas of the state is necessary for students who rely on public transit.

David Lauterbach from the Kent Center opposed the cuts. The Kent Center serves thousands of people with mental health issues and substance abuse. The Kent Center had been required by MHRH to choose locations with access to public transportation. Many people rely on public transit to get to their two locations on Tollgate Road and Centerville Road. Transit is an essential service, a lifeline, and contributes to the quality of life for many people, allowing them to participate in the community and to access needed services, such as shopping, medical and dental offices, and recreational opportunities. He provided a written copy of his testimony.

Roberta Merkle of Cornerstone expressed concern regarding the proposed cuts. She is an advocate for the most vulnerable citizens, including frail elderly and adults with disabilities due to mental illness, Alzheimer's, injury, and other causes. She stated that the cuts will affect those most in need, as well as family members who will not be able to work and care for their family members who lose transportation to needed programs.

Patricia Manning uses Route #12 on Saturdays and urged that it be kept. She expressed opposition to the government being involved in providing transportation, and suggested that all public transit in Rhode Island be privatized.

Mark Susa has a business called Accessing Community Transportation, which provides travel training. He read a letter urging support for RIPTA. People with disabilities rely on public transit to work, shop, for quality of life, and for independence. He urged more use of RIPTA fixed route service by people with disabilities, rather than use of the Ride Program, and suggested that RIPTA pay for travel training. He provided a written version of his comments.

Edward Soares called the bus cuts a mistake. He stated that he will be stranded if Route #30 is cut.

Jeanne Fay works for the Ocean State Center for Independent Living. She works with people who need public transit. Cutting routes cuts options, and will prevent people with disabilities from working and contributing to society.

Hal Fayerweather works for the Ocean State Center for Independent Living. He attended as an advocate for consumers with disabilities to urge that Routes #29 and #8 be kept. They provided needed access to INSIGHT, TechAccess, educational and job opportunities, and medical offices.

Colleen McCarthy works for the Sargent Rehabilitation Center. Elimination of Route #29 will be devastating for the people they serve. Sargent is the only neurological day treatment program in RI for people who have experience stroke or Traumatic Brain Injury. The average age of people they serve is 40, and they come from a wide range of professions and incomes. They have significant deficits after the injury; 96% are unable to drive and require paratransit service. Sixty-eight percent of people they serve return to work. She provided a written copy of her comments.

Karlton Bontrager suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury while snowboarding and lost the ability to drive a car. Ride is a lifeline, and access to the Sargent Center was vital for him to return to college and go to work. He provided a written copy of his comments.

Lorna Ricci, Executive Director of the Ocean State Center for Independent Living, opposed all cuts. She expressed apprehension on behalf of those who do not drive who will lose service, including herself. She urged that Routes #29 and #3 not be cut. The bus provides people with the autonomy to go anywhere in the state. As an

Executive Director, she understands the need to balance a budget, but this is not the way to do it. Keep RI's transit functioning.

Steve Farrell, President and Business Agent for ATU618, who represents 640 union members at RIPTA, opposed the cuts as both a union member and as a member of the riding public. He listed the following good points of RIPTA: leadership of Al Moscola; maintenance is the best it has been in his 28 years in transit in RI; training of drivers and mechanics is the best it has been in his 28 years in transit in RI; the ADA stop announcement compliance is at an all-time high; and the overall public perception of transit is the best it has been in his 28 years in transit. He stated that RIPTA has been growing and expanding much-needed service and should not go backwards and cut service now. He thanked RIPTA Board member Bill Kennedy for attending the hearing.

Marie Perna stated that many people need RIPTA, and that public transit is an important part of the state's accessibility. A collaborative effort that she heads has just published the second edition of AccessibleRI, a guide to accessible restaurants and other locations in RI. Two pages are devoted to transit because of its importance to everyone in the state.

Kate Soulliere asked that Route #29 not be cut. It is a vital service.

Helen Ripa from the Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center urged that Routes #29 and #3 be saved because they are vital links to services including the courthouse, educational and employment opportunities, medical and mental health services, and other services in Buttonwoods. On a personal note, she noted that her father just had to give up his license and that Route #29 has become his transportation.

Debra Brynes stated that she has been using Route #29 for a long time and relies on it.

Jeanne Gattegno from West Bay Community Action on Buttonwoods Avenue stated that the impacts from the proposed service reduction will be felt by those most economically fragile. People need to get to West Bay Community Action for food, services, job training, childcare, and a new health center that is being built. These cuts will prevent people from achieving economic self-sufficiency.

Marie Pareanty stated that she needs access to Route #29 to get to all vital services, including the post office, doctors, shopping, library, and to get to Arctic.

Lillian DeAngelo uses the bus to get to INSIGHT and to the North Kingstown Senior Center.

Bill Kennedy, RIPTA Board member, thanked people for speaking and stated that the Board has hard decisions to make. He praised the leadership at RIPTA. He understands that working people, disabled, and elderly rely on RIPTA, and that the State needs to change the funding system or we'll be doing this again next year.

Almas Kalafian said that Mr. Kennedy attended the Providence hearings, and asked if other Board members had attended any hearings. (Sharon Canard Wells had also attended in Providence).

Written Comments were provided as follows:

A letter from **Representative Joseph McNamara** was read into the record. In it he strongly objected to the decrease in service in Warwick and Cranston both as a state representative and as a member of the riding public. He stated that the cuts will cause significant hardship on many people, the environment, and on economic opportunities available to Rhode Islanders. Effective transit service must be frequent and reliable. It is estimated that 50% of RIPTA's riders use the bus to get to work. Cutbacks will discourage use and adversely affect seniors and people with disabilities in disproportionate numbers. He stated that Rhode Island should strengthen public transit with funding adequate for expansion. He has sponsored legislation to establish a Blue Ribbon Commission to study transit in the state, and is hoping that a multi-year financial plan for an intermodal transit system will be developed. He believes that the state should properly fund transportation, not cut services.

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David Lauterbach from the Kent Center provided a written copy of his comments. He opposed the cuts. The Kent Center serves thousands of people with mental health issues and substance abuse. The Kent Center had been required by MHRH to choose locations with access to public transportation. Many people rely on public transit to get to their two locations on Tollgate Road and Centerville Road. Transit is an essential service, a lifeline, and contributes to the quality of life for many people, allowing them to participate in the community and to access needed services, such as shopping, medical and dental offices, and recreational opportunities.

Mark Susa read his comments into the public record. He has a business called Accessing Community Transportation, which provides travel training. He read a letter urging support for RIPTA. People with disabilities rely on public transit to work, shop, for quality of life, and for independence. He urged more use of RIPTA fixed route service by people with disabilities, rather than use of the Ride Program, and suggested that RIPTA pay for travel training.

Colleen McCarthy provided a written copy of her comments. She works for the Sargent Rehabilitation Center. Elimination of Route #29 will be devastating for the

people they serve. Sargent is the only neurological day treatment program in RI for people who have experience stroke or Traumatic Brain Injury. The average age of people they serve is 40, and they come from a wide range of professions and incomes. They have significant deficits after the injury; 96% are unable to drive and require paratransit service. Sixty-eight percent of people they serve return to work.

Karlton Bontrager provided a written copy of his comments. He suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury while snowboarding and lost the ability to drive a car. RIde is a lifeline, and access to the Sargent Center was vital for him to return to college and go to work.

Debbie Hooper provided written comments. She is legally blind and depends on the RIde Program for doctor's appointments, school, and work. Without transportation she will lose her ability to function. She also needs to go to INSIGHT for services.

Bill Hooper provided written comments. He asked why RIPTA wants to stop handicapped people from being mobile. Without public transportation his wife, Debbie Hooper, will not be able to get around. He works in Connecticut and cannot be there to drive her around every day. There must be other ways to save money than attacking the handicapped.

Anne Killay provided written comments. She uses Route #29 to get where she needs to go. She has a disability and still drives, but may not be able to drive soon. She asks that the route not be cut.

Cheryl Armstrong provided written comments. She has been using Route #29 for over a year. She is disabled and cannot afford a car. She has two children and the bus is the family's sole source of transportation.

Cheryl-Ann Ring provided written comments. She works for the Trudeau Center Supported Employment Department, which serves over 100 individuals who are valuable employees and volunteers in the community. Public transit and ADA service are essential parts of the support services required by these individuals in order to maintain employment. Cuts will result in loss of jobs, lost income, and lost independence.

Elizabeth Bode provided written comments. She works for Bridges, Inc. in Jamestown, supporting people with disabilities throughout Rhode Island. RIPTA is vital for these people who do not drive. She urges RIPTA to keep Rte. #30 on Sundays and Rte. #64.

RIPTA staff in attendance included: Henry Kinch, Tim McCormick, Ed Scott, David Pearsall, Dan Bannister, Anne LeClerc, Christine Johnston, Peter Michaud, Ed Brown, Maureen Neira, and Dave Browning.

Warwick
Wednesday, September 8, 2004
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

On Wednesday, September 8, 2004, at the Warwick City Hall Council Chambers, 41 members of the public attended, ten (10) made oral comments. No public officials attended. There were no written comments.

Oral Comments were provided as follows:

Nick Schmader stated that Rhode Island's elderly population, one of the highest percentages nationally already, will experience a large increase in the next decade that will require public transit service. If the proposed cuts are made, it will be very difficult to re-establish the service in the future. The proposed cuts will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of lower ridership due to less available and less convenient service, which will then result in additional cuts. He said the State should fund in-state transit needs first. He expressed opposition to the airport runway expansion "to expedite people getting to Los Angeles" when people can't get around Rhode Island.

Judy Smith, President of INSIGHT, echoed Mr. Schmader's views on the transit needs of Rhode Island's aging population. She stated that most people lose vision at age 60+, that 1 in 6 people over age 65 are visually impaired, and that 1 in 4 people over age 75 need vision rehabilitation services. These people need ADA service. Ms. Smith stated that INSIGHT provides over \$600,000 in free services each year; the least the state can do is provide transportation to these services. She also called the proposed cuts discriminatory, and suggested that the Providence LINK should be cut instead of vital services. She suggested the State fund transit appropriately and that this process of proposed cuts and hearings should not be necessary each year.

Melissa Fundakuski asked that her bus service in Kent County not be removed. She testified as to the importance of bus service for people like her with no other way to get around, and asked that RIPTA look at the impact of the proposed cuts on individuals and on the community as a whole.

Kathleen Podgurski, member of RIPTA's Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee, stated that if the bus service is cut, her complementary paratransit ADA service will also be lost and she will be unable to go anywhere, including medical appointments. Tollgate Road, where many of Kent County's medical services are centered, will lose bus service. She urged members of the public to call their state representatives and Congressmen to ask them to find the money to support public transit in Rhode Island, because many people will suffer with these cuts. She stated that the current situation is not RIPTA's fault, but many people will be hurt nonetheless.

Anne McDonald asked to keep Route #8 serving Jefferson Blvd and Buttonwoods. She has been taking the bus for over 20 years and will have no way to get to work

without it. She believes that the bus has sufficient ridership to be kept. She stated that there seems to be 15-20 people using the #8, and more development happening on Jefferson Blvd. which may increase ridership. She suggested fine tuning the route, perhaps by eliminating the Warwick Mall segment. She urged RIPTA to look at the social impacts of route cuts, particularly on the disabled, elderly, and others. She stated that even those who don't take the bus will be negatively impacted. She would like to see RIPTA come up with more incentives for people to take the bus. The Governor and General Assembly should increase funding. If service is going to be cut, why in January. Please don't do it in the coldest month of the year. Anne McDonald provided a written version of her statement.

J. Fleury listed opportunities she sees for RIPTA to increase service, not cut it. She asked if route consolidation and other restructuring efforts had been considered instead of route cuts.

Steve Farrell, President and Business Agent for ATU618, who represents 640 union members at RIPTA, opposed the cuts as both a union member and as a member of the riding public. He listed the following good points of RIPTA: leadership of Al Moscola; maintenance is the best it has been in his 28 years in transit in RI; training of drivers and mechanics is the best it has been in his 28 years in transit in RI; the ADA stop announcement compliance is at an all-time high; and the overall public perception of transit in the best it has been in his 28 years in transit. He stated that RIPTA has been growing and expanding much-needed service and should not go backwards and cut service now.

Kathleen Wood stated that she was a victim of domestic violence and that transit has allowed her to find a job and start a new life. She cannot afford a car, and without the bus she would not have been able to start over and would not be able to get to work and provide for her son.

Cedric Cushing asked that route #29 and holiday service not be cut.

Linda Furney spoke on behalf of her son, who is gaining independence with transit. She stated that just as elderly population is increasing, so is the population of people with disabilities. She asked what options other than cuts are being considered. She stated that she understands the ADA service is provided by a federal mandate, and asked if the ADA corridor could be maintained without the associated fixed route. She also applauded RIPTA for all it does and asked that the State find the funding.

The audience asked a number of questions.

Sue Duggan: If you have been trying to increase ridership since 1999, isn't decreasing service a step back? **Henry Kinch** answered that we don't want to decrease service, but as the RIPEC reported states, the current revenue stream for RIPTA is insufficient to fund the current service levels.

Sue Duggan: Why not reduce routes that run every ten minutes rather than remove service entirely from some areas? **Tim McCormick** answered that we gather ridership data from all routes using Automated Passenger Counters and have used this data to adjust routes. The routes that run most often have already been adjusted, and removing more service from those routes would result in overcrowding.

Sue Duggan: Has this presentation been made to the Governor and General Assembly? **Henry Kinch** answered that it has not.

Sue Duggan: On the handout showing the proposed reductions, routes #29 and #8 have a combined ridership of 111,000. How does this compare to other routes? **Tim McCormick** answered that this is worse. The routes in the proposal are all at the bottom of the list of performance rankings. He explained RIPTA's performance measures of passengers per hour, mile, and trip.

Paul Drywa asked for an explanation of the federal mandate for ADA service that Linda Furney mentioned. **Tim McCormick** explained the ADA law requiring complementary paratransit service.

Sue Turchette: Are RIPTA's budgets available for public viewing? **Annamarie McMahon** answered that she could send it out to anyone who would like it.

Nick Schmader: Can the federal government help with RIPTA's financial troubles? **Tim McCormick** answered that federal funding is not available for operating costs, only for capital costs. **Nick Schmader:** Is that due to the current Administration? **Tim McCormick** stated that that has been the case since 1997.

Paul Drywa: Won't the \$2.50 fare from ADA help? Can't we get more people on that service? **Henry Kinch** explained that the ADA is an unfunded mandate, and that the costs per passenger are much higher than in fixed route. **Tim McCormick** responded that the last increase in fares was offset by the loss of passengers, and an additional fare increase is more likely to lower RIPTA's revenue than increase it. A peer group analysis also shows that Rhode Island already has one of the highest fares compared to similar sized transit systems around the country.

Lisa Dalo: If my bus service is cut I won't be able to get to work. Can you put fewer trips on the route but not cut it altogether? **Henry Kinch** explained that RIPTA's revenue stream is insufficient and that cuts are necessary.

Laurie Furney: Perhaps the improved maintenance has added too much to the costs. Maybe the maintenance is too good. Is there a balance? Can RIPTA not replace buses? **Tim McCormick** responded that RIPTA already keeps buses beyond the typical 12-year life of a bus; RIPTA still has 1988 buses on the road. **Henry Kinch** stated that RIPTA will not compromise on safety.

Steve Farrell: Is RIPTA reviewing the one state one rate and considering a two-tier system? He was told yes.

Judy Smith: Do RIPTA employees contribute to their health insurance? **Henry Kinch** answered no.

Jean Constantino: Have business and industry leaders been asked to help support RIPTA? **Henry Kinch** stated that RIPEC speaks for the business community's interests.

Anne McDonald: Can RIPTA find money from the private sector business community? **Henry Kinch** stated that RIPTA will be asking for financial support for the trolleys if the business community wants to keep them.

Dave Stewart asked about service to Quonset Point and to the Trudeau Center on Commonwealth Avenue in Warwick. He also asked why bus drivers are changed on routes.

Laurie Furney: How much do the trolleys cost? Why not cut trolleys overall and save routes? She was told this option is on the table.

Written comments were provided as follows:

Anne McDonald asked to keep Route #8 serving Jefferson Blvd and Buttonwoods. She has been taking the bus for over 20 years and will have no way to get to work without it. She believes that the bus has sufficient ridership to be kept. She stated that there seems to be 15-20 people using the #8, and more development happening on Jefferson Blvd. which may increase ridership. She suggested fine tuning the route, perhaps by eliminating the Warwick Mall segment. She urged RIPTA to look at the social impacts of route cuts, particularly on the disabled, elderly, and others. She stated that even those who don't take the bus will be negatively impacted. She would like to see RIPTA come up with more incentives for people to take the bus. The Governor and General Assembly should increase funding. If service is going to be cut, why in January. Please don't do it in the coldest month of the year. Anne McDonald read her statement into the public record.

RIPTA staff in attendance included:

Henry Kinch, Tim McCormick, Ed Scott, David Pearsall, Dan Bannister, Anne LeClerc, Christine Johnston, Peter Michaud, Ed Brown, Annmarie McMahon, Tom Clupny, Betty Constantino.