

Providence
Tuesday, December 21, 2004
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

On Tuesday, December 21, 2004, at the University of Rhode Island Feinstein Providence Campus Auditorium eleven (11) members of the public attended, including two (2) public officials. Nine (9) made oral comments, including two (2) public officials.

Oral comments were provided as follows:

Harry Dunbar asked how inflation was included in the budget that was prepared. He was told by Mark Therrien that the budget was prepared nine months before the beginning of the fiscal year and did include an adjustment for inflation, but that the increases in the cost of fuel could not have been anticipated. Mr. Dunbar asked whether employees pay a portion of the cost of health care insurance. The answer provided by Mr. Therrien is that by union contract employees do not pay a portion of the premium, but non-union employees do pay a portion of their insurance.

Greg Gerritt, a regular bus rider, asked

- If it was true that last time that RIPTA raised fares the overall revenues fell; Mark Therrien responded that revenues did fall after the last fare increase,
- What would be the specific impact on ridership? Mr. Therrien responded that anticipated ridership changes were not available at the time of the hearing but can be provided when staff is back in the office; and
- Why not consider adding suburban/park and ride fares? Mr. Therrien responded that RIPTA has considered adding a suburban zone, but the revenue increase from this zone would not generate enough revenue to balance the budget.

Mr. Gerritt asked that RIPTA reconsider the need for fare increases since they would only provide a small share of the funds needed to balance the budget.

Charles St. Dennis from Tiverton opposed the fare increases because of their impact on handicapped people. As a blind person, he knows that transportation is important to disabled people's ability to work and earn a living.

Barry Schiller, representing the Sierra Club, objected to the proposed fare increase and its impact on the metropolitan area. This fare proposal would negatively affect long-term ridership, have a larger impact on the poorest residents of Providence, adversely affect the environment and sprawl by limiting choices for transportation, and be bad for the economy by forcing more people to use their own cars and buy additional gasoline.

Mr. Schiller offered 10 suggestions:

1. Implement a two zone system, which would be more socially just
2. Eliminate the abuse of the transfer system, and go back to the 25 cent transfer fare
3. Charge a fare for all passengers on the RIde program, and encourage all RIde passengers to use the fixed route system, if they are able to do so
4. Promote participation in the parking buy out program and the EPA sponsored Best Workplace for Commuters by marketing to employers
5. Seek implementation of traffic light prioritization for buses, which would decrease travel time for RIPTA
6. Seek to index the gas tax to inflation
7. Market the short zone to encourage ridership
8. Restructure the Providence Trolley, since this is duplicative service with other fixed routes. This duplication will be more significant when trolleys have the same fare as other fixed route services
9. Seek internal efficiencies and control overtime
10. Cancel all RIPTA service on Thanksgiving and Christmas that have traditionally been the days with the lowest ridership. Churches and taxis could meet transit needs on holidays.

Russell Gifford, a member of the Gray Panthers, stated his opposition to the fare increase because it would hurt the working poor.

Anthony Genzale, a Pawtucket resident, complimented RIPTA's friendly drivers and offered suggestions for improving operations and suggested that RIPTA advertise transit more. Mr. Genzale said that a fare increase should not be as large as going to \$1.50, \$1.35 would be better, and that RIPTA should consider creating a zone based fare system.

Patricia Robb expressed her concern that the proposed fare increase would affect ridership and supported Mr. Schiller's suggestions.

Senator Rhoda Perry opposes fare increases because of their impact on lower income people and on the city of Providence. She suggested that fares should be proportional to the time and distance of the trip, like the current lower cost of trolley fares, which provide an important service on short trips. Senator Perry noted that great cities have affordable and pervasive transit and Providence should strive for this quality of service. She recommended that RIPTA look for additional revenue from the governor and the legislature.

Representative Arthur Handy stated his opposition to increasing fares and his support for RIPTA's efforts to seek a long-term solution to provide adequate funding.

No written comments were provided.

Providence
Tuesday, December 21, 2004
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

On Tuesday, December 21, 2004, at the University of Rhode Island Feinstein Providence Campus Auditorium two (2) members of the public attended the evening hearing.

Oral comments were provided as follows:

Molly Clark, representing the American Lung Association and the Rhode Island Transit Collaborative, supported RIPTA's role in improving the environmental, social, health and welfare conditions of the state. She opposed fare increases, which would decrease ridership. Ms. Clark is glad that the cost of the monthly pass is not going up, but she is concerned that increases in the fares for individual trips will discourage infrequent riders and "choice" passengers, who have other options for travel. She does not think that the fare increase will solve the long-term funding needs for RIPTA.

Grant Dulgarian, of Ecology Action of Rhode Island, complimented RIPTA for the number of public hearings and for its efforts to maintain service. He is glad that we are not repeating the decline in service that occurred in the 1990's. Mr. Dulgarian proposed that fares be based on the distance traveled and that the fares be broken into three zones with fares ranging from \$1.00 and \$2.00. He also objected to the increases in the fare for the short zone and recommended that short zones be created in Woonsocket, Newport, Pawtucket and URI (Kingston).

No written comments were provided.