

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Virtual meeting: RIPTA Webex
Thursday, May 7, 2020

Participants: Rui Cabral (Chair), Jean Bousquet, Liza Burkin, John Carvalho, Paul Delpape, Monica Dzialo, Elisabeth Hubbard, Grace Pires, Heather Schey, Angela Stabile, Lisa Stamp, and Mark Susa.

RIPTA Staff: Nate Hannon, Sarah Ingle, Joelle Kanter, Chris McKenna, Greg Nordin, and Matthew Salisbury.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Rui Cabral called the ATAC meeting to order at 4:08 PM.

The March 5, 2020 meeting minutes were presented, but the committee postponed the vote to approve them.

II. Discussion about impact of COVID-19 on ATAC members

Committee members shared their experiences with public transportation since mid-March. Several noted that they have not taken Ride trips since they started working from home and/or their regular programs were canceled. A few mentioned that they've gotten rides from family members for essential trips. One said that he has left home to go to doctor's appointments, and he's used MTM. Another said that she has tried calling Uber or Lyft, but they haven't been available, so she's been walking instead.

A few commented on their experience with fixed route buses. One committee member has taken the Route #58 bus for essential shopping trips and was informed about the 15 passenger limit. Another reported that when the bus arrives at Stop & Shop in East Providence, it is often already at capacity. In one experience, two buses on Route #78 passed her on their way to Pawtucket, leaving her to walk home with her groceries.

A member who is currently working from home expressed concern about taking public transportation again when he does eventually go back to his office.

III. Update on RIPTA projects

Greg Nordin, RIPTA's chief of strategic advancement, commended everyone for adapting to the circumstances and joining the meeting. He shared the following updates.

- RIPTA's COVID-19 response: RIPTA is maintaining as much normalcy for riders as possible, despite the reduction in ridership. While some transit agencies have reduced their service levels, RIPTA has maintained its regular service schedule, and in some cases has expanded service to accommodate social distancing requirements that limit capacity on fixed route buses to 15 passengers.

RIPTA has intensified its cleaning protocols, focusing on high touch points throughout the day. Buses are also cleaned thoroughly every night. The Kennedy Plaza facility in downtown Providence and Newport Gateway and Pawtucket hubs will remain closed for the short term. RIPTA continues to work closely with the governor and state agencies on reopening plans to determine how the 3-step process will relate to public transportation.

- Downtown Transit Connector: Construction continues, and bus and bike lanes will be added in the next few weeks. The project should be complete by the end of June. Greg is reviewing feedback about the color contrast between the yellow tactile warning strips and the granite curb edge.
- WAVE fare technology: Beta testing has been underway for a few months, and mobile app testing began about two weeks ago. The WAVE program is expected to go live later this summer. RIPTA is still determining the best approach to incorporating RIder into the system, potentially utilizing new funding sources.
- Little Roady: Since the Little Roady autonomous shuttle operator, May Mobility, left Rhode Island in March, RIPTA has been operating paratransit service along the same route between the Providence train station and Olneyville. There are 23 trips/day with a 15 minute headway.

IV. Discussion about the Reveal app

Chris McKenna, paratransit quality assurance manager, reached out to Reveal in January to address concerns about the app. He relayed the request from clients to have their login information stored, but heard that the app will not be opened for development anytime soon. Paratransit riders noted specific glitches involving scheduled trips that appear on the website and IVR system but do not populate on the app. Chris will follow up on this issue.

V. Discussion about ADA paratransit user guide

This discussion will be postponed.

VI. RIPTA reports: KPIs

Greg Nordin announced that RIPTA ridership is down about 70% averaging 13,000 passenger boardings each day (compared to the typical 53,000—60,000 boardings per day). RIPTA is watching on-time performance closely since road conditions have changed, leading some buses to run early.

Chris McKenna gave an overview about paratransit ridership, noting that RIder is operating about 230 trips daily, which is a decrease of more than 1,000 trips from its typical volume. The sharp drop began around March 15th when schools were closed and continued further with the shelter at home orders at the end of March. The cancellation rate for scheduled trips is 27%, which is a significant increase from a normal rate of 15%.

In addition, paratransit shuttles now have a limit of 4 passengers.

Paratransit is also providing new services including transporting 32 employees/day to work at Honeywell in Smithfield, which produces N95 masks; providing meal delivery to 15 people through Meals on Wheels; and distributing meals from a company in Northern Rhode Island to senior centers. Some RIde operators have also shifted roles and are now assisted with vehicle cleaning.

VII. Feedback on RIPTA/RIde service

A discussion followed, focusing on a range of topics:

- Participants asked RIPTA staff to further elaborate on the 15 passenger limit on fixed route buses. Since buses can accommodate 35 passengers, this is less than 50% capacity.
- A request was made for additional buses on Route #78. RIPTA staff described the challenge of putting extra buses on the road, particularly because of staff shortages. Some RIde drivers are providing extra support by filling in gaps with supplemental service.
- The group discussed current conditions in Kennedy Plaza while the building remains closed.

RIPTA staff will send out a survey about the June meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 PM.