



2025 Service Cuts IMPACT REPORT

January 2026

SAVE RIPTA



INTRODUCTION

In the second half of 2024, the future seemed brighter for the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). The agency had the leadership of a new CEO, Chris Durand, and a new, strong advocacy community behind it, Save RIPTA, leading to a \$15 million one-time investment from the Rhode Island General Assembly. With these funds, the agency was able to cover its post-COVID, post-inflation budget gap as well as raise wages and change hiring and training processes to solve its worker shortage. Things were looking up — temporarily.

“ *My manager told me today that if this bus situation continues to cause lateness she will have to let me go... My alternate is rideshare... using it will cost me \$130 per week. ~ Tawana* ”

But like transit agencies across the United States, in January 2025, RIPTA was again facing a serious budgetary deficit. By the end of June, what began as a \$32.6 million funding gap left by Governor McKee’s FY2026 budget was reduced to \$17.6 million thanks to \$15 million in new **annual** support from the Rhode Island General Assembly. In the summer of 2025, RIPTA was then further able to reduce its deficit to \$10 million by locking in favorable diesel fuel prices and strong performance in its pension plan investments.

Unfortunately, RIPTA was still facing a major gap and was forced to propose devastating service cuts. Hundreds of riders, as well as dozens of business and municipal leaders vocally opposed the proposed cuts by speaking at public hearings, passing resolutions, attending rallies, writing op/eds and making calls to their elected leaders.

A much-delayed efficiency study, released on August 1, predictably concluded that RIPTA is an efficient operator of essential public transit service throughout the state. There was no way to prevent drastic cuts to transit service unless external stakeholders such as the Governor or State Legislature had chosen to intervene and fund RIPTA. Unlike Democratic state leaders in New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, they did not.

Instead, a “budgetary framework” by Governor McKee and RIPTA that relies heavily on nonexistent advertising dollars and borrowing against RIPTA’s own capital budget was agreed upon and implemented in late August. This agreement reduced the proposed service cuts but did not stop them entirely. **As a result, on September 27, 2025, the largest service reductions in the agency’s 59-year history went into place, affecting 45 out of 63 routes and reducing service by approximately 15% across the system. What follows in this report is the impact of those cuts on Rhode Island’s bus drivers and riders, who ultimately bear the burdens imposed by the lack of action by the State.**

On page 10, the Save RIPTA coalition presents our 2026 legislative package, which would restore and expand public transit service to connect our communities, support our local economy, improve our climate, and better support our students, seniors, workers, newcomers, businesses, differently abled, and everyone who would rather take a seat than get behind the wheel. We sincerely hope you will join us in fighting for it.

“ *A 2024 public opinion poll found 70% of respondents believe RIPTA is “a vital public service to all of the people and businesses of Rhode Island.”* ”
~ RI AFL-CIO

“ *While service reductions may seem to provide short-term savings, they will ultimately harm our local economy. Reduced access to jobs will hurt workers, fewer customers will impact small businesses, and young talent may choose to leave.* ~ Providence Foundation

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SERVICE CUT IMPACTS BY THE NUMBERS

All data presented here is publicly available or requested from RIPTA and analyzed by Save RIPTA staff and volunteers. See the Appendix Summary on page 11 for a list of data sources, and raw data on our website: pvdstreets.org/save-ripta.

Community Opposition

In the summer of 2025, a total of **12** public hearings on service cuts were held across the state. **645** riders and community members attended and spoke for over **11.2** hours, with an additional **589** oral and written comments submitted to RIPTA opposing the proposed cuts, including **20** Town and City leaders.

Service Hours Lost

Despite community opposition, on September 27, 2025, new schedules went into effect with **113,684** annual hours of service lost. This includes:

- **13%** of weekday service
- **20%** of Saturday service
- **22%** of Sunday service

Frequency Lost

The number of RIPTA routes that meet RIPTA's **lowest minimum frequency standard** of running at least hourly, seven days a week, dropped from **33/63** to **21/63** following the cuts.

Financial Efficiency Lost

According to RIPTA's budgets, with much of their staffing overhead remaining the same, it now ironically costs **29% more** to deliver each hour of bus service than before the cuts.

Figure 1: Town-by-Town Service Cuts Map

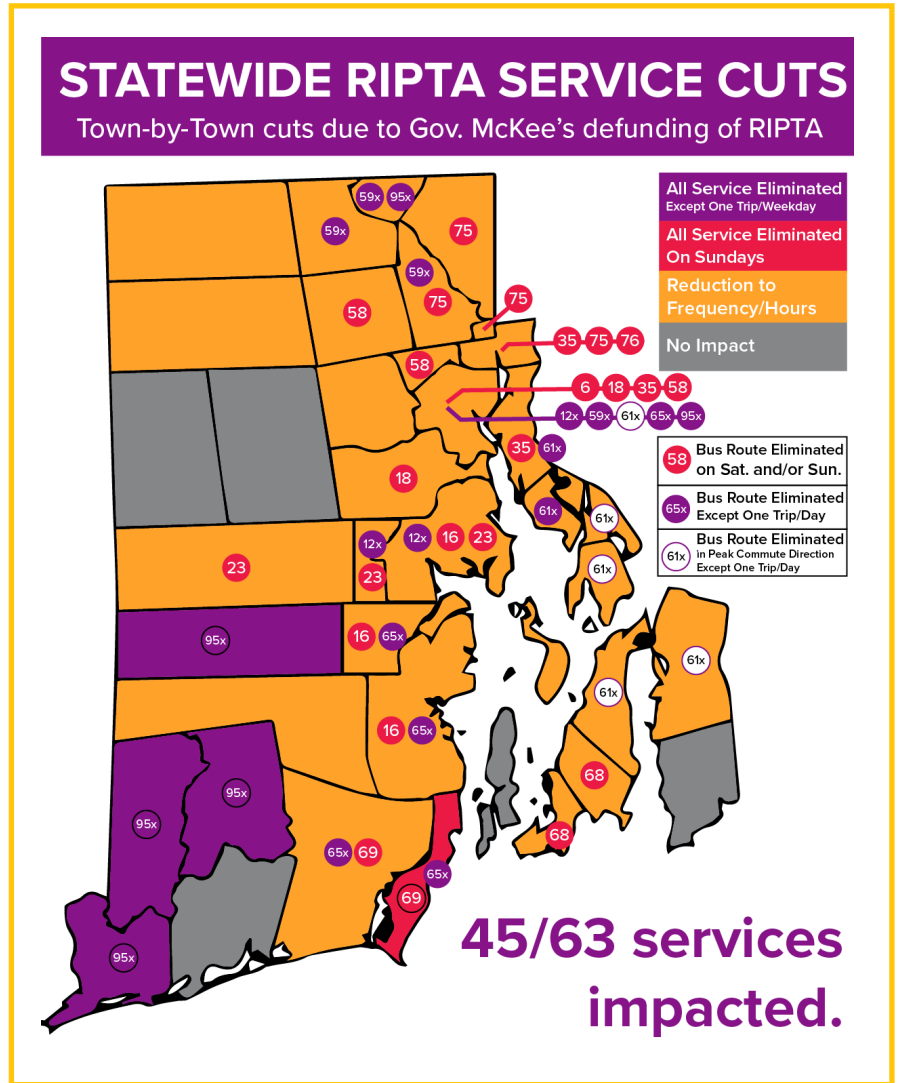
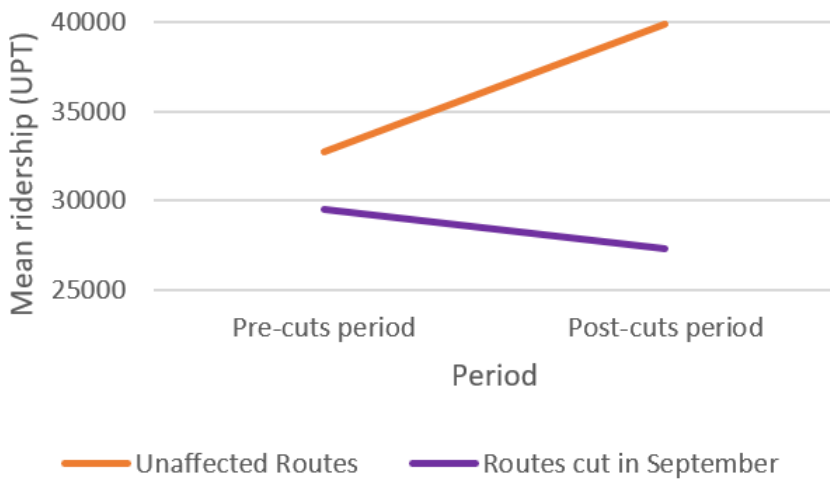


Table 1: Service Hour Cost Comparison, 2024-2025

	Annual Budget	Service Hours	Cost per Service Hour
RIPTA FY 2025 actual budget	\$139,398,833	761,080	\$183.16
RIPTA FY 2026 revised budget	\$153,251,929	647,396	\$236.72

“ I work on a gillnetting fishing boat in Galilee and make \$1500 approx. every day I work, so by missing 2 days of work, RIPTA is costing me \$3000 every weekend. [The Governor is] leaving tons of commercial fishermen stranded in Galilee all weekend. ~ Jason ”

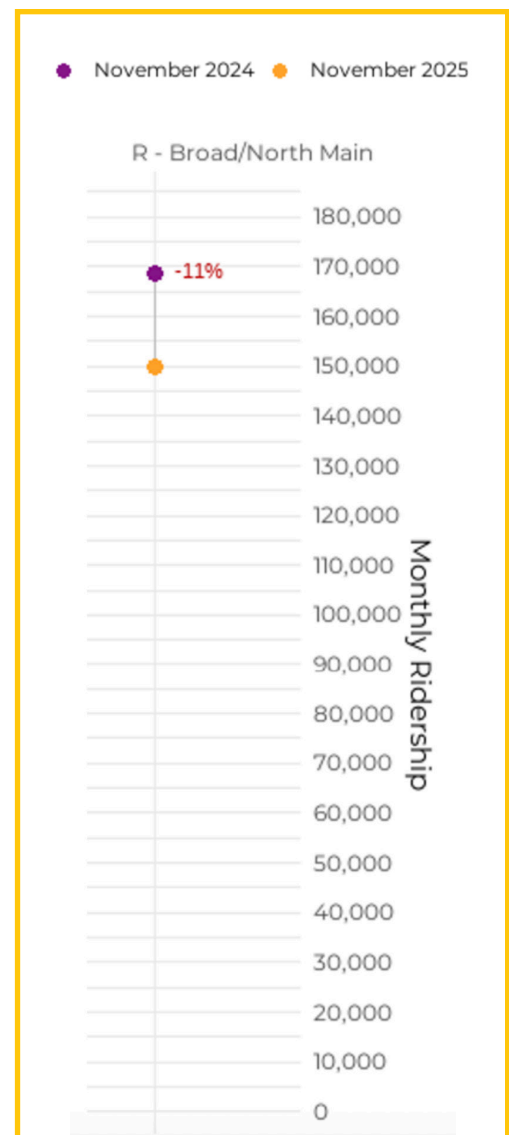
Figure 2: Change in Mean Ridership From Pre-Cuts Period (Jan 2024-Sept 2025) to Post-Cuts Period (Oct-Nov 2025) for non-express lines that serve Kennedy Plaza.



All throughout the summer of 2025, bus riders and Save RIPTA coalition members rallied against the proposed service cuts.



Figure 3: R-Line Ridership Changes, November 2024-November 2025

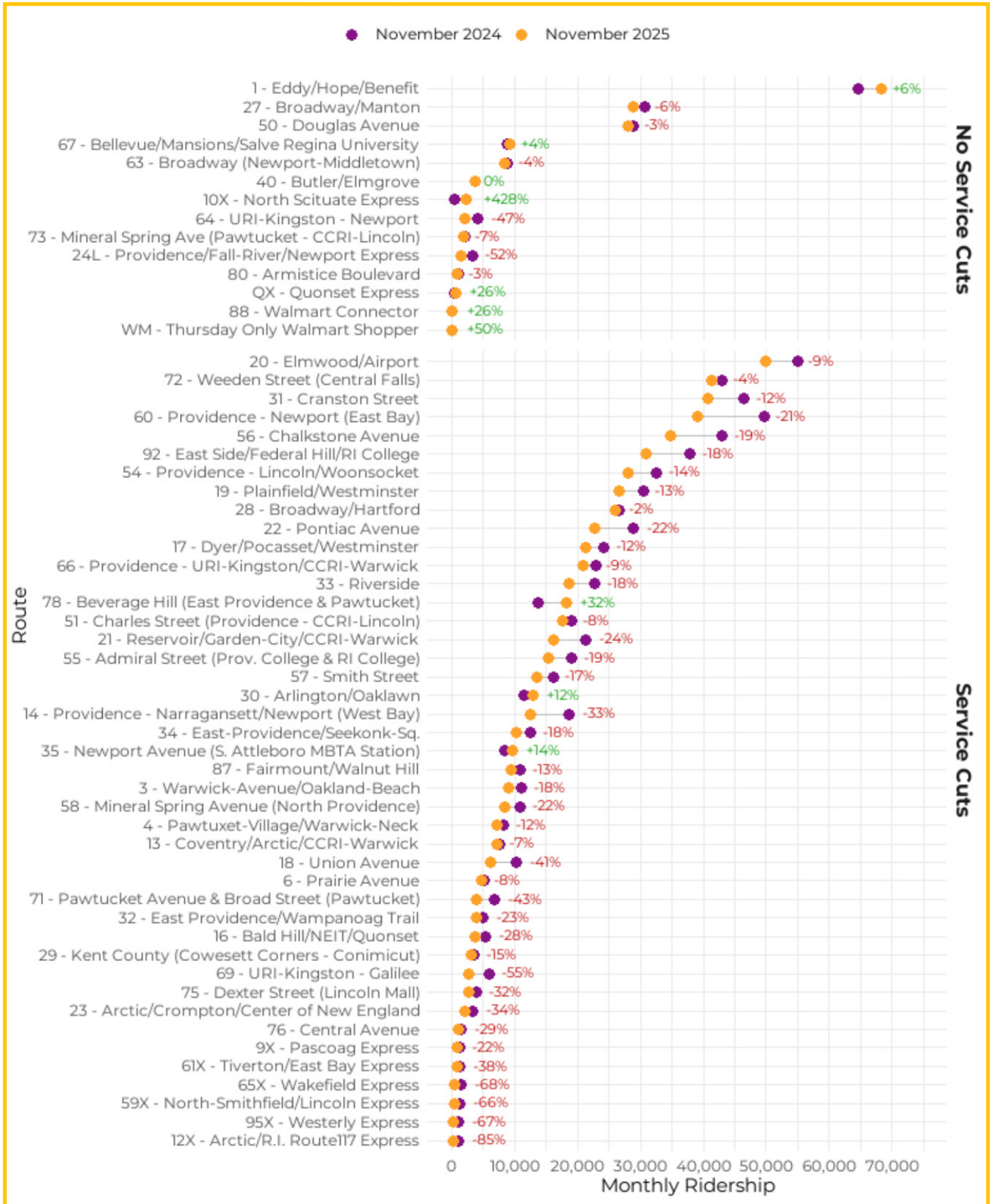


Ridership Lost

- Before the cuts (Jan 2024-Sept 2025), **81%** of RIPTA routes were gaining ridership; after the cuts **75%** were losing ridership. Not a single route with weekday service cuts saw an increase in ridership (Figure 2).
- Of all non-express routes servicing Kennedy Plaza, those that received service cuts experienced a **17%** reduction in monthly ridership, equivalent to roughly 5,000 fewer passenger trips per month, compared to routes that did not receive service cuts.
- Across the entire fixed route system, ridership between November 2024 and 2025 decreased sharply by about **-12.1%** or **125,792** monthly trips (Figures 3 and 4).
- Every time a route’s frequency is reduced by half, ridership decreases by **-27.44%**
- The routes **with service cuts** collectively saw **-14%** ridership (-4,033 avg daily riders)
- The routes **without service cuts** collectively saw **-0.5%** ridership (-26 avg daily riders)
- For Express Bus routes only, the routes **with service cuts** saw **-57%** ridership (-132 avg daily)
- Express bus routes **without service cuts** saw **+6%** (+8 avg daily)

“ I’m a 15-year-old student at Mount Pleasant High, and I take the buses every day and it’s been harder now because there aren’t many buses. I’ve arrived so late to class that it’s affecting my grades simply because the buses are taking more time and I have to wake up much earlier than I should have to, and what’s more it’s making it harder to pay attention in my classes. ~ Maria ”

Figure 4: RIPTA Ridership Changes, November 2024-November 2025



RIDER IMPACTS

The following survey responses were received between September 2 and December 21, 2025 in response to a solicitation by the Providence Streets Coalition through posts on social media, posters at bus stops, and a banner alert on the Transit App. A total of 263 unique responses were collected through the survey, which can be accessed on the Save RIPTA website. A small number of additional responses sent directly to RIPTA customer service were obtained through a public records request. Our analysis showed that **3.6% of respondents lost their jobs directly due to service cuts, 8% had their work hours reduced, and 30% feel at risk of losing employment.** The responses below are being shared with the full permission of each passenger.



“I rely on the 69 to go to the grocery store, library, pharmacy, and other places with my 8-year-old son. I do not have a car because of my disabilities. The 69 does not run on weekends at all anymore. This is a big issue for us because now we can’t go to church or anywhere else. Sometimes we liked to visit family in Cranston and Providence on the weekends, now we can’t do that because there is no way to get to bus 66. We are literally stuck at home every weekend. I would like to take my son out to places like the zoo, museum, beach, park, library, and other fun places on weekends so I can give him a fun childhood. It’s impossible now.” ~ **Shimei, South Kingstown**

“I live in East Providence, and every weekday morning, I have to get to my hourly-paying job in Warwick by 8:30am. Now, because of these bus cuts, I have to leave my house at 7am to catch a different bus at a farther location, AND I now also need to leave my job 40 minutes early every evening because of the earlier bus times--which is cutting out time AND pay from my hourly job. Governor McKee’s cuts aren’t merely causing me an inconvenience--they’re burning money away from my valuable paychecks.”
~ **Barry, East Providence**



“Since they’ve reduced the number of trips per hour, I’m much more limited in my university plans, limiting the time I can spend with classmates to study or work. Another problem with the reduction in bus schedules is that the buses are now much more crowded, and there isn’t enough room for everyone to sit, which can be dangerous for some people. This forces me to arrive at the bus stop much earlier to secure a seat, which further limits my schedule and reduces my time to study.”
~ **Mariana, Cumberland**



“I work in retail and often work overtime past store hours, and due in large part to these changes I have stopped using RIPTA entirely and now solely rely on my own electric bike, or rideshare.

This change from RIPTA and the Rhode Island government and the inconvenience that it has caused to its citizens and users was the last straw. Change needs to be made. Limiting the availability of public transportation means that citizens who avidly commute via bus will have less access and will be faced with more struggle. E-bikes are cost effective and aid in giving me a routine, but the roads are more dangerous and difficult to navigate, and take longer in some cases.”

~ Mario, Cranston

TOP RIDER IMPACT THEMES:

- Lost wages and jobs/risk of firing
- Lost/threatened educational opportunities & impacted school attendance
- Unaffordable transportation alternatives (Uber/Lyft)
- Stranded by weekend eliminations
- Longer, worse, more unreliable commutes and impossible RIPTA to MBTA connections
- Denied boarding and unsafe conditions due to overcrowding
- Lost/threatened medical appointments and civic opportunities
- Worsening social structures/safety nets
- Increased driving congestion

“I take bus 22 which ran every 35 minutes previously, and conveniently got me and my child to daycare and work within 20 minutes of my shift starting and ending. With the new routes, I have to opt to be either an hour early to work or 30 minutes late, and have to leave 10 minutes before my shift ends to make it home. If i miss that bus I have to wait an hour after my shift ends for the next one. I travel DAILY with a child and stroller, and the new morning route makes it almost impossible to find seating for myself and my child that accommodates my stroller.”

~ Shakira, Providence



“My family of four has one car, and we use RIPTA to supplement when one of us has the car. The service cuts have made it harder to get to the commuter rail station, harder to run errands, and added frustration to our lives. I’m so disappointed in our leadership, especially the Governor.” ~ Rory, Providence

RIPTA DRIVER IMPACTS

The following survey responses were received between November 14 and November 25, 2025 in response to a solicitation by the Providence Streets Coalition through an Amalgamated Transit Union Local 618 member meeting and internal union communications channels. A total of 33 unique responses were collected through the survey. Personal details of drivers are not being shared to maintain privacy.

1. Since going into effect on September 27, have the service cuts caused any of the following impacts?

- Shortened your recovery time - **88%**
 - Made it harder to eat - **88%**
 - Made it harder to go to the bathroom - **88%**
 - Made working at RIPTA more mentally and physically difficult - **73%**
 - Made you think about resigning - **52%**
 - Made you think about retiring - **46%**
-

2. How often are you passing people because your bus is full?

- Multiple times a day - **42%**
- About once a day - **28%**
- About once a week - **14%**
- Never - **9%**
- Other - **7%**

70%

of bus drivers are leaving riders stranded at least once a day because of overcrowded buses

3. How often are you running late now?

- Multiple times a day - **85%**
- About once a day - **6%**
- Never - **3%**
- Other - **6%**

91%

of bus drivers are running late at least once every day

On Passenger Frustration and other Service Cut Impacts:

“People complain to us all day long we get mistreated yell at because they think we have something to do with it .. people are getting aggressive to the point that some of us feel in danger not secured at work.”

“Too many people on the bus can’t fit walkers and wheelchairs.”

“Passengers are complaining of being stranded with out service on weekends. Connecting buses don’t line up like before and waiting longer for the next bus. Now that it’s getting colder out it will be worse.”

“We are meant to be safe, reliable and efficient. When people can’t get to the doctors, shop and work and when drivers can’t eat or have basic human needs met, we are no longer safe reliable or efficient. Much longer waiting times and to add extra time for basic human rights such as relieving your bladder makes passengers who are already aggravated beyond angry. Drivers are being verbally abused because of this. Passengers are missing connecting buses that are hard enough to connect with. This affects everyone. Drivers, passengers, supervisors, dispatch, – everyone.”



“I’m afraid now my job with Ripta does not make my life with my family comfortable so I have to look for another job to cover all the expense.”

“Drivers are not machines, they need time to eat take a walk and have a drink.”

“With these cuts our jobs are more stressful and very unhealthy for us. Not enough time to take our breaks to go to the bathroom or to eat, which I get out of the seat to be able to move our bodies around, cutting off our circulation and hurting our bodies from being in the seat for too long of a period.”

“I’m increasingly worried about the difficulties the public faces when trying to get to work. It seems like congestion and lack of space are getting worse, making it even harder for people to commute.”

“We need to work for the people of Rhode Island and students from other States.”

“Full bus and traffic making passengers frustrated. All I can do is try to make the bus ride efficient as possible.”

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: GETTING OFF THE TRANSIT DEATH SPIRAL

In a 2023 interview with NPR, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority General Manager Randy Clarke explained the crisis currently facing public transit systems across the country, including RIPTA.

Deep cuts to service, said Clarke, mean “service, as we know it, does not exist. Which then leads to less revenue for the system... Which then leads to more cuts... And the whole thing falls apart.”

Public transportation in the United States – especially in Rhode Island – has never been adequately funded. Yet since the COVID-19 pandemic permanently changed commuting patterns and inflation increased the cost of everything, transit advocates and professionals across the country have called the transit fiscal cliff a potential “death spiral.”

On September 27, 2025, the State of Rhode Island forced RIPTA into this spiral. Additionally, Governor McKee’s current proposal to increase fares will only make things worse by further reducing ridership, thus wiping out any potential financial gains. Numerous studies on fare elasticity demand, including RIPTA’s own 2025 efficiency study, make this clear.

The good news is, **we can still get out of the death spiral and into a virtuous cycle of growth and sustainability.** The Save RIPTA Coalition and our wonderful allies in the General Assembly have a different prescription for the system: our leaders can not only restore and preserve the current system, but actually **expand** RIPTA service to be the reliable, convenient, safe, affordable, and environmentally conscious option for more of our residents and visitors.

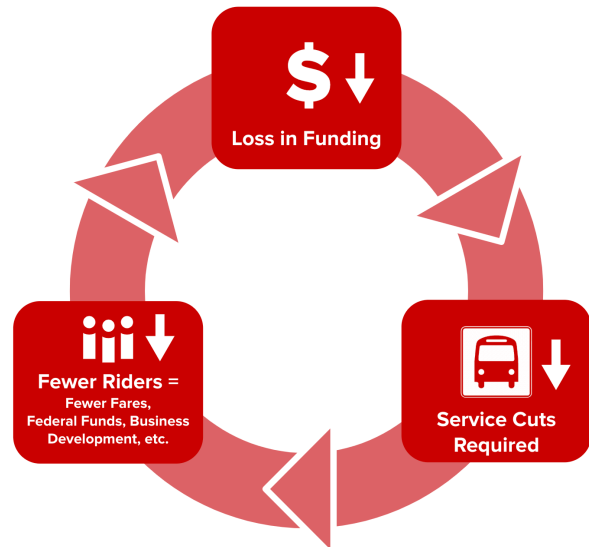
This is a politically popular idea: a 2024 poll commissioned by the RI AFL-CIO and conducted by Fleming & Associates found that 65% of voters have a favorable opinion of RIPTA, and **70% believe RIPTA is “a vital public service to all of the people and businesses of Rhode Island.”**

Passing the package of bills on the following page is the first step towards riding together towards a better future. Why? Because **adequately funding RIPTA will ensure Rhode Islanders have access to their communities, regardless of the day of the week or time of day. A robust, efficient, and accessible transit system delivers far-reaching benefits that ripple through the entire community, regardless of whether you ever step onto a bus yourself.**

“ **Accessible, reliable public transportation is a critical component in uplifting our communities and connecting residents to jobs, supporting small businesses, and keeping Rhode Island’s economy moving. Reducing public transit service will harm workers, employers, and the overall vitality of the state.** ~ RI Hospitality Association ”

“ **Transportation is a major concern for many in our state. The bus routes support our members, provide good paying manufacturing jobs with benefits. This situation hurts the worker and the employer if they cannot get to their jobs.** ~ RI Manufacturer’s Association ”

Figure 5: The RIPTA “death spiral”



RESTORING, SUSTAINING, AND EXPANDING SERVICE: 2026 DRAFT SAVE RIPTA LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE

1. \$5 million Budget Allocation [McKenney/Alzate]

\$5 million budget allocation in FY '27 budget to restore the 2025 service cuts.

2. *Increase RIPTA's share of the Highway Maintenance Account to 20% [/Cortvriend]*

Increases RIPTA's share of Highway Maintenance Account funds from 10% to 20%. An 80/20 split for surface transportation funding between highways and mass transit has been the standard in Congress since 1982. Estimated annual revenue to RIPTA: \$10 million.

***top priority bill**

3. Rideshare Sales Tax Reallocation [Britto/Stewart]

Allocates the current 7% sales tax collected on all Uber/Lyft rides to RIPTA's Ride Anywhere operational budget. Estimated annual revenue to RIPTA: \$10-\$15M.

4. Commuter Transportation Benefits Act [Bissailion/Hull]

Requires any company with 500 or more employees to provide transit passes to employees as a pre-tax transportation fringe benefit, to generate more revenue for RIPTA via its Wave to Work program. Estimated annual revenue to RIPTA: TBD.

5. Transit Master Plan Bond Referenda [Vargas/Tanzi]

Puts forward a bond for \$100M in Capital Improvements for implementation of the 2026 Transit Master Plan. Capital assets would include updated technology to grow ridership and improve fare collection, bus stop improvements and safety, and infrastructure for high capacity transit lines. Would not be used to fund the proposed downtown Transit Center.

6. Car Inspection Fee Increase [Vargas/]

Raises the standard inspection fee on personal cars and motorcycles, with the increase going to the Highway Maintenance Account. The last increase was in 2014. Estimated annual revenue to RIPTA: TBD.

7. RIPTA Board Restructuring [Mack/Tanzi]

Reverses the 2023 law making the Director of RIDOT the Board Chair of RIPTA, and updates, clarifies, and strengthens other Board appointment guidelines. Not a revenue bill.

8. Motor Fuel Tax – Index Allocation to RIPTA to Inflation and Two-year Inflation Rate [Zurier/Stewart]

Indexes RIPTA's 2025 share of gas tax revenues (29%) to inflation and changes how the gas tax is impacted by inflation. Currently, the tax is only evaluated and increased against inflation every two years using the previous year's inflation rate. The bill would adjust that so the increase would take into consideration the rate of inflation over the full two years, increasing the total amount of gas tax collected, and thus the amount RIPTA receives.

APPENDIX SUMMARY

The following sources of data were used to produce this report. Data and analysis is available on our website at pvdstreets.org/save-ripta.

1. Save RIPTA Directly Impacted Rider Survey: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScw-pQkuTV0kR0gwFEUrPAIP_dwWiaa4H2_LZCdAf4e5FKtKA/viewform?usp=dialog
2. Save RIPTA Driver Impact Survey: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeTHEpC2G-caRgVSnJHKgTxPC9kAsIFGRxQAODRgXtvcoYrYbA/viewform?usp=header>
3. Municipal letters/resolutions: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tEzDRDFK8n7sNuwp07TDbPb7ok15BGsD?usp=sharing>
4. RIPTA Annual Financial Plan: 2026-2031: <https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/RIPTA-FY27-budget-submission.pdf>
5. Data Analysis and sources for various figures and statistics are accessible in this spreadsheet: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WT_1IPUIP4sOGq3dZdml582SPzuNHR-kpcawxVOLKg4/edit?usp=sharing
 - Includes percent service lost in each municipality in “Figure 1 Map Appendix”.
 - Includes community opposition analysis
 - Includes changes in Service Hours pre/post cuts “Service Reduction Proposal 2”, requested from RIPTA.
 - Includes 2024/2025 RIPTA Ridership Data, provided by RIPTA
 - Includes cost per hour changes
 - Includes routes that pass/fail RIPTA frequency standards
6. Data Analysis and sources for various figures and statistics are accessible in this spreadsheet: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1R1NHfd5CinjrSCOL6kddCiVMqFqsT6T8dQEHk03sOuE/edit?usp=sharing>
 - Includes route-by-route ridership loss regressions (controlled for existing ridership trends)
 - Includes survey encoded responses and statistics analysis
7. RIPTA Operational Efficiency Report: https://www.ripta.com/sites/default/files/2025-11/RIPTA_Operational_Efficiency_Study_FINAL.pdf
8. RIPTA Public Hearings Meeting Minutes: <https://www.ripta.com/publichearings>
9. 2024 AFL-CIO poll: available upon request
10. NPR interview with Randy Clarke: <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/15/1212879398/public-transit-ridership-down-covid-pandemic-death-spiral>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was co-authored by a consortium of public transit academics and professionals affiliated with the Providence Streets Coalition, Brown University, Transit Matters and Amalgamated Transit Union Local 618: Liza Burkin, Dylan Giles, Cedric Ye, Maddock Thomas, Ethan McIntosh, Ethan Joyce, Nicole O'Loughlin, and Vinh Pham.

The top image on the first page was taken by Steve Ahlquist. All other images were taken by Liza Burkin, Dylan Giles, and Nicole O'Loughlin.

Huge thanks to all of our Save RIPTA partners, elected allies, volunteers, and sponsors, and the hardworking public servants at RIPTA. Onwards!





ABOUT SAVE RIPTA

Founded in 2023, the Save RIPTA campaign is a broad coalition of community organizations, labor unions, legislative champions and everyday Rhode Islanders who are calling upon our state leaders to save and expand RIPTA. The backbone organization of the campaign is the Providence Streets Coalition, a registered 501(c)(4) social welfare organization.

Members include:

Labor Unions/Groups:

- Amalgamated Transit Union Local 618
- Climate Jobs Rhode Island
- LiUNA Local 808
- RI AFL-CIO
- RI Committee on Occupational Safety and Health
- SEIU Local 1199

Community Organizations:

- AARP Rhode Island
- Climate Action Rhode Island
- Community Libraries of Providence
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Economic Progress Institute
- Groundwork Rhode Island
- Haus of Codec

- Lefty Loosey Bike Collective
- Progreso Latino
- Providence Preservation Society
- Providence Student Union
- Rhode Island Association of Railroad Passengers
- Rhode Island Environmental Education Association
- Rhode Island Housing Network of RI
- Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty
- Rhode Island Organizing Project
- Rhode Island Transit Riders
- Trinity Square Together
- West Broadway Neighborhood Association
- Women's Fund of RI
- Young Voices Rhode Island

Learn more, join us, and get involved:
PVDStreets.org/Save-RIPTA