

BETTER TRANSIT NOW

Effective advocacy tools and tips for community groups and neighborhood associations seeking better transit for accessing all of life's essentials.



Made Possible By:



United Way of Rhode Island



Presented By:



GrowSmartRI
Sustainable Economic Growth
& Quality of Place

This guide is for all those who want to improve public transit in their community or neighborhoods across Rhode Island. By getting involved, advocates can make a positive difference in their own community, helping neighbors gain better, more convenient access to work, school, stores, family & friends, economic opportunity and all of life's essentials.

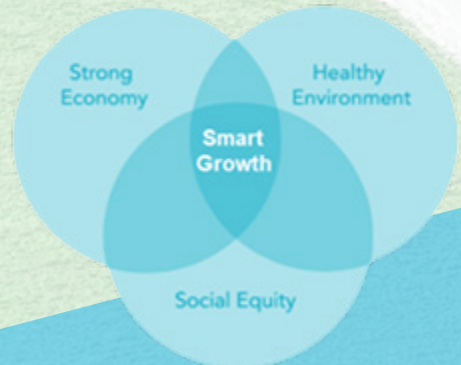
This Advocacy Guide Will Help You Learn How To:

- Advocate for better transit in a meaningful way
- Advocate for funding and swift implementation of the Rhode Island Transit Master Plan
- Contribute your input and local knowledge to transportation decisions
- Connect with decision-makers and other organizations

A Word from Grow Smart RI

Grow Smart RI is a non-profit public interest group representing a broad coalition of organizations and concerned citizens committed to strengthening and growing Rhode Island's economy in a sustainable and equitable way. At Grow Smart RI, we're in the business of creating long-term systemic change that improves people's lives by improving neighborhoods & communities. We advocate for policies that reflect our commitment to the three E's of Economy, Equity and Environment.

A prime example includes our lead role in advocating for an improved public transportation system that better connects people to all of life's essentials: work, school, medical appointments, shopping, visiting family and that gets more residents where they're going quickly and with dignity and affordability, while providing help to reduce climate changing emissions.



CONTENTS

- Rhode Island's Transit Master Plan
- Making Connections: Who Are the Key Players
- The Advocacy Process
- Decide What You Want
- Coalition Building
- Developing a Campaign and Action Plan
- Presenting Your Request
- Engaging the Media
- Appendix
-

Overview of TransitForward RI 2040

What Is the TransitForward RI 2040?

TransitForward RI 2040 is Rhode Island's adopted Vision and Master Plan for reimagining a 21st century transit system for Rhode Island that was adopted by the State Planning Council on December 10, 2020. It's a bold and ambitious plan designed to help make Rhode Island a better and more prosperous place to live, work, and play.

Why should I be an advocate if there's already a Transit Master Plan (TMP)?

Let's be clear! The Transit Master Plan is simply a vision and a set of recommendations. It still requires funding and time to implement. Therefore, all concerned need to make their voices heard on what should be prioritized first for your neighborhood and your community!



Five Broad Recommendations:

Improve Existing Services

A major focal point is to provide more frequent service for longer hours, including the development of a Frequent Transit Network to provide frequent services to the state's major destinations, faster and more frequent Providence Line service, and more.

Expand Services to New Areas

These improvements will include new local services, new crosstown routes, new service partnerships, an Amtrak station at TF Green Airport, and new Flex service to, from, and within the Quonset Industrial Park.

Develop High Capacity Transit

Rapid Bus, Bus Rapid Transit, and Light Rail would make transit in high-demand areas much more attractive by making it frequent, fast, and reliable.

Improve Access to Transit

Transit Forward RI will provide more and better options to get to and from transit comfortably and safely.

Make Service Easier

RIPTA and RIDOT will adopt new technologies and methods to make service easier to use, including easier fare payment and better integration of available services.



Making Connections: Who are the Key Players?

When preparing to make a difference improving transit in your neighborhood or community, you'll first need to know what improvements your neighbors value most and then build support for your cause. Know who the decision makers are, as well as other key allies to improve your chances of success.

This section outlines the roles of state and city government, neighborhood associations, and community organizations so that you as an advocate can optimize your advocacy effectiveness.

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA)

The quasi state agency created in 1964 that manages Rhode Island's statewide public transportation system. It is governed by a board of directors that are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the State Senate.



RIPTA's Mission is to provide safe, reliable and cost effective transit service with a skilled team of professionals responsive to our customers, the environment, and committed to transit excellence. RIPTA led the process of developing Rhode Island's first-ever transit vision and master plan, which was adopted by the State Planning Council in December, 2020.

The RIPTA Board accepts public comment at every monthly meeting!



RI State Planning Council

The State Planning Council adopts goals and policies related to planning, most of which are contained within individual plans, which are elements of the State Guide Plan. The Council has been designated as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation planning purposes and, as such, the Council adopts the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), a ten-year budgeted program of transportation investments. The body also advises the Governor on strategic planning matters.

The Council accepts public comment at every monthly meeting!

Office of Governor Dan McKee

The Office of Governor Dan McKee holds broad Executive Branch Authority over agencies in state government including RIPTA, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, the State Planning Council, among others. The Governor's Constituent Service Office provides an opportunity for dialogue with the Governor about the functions of all state agencies, including RIPTA.



RI Transportation Advisory Committee

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) is a sub-committee of the State Planning Council and provides it with advice on transportation planning and encourages public involvement in the process. The TAC reviews and provides input into the transportation planning documents that are the responsibility of the State Planning Council, notably the Long-Range Transportation Plan and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

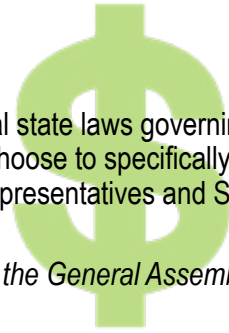
The Committee accepts public comment at every monthly meeting!



The State Legislature

The General Assembly holds the authority to pass, amend or repeal state laws governing transportation. The legislature determines the State Budget and can choose to specifically allocate funding, for example, to implement the state's Transit Master Plan. Representatives and Senators in the General Assembly are there to serve YOU, their constituents.

Using your address, you can connect with your representatives in the General Assembly [HERE](#).



Your City or Town Council Members

City and Town Councils have decision making authority at the local level. This means if you're advocating for dedicated bus lanes on municipally owned roads, or if you're advocating for the development of a Mobility Hub (one of the Transit Master Plan strategies), you'll want to engage your local Council representatives to earn their support.

Your City or Town Planning Board

The general purpose of a municipal Planning Board is to provide for and guide the orderly growth and development of the community. This is accomplished primarily through development of a municipal Comprehensive Community Plan and providing advice to a city or town council on matters pertaining to the management of land use including housing, transportation, public facilities, economic development, open space and natural resources affecting the health, safety, morale and general welfare of the people and the economy and efficiency of community life.



The Advocacy Process

Community stakeholders like you are central to our theory of change. In Rhode Island, people are power. Community organizing is a way of identifying and mobilizing like-minded people to act collectively.



Decide What You Want



Remain Impatient



Build A Coalition



Be Persistent



Present Your Requests



TIP-STOP

Connect with other activists: Grow Smart RI is building a statewide network of people just like you. Join the email listserv to share best practices, celebrate one another's success, learn from others and collaborate on statewide advocacy.



Decide What You Want

Improve Existing Services

See TMP p. 11

- More frequent service, longer hours of service, improved weekend service
- Transit Priority Lanes and technology to make service run faster
- More frequent and faster express bus service
- Flex Service Improvements, on-demand scheduling
- Improved frequency of commuter rail service to Boston and South County

Expand Service to New Areas

See TMP p. 21

- Bus services to more places people go and new crosstown bus routes
- Wickford/Quonset Flex service
- A Mobility Hub in your community that integrates other forms of transportation
- Expanded seasonal and special event services

Develop High-Capacity Transit

See TMP p. 29

- Rapid Bus
- The R-Line is currently RIPTA's only Rapid Bus service
- Six other Rapid Bus lines would be developed
- Regional Rapid Bus
- Light Rail and Bus Rapid Transit

Improve Access to Transit

See TMP p. 35

- Paratransit and non-medical emergency transportation
- Walking/Pedestrian and Bicycling Improvements
- Driving/Park and Ride Lots and Passenger Drop-Off and Pick-up Areas
- Transportation Management Associations and Employer Shuttles
- Rideshare Partnerships
- Microtransit

Make Service Easier to Use

See TMP p. 41

- Fare Capping / Fare-less Transit
- Better Information and Signage
- Fare Integration with other regional service providers, such as the MBTA
- Implementation of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) platforms

Coalition Building

A key strategy for getting what you want is working others in your community who have an interest in the same thing. There's power in numbers and diversity. You may want to effect change but lack the time, resources, or political power to accomplish it on your own. Working together, groups can accomplish much more than each could alone.

Construct your Power Wheel

Take time to identify all the other groups you know who might join forces with you and yours to support your goals.



Developing a Campaign and Action Plan

This Section describes how to activate a network of key players from your neighborhood to the State House. The strategy chart helps you think about what it is that you want to accomplish (Goals), the resources you have to work with, who your partners are (Allies and Constituents), who you need to persuade to deliver what you're requesting (Decision makers), and what you and your coalition will need to do to get results.

Goals	Resources	Allies Constituents	Decision Makers	Tactics
Short Term				
Mid Term				
Long Term				



Set a Goal:

Choose goals with a reasonable chance of success. This will allow you to build a strong network of supporters and form the lasting relationships with other stakeholders.



Access Resources:

List the resources you have to influence decision maker. These can include your time, your neighbors' energy or skills, the ability to print materials, etc. (e.g. "two hours per week of my time", or "Rochelle's printer to print 100 flyers". One goal of the strategy chart is to be realistic about what you have at your disposal, so you can leverage your resources as efficiently as possible.



Identify Your Targets:

While your end goal is to win over decision makers, your targets should also include those who can influence them. Build a list of those individuals or committees in key decision maker roles. Follow the calendars and agendas of relevant committees and identify where there is opportunity to provide public comment, or seek an opportunity to present your request on the committee's agenda.



List Your Tactics:

Tactics are action that you and your partners take to convince your target audience to do what you want. Tactics include petitions, coalition letters, one-on-one meetings with your target, rallies and press coverage.

Presenting Your Request

Sample Coalition Letter



CONTACT:

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July 27, 2022

Dear Candidates for The Office of Governor of Rhode Island,

We, the 36 undersigned organizations, call on Rhode Island's next Governor to make bold changes to bring our state's transportation infrastructure into the 21st century.

Rhode Island's outdated transportation system is failing to keep pace with the needs of our residents, our economy and our planet. We believe that Rhode Islanders deserve a transportation system that provides for their diverse mobility needs, reduces air pollution, improves local economic development, supports affordable housing development, and cuts greenhouse gas emissions.

Develop a Pitch



Introduction:

Think about the best way to introduce yourself. Tell who you are, and provide some very basic information about the neighborhood or service routes where you most want to see improved transit and how.



Action:

You should have an “Ask” or specific request – this could include signing on to your coalition letter, signing a petition, or coming to a meeting. Make your ask clear and get people to join you.



State the Problem:

What’s wrong with the status quo transit? Does it not get you where you need to go in a reasonable time? Is it not reliable or do the service hours end too early?



Urgency:

Why should your audience act on this now? Is a lack of funding going to cause disruptive service cuts, cutting you off from your job?



Solution:

What’s the solution you’re proposing? Is it adequate funding to maintain or enhance service? Is it earlier or later hours of service?



Personal Story:

Close with your personal motivation for working on this issue. Your story doesn’t have to be directly related to the issue at hand – it just has to help connect people to you and your cause for better transit.

Present to elected or appointed officials, community boards

This can be an informal coffee meeting with your representative on the city council or in the state legislature. Remember that YOU are their constituent.

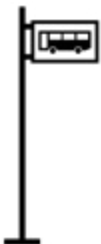
Timing is everything. The best time to engage an elected official is general once you already have a base of community support. Demonstrating that key players in the community support your initiative will show the elected official that it's safe to sign on to your effort.

Be yourself, but be prepared. Making your pitch concisely with a direct and clear 'ask' will help you stand out from the crowd and demonstrate that you respect the decision maker's time.

The power of We. If possible, bring others from other groups who support your initiative. Have each mention the number of people, businesses, etc. that they represent to demonstrate the influence they wield in the community.

Always have an "Ask." Remember to always close a meeting with a specific request. An effective request will be realistic and concrete. And ask should be actionable, specific and reasonable. Signing on to a letter, recruiting their colleagues to co-sponsor a bill, or approve the installation of a bus shelter in your neighborhood.

When presenting to public bodies, remember to keep it brief. Encourage your group members to make impassioned remarks, but to keep them short. Fill the room if you can, but make sure no one drones on, especially if they're repeating what others have said. If someone else said what you wanted to say, simply say that you second their point.



TIP-STOP

Make it easier for you and your group: Use the resources and templates in the digital appendix where you'll find sample letters, links to others' public comments to decision makers, and ways to connect with your government representatives.

Engage the Media

Media can be a helpful tool to raise the profile of your issue, recruit new activists and hold public officials accountable for supporting your cause.

Get to know the journalists that cover transportation in your local and statewide news media.

Make an Impact: News outlets looking to cover events or topics love stories that have a strong visual message. It helps attract reporters illustrate a story for them.

Have data ready: Be prepared to provide as much data as practical to demonstrate your point (e.g. buses along X route stop at 9PM leaving second shift workers without a ride home, or the trip time for workers to travel from Central Falls to manufacturing jobs at Quonset is 1 hour, 35 minutes one-way).

Leverage conflict: While it's important to begin running a positive campaign, a journalist's job is to identify opposing views on a topic. Don't be afraid to expose conflicting opinions. For example, a recent and popular move to eliminate the local car tax now means the State of Rhode Island budgets \$230 million annually to reimburse local municipalities for stopping the practice. Yet, State decision makers still have not allocated funding to implement the state-approved Transit Master Plan. How is that equitable for those who rely on public transit?

A Personal Touch: Reporters know that readers respond to a personal story. Do your best to find a person with a powerful story to speak with a reporter on behalf of your initiative. Or, tell your own personal story – it's probably more relevant and moving than you think.



Appendix

The Key Players

[Rhode Island Public Transit Authority](#)
[The Office of Governor Dan McKee](#)
[RI State Planning Council](#)
[RI Transportation Advisory Committee](#)
[Rhode Island General Assembly](#)
[Find Your Elected Representatives](#)

Look up public body meeting dates, agendas or minutes [HERE](#).

Resources

[TransitForward RI 2040 – RI’s Transit Master Plan](#)
[Estimated cost to implement Transit MasterPlan](#)
[TransitForward RI 2040 Funding Options](#)
[Understanding the State Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\)](#)
[State Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\) detail](#)
[STIP Budget Summary Table by Category](#)
[Coalition Building Guide](#)
[National Alliance of Public Transportation Advocates \(NAPTA\)](#)
[Transportation for America](#)

Advocacy Tools

[Sample Coalition Advocacy Letter](#)
[Sample public comments before RIPTA Board](#) - John Flaherty
[Sample public comments before a legislative hearing #1](#) - Val Reishuk
[Sample public comments before a legislative hearing #2](#) – 15 year-old Cedric Ye
[Sample public comments before the RI Transportation Advisory Committee \(TAC\)](#)
Request to [join our Transit Advocacy Listserve Network](#) - Transit-4-RI@googlegroups.com

Got questions?

Call or Email

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