



RI Transit Riders does not support Senate President Ruggiero's recent call for Scott Avedisian to resign and for RIDOT to take over RIPTA.

We have not always agreed with Avedisian's decisions, but during his administration RIPTA has been improving its performance as of late. The Agency has now raised wages for drivers and is actively recruiting additional staff in the face of a national shortage of drivers. RIPTA has improved its lost service record significantly since early fall. It has begun to implement the State's Transit Master Plan (TMP), which will enhance public transit for people throughout the state and help Rhode Island meet its climate goals.

If President Ruggiero is truly concerned about public transit in Rhode Island, we are surprised he did not reach out to stakeholders, including RI Transit Riders, before deciding to issue his statement. If President Ruggiero really wants to aid RIPTA, he will support legislation in this session to allocate the additional funding needed to fully realize the aims articulated in the TMP. President Ruggiero will also work with the General Assembly to provide a sustainable source of funding for RIPTA that is not dependent on the gas tax. There are lawmakers already working on the issue who can be consulted, along with riders and stakeholders like us who are eager to help.

We urge President Ruggiero to reconsider his proposal to have RIPTA, with its focus on riders and public engagement, taken over by RIDOT, a car-centric agency with no public engagement and a long history of controversy. We note that RIDOT removed a passenger terminal from the plans for the Pawtucket Central Falls Station, an error that RIPTA is now remedying. The Multi-Hub plan, which the public overwhelmingly opposed and defeated, is one of RIDOT'S more notorious failures. RIDOT did not consult riders nor collaborate adequately with RIPTA in planning that project. This leaves us with no confidence that a RIDOT-controlled RIPTA will be in the best interests of riders.

And in our worsening climate crisis, RIPTA has a beneficial role to play. Even RIPTA's diesel buses are better for the climate than electric cars, and expanding and electrifying bus service will do a lot for climate goals. But what we have been seeing instead is an ongoing neglect of RIPTA. This is one of the biggest ways that the state's climate potential is being squandered. Given RIDOT's record, putting RIPTA under RIDOT will just prolong our neglect of climate goals.

Wherever buses are concerned, positive change starts with listening to RIPTA's riders, not making arbitrary decisions in consultation with outside actors. With RIDOT in charge, public transit in Rhode Island will get worse, not better. We would be glad to work on transit issues with President Ruggiero and others in the future, as long as riders are always consulted.

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