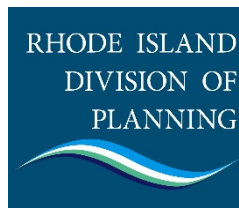


Public Comment and Hearing Report

Moving Forward RI – Transportation 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan

PREPARED BY



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Public Engagement and the Long Range Transportation Plan	1
30-day Public Comment Period.....	2
Public Comments and Responses	2

Introduction

Public Engagement and the Long Range Transportation Plan

Public engagement has been a critical component of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and accompanying modal plans, including the Bicycle Mobility Plan (BMP), Transit Master Plan (TMP), Congestion Management Process Plan, and State Rail Plan Update Supplement. Throughout the process of preparing these long range documents, several methods of public outreach and engagement have been deployed to capture public sentiment and feedback. These methods have blended traditional, in-person meetings and workshops with more innovative engagement forums such as conducting online surveys and hosting an interactive bicycle map.

Public Workshops

Workshops were held in all five counties across the state and a total of over 300 workshop participants, including members of the public, public officials, planners, and local advocates participated. This early engagement ensured that feedback was incorporated into the needs assessment phases of the long range plans.

Electronic Survey

An online survey was conducted and distributed to the public to gain a better understanding of transportation conditions, needs, and gaps. Over 1,300 responses were received and the results are summarized in the LRTP's Appendix H. Public Participation Plan.

Project Websites - PlanRI.com and TransitForwardRI.com

Project websites were established early in the process and provided information about the project, including updates and notices for meetings. The websites also served as repository for project reports and documents.

Online Interactive Bicycle Map

The Interactive Bicycle Map provided the public an opportunity to share information about bicycle assets, conditions, and needs around the state. This feedback helped to align the Bicycle Mobility Plan with the needs of the cycling community.

Advisory Committee Meetings

As part of the LRTP effort, 35 advisory committee meetings were held, not including an additional 20+ State Planning Council and Transportation Advisory Council meetings, to present elements of the plans to the public as they were completed.

The combination of traditional and more innovative methods for conducting public participation has enhanced the level of public input and feedback captured during the LRTP Process. This has resulted in the development of a long range transportation plan which is informed by a diverse audience, geographically, socially, and economically. This LRTP will help frame policy decisions and set the course for surface transportation investments in the State of Rhode Island for the next 20 years.

Circulation of the draft LRTP and accompanying plans for a 30-day public review was the penultimate step in preparing and adopting Moving Forward Rhode Island 2040.

30-Day Public Comment Period

The public comment period ran from Friday, October 9, 2020 through Monday, November 9, 2020 (30 days) and the public hearing was held before the Transportation Advisory Committee on Thursday, October 29, 2020, at 5:00 p.m., by web based meeting via the Zoom online platform.

Notice of the public hearing and opportunity to comment on the Draft LRTP were provided in English and Spanish through a posting on the Rhode Island Secretary of State website, a posting on the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning website, posting to PlanRI.com, and through email notice to over 1,400 stakeholders.

The public hearing was accessible to individuals with disabilities. Any individual with physical or sensory impairments requiring assistance for a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in the remote hearing was able to make requests for accommodation prior to the hearing. Translation services were also available to those in need.

Written comments could be submitted via an online comment form. Written and verbal statements were also accepted at the October 29, 2020 public hearing. Over the course of the public comment period, **24** people or organizations submitted either verbal or written comments.

Public Comments and Responses

What follows is a record of all written comments received during the 30-day review period and oral comments offered at the public hearing. After each comment, a formal response is provided.

Charles Foster

Submit Date: 10/11/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

I have a vacation home in Green Hill I plan on retiring to in the next year or so. I bicycle a lot in the area. Rte 1 is popular for cyclists, however there have been several accidents due to distracted motorists crossing into the shoulder. I suggest that RI add some type of rumble strip at the right hand edge of the road.

Response

Candidate bicycle treatments have been outlined in the vicinity of Route 1 in Washington County, specifically along Route 1A (Post Road). A combination of shoulder and advisory bicycle lanes have been conceptualized to improve safety for bicyclists wishing to travel from Narragansett into South Kingstown and Charlestown. Post Road was chosen for candidate treatments based on a number of factors including: safety, utility (usage), potential to address bicycle hazards, health factors, economic development, density, and equity. Additional safety improvements as it pertains to bicycle mobility along state routes not explicitly mentioned in the Bicycle Mobility Plan may be included in other safety plans or warrant further study as determined necessary to improve road user safety.

Marisa Mazzotta

Submit Date: 10/14/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

I strongly support the Statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan. This is something that is much needed and that will improve quality of life in RI. It's especially important to have designated bike lanes or paths as traffic gets worse and drivers are more and more distracted. Many roads are not currently safe for biking.

Response

The Bicycle Mobility Plan was designed to address roadway user deficiencies and improve bicycle safety and usage. A combination of candidate bicycle treatments along state and local roads have been conceptualized to that end. The BMP is the first step toward improving bicycle mobility in the state and will require local and state partnership to see candidate treatments programmed into local Capital Improvement Plans and the State Transportation Improvement Program for design, permitting, and ultimately construction.

Patricia Russo-Magno

Submit Date: 10/15/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

We absolutely need the bike bath to promote a healthy and safer way to explore the beauty of our area. Less cars and more bikers will keep Charlestown's natural beautiful preserved for years to come. Safety for our residents is also the benefit for those who walk, bike or just like to be outdoors. I see no down side (sic) to this bike path. Please join me in supporting this great initiative.

Response

The Bicycle Mobility Plan was designed to address roadway user deficiencies and improve bicycle safety and usage. A combination of candidate bicycle treatments along state and local roads have been conceptualized to that end. The BMP is the first step toward improving bicycle mobility in the state and will require local and state partnership to see candidate treatments programmed into local Capital Improvement Plans and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for design, permitting, and construction. We appreciate your comment and involvement in this phase of the LRTP.

Tom O'Neill

Submit Date: 10/21/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

East and West Main Roads [in Portsmouth] are hostile to pedestrians, cyclists etc. Also many of the subdivisions are not connected. Power poles are in the narrow sidewalks on the 2 roads, a difficult situation. Complete streets would be a blessing.

Response

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) is current studying East Main Road to determine potential roadway and traffic safety improvements, as well as operational enhancements. In addition, the Bicycle Mobility Plan is the first step toward improving bicycle mobility in the state and will require local and state partnership to see candidate treatments programmed into local Capital Improvement Plans and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for design, permitting, and construction. Additional improvements as it pertains to bicycle mobility along state or local routes not explicitly mentioned in the Bicycle Mobility Plan may be included in other safety plans or warrant further study as determined necessary to improve road user safety.

Greg Gerritt

Submit Date: 10/22/2020 & 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Website & Oral

Comment

While I appreciate the greater emphasis on non-motorized transportation and mass transit, there are some real weaknesses in the plan primarily because the people writing the plan do not take into account the fast pace of change around all of the issues related to climate change and the State of RI continues to be stuck on a model of economic development that is based on growing inequality, greater violence, and ecologically destructive activities. You say some sort of good things in the National Goals and Planning factors, but it is all based on a neoliberal economic model that has proven that it mostly helps billionaires and is incompatible with sustainable communities. And despite our dependence on tourism, predicting the growth of tourism and travel is iffy as the global economy changes, becomes more equal, and moves rapidly to zero emissions. You are holding two antithetical ideas at the same time, strong sustainable communities and rapid economic growth in an age of crashing resources, forest destruction and climate change. You are not taking that stuff seriously enough, and ignoring them for ideological reasons to make politicians happy rather than describing reality. Economic development based on real estate development is among the more destructive practices on the planet, but this is what you are betting on.

If this year's fires and hurricanes (and last year's, and the year before that's) have not made the State of RI rethink its economic models, I despair that rational thinking will ever prevail in the halls of government. Economic growth is essentially dead, and so when the state discusses growth, it is essentially discussing how the rich can steal more and avoid taxes, not actual prosperity for the community. The toxins being dumped at the site of the 6/10 connector makes that absolutely clear. We should be shrinking the highways. A boulevard would have worked better.

I have also followed reasonably closely efforts by RI to reduce our climate impact, and seen near total failure by both the legislative and executive branches. There is almost nothing in the draft report that reflects the changes that the climate catastrophe will wreak on the economy. Nothing about how coastal and riverine communities are going to have to move a lot of expensive buildings and turn land back to the waters. Nothing about how hotter days are going to make waiting for buses (or having to walk further for buses if the totally stupid real estate driven destruction of the bus hub at Kennedy Plaza continues) much more difficult. Nothing about how RI is going to have to grow a lot more food. Nothing about how stupid it is to bet on industries that drive more and more people into bankruptcy like the medical industrial complex, and how a real estate model like the one RI uses creates more homelessness.

The understanding (finally only 10 years behind schedule) that the gas tax will no longer be able to fund transit or roads is welcome. A VMT is somewhat better if gas mileage efficiency goes up, but even that fails as people stay home due to pandemics or bike out of the desire to stop polluting. While some of what is in the plan is just a prediction based on trends, there is nothing in it about how the state is going to really move people out of cars, which is absolutely critical to reduce emissions to zero. Even if the car fleet moves rapidly to electrics.

I also saw nothing about making buses free, which is the future. Fare box revenues are not that high, and are never going to be unless we ban cars today. All transit systems in the US run at a deficit. Accept the reality and quit worrying about the small percentage from fare revenues. Maybe the way to do that is to require legislators and executive branch upper echelons to commute on the bus. That ought to be in the plan. If legislators had to ride, they would find a way to fund, maybe by raising taxes on millionaires, which would do more for the economy than anything I have seen offered by RI in the last 20 years.

Typical of how RI thinks about transportation is our obsession with the airport. Usage of Green has gone down considerably in the last few years, and that was prior to the pandemic essentially wiping out air travel for most people. It will be years before Green airport is again a busy place, and if the pandemics become chronic, maybe it will never come back. Every cent spent on the airport is a waste of money and leads to further climate destruction. We know why you obsess about airports. Rich folks demand them. And the rest of us pay the price. I went to bus hearings a few years ago and money was being spent on the airport when users were down, while bus riding was up but unfunded. As long as the priorities are the needs of the rich RI fails. Maybe what we need to do is quadruple taxes on the wealthy so as to meet real needs, not excessive greed. It will take wealth and income taxes to replace the revenue lost as the car industry decays.

There is a much needed emphasis on stormwater management using Green Infrastructure. Hurray. But even here we need to do much more around restoring ecosystem health, with a useful indicator being amphibian populations. Any work with stormwater that does not include amphibian populations needs to be rethought.

Final thoughts. Plan has some good points on bikes, pedestrians but is weak on implementation. It also really shows a lack of forethought relating to the climate crisis and the economic transformations necessary to survive the climate crisis. Therefore almost all of the initiatives focused on the economy are off base, and will promote an economy skewed to the rich.

Response

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is a federally required document that is put together by the state every 5 years. The Plan is broad and far-reaching and utilizes the best data available at the time of preparation. The LRTP encompasses several other transportation plans and endeavors to be consistent with concurrent state initiatives such as planning for housing, economic development, climate resiliency, and changing state demographics. At the same time local comprehensive plans developed and adopted by cities and towns, along with local land use control and policies, are subject to consistency with the State's LRTP, as an element of the State Guide Plan. While laying out a broad understanding of current and future trends in our state, the LRTP is intended as a guide and foray into subsequent planning efforts at the local and state level and partnership between local, state and federal government agencies. In the course of preparing the LRTP, numerous public meetings and workshops

were held to gauge the public's top priorities. Advisory committee meetings were convened, and an online survey was conducted with participants throughout the state, among other methods of outreach. The results of this engagement informed us that maintenance of bridges and roads, congestion reduction, and providing opportunities for bicycles and transit ridership, were at the top of the public's list of transportation priorities. While certain priorities rose to the top of the concerns list, still other initiatives and topics were analyzed and are accounted for in the plan. The LRTP itself is a living document and will be updated again in 5 years, or sooner as conditions dictate. In the meantime, local and state planning around key areas of concern will continue to take place, while public input and feedback will be critical to planning for key topic areas and addressing the challenges of the present, along with those that lay ahead.

Note: This commenter also presented their written comments at the public hearing.

Gayle Gifford

Submit Date: 10/27/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

As I read through this plan, I was unable to find any mention of design and aesthetics. Perhaps I missed them? As a state that prides itself on internationally recognized design, on quality of place, on historic preservation and environmental quality, how does our transportation infrastructure reinforce that? When I drive on the interstate highways in Vermont, I get a feeling of what is valued in Vermont. When I drive on route 95 in RI, the only feeling I get is of concrete jersey barriers. Why shouldn't these major car corridors be required to incorporate design that enhances our attractiveness to live and visit here?

Response

Design and aesthetics are important components of any transportation project. While design is typically focused on addressing safety, structural integrity, feasibility, and long-term maintenance primarily, other motives such as community character and architectural appeal are also considered before a design is finalized. There are several scenic roadways in Rhode Island whereby improvements or rehabilitation would be subject to committee review and approval. Currently, I-95 is not on the list of designated Scenic Roadways. Nevertheless, community character and historic preservation are taken into consideration at the project development level to ensure a final design that is appropriately scaled to the surrounding environment and fits the necessary operational characteristics of the project. The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is intended as an overarching guiding document and the detail required to develop design and aesthetics criteria for different types of infrastructure is better suited to be addressed at the project level.

Susan Feeley

Submit Date: 10/27/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

Although there is much to applaud about this plan, I am concerned that the plan does not mention the (currently threatened) central bus hub at Kennedy Plaza in downtown Providence. This central hub is a great convenience to transit riders, and an asset for the businesses and agencies in the city center. That this plan makes no mention of the importance of having a central bus hub in the city center is a

problem, since there is currently a risk that this transit asset, which has the support of so many transit users, could be replaced with the inferior multi-hub option. I hope this poorly designed proposal to change to a multi-hub system will be addressed in this plan.

Response

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is a federally required document that is put together by the state every 5 years. The LRTP is broad and far-reaching and establishes a framework for a future transportation system that appeals to all users. The purpose of the plan is to develop a value-set for guiding future transportation projects, yet it is not developed explicitly to evaluate the benefits or costs of individual projects. To that end, each project in the plan undergoes a project development and design cycle that delves deeper into expected impacts and outcomes. This phase of project development includes opportunities for public engagement and involves coordination with decision makers and elected officials at the municipal level. Neither the LRTP nor the TMP addresses Kennedy Plaza specifically or weighs the merits of a mono-hub versus a multi-hub approach to carrying transit riders to and from Providence. However, the benefit of a mobility hub approach to improving transit in Rhode Island are discussed in detail in the TMP.

Peter Brassard

Submit Date: 11/07/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

This is an excellent plan. Please consider my comments below:

Bus:

(1) From the East Bay Area to East Providence there are no reasonable transfer points, due to the 60 bus mostly travel on limited access roads within East Providence. Currently passengers wanting to transfer in either direction (E Providence - East Bay) have to make transfers in downtown Providence.

Possible solutions:

A. Establish a transfer point on Wampanoug Trail at Mink Street near the Mobil Station for 60 and 32 buses. Southbound is challenging due to no traffic signal in that direction and road speed. An alternative could be to propose creating a northbound crosswalk at the existing traffic signal (Wampanoug & Mink), and utilize the existing cross-median ramps, to create a new southbound bus stop within the median triangle between the ramps, so passengers can make transfers to any bus by using the northbound signal crossing. Southbound buses would briefly exit (left) then re-enter (left) onto Route 114 south. The northbound bus stop could be relocated for transfers easier. Part of the area of the median triangle would require road surfacing for a bus lane, a bus stop sidewalk, and a walkway. The 32 bus is more centrally located within East Providence that could serve more potential passengers.

B. Extend the 33 bus to White Church in Barrington for transfers to the 60 bus.

(2) Combining two of the proposed new routes to create a second downtown west "loop" crosstown bus route. A first west inner "loop" crosstown is already proposed as N9 in TMP document. To create the second crosstown loop the N13 and N7 would need to be combined into one single route. Both routes are of similar length and have the same proposed frequency (every 15 minutes). The advantages would be no mandatory transfer at Olneyville Sq.; South Providence, Elmwood, and West End, residents

could seamlessly reach potential Valley jobs between Olneyville Sq. and Smith Hill; and there would be direct travel (no transfer) to Providence Station for South/West Side residents who would use this route.

(3) The Park Avenue crosstown route might better terminate at Pawtuxet Village instead of Broad and Park, to connect to the dense population of the village, in both Cranston and Warwick, and eliminate the need to transfer for crosstown Park Avenue service for those residents and businesses.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT):

The TMP recommendations map may be conceptual at this point, but consider shifting and adding proposed stops on the map.

Current stop sequence is shown at: Hospitals - Potters Av - I-95 - Broad St. The I-95 stop location is isolated and there are no transfers, since buses are on the highway below.

To serve residential populations and job destinations a better stop sequence could be Hospitals - Potters Av - Thurbers Av - Baker St - Broad St. The spacing for this series would be slightly over 0.4 miles between each stop. A Baker Street stop would offer a clear walking path from the N8 on Eddy Street to the Roger Williams Park entrance at Broad Street.

Light Rail (LRT):

(1) Due to heavy car use on Reservoir Avenue and traffic congestion at the Reservoir/Park Avenue intersection in Cranston, consider elevating the light rail right-of-way over Reservoir Avenue between the beginning of Pontiac Avenue in Providence, crossing over Route 10 and Park Avenue to Aqueduct Road, (or possibly Garden City Drive). One station at Park Avenue would need be elevated.

(2) Consider higher capacity vehicles that incorporate open gangway two car train sets. Hudson Bergen Light Rail recently converted existing two car LRT train sets by adding an open gangway segment linking the cars to increase capacity on trains. Some light rail car manufactures offer 100% low floor open gangway train sets.

(3) Due to higher capacity of LRT as compared to BRT, to accommodate future system growth, LRT should be preferred mode on proposed N12 line, even though costs are higher for LRT than BRT. There are about a dozen comparable medium-sized metropolitan areas around the country that have received federal funding for similar light rail projects. Many of these metro areas have much lower population density than the Providence urban core where N12 is proposed. Our congressional delegation could assist with securing funding. Additionally, the Transportation & Climate Initiative (TCI), may be another funding source for capital costs, but also for operational expenses.

Commuter Rail:

(1) Advocate for the use of electric trains that will reduce acceleration times and Electric Multiple Units (EMU)s provide the greatest acceleration benefit. Besides, both electric locomotives and EMUs would significantly improve reliability as compared to the current diesel fleet. Diesel locomotive failures occurs between 5,000 and 25,000 miles. EMU failures occur between 150,000 and 450,000 miles.

(2) Electrify the third track south Providence though TF Green and electrify the Wickford Junction siding.

(3) Consider adding language in the document to propose future study of potential commuter rail infill stations, as demand for commuter rail increases over time. Consider inclusion of potential infill station locations for study at Olneyville, Cranston, East Greenwich, and West Davisville.

Ferry:

Currently when large-scale events happen at Fort Adams in Newport, thousands of cars weave through narrow downtown Newport and 'Ocean Drive' streets to find their way to Fort Adams or making the reverse trip following an event. The traffic congestion is not insignificant. Consider developing a seasonal ferry shuttle for large events, minimally between Perrotti Park and Fort Adams in Newport. Alternately other locations could be considered where large parking areas could be developed.

Response

Thank you for your comments. With regard to bus routing suggestions, the TMP considered many challenges and opportunities, and ultimately recommends what was determined to be the highest priority set of interventions/solutions. Specific bus stop locations and intersection geometry improvements (when and if determined feasible), will be worked out during project development. Similarly, the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT) projects are subject to further planning and project development, during which elements such as station locations and vehicle specifications will be identified beyond a concept level. The TMP also aligns with MBTA's Rail Vision and the endorsed resolutions by MBTA's Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB) passed including electrified service. The TMP provides for development of partnerships addressing seasonal and special events transportation in which case, a seasonal ferry shuttle within Newport could be considered feasible in conjunction with the development of additional parking facilities where determined required.

David and Rosemary Smith

Submit Date: 11/08/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

We served on the Bicycle Mobility Plan Advisory Committee and have been waiting for the adoption of the plan since the substantial completion of the draft in 2018. We are proud of the way evidence was gathered in the community and the way the project staff and the Advisory Committee worked cooperatively. The plan captures the enthusiasm and energy of the growing bicycle community in Rhode Island.

The Bicycle Mobility Plan shows what has already been accomplished with shared use paths and on-street treatments, and it articulates the even greater need for bicycle infrastructure, Border to Bay. Importantly, the plan also graphically details the techniques for planning and constructing the envisioned improvements. This tool kit is very helpful for community engagement.

Under "Financial Plan: Future Investments," the Long Range Transportation Plan refers to the importance of project bundling in realizing the vision of the BMP:

Bicycle/Pedestrian: Much like technology needs, bicycle and pedestrian needs are often met through project bundling with Bridge, Pavement, and Safety projects, and auxiliary programs like Transportation

Alternatives. While this approach has provided many enhancements, it does not always address the most critical needs or systematic network expansion (LRTP, page 30).

We were encouraged by the way project bundling met "bicycle and pedestrian needs" in the redesign and repaving of Old Tower Hill Road in Wakefield this year. But for this to always be the case, there must be a champion of bicyclists and pedestrians within RIDOT and/or Statewide Planning who has authority, expertise and visibility to serve as a single point of contact for bicycle and pedestrian advocates, and to ensure that Complete Streets is more than just a phrase.

Please move forward with adoption, and implementation, of the Statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan.

Respectfully,
David and Rosemary Smith
Friends of the William C. O'Neill/South County Bike Path
Paths to Progress

Response

Thank you for your comments and your involvement with the Bicycle Mobility Plan Advisory Committee. Your hard work has resulted in a statewide bicycle plan that can serve as a framework for future improvements. Presently, there is a reliance on project bundling to ensure that all roadway users are considered during planning or redesign of our existing roads and bridges. Individual projects focused solely on bicycle improvements will also emerge, such as efforts to rehabilitate the East Bay bike path bridges or completion of the William C. O'Neill/South County Bike Path. And while RIDOT maintains an in-house bicycle coordinator, the work of local agencies and their constituents to identify transportation needs and work with state agencies to plan, design, and implement those improvements remains a key method to ensure ongoing and future bicycle improvements are made. We look forward to continuing to work with you on these important initiatives.

Mal Skowron

Submit Date: 10/29/2020
Submit Method: Oral

Comment

Hello, my name is Mal Skowron, I represent Green Energy Consumers Alliance, which is a nonprofit based in Providence. Our mission is to harness the power of energy consumers to speed the transition to a low carbon future. We have hundreds of members in Rhode Island, and we've helped them transition to green energy purchase electric vehicles and make all other kinds of green energy choices.

I want to start off by saying I think specifically the transit master plan and the bicycle mobility plan are bold innovative and forward thinking. I believe the improvements outlined in those two plans would help increase mobility, especially for the most disadvantaged in Rhode Island, decrease vehicle miles traveled which aligns really well with some of the state's priorities addressing climate change and also congestion, and it would also address the state's growing emissions from the transportation sector. This establishes a really excellent vision for the state in which taking the bus and riding your bike can be as easy or even easier than jumping into a car. I think that that will be really crucial thinking about the next 20 years and what the state's priority is, so congratulations. I think the plans are really well thought out and put together.

However, where I am concerned is that the plan will fall flat on execution because funding is not yet identified for a lot of the really great projects that I've seen in the bicycle mobility plan and the transit master plan. The funding that has been identified in those plans is often scooped to prioritize highway expansion work and other work to benefit single passenger vehicles. The green economy bond being a good example. So again, great plans. I want to see them become reality. So it should be a priority to secure the funding for those projects and make sure that the funding stays towards those projects.

I do believe that the transportation and Climate Initiative TCI would be a good way to raise the revenue for some of the projects that don't yet have funding identified in the public transit and cycling infrastructure realms. I know that the governor's mobility innovation working group is working hard to identify investment priorities and I think that the proposals in the transit master plan and the bicycle mobility plan are a great set of projects to draw from and those should receive priorities for that funding.

One thing that I do want to talk about that's missing from the report is a strategy for vehicle electrification. The only time it's really mentioned is to reflect on the fact that gas tax revenue will be decreasing as EV adoption increases. I do understand it's a lot to cover in one report and I am glad that there were ample resources dedicated to transit and bike and pedestrian infrastructure, since that should be the state's priority, especially when it comes to thinking about how to address climate change, but I do bring it up because there is significantly more space dedicated in the plans to autonomous and shared vehicles compared to electric vehicles and if we're talking about market readiness EVs are poised to make a much bigger splash in Rhode Island in the near term compared to autonomous or shared vehicles.

Analysts predict that by 2024 which is just a couple years away, electric vehicles will be less expensive to purchase than comparable gas powered cars. Reports by Consumer Reports and other reputable consumer advocacy organizations have found that electric cars are already cheaper to own on a lifetime basis.

So that transition could happen very quickly. I think Rhode Island could be caught not being prepared. And so in the future, I would like to see more of an emphasis on a strategy for electrification, considering how quickly the market can turn. I think that planning process could be done in conjunction with a lot of state agencies, namely the Office of Energy Resources, The Division of Public utilities and carriers, the Public Utilities Commission and lots of other stakeholders there. I think it'll be important to consider that. Because even five years from now, the next time that this plan is reviewed the market will be completely different. And it'll be important to consider how quickly that technology is changing in the near future.

Finally, I just wanted to say I'm really grateful for the opportunity to give comments here in this public meeting. Part of what I believe, makes the transit master plan and the bicycle mobility plan so great is that they were developed with robust community engagement.

I really applaud the level of public participation that has happened over the last couple years and I really would like to see that continue as the state considers which projects should be prioritized and what the future of transportation is in the state.

Again, the transit master plan and bicycle mobility plans have a lot of great ideas and I'm looking forward to seeing them come to life over the next 20 years so I'll be submitting written comments as well to elaborate on some of these points and thank you for your time today.

Response

Thank you for your comment. The LRTP is a valuable planning document that identifies the direction and vision for transportation in the state. This document helps to inform the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which is where individual projects are programmed for project development, engineering, and construction. Every attempt is made each year to maintain existing available sources of revenue for transportation projects and leverage those resources to implement the most needed transportation projects. Frequently, transportation needs exceed available resources and this trend is expected to continue as the state adapts to rising construction costs and decreasing revenue as a result of the increase in adoption of electric vehicles as a strategy to achieve our environmental goals. Identifying additional streams of revenue to fund transportation projects will be a major theme in the coming years. The Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) should provide an important source of funding for low-carbon investments that would help to decarbonize the transportation sector and would be a good starting point for identifying other reliable and strategic streams of funding that could be used to expand our transportation network.

Kathleen Gannon

Submit Date: 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Oral

Comment

Hello, I'm Kathleen Gannon, and I'm the board chair for the Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition. Firstly, I just would like to say that the Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition heartily supports the long awaited bicycle mobility plan. We're very happy to have this plan finally becoming an official part of the state documents and we're very, very happy, especially with the public engagement that occurred with this plan. The Public clearly wants this plan to be implemented. Many, many people commented on it. It's a very robustly vetted plan and people want this to be implemented, and if it is implemented, of course, it will have significant impact on public health on climate change on social equity issues and we know those are three of the most pressing issues in society at the moment. But we would like to urge also, like some of the other speakers have said, we think that one of the issues is with implementation, we don't want this plan to be another plan that's on the shelf that no one ever refers to again.

Furthermore, it's our belief that piecemeal implementation of the plan will undercut the effectiveness of the plan. And so we would hope that the state will commit significant resources to funding the plan on a regular basis, both directly and in any bonds put up before the public will note that the current green bond that's actually being talked about right now at the house finance committee does not include any funding for bicycles and that's a big disappointment.

And finally, I'll just say that as Mal just mentioned, oftentimes we find ourselves in a position where once the funding has been appropriated for certain projects that we need to fight to protect that funding because the funding somehow disappears from the projects and goes to other projects.

So we would hope that this public engagement is a model for all projects across the state for all transportation projects and that we commit to and protect funding the bicycle mobility plan. So thank you very much.

Response

Thank you for your comment. The LRTP is designed to inform investment decisions in our transportation network such that future projects result in economic, social, and environmental benefits in addition to improving overall mobility. Typically, decisions about which projects to fund are difficult to make and require assessment of the value proposition of maintaining the transportation network over calls to expand the network. The overall goal is not to overlook one user's needs for another but to address the most systemic issues first. As previously noted, transportation infrastructure needs commonly exceed the available resources and this trend is expected to continue as the state adapts to rising construction costs and decreasing revenue as a result of the increase in adoption of electric vehicles as a strategy to achieve our environmental goals. As such, maintaining existing funding levels as well as identifying additional streams of revenue to fund transportation projects will be a major theme in the coming years.

Barry Schiller

Submit Date: 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Oral

Comment

My name is Barry Schiller and some of you know that for many, many years I was transportation chair for the Rhode Island chapter of the Sierra Club and on the transportation Advisory Committee. So I've had contacts with lots of different aspects of transportation, highways, transit, bikes, rail, and I have comments on all of the above. I don't think I could limit myself to five minutes. So let me know what I have a half a minute to go and I'll save the rest of my comments for after others speak.

So my overview is the plan is a generally good framework for the goals, which I know includes reducing vehicle miles traveled is very important, but perhaps thanks to the Trump administration, the required national goals don't include reducing climate emissions.

That doesn't prevent the state from making that a major goal, adding it to the national goals and with the climate emergency that we have, I think it should be one of the central goals that guides the entire process.

The draft plans list of projects which I looked at in Appendix E. I counted 47 different appendices and I certainly didn't review all of them. I don't know if anybody could.

But the list of projects tells you what is really going to happen, the projects cost far beyond what we could expect to afford in the next 20 years and includes expensive highway expansions along limited access highways, 95, 195, 295, routes 4, 403, 146 along with their ramps. I counted up the those projects - It comes to about \$800 million to \$1.4 billion in highway expansion on the limited access highways, which I think is far excessive for what we want to do.

Those expansions that speed up travel on all those roads just means that it attracts more traffic and sometimes it results in congestion somewhere else, but also encourages long distance driving. More

driving and longer driving and that's contrary, not just to our climate goals but to our land use goals. You make it easy to commute further out than people will live further out. That's not what we want.

Living further out erodes the natural areas, farmland, and quality of life in rural areas that most people there want to keep rural. The highway section is an equity issue. And that's why I think instead of expanding the highways, since the draft list of projects is far beyond what we could pay for, what I would suggest is that instead of that massive highway expansion I just referred to, we should be prioritizing investments in electrification of vehicles, electrification of the commuter rail, improvements in transit, and expansion of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, especially in our core cities. So I have comments on all those individual areas.

The rail area, to start with, since it's my shortest part, I would say that electrification of the commuter service, I realize that since it involves the MBTA we need regional cooperation, but it's not just the speed up Boston/Providence commuter trains electrification is also part of our climate action because obviously electrification of trains, just like cars, means lower greenhouse emissions, because the electric sector can become more renewable. It's also an equity issue because electrification of the trains that go through Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls on their way to Boston - That's an area that already suffers from pollution from I-95, so having less pollution from the trains is an equity issue.

When I was on the TAC, we discussed infill stations in Cranston and East Greenwich, I don't see that in the update of the state rail plan that's part of this. I would like to know more about why that's no longer apparently included.

Schiller (continued)

When I ended I was commenting about the lack of infill stations on our freight rail line that we have commuter rail on, Cranston and East Greenwich come to mind. And the reason I point that out is there's a potential very, very expensive bus rapid transit or light rail with new infrastructure, rather than using our existing Northeast Corridor rail infrastructure, including the freight rail line. And I'm just wondering why that's a better way to go to develop high speed transit that doesn't get stuck in traffic.

Also on the rail there's 180 million suggested for an Amtrak stop at TF Green airport. I think that should be a low priority. I don't see the market for it, it seems to me that would slow the regional system and the regional Amtrak trains by having another stop between Providence in New York. I don't see that Amtrak is in a position to fund 180 million, neither is the state. Amtrak itself has so many problems right now with reduced revenue they have so many capital requirements on the northeast corridor that are so much more important, the tunnels under the Hudson River, the Connecticut shoreline, Baltimore tunnels, South Station expansion. Spending all that money on a stop when the airport already has terrific public transit to it from the MBTA commuter rail and at least three major bus lines that provide transit to the airport from Boston and from points in Rhode Island. I don't see any need for that, or at least might be nice to have if we had infinite money, but we don't

My comments on the bike plan, which I agree with the previous speakers, I'm very positive about but I want to give priority to our core cities. It's a matter of equity. And I've been following for example the Blackstone bikeway for about 30 years and it still hasn't gotten to downtown Woonsocket or downtown Central Falls or downtown Pawtucket and it's still not connected through Providence. These are

communities that need the help that don't always have cars and a good safe bicycle infrastructure is needed in these communities.

It's also good for our tourism economy because the Blackstone bikeway in Woonsocket will go to the museum of work and culture in Pawtucket to Slater Mill. These are places that we could market with the Blackstone Heritage National Park. So there's a lot of reasons for doing that.

We built the bike paths in the suburban areas but not in the core cities, it's time to emphasize that and connect them all in Providence with a good connection between the various bikeways

I also want to say about bikeways that it should be prioritized, partly because we've already lost bike funding when that TIP Amendment 19 that the transportation advisory committee heard about. It's not in the current green economy bond and the pandemic is pushing people away from dense places like cities, that's bad for our climate goals because it's much more energy intensive to live out where you have to drive everywhere and single family homes as opposed to apartments, need more energy for heating and cooling, so that's against our land use goals. How can cities compete if people are worried about density? Taxes might be higher, schools are a problem, possibly crime is a problem and perception.

Well, one way cities could compete is if they had bikeable, walkable neighborhoods.

That's something that the smallville places can't compete with if you could save on transportation by going out your door and walking or biking to all the places that you need to go to that makes cities more competitive, and I think we need to do that for that reason too.

Moving on to transit. I know some of you know I was on the RIPTA Board of Directors for five years back in the 1990s. So I want to say that the transit master plan has a lot of really good ideas the most important things that should be prioritized and the COVID section in the long range plan does say the right thing about this. First things are better service on the important routes to increase the frequencies and extend the time of day as needed. That's crucial. That's what riders want most of all. Secondly, speed up the trips with things like signal priority better fare collection. Then, bus stop improvements and that's important because we need to wait for busses and avoid getting drenched at a bus stop.

There's a section on access to transit stops that makes some good points, but one point it doesn't make that should be added is part of the problem in the winter is the failure to adequately remove snow from the sidewalks to get to bus stops. RIPTA has a good contract with the bus shelters, but the bus stops are still a problem and that should be addressed, or at least call attention call to it, it's very important in the winter for a bus passengers.

When I was on the TAC, there was a section in the state long range plan that said the state should lead by example by encouraging state employees to reduce their commute vehicle miles traveled by having transfer promotions and Rhode Island general law section 36-621.1 encourages the state to do that. But I didn't see it in the plan anymore. There was some comment about having state employees use bicycles more but if it's mentioned about transit, I didn't see it. So I think it should be amended that the state itself as a major employer should lead by example and encourage employees to use transit or carpool or bike or walk and reduce their vehicle miles traveled.

One way that that might happen, which I've been trying for about a decade to get and maybe it should be in the plan, is one of the bus stops that absolutely needs improvement is at the state house. Right now, there's no shelter and there's three major bus lines that go up there. But it's not just state employees. It's an army of lobbyists there's people who come as tourists to see the state house, there's people who go to rallies, that could be a major bus stop. It's just outrageous that there's that the people who use the bus there if it's raining have to get drenched, there's plenty of room for a bus stop, like in front of the DOA building, for example, on the outbound so that should be that should be noted.

When I was on the board I tried to convince my neighbors - we have pretty good service on the 57 line if they're going to the State House or downtown to take a bus. But if they had a car even downtown. That was a hard sell. They knew how to park maybe at the Providence Place mall, and once you have a car and have free parking, it's very, very hard to convince people to even think about transit. So I think there needs to be a stronger section on marketing and incentives to use transit.

RIPTA's transit budget was about 1.6 million for marketing that it's now called public affairs. Very, very small amount for marketing at an agency with about 130 million dollar budget so that's a problem. I don't expect the plan to address that. But it should address the need to market and provide incentives, I believe that if we really wanted to transit system to help in the climate fight or help our land use or economic development, we need a lot more riders and to get a lot more riders, we have to level the playing field between using a car and taking transit, especially with regard to parking. So I would think that should be a section about investigating whether the buses should be free as Greg suggested.

RIPTA only gets about 12-13 million in passenger fares, even pre-COVID, and they get a about the same amount in third party fares other state agencies like the senior department or public schools in Providence. So maybe it should really be free and that would speed up trips.

This is my last point, the electrification of the bus fleet is over \$1 billion. Now, as I understand it, and electric buses about 800 to 900 million and this about let's say 220 buses in the fleet. I don't see why that should cost more than a billion dollars. It suggest that because of the limited range of electric buses that might need to double the fleet, but that would still be much less than a half a billion dollars. So I suggest that you take a look at that line item and the suggested costs and make it more realistic so that electrifying the bus fleet will seem more realistic. Okay, thank you for the time. And I'm sorry that I went so long, but there's a lot in this plan and I hope that people will consider my comments.

Thank you again. Bye.

Response

Thank you for your comment. The LRTP takes into account climate issues, reducing emissions, and resiliency. Rising sea levels, extreme flooding, and hotter temperatures will stress transportation infrastructure in the future differently than today. These environmental impacts require changes in design specifications for system resiliency. Long-range planning will be required to adapt increased frequency of freeze-thaw cycles or more precipitation events. Chapter 4 of the LRTP's Trends Report (Appendix D to the LRTP) details emissions reduction strategies, shifts toward electric vehicles, and other elements of sustainability in Rhode Island which we agree are at the forefront of long range planning in the State.

Regarding highway expansion, I would like to direct you to the Congestion Management Plan. This plan takes into account the elements of the BMP and TMP, but provides a more detailed outline for the best practices in addressing traffic concerns – in particular – that increasing capacity is the final option to alleviating congested corridors. The following is a list of congestion management strategy types in general order of priority from the CMP:

1. TDM strategies that eliminate or reduce the need to make trips by motor vehicle.
2. Land use strategies that promote mixed-use and transit-oriented development and allow for reduced use of motor vehicles for some discretionary trips.
3. Strategies that expand public transportation and promote the use of higher occupancy modes.
4. Bicycle and pedestrian strategies that shift trips to bicycling and walking modes.
5. Operational improvements and ITS that make the best use of existing capacity.
6. Pricing strategies that reduce vehicle demand.
7. Roadway/mobility (non-ITS) strategies that are designed to help improve operations and relieve bottlenecks on existing facilities through improvements that do not add capacity.
8. Roadway capacity expansion strategies such as adding additional capacity to existing roadway facilities or constructing new roadway facilities that serve newer developed or rapidly developing areas, or where gaps exist in the existing freeway or arterial network.

It is our best hope that as we integrate this newly adopted plan into our project prioritization that it assists in promoting smarter ways of addressing issues regarding transportation.

In reference to electrifying commuter rail, as you allude to, it will take cooperation and funding from the MBTA to make this a reality. It is on the State's radar and has been for a long time. While items like this are not entirely within reach as we do not own the rail line, other similar initiatives such as electrifying the bus fleet, are being pursued right now as you know.

In regards to infill transit commuter rail stations – while they are a great idea in essence, at the moment adding stations to Cranston and East Greenwich were determined not to be feasible at the moment as the demand was not there to warrant investment in new rail stops. This could change in the future as improvements are made to the rail system. TF Green Commuter Rail Station, however, is a location that has a more robust density of passengers and could benefit from increased service to Providence from the airport, and would help achieve climate goals if electrified.

The State agrees that core cities should be, and are, a priority of expanding the bike network across Rhode Island. The State's BMP outlines connections throughout that would add to the network of cycling both within our core cities and outside of it. The BMP manages to promote elements of cycling for active transportation as well as for recreation, which are both vital aspects of appealing to the most riders possible. However, when it comes to prioritization, I would direct you to the scoring criteria for candidate corridors on page 71 of the BMP. This outlines what factors were taken into account when focusing in on bike corridors, which include both equity and density as key elements. The concept of complete streets is very much present in the BMP, and while we recognize gaps in the existing bike network, it will take ongoing cooperation with local governments, residents, and stakeholders to ensure that these critical connections are made. We believe progress is being made in making connections (Central Falls is working with a consultant on connecting the Blackstone Bikeway entrance in Cumberland to Pawtucket at the moment, for example) but, while frustrating, these are not easy solutions, nor ones that are met without resistance. The State, as dictated in the BMP, agrees that

Rhode Island should be composed of a robust bike network where bikeable, walkable neighborhoods are the norm and not the exception.

In regards to transit, the TMP outlines several initiatives related to your points, many of which are already underway. A new fare collection system is being integrated by RIPTA. Fare integration with other mobility options was in the works before COVID-19 and the bike share system in the State was forced to be reworked, but this will continue upon bike share returning. Better bus stops, shelters, and hubs are all integral to the TMP and revamping the State's transit network. Faster service is a core principle in which the TMP was written and is of the utmost importance for our riders that depend on RIPTA to get around.

Ian Westcott

Submit Date: 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Oral

Comment

Hi. So I'm here, just as a Providence resident, not with any organizational affiliation. In non-pandemic times I actually commute to Boston, I would either take a RIPTA bus or bike to the commuter rail to Boston and back. I live in a one car household so I'm always looking for ways to get around without having to drive.

As a bus rider, I strongly endorse the transit plans proposal for increased service levels for core RIPTA routes. I feel that the 10-minute headways proposed for many routes are critical to a good community experience.

As a bike commuter and recreational cyclist, I also appreciate that the bicycle plans goal is to connect disparate bike paths throughout the state to stitch together a comprehensive network. I'm no stranger to riding on unprotected roads, but it's not always a pleasant experience. And there's a clear need for a more safe and welcoming environment for bicycle riders.

I think the state's goal should be for every Rhode Islander to be able to walk out of their home and quickly find a local bus stop or a protected bike lane that they can use, not just to commute to their workplace, but also for shopping and recreational destinations as well. I think that these plans do share that goal and that's admirable.

I would like to see for one more recommendation for things like zoning changes and adoption of transit oriented development, particularly along corridors where light rail or BRT are proposed, such as Reservoir Avenue in Cranston or North Main Street in Providence.

I think that adding density is a key factor in the success of better transit services. I think, TOD helps make the argument that better transit can be part of a strong economic policy, despite the investment overhead, and that's something that people are going to be talking about as these plans get closer to implementation.

I'd also like to see the state engage in more outreach as these things move forward to help improve public perception of the benefits of good transit and cycling infrastructure. There's a lot of bad faith arguments out there against bikes and buses and I feel that the success of this plan hinges in part on

countering bad arguments by presenting facts clearly and concisely. Additionally, many Rhode Islanders can barely conceive of traveling anywhere in the state without driving. I know haters are always going to hate, but hopefully we can find a way to minimize excuses for ignorance and apathy.

I share the concern of other commenters here that we have an uphill battle in terms of finding clear sources of funding. I think if the State wants to prove that it takes these plans seriously, we need to put our money where our mouth is. But overall, I just want to thank everyone who's been involved in this process for all the work that we've been putting into making these plans. I grew up in Rhode Island moved away and came back, and one of the reasons I was drawn to return here from bigger cities was because there was motion to make something for an urbanist like me, more comfortable in a place that is so dense and yet so hard to get around. So thank you. And I look forward to seeing much of this implemented in the future. That's all.

Response

Thank you for your comments. It was a goal of the long-range planning process to sketch out a vision for the state that includes more travel options and opportunities for citizens to walk, ride a bicycle, or take the bus to all destinations, not just commuting to work. It is our experience that people will choose an alternative to driving when the alternative is considered safe, accommodating, and convenient, and the recommendations in the BMP and the TMP are designed for that purpose. Having a statewide plan in place is the first step to making advances in improving bicycle and transit amenities. Forming partnerships with local agencies that control and make land use decisions, such as zoning decisions, will also encourage smart land use choices that enable greater access to transit and other forms of mobility. Programs that provide outreach and learning opportunities for how Rhode Island citizens can take advantage of alternative modes of travel is also part of annual state agency programs. Over the last several years, the Division of Statewide Planning has offered Land Use Training to local municipal planners and elected officials. Similarly, RIPTA runs several advertising campaigns a year that seek to reach and inform consumers about their travel choices, as well as, the personal and societal benefits of taking the bus. These are just a few examples of outreach at the state level. With regard to funding, every attempt is made each year to maintain existing available sources of revenue for transportation projects and leverage those resources to implement the most needed transportation projects. Frequently, transportation needs exceed available resources and this trend is expected to continue as the state adapts to rising construction costs and decreasing revenue. Identifying additional streams of revenue to fund transportation projects will be a major theme in the coming years.

Hayley Bucky

Submit Date: 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Oral

Comment

Hi - I'm planning to submit a written comment too but I just wanted to say briefly that, it's hard to take Rhode Island seriously when we act progressive in terms of environmental causes and we don't see a lot of progress in terms of alternative transit. So it's really nice to see the bicycle and bus plans. I wish they were more robust. I don't fully understand why we have the money to spend, potentially, a billion or more dollars on expanding the highways in this tiny state and we can't find the funding for bicycle and bus projects. I hope they do get funded and I hope we stop expanding the highways. Because I mean, come on. Rhode Island is so small. We don't want to have a whole state of highways and parking lots.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Regarding expanding the highways in favor of alternative modes of assisting travel flow, please refer to the Congestion Management Plan. This plan takes into account the elements of the BMP and TMP and provides an outline for the best practices in addressing traffic concerns – in particular – that increasing capacity is the final option to alleviating congested corridors. The following is a list of congestion management strategy types in general order of priority from the CMP:

1. Travel Demand Model strategies that eliminate or reduce the need to make trips by motor vehicle.
2. Land use strategies that promote mixed-use and transit-oriented development and allow for reduced use of motor vehicles for some discretionary trips.
3. Strategies that expand public transportation and promote the use of higher occupancy modes.
4. Bicycle and pedestrian strategies that shift trips to bicycling and walking modes.
5. Operational improvements and ITS that make the best use of existing capacity.
6. Pricing strategies that reduce vehicle demand.
7. Roadway/mobility (non-Intelligence Transportation Systems (ITS)) strategies that are designed to help improve operations and relieve bottlenecks on existing facilities through improvements that do not add capacity.
8. Roadway capacity expansion strategies such as adding additional capacity to existing roadway facilities or constructing new roadway facilities that serve newer developed or rapidly developing areas, or where gaps exist in the existing freeway or arterial network.

It is our hope that as we integrate this newly adopted plan into our project prioritization that it assists in promoting smarter ways of addressing issues regarding our transportation network.

Liza Burkin

Submit Date: 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Oral

Comment

Thank you. My remarks will be brief. I want to reiterate what many others have said, which is that a lot of what we're seeing in these three plans is really hopeful and really forward thinking and we're glad to see many improvements, hopefully coming in terms of bike and rail and bus and thinking about congestion, it's all great stuff.

But I hope that you all know that you can't fault us with being skeptical about the implementation, especially as we're seeing a real lack of representation within the decision making powers that be, whether that's the lack of a rider on the RIPTA board or the total lack of communication with RIDOT's supposed bike coordinator- I've been working on these issues for six years. I've never met him. I don't know what he does, or where he is.

So it seems like this community, I think, would really appreciate walking the walk and not talking the talk. This is very good talk and we're really happy to see it.

Hope that you all will rise to the occasion and actually see a lot of these projects implemented. Thank you.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Having a statewide plan in place with strategies for improving mobility is the first step to finding amenable solutions that improve our transportation network. Implementation will also require partnerships with local agencies and other state agencies to see candidate treatments programmed into local Capital Improvement Plans and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for design, permitting, and ultimately construction. Decisions about which projects to fund are difficult to make and require assessment of the value proposition of maintaining the transportation network over the desire to enhance the network. The overall goal is not to overlook one user's needs for another but to address the most systemic issues first. With regard to your other points, please contact Ms. Pam Cotter with RIDOT's Planning Office (401-563- 4004) to discuss your specific bicycling concerns. More information on RIPTA's Board of Directors and contact information can be found on RIPTA's website at <https://www.ripta.com/ceo-board-of-directors/> or by referring to RIPTA's enabling legislation (RI General Laws Chapter 39-18), which outlines board composition, terms, etc.

Peter Friedrichs

Submit Date: 10/29/2020

Submit Method: Oral

Comment

My name is Peter Friedrichs I am the City Planner for Newport and I was also on the advisory committee for the bicycle plan when I was the Director of Planning and Economic Development in Central Falls. I'm not appearing in either capacity this evening. I would like to thank the consultant team and statewide planning and everyone else that has participated in this process of creating this long range transportation plan. I think it's a fantastic product and you've done great work.

I have one small comment, which is the challenges and opportunities section on pages 16 and 17. I think it is missing a really critical opportunity which is active transportation. Our Department of Health has done great working with this group and others on identifying active transportation as an opportunity for increased physical and mental health. That's a great opportunity in the future if investments are made in active transportation to increase the wellbeing of Rhode Islanders. I also think it's a great economic development opportunity. The benefits of bicycle infrastructure investments are well documented.

And finally, I think, given the overall total price of bicycle infrastructure, a little under \$300 million. That's the price of one highway interchange. And there's incredible opportunity for this group and the State Planning Council, Statewide Planning, and the Department of Transportation to really provide great quality of life improvements to Rhode Islanders by investing in bicycle infrastructure at a fraction of the cost of transit and road projects. And I really hope that that's prioritized moving forward. Thank you.

Response

Thank you for your comment and participation in the Bicycle Mobility Plan Advisory Committee. Your hard work has helped to prepare a vision for making sweeping improvements in bicycle mobility around the state. With regard to Active Transportation, we agree this is an important facet of the BMP that must be embraced, and we have made edits to the LRTP to highlight bicycle mobility with the benefit of better physical and mental health. Thank you for pointing that out. And while it is true that

bicycle infrastructure can cost a fraction of what highway improvements costs, it is also true that the state is obligated to make infrastructure improvements to maintain our existing highway network. Nonetheless, we believe that having a bicycle plan in place to highlight the value of bicycle infrastructure will lead to more bicycle projects in the future.

Faith LaBossiere

Submit Date: 11/09/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

South County has the opportunity, at this public comment period, to demonstrate the need to actualize the Bicycle Mobility Plan as the LRTP 2040 is formulated.

2020, the year of the coronavirus, has demonstrated beyond doubt how crucial having access to outdoor activity is to our mental and physical health. Increased numbers of walkers and bikers is obvious. To quantify, Paths to Progress, RI's bike advocacy group's Biking in the Time of Coronavirus survey of bike shops and cycling, provides striking data. Of the 624 respondents, the survey showed an 80% increase in biking, bike shop inventories were low or non-existent. Riders said they expect to continue riding after the pandemic. The largest percent want more dedicated bike paths. (Survey in the Biking in the Time of Coronavirus, 2020)

Economy

South County with its economy largely dependent on tourism, can expand its limited season to the shoulder months of spring and fall by providing destination biking. Many areas countrywide can point to the economic impact of bicycle infrastructure, and to quote: "\$60 million/yr economic benefit in North Carolina's northern Outer Banks from bicycling activity. 53% of visitors return because of the bicycle facilities." (Institute for Transportation Research and Education) Numbers tell the tale: Tourism swells the population in the four towns by 38% June – September. Encouraging a portion of those visitors to South County in April, May, October and November for beautiful seaside cycling would have huge economic benefits. (South County Tourism's data and town websites).

Connect and Expand the State's Bicycle Network

December 14, 2016, the first Tri-Town Coastal Route meeting was held with the goal of coordinating pathway linkage Westerly to Narragansett. Subsequently, many meeting and some progress has been made. The BMP identifies the coastal route as the Block Island Sound Greenway. In addition to providing beautiful shoreline vistas, this route opens access to the beaches, at least 15 recreational destinations and creates commuting opportunities. Significantly, the Block Island Sound Greenway parallels Route 1 with only 5 controlled crossing lights. Extensive study is required to find safe crossing of Route 1 along the coastal route. Unsafely, riders are forced to use Route 1, a 4-lane highway with average speeds of 59 mph. (Vanasse Hangen Brustlin/Route 1 Crossing Feasibility Memo 6/21/19)

Once across, Rt. 1 riders have access to 7 roads deemed suitable and most suitable (2011-2012 RIDOT Guide To Cycling) as well as scenic while providing linkage to the rest of the state and the following destinations: USFW Refuge, Burlingame State Park, Great Swamp Management Area, Woody Hill Management Area, Ninigret Park and Wildlife Refuge, Trustom Pond National Refuge, Watchaug Pond, Wordens Pond, 5 tidal salt ponds and University of RI. Since the inception of the Tri-Town Coastal Route meeting in 2016 South County has seen some progress.

Specifically, with regard to:

Charlestown, in 2016, completed a prototype pathway in Ninigret Park demonstrating to the public the goal of future pathways; businesses in conjunction with the Parks & Recreation Commission, installed bike racks throughout town including Library and Post Office; the town is beginning a TIP application for bike lanes on Rt.1A from Ninigret Park to King Tom Pond including the restructuring of the Rt. 1/Rt. 1A interchange in the King Tom Pond area.

South Kingstown, in 2020, extended the William C. O'Neill pathway into URI creating a link to Kingston Station and Narragansett. Business district on Old Tower Hill Road near four corners has been redesigned to include designated bike lanes.

Narragansett, in 2019 began construction on Phase 4A of the William C. O'Neill/ South County Bike Path funded by a RIDEM grant under the 2016 Green Economy Bond. This segment is nearing completion and is already in heavy use. During the pandemic and shut down the path became a popular place for people to seek exercise and fresh air. It continues as the cold weather approaches. Completion of the path to the Narragansett Town Beach (Phase 4B) would fully realize the tourist and economic benefit of the South County Bike Path. Bike traffic is also increasing along the major state routes especially Boston Neck Road (Scenic 1A) and in downtown Narragansett.

Westerly has heightened biking awareness and safety with on-road bicycle icons throughout town. In 2020 a \$330,000 grant has made possible the design of an Atlantic Avenue pedestrian and bike pathway. The pathway, on the north side of Atlantic Ave, will provide a safe and scenic addition to Westerly's popular shoreline. Westerly currently shares a goal with South Kingstown and neighboring Charlestown for establishing a continuous bikeway which would become part of RIDOT's bike network and may serve, in part, as a segment of an off-street East Coast Greenway. (Westerly Comprehensive Plan 2020-2040)

Health and Safety

Elements in the BMP would resolve serious safety problems resulting from the increased bicycle and pedestrian use of the public roads. Alternative transportation in South County is extremely limited. The Amtrak main line, which runs from New York to Boston, crosses the northerly portion of Charlestown. Despite having this major transportation feature within its boundaries, there is no direct connection for Charlestown residents and visitors; the nearest passenger stations are in the Town of South Kingstown to the north, and in the Town of Westerly to the west. There is also no regularly scheduled bus service within the town. (Charlestown Comprehensive Plan 2020 rewrite) South Kingstown and Narragansett are served by RIPTA to major destinations, Mall, train station, URI, from those locations passengers must walk or ride a bike. Walking and cycling have been shown as a major tool in developed nations to improve public health and to reduce health care costs. A study by Columbia University found that investment in bike lanes added a year of quality living to the average NYC resident. (Mohit & Muennig The cost-effectiveness of bike lanes in NYC 09/September 2016)

South County

Westerly to Narragansett, do not have the bicycle infrastructure to provide safe, fun and practical cycling. The BMP's 20 year Plan of 4 Goals, 5 Initiatives and the 8 actions are not being actualized despite the demonstrated need in South County. RI bicycle advocates recognize the need for a point person within RIDOT and Statewide Planning coordinate and address bicycle and pedestrian needs.

Please adopt and implement the Rhode Island Bicycle Mobility Plan.

Respectfully Submitted, Faith LaBossiere Charlestown Parks and Recreation Commission Paths To Progress, Member

Response

Thank you for your comments. The efforts of the bicycle community to expand bicycling opportunities within our communities is applauded and will be relied on to continue the growth and development of future bicycle paths and amenities. Local and municipal support as it concerns matching funds, preparing and submitting STIP applications, or actually beginning to design and permit facilities will be important to seeing the projects listed in the BMP come to fruition, at least in the short term and likely in the long term as transportation funds are currently spread thinly across several programs. Grants will also be a key source of funding, as you point out, to help fund design and potentially match state construction funding. Important multi-modal connections at train stations and within/connecting town centers, will also serve to help improve rider safety, catalyze economic development and increase the utilization of bicycle amenities. The efforts of local bicycle advocates are important to seeing these improvements realized and bring attention to areas not currently adequately served by all modes of travel.

Phil Moreschi

Submit Date: 11/09/2020

Submit Method: Email

Comment

Hello Mr. D'Alessandro,

I just became aware of the Statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan in October of this year through our Town of Charlestown Planning & Zoning Commission Chairperson, Ruth Platner. I was not aware that this plan was being developed:

<http://planri.com/pdf/bmp/RI%20Bicycle%20Mobility%20Plan%20October%202020%20DRAFT.pdf>
[linkprotect.cudasvc.com]

I do understand that comments need to be submitted on the plan by today. I did not see anywhere in the plan where comments could be provided. I looked at the interactive map but it did not allow me to comment or edit. I also went to Facebook and it did not have an obvious place to comment. I am hoping sending my comments to you will be acceptable.

First of all let me say that it is an impressive study and conceptual plan and I will certainly do what I can to support its implementation. Living in Charlestown I cycle along the coast and appreciate the opportunities and challenges that the current roadway systems offer. My comments are focused on one very specific connection that I believe is very strategic and hopefully totally affordable so it can receive high priority for funding in the near future.

Looking at this Scalable Map:

<https://vhb.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9f102148f9a9484e95560042c79d3f71>
[linkprotect.cudasvc.com]

The current plan recommends a Bicycle Lane or a Road Diet with Bicycle Lanes (I was having a tough time understanding the color shading relative to the key) for the connection of the two segments of Old Post Road in Charlestown that are separated by a Northbound Route 1A Ramp to Route 1 that merges with a Northbound Route 1 Exit to Route 1A. See map below. This connection is located just north of King Tom Pond, just to the west of Charlestown Liquors in Charlestown. As defined in the Bicycle Mobility Plan, a bicycle lane does not have any physical separation from the roadway. The bicycle lane would therefore be a section of pavement at the inside (south side) of the exit/entrance ramp.

I think this is a big mistake for this short stretch of bicycle path along this highway entrance ramp/exit ramp. I cycle this route often, travelling west bound on Route 1 A to get to Ninigret Park. I cross to the southbound side of Rt. 1 A approximately 300 feet from where the Rt. 1 exit ramp enters Rt. 1A. I do this since the traffic off of Route 1 comes flying around the bend and onto Route 1A at high speed with poor visibility. It is dangerous to try to cross to the southbound side of 1A if you are cycling close to the exit. I then ride my bicycle Southbound (actually West) on the grass on the south side of the exit ramp/entrance ramp. I ride or walk my bike behind the guiderail since traffic on the exit ramp/entrance ramp is either flying at high speed exiting off of Route 1 or accelerating at high speed from Route 1A around a curve to merge onto Route 1. I travel behind the guiderail, then continue up Route 1A heading West (Southbound) opposing traffic until I get well beyond the exit from Route 1 where traffic is exiting to Route 1A Southbound (West). Since traffic is travelling at a high rate of speed coming off of Route 1 exit ramp and also entering Route 1 entrance ramp it would be very dangerous to have an unprotected bicycle lane adjacent to such high speed traffic on a curve with poor visibility in several locations. It would make much more sense to separate the bicycle and vehicular traffic by creation of a side path.

This would be a very short section of path and would provide a huge safety benefit and would open up an important section of Charlestown to the balance of the bicycle traffic on Route 1A in Charlestown and in South Kingstown. People cycle Route 1 A to get to Ninigret Park and many people cycle Matunuck Schoolhouse Road between Charlestown and Matunuck. Making this very short connection of the two segments of Route 1A would open up a very substantial cycling route with a very desirable destination to the riding public from Charlestown and Matunuck. This is a highly populated area with very dense development associated with the beach colony developments between Route 1A and the shoreline. This small connection would serve a large population of cyclists to several additional miles of Route 1A.

Response

Thank you for your comments, you bring up some important points that should be considered during subsequent phases of the project. Since the BMP is conceptual in nature, the candidate treatments are intended as a guide and subject to alteration as individual alignments and actual improvements make their way through planning, project development, and design. We also expect municipalities to submit applications for projects during the solicitation of projects that is conducted as part of preparing the STIP. The BMP is the first step toward improving bicycle mobility in the state and will require local and state partnership to see candidate treatments programmed into local Capital Improvement Plans and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for design, permitting, and construction.

Alison Ring, New Shoreham Town Planner

Submit Date: 11/09/2020

Submit Method: Email

Comment

Draft State of Rhode Island Long Range Transportation Plan, October 2020

<http://planri.com/documents.asp>

Town of New Shoreham Comments

11/9/2020

New Shoreham Town Listing / Consistent Representation in Appropriate Region

New Shoreham was not included in the list of Rhode Island communities on page 9 of the draft plan. None of the maps of the four regions on page 10 display Block Island. Page 44 map of South - Washington County, does not color in Block Island, instead Block Island is color coded the same with towns in the Southeast & Islands - Bristol and Newport County region on page 45. However, the island is not specifically mentioned in these pages so it is unclear in what region Block Island has been designated. It is typically grouped with other Washington County communities.

Corn Neck Road Resiliency

A majority of the public roads on the island are State owned and are maintained by the Town with State funding. One State-owned road that has been part of a significant amount of local planning efforts is Corn Neck Road. The roadway is susceptible to storm inundation and sea level rise and was significantly damaged during Hurricane Sandy. The Town of New Shoreham received a Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Hurricane Sandy Resiliency funding to undertake a planning study of Corn Neck Road to identify alternatives to mitigate impacts from storms and climate change. This Transportation Resiliency Planning Study (completed in 2017) evaluates existing roadway data and hydrographic data including storm surge and sea level rise data, incorporates public input, and identifies alternatives to improve the resiliency of the Corn Neck Road corridor. The Town selected a preferred alternative that would involve elevating a portion of the roadway and the next step is to identify funding for engineering.

Improving Safety of Roadways

Improving safety and reducing congestion of vehicles, taxis, mopeds, bicyclists and pedestrians is a major priority to the Town. During the peak tourism season, issues of congestion and safety arise on Block Island because of the large influx of people and automobiles. Accommodating multiple modes of transportation safely and efficiently on narrow roads during the busy season is a challenge. Visitors can be distracted, unfamiliar with the geography, and lacking experience on mopeds and bicycles, creating safety issues on the island's roadways. The Town would like to work with the State on implementing transportation improvements that could improve safety including continued expansion of sidewalks along state-owned roads in the village areas and exploring improvements to bicycle transportation on the island.

Currently, the only bicycle path/lane is a narrow marked shared bicycle lane in the shoulder of Corn Neck Road. All alternatives in the Corn Neck Road Transportation Resiliency Plan include widening as necessary to provide a consistent 30 foot wide asphalt paved width including two 10-foot travel lanes, a 2-foot shoulder on the west side of the road, and an 8-foot shoulder on the east side of the road. The wider eastern shoulder would provide a shared use path for pedestrians and bicycles.

New sidewalks were installed this year along West Side Road. Another top priority location for the extension of sidewalks (currently listed within the STIP) is along Chapel Street from Weldon's Way to Old Town Road.

Ferry Service

The LRTP covers ferry service but there is no reference to the ferry service to and from Block Island which serves as a lifeline to the island community. The service is displayed on a map within the Plan but the only text/content in regards to ferry service relates to the Narragansett Bay RIDOT Providence-Newport ferry service. The ferry terminal in Galilee is vulnerable to sea level rise and flooding due to coastal storms. Due to this concern, the community recommends resiliency planning, preparedness and improvements to mitigate potential interruptions in mainland access. The Block Island Harbors Sea Level Rise Adaptation Study (2013) and the 2016 Comprehensive Plan raise this issue.

Mainland Parking Facility

Related to the Block Island Ferry is the State-owned and managed mainland parking facility in Point Judith. This lot is relied on by Block Island residents for long-term parking of a mainland vehicle, and use for overnight parking for those who travel frequently to the island. The provision of affordable mainland parking is essential to successful ferry operations and the goals of the Town. The Town's Comprehensive Plan advocates for improved mainland parking facilities and amenities with affordable rates for island residents and property owners. An action within the Plan is to work with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and the Town of Narragansett to develop a long-term parking plan in Point Judith.

Establishment of a Port Authority

More than any other RI community, Block Island relies on the services of private transportation companies to provide critical transportation connections to and from the island. The community desires an increased voice in transportation access and management decisions. The following language is included in the Town's 2016 Comprehensive Plan, Aside from direct discussions, or involvement in hearings, with the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission, the Rhode Island Airport Corporation and the Coastal Resources Management Council, the Town currently does not benefit from any official representation on governing bodies making transportation access decisions. As such, the Town would like to explore with the State the establishment of a Port Authority consisting of island representatives appointed by the Town Council. A local transportation commission could provide a unified voice for the island in crucial sea, air, and related land access management decisions, such as, but not limited to, ferry scheduling and fare structures, freight costs, airport fees, expansions or limits on mooring fields and moped licenses issued. The local transportation commission could also assist the Town in advocating for fair representation and the establishment of a Port Authority.

Response

Thank you for your comments. The listing of New Shoreham has been corrected and edits have been made throughout the LRTP to consistently represent the town in appropriate sections and maps. Additional edits have been made to the LRTP to reflect the specific concerns of New Shoreham. These edits include: 1) A strategy has been added to the goal of Promote Environmental Sustainability that encourages state agencies to work together with the RI Infrastructure Bank's Municipal Resilience Program to bolster climate resilience planning, including identifying options for available funding for projects like Corn Neck Road Resiliency or building for resiliency at the Port of Galilee to protect continued operation of ferry service to Block Island; 2) a strategy has also been added to the goal of Support Economic Development that encourages the state to work specifically with towns that serves as tourist destinations on implementing transportation improvements that could improve safety including continued expansion of sidewalks along state-owned roads in the village areas and exploring improvements to bicycle transportation; and 3) a strategy has been added to explore the possibility of establishing a Port Authority at the Port of Galilee and evaluate long term options and methods to streamline and improve decision making around development and parking in Point Judith, and transportation access and management decisions. New Shoreham faces a unique set of transportation related issues and it is our hope that working together we can better address these issues.

ACLU of Rhode Island

Submit Date: 10/28/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

The ACLU of Rhode Island appreciates the opportunity to provide commentary on the October 2020 draft of the Long Range Transportation Plan. Though there are no specific aspects of the draft plan that we would like to provide targeted comments on, we would like to briefly provide testimony on the role of privacy and data security as technology inevitably becomes a larger part of the future of transportation in Rhode Island. As technology begins to play a prominent role in the facilitation of transportation in Rhode Island – in whatever capacity, whether through moving vehicle fare collection, license plate readers, or other camera-based traffic management systems – it is just as critical that policies be proactively implemented to secure the privacy of drivers in our state. For all new technology services or devices which are considered or installed, the State should publicly disclose the exact parameters of data being collected; where and when this data will be collected; how the data will be stored and for how long; the purposes for which it will be accessed; and the limitations that the State has put on sharing this data, including with law enforcement agencies and personnel. While public disclosure is crucial, the State should also proactively put limits on each of the above considerations. All data should have a time limit for deletion, should be collected with a very narrowly tailored and express interest to facilitate its specific transportation goal, and should not be shared with outside agencies or law enforcement in the absence of a warrant. Though we recognize that this plan does not discuss these exact types of technological tools, undoubtedly they will be utilized to some degree as these transportation and infrastructural plans move forward. As this happens, and as these technological tools become incorporated, we highly encourage the State to keep our commentary in mind to design a transportation infrastructure that works in both the interests of Rhode Island and preserves the privacy of Rhode Island drivers. Thank you for your consideration.

Response

The state appreciates your comments and we have included them as part of the public record.

Mental Health Recovery Coalition of RI (MHRC-RI)

Submit Date: 10/30/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

Hi, Everyone I know favors keeping Kennedy Plaza as the central bus hub in Providence. For people who take the bus daily, including people recovering from mental health issues, transferring from bus to bus needs to be as easy as possible. People in recovery may be going back to school, or to work, or to recovery meetings, or even owning their own business, and they need to be encouraged to get to these places easily, so they can move on in their lives. It is also good for the environment to expand bus ridership, which will not happen if people cannot easily get to school, work, and other places, such as church, grocery shopping and doctor's appointments. My suggestion is to do a survey of bus riders to see what people really think. You could hand out surveys on the buses or at bus stops, just like previous surveys have been carried out. Not all bus riders have computers, so they cannot all respond online. Or if they do have computers, they may not notice the postings or remember the links when they get home, to be able to respond online. It is in the interest of all RI bus riders who pass through Providence that Kennedy Plaza remain the central bus hub in Providence, and it is the interests of bus riders that should be taken into account when making this decision.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Due to ongoing multiagency efforts to address downtown mobility and quality of life, the Transit Master Plan does not include specific recommendations relating to Downtown Providence, including Kennedy Plaza. Similarly, the Long Range Transportation Plan does not address the transit multi-hub vs mono-hub approach to serving downtown Providence. With regard to public engagement, several forms of outreach transpired over the course of preparing the LRTP and TMP, including in-person outreach at transit plazas, including Kennedy Plaza, and elsewhere around the state. The purpose of in-person outreach was to engage the public without access to the internet or ability to comment otherwise. However, on-board surveys have been conducted in the past and may be conducted in the future.

RI Transit Riders (Patricia Raub, RI Transit Riders Coordinator)

Submit Date: 11/03/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

RI Transit Riders is in general support of the transit elements of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, as it calls for many transit improvements. These improvements include the following: increased frequency and span of day on most bus routes; the speeding up trips with transit priority, bus-on-shoulder and regional as well as metro-area rapid bus routes; extension of the R Line to Central Falls; bus stop improvements; fare integration and information sharing amongst various transportation agencies; opening more local and regional transportation hubs; establishing some new crosstown routes and local services in Newport, Woonsocket and Westerly; instituting flex service at Quonset; and providing faster and more frequent Boston-Providence commuter rail.

However, we do suggest a few improvements: the LRTP generally calls for maintaining existing infrastructure but omits calling for maintaining a central bus hub in Providence, a major transit asset now

under threat. There also needs to be attention to marketing and incentivizing transit use to increase ridership. Access to transit stops should include the need for timely clearing of snow from sidewalks after storms. The safety section should note mode shifting from cars to transit as a safety strategy since, as reported by Peter Ginaitt, RIPTA's safety officer at the last Board meeting, "Transit Passengers are 40 to 70 times less likely to be killed or injured when riding public transportation than driving or riding in a motor vehicle."

We also note the inclusion of some projects that seem prohibitively expensive: for example \$2.08 billion for Central-Falls-Warwick bus rapid transit, \$180 million for an Amtrak stop at the airport, and \$1.096 billion for bus fleet electrification. Electrifying about 218 fixed route buses should be much less costly. Despite our reservations with regard to these shortcomings, we are impressed with the scope of the plan overall. Its implementation will greatly improve public transit in Rhode Island, and we hope the state will prioritize transit improvements in the Plan implementation.

Response

Thank you for your comment. Due to ongoing multiagency efforts to address downtown mobility and quality of life, the Transit Master Plan does not include specific recommendations relating to Downtown Providence, including Kennedy Plaza. Similarly, the Long Range Transportation Plan does not address the transit multi-hub vs mono-hub approach to serving downtown Providence. With regard to your other points, RIPTA's marketing department focuses on this work on an ongoing basis. RIPTA also provides snow removal at bus shelters but maintenance of sidewalks at bus stops is typically the responsibility of adjacent property owners. RIPTA also strives to maintain rider safety and statistically speaking, riding transit can be safer than driving an automobile.

In terms of cost estimates included in the plan, all cost estimates are preliminary and subject to more detailed funding plan development for each line item. The funding sources are also assumed to include substantial federal discretionary grants.

The Nature Conservancy

Submit Date: 11/04/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Long-Range Transportation Plan Moving Forward RI, including the appendices such as the Bicycle Mobility Plan and the Transit Master Plan. As you know, the science of climate change is clear and unequivocal. To prevent the worst effects of climate change and also make the clean energy transition at lowest cost to Rhode Islanders, the state must act quickly and decisively to decarbonize our economy by 2050 at the latest. As you are no doubt aware, transportation accounts for more than a third of Rhode Island's greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation and transit planning is an essential element of our state's climate response.

We appreciate the discussion of climate change in the LRTP. However, to reflect how central transportation planning is to climate change, we respectfully add the following comments:

More Robust Inclusion of the Transportation and Climate Initiative

The Long Range Transportation Plan and the potential Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) need to be more explicitly coordinated. The LRTP is setting the direction for mobility-related investments for the next twenty years in Rhode Island. It is vital that it sets the state on a direction to drastically reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from the mobility sector. The Transportation Climate initiative would provide an important source of funding for low-carbon investments, but cannot by itself decarbonize the transportation sector. Further, the LRTP (and included Bicycle Mobility and Transit Master Plans) should be used to guide the types of investments made with any funding that becomes available through TCI. Further, the LRTP includes a recommendation that a "Mobility Working Group" is created to "build support for TCI." The Governor recently created a Mobility Task Force, which appears to have a broader scope that includes proposing the types of programs that TCI could invest in. The LRTP (and its appendices) could serve as an excellent guide for investments that increase access to public transit and expand bike-ability and walkability of neighborhoods.

Collaboration with Municipal Resilience Program

The implementation of key pieces of the LRTP should partner with the Municipal Resilience Program at the RI Infrastructure Bank. The Municipal Resilience Program (MRP) partners with municipalities across the state to support comprehensive climate resilience planning. The program includes a Community Resilience Building workshop with diverse community leaders and culminates in grant opportunities to kick off implementation of municipal resilience plans. As of November 9, 13 Rhode Island municipalities will have participated in the MRP.

The workshops identify specific roads, bridges, and other infrastructure already or likely to be affected by climate change. On pages 34-35 of the draft LRTP, under the goal of Maintaining Transportation Infrastructure, you include three metrics that would be very relevant to the MRP efforts:

- # of bridges vulnerable to sea level rise (77)
- Miles of roadways vulnerable to sea level rise (84)
- No. of intermodal hubs vulnerable to sea level rise (6, 2)

This data would not only be relevant to the MRP communities, but also the MRP planning efforts and grant program could be a key partner in implementing elements of the LRTP goals.

Stronger Metrics on Non-Car Mobility Investments

Section 5: Measuring Performance and Outcomes includes metrics and goals for each of the sections of the LRTP. Overall, there are clear, data-driven, and quantitative metrics in this section of the report. However, we note that for several climate-related goals, the metrics are imprecise and need to be clearer and more aggressive.

For example, while there are specific targets for "percent of vehicle miles traveled on interstate that are reliable", transit ridership is only being tracked as "upward trend" by 2040.

Other examples include:

- "On-time performance of RIPTA service" has an "upward trend" metric
- "No. of bridges vulnerable to sea level rise" has a "downward trend" metric
- "Miles of roadway vulnerable to sea level rise" has a "downward trend" metric
- "No. of intermodal hubs vulnerable to sea level rise" has a "downward trend" metric
- There are only 3 metrics for the "Strengthen Communities" goal including two with only "upward trend" metrics by 2040
- The Promote Environmental Sustainability Goal includes an "upward trend" metric for the adoption of EV's, instead of having a strong goal for EV adoption and EV infrastructure across the state. It also includes a goal of reducing VMT's by only 10% between 2020 and 2040, not nearly aggressive enough for the full decarbonization that we will need to see to meet our science-based climate targets.

Each of these actions are critical components of the plan, so the state should set specific measurable targets and timelines for implementation.

Lastly, we support public comment made at the public hearing on October 29, 2020. Several commenters mentioned that the plan (including the Bicycle Mobility and Transit Master Plan) include a lot of important projects that would help move us to a more walkable, bikeable, and low-carbon transportation system. The Division of Planning, Department of Transportation, RIPTA, and ultimately the Governor's Office will need to prioritize the implementation of these low and no carbon solutions.

The climate crisis is one that we have seen coming for many years. We know what we need to do to mitigate the worst outcomes, and the transportation sector will be a key player in this effort. What we need now is political leadership and practical strategies from you to enable these policies and programs and the commitment to funding and implementing the LRTP. We stand ready to work alongside you and other state leaders to deliver a cleaner, healthier future for all Rhode Islanders.

Response

We appreciate your feedback on the LRTP and echo your stance on climate initiatives and their undoubted importance in the immediate future. We agree that the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) would play a vital role in reducing climate emissions from the transportation sector but that more can be done. As the TCI is expected to make its way through the approval process and eventually to the Rhode Island legislature for consideration, it is important that potential future funding allocations are aligned with statewide transportation plans as well as the State Transportation Improvement Program. The LRTP itself is updated at a minimum every 5-years or sooner and would incorporate TCI and help inform TCI as headway is made to adopt that program. Future updates of the LRTP will also incorporate improved target setting of state priority performance measures that are currently tracked as a downward or upward trending. This will be possible as data collection and analysis is improved and target setting accuracy is aligned with future transportation revenue and spending.

Regarding the Municipal Resilience Program, we agree our planning efforts can help to inform the MRP and have added a strategy under the Goal of Promote Environmental Sustainability that encourages state agencies to work together within the Municipal Resilience Program at the RI Infrastructure Bank and with municipalities across the state to support comprehensive climate resilience planning. The state sees the benefit of data sharing across platforms in order to track and help to achieve measurable

progress on our environmental goals. We believe having strategic plans in place at the state level will also lead to consensus and commitment of funding to projects that better address the climate crisis.

Mal Skowron

Submit Date: 11/09/2020

Submit Method: Website

Comment

Green Energy Consumers Alliance is a non-profit organization based in Providence. Our mission is to harness the power of energy consumers to speed the transition to a low-carbon future. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and submit the below comments to supplement the three-minute testimony given at the public engagement meeting hosted on Thursday, October 29, 2020.

1. The Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan establish a bold and forward-thinking vision for Rhode Island.

Among the hundreds of pages of the LRTP and its appendices, the Transit Master Plan (TMP) and Bicycle Mobility Plan (BMP) stand out. The two plans establish a vision for Rhode Island where it is as easy to hop on the bus or on a bike as it is to drive a car. Providing a variety of low-carbon transportation options to Rhode Islanders not only helps manage congestion and improve mobility, but also reduces vehicle miles travelled, greenhouse gas emissions, and health-harming emissions like ground-level ozone and particulate matter. Green Energy Consumers strongly supports the proposed framework to reduce climate-warming emissions by getting Rhode Islanders out of single-occupancy gas-powered vehicles.

The Transit Master Plan outlines investments that make the bus easier to use for those who already depend on it every day to access work, healthcare, and other essentials, while also creating a good case to use the bus for those who have never relied on it before. Green Energy Consumers is excited to see faster transit services in dedicated lanes and increased transit frequency. Most importantly, both the Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan explore the holistic benefits of better transit and bike/pedestrian infrastructure: climate benefits, public health benefits, and economic development benefits that come from a transportation system that is not dependent on single-occupancy gas-powered vehicles. We support a robust implementation of the vision outlined in these plans.

2. In addition to identifying more funding, existing transportation funding should be allocated according to a holistic assessment of benefits to encourage execution of the full Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan.

The Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan offer health and climate benefits that extend far beyond the typical considerations of transportation infrastructure. According to the LRTP, an additional \$194 million will be required annually starting in 2020 to achieve the full vision set by the Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan. By 2040, the annual budget gap is expected to grow to \$500 million. Because the current approach to program funding established by the LRTP is to prioritize the maintenance of existing infrastructure, funding decisions will favor highway projects (to further support single-occupancy vehicles) over the more holistic visions established by the TMP and BMP. This

diminishes the plan's other goals to connect people and places, strengthen communities, promote environmental sustainability, and support economic growth.

New and historically underfunded transit and bike/pedestrian projects cannot compete for funding in a decision-making process that favors existing infrastructure and does not account for benefits such as air quality improvement. Rhode Island has a long history of redirecting dollars intended for bike/pedestrian infrastructure towards highway rebuilding and maintenance. To combat this history, we urge the funding for transportation improvement projects to be allocated according to the full suite of benefits they offer. In the absence of a holistic decision-making process, roadway projects will cut to the front of the state's list of priorities. Here are two examples of how this plays out:

The Congestion Management Plan lists increasing bicycle and transit trips as a strategy to manage vehicle congestion. However, upon review of the Pool of Projects (Appendix E), all the solutions for bottlenecks in the next five years involve adding lanes to increase vehicle capacity.

Appendix K (Social Equity: Title VI and Environmental Justice Analysis) acknowledges "Minority individuals continue to live in census tracts that are in close proximity to the state's highways and therefore have a higher exposure to mobile source pollutants. There is also a growing minority population in census tracts adjacent to the State's interstate highways." However, no proposed projects in the LRTP are assessed for their potential to widen or narrow the exposure gap described in Appendix K, disadvantaging active transport and transit projects.

In addition to prioritizing projects according to the holistic benefits they provide, the state will need to identify more funding. The Transportation & Climate Initiative (TCI) is a regional collaboration of twelve states (plus Washington, D.C.) to put a price on high-emitting on-road transportation fuels and fund much-needed investments in clean transportation. The Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan should act as a guide for the investments that Rhode Island makes using TCI revenue. The most aggressive TCI program, which would establish 25% carbon emission reductions by 2032, would generate \$75 million annually, starting in 2022. A less aggressive program would only generate \$22 million annually. Even if 100% of TCI proceeds supported bike/pedestrian and transit projects (an unlikely scenario), a gap of at least \$100 million remains. Therefore, TCI does not preclude the need to assess projects more holistically to allow transit and bike/pedestrian projects to receive more attention for funding.

3. The LRTP does not adequately prepare for vehicle electrification. In 2017, RIDOT issued an RFP to explore the role that autonomous and shared vehicles could have in Rhode Island's transportation system. The state's initiative to consider the rapidly accelerating pace of technological development is appreciated. However, vehicle electrification is poised to be more influential in Rhode Island's immediate future than vehicle autonomy is and has received little attention in the LRTP's twenty-year vision. Electrification is discussed only as a problem in the context of decreasing revenues from the gas tax, rather than an opportunity to promote environmental sustainability (one of the five key objectives established by the LRTP.)

In Rhode Island, every electric vehicle that displaces a gas-powered car reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 75% on a per-mile basis. Consumer Reports has found that electric cars are cheaper to own on a lifetime basis compared to the best-selling, top-rated, and most-efficient cars in their class. The American Lung Association estimates that Rhode Island could receive \$178 million in health

benefits through the transition to EVs. Analysts at MJ Bradley & Associates have found that EV adoption provides widespread economic benefits in every state they investigated, including neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut.

EV adoption in Rhode Island is no longer a question of "if," but "when." There is a wave of electric vehicles coming, but it will happen unevenly across jurisdictions. Prepared states like California and Massachusetts are in position to take full advantage of the benefits of electrification. Rhode Island should make it a priority to consider revenue-raising alternatives to the gas tax that does not disincentivize EV adoption, expand on the electric vehicle charging infrastructure deployment already achieved the Office of Energy Resources and National Grid's Make Ready program, and create an infrastructure deployment strategy for the state to meet its 2025 Zero Emission Vehicle adoption goals.

4. Public participation ensures clarity of process and good planning. Participation should be considered in project execution, too.

One of the greatest assets of the Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan is that the plans were developed with comprehensive community engagement and input. According to the LRTP, engagement consisted of two years of pop-up displays, in-person meetings, and comment submission periods. This planning process led to a comprehensive and thoughtful plan; public engagement should be used to guide funding decisions as well.

The recent outcry against the proposed multi-hub bus plan in Providence is a good example of the consequences of leaving bus riders out of decisions related to transit improvement. It is disappointing that the multi-hub plan was approved despite widespread criticism from the public. By integrating community involvement in decision-making, those kinds of fiascos are less likely to occur. At the very least, funding decisions should prioritize projects that have had community input (like the projects outlined in the Transit Master Plan and Bicycle Mobility Plan) over projects that have not.

Green Energy Consumers Alliance appreciates the opportunity to provide comments and looks forward to the implementation of the Transit Master Plan and Bike Mobility Plan. Please contact Mal Skowron with any questions.

Response

Thank you for your comment. The LRTP is a valuable planning document that identifies the direction and vision for transportation in the state. This document helps to inform the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which is where individual projects are programmed for project development, engineering, and construction. Every attempt is made each year to maintain existing available sources of revenue for transportation projects and leverage those resources to implement the most needed transportation projects. Frequently, transportation needs exceed available resources and this trend is expected to continue as the state adapts to rising construction costs and decreasing revenue as a result of the increase in adoption of electric vehicles as a strategy to achieve our environmental goals. Identifying additional streams of revenue to fund transportation projects will be a major theme in the coming years. The Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) would provide an important source of funding for low-carbon investments that would help to decarbonize the transportation sector and would be a good starting point for identifying other reliable and strategic streams of funding that could be used to expand our transportation network. As the TCI is expected to make its way through the approval process and eventually to the Rhode Island legislature for

consideration, it is important that potential future funding allocations are aligned with statewide transportation plans, including the LRTP, and the State Transportation Improvement Program. The LRTP itself is updated at a minimum every 5-years or sooner and would incorporate TCI and help inform TCI as headway is made to adopt that program. We thank you for your support of the LRTP suite of plans and look forward to working with you on these important initiatives.

END OF PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSES