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Fourteen Community Organizations Join the Rhode Island Transit Riders In Calling On Incoming Governor McKee To Halt the Harmful and Discriminatory Multi-Hub Bus Project

PROVIDENCE – Since initial concept plans were released in late July 2020, opposition has mounted against the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT)’s ‘Multi-Hub Bus Project’ — a project to break up Kennedy Plaza’s central bus hub and replace it with a “multi-hub” system of satellite hubs sited in less convenient locations, a plan formulated with no input from riders.

Last week, fourteen community organizations joined the Rhode Island Transit Riders — a grassroots group fighting to preserve, expand, and improve public transportation in Rhode Island — in calling on incoming Governor Dan McKee to reverse course from the Raimondo Administration and stop the plan. The full text of the letter and signatories are below.

A Title VI civil rights complaint (here and here) was also filed on January 18th against the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) by allied organizations Grow Smart Rhode Island and the South Providence Neighborhood Association charging that the multi-hub bus plan discriminates against low-income and minority passengers.

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January 20, 2021

Dear Lieutenant Governor McKee,

We are writing to wish you our congratulations on your imminent ascension to the Governorship. We are also writing to ask you to call for a halt to RIDOT’s proposal to break up RIPTA’s bus services in Kennedy Plaza, because this plan is a threat to the present needs of Rhode Islanders and to the future growth of the State.

It is no secret that the plan is deeply unpopular. To familiarize you with the plan, RIDOT has proposed fragmenting Downtown Providence bus service into three mini-hubs, which will damage the bus system for riders without improving traffic circulation. This isn’t only an issue for Providence residents; the plan deprives the entire state of its central bus hub, and disabled riders have said that it will make transportation unworkable for them by requiring extra transfers.

The American Planning Association-Rhode Island accurately described the plan as “contrary to the basic principles of transportation planning,” and said that the way it was developed “violates a professional planner’s ethical code,” spending borrowed money in a way that “ignores the expressed purpose of the bond and the clearly articulated needs of the community.” (See letter.) RIDOT’s plan, which would almost completely remove buses from Kennedy Plaza, is not the kind of change we need. Bus riders and their allies understand that it is based on the assumption that Rhode Islanders who ride the bus are “undesirable” lesser members of society, not worthy of such a central, convenient, and grand public space.

RIDOT has failed to provide any convincing arguments that this proposal would benefit RIPTA’s ridership or encourage the growth of transit in Rhode Island. For instance, it is clear that this proposal would move most bus riders further from the Providence train station and from the locations that bus riders use most in downtown, and the proposed new mini-hub in the Jewelry District is cramped and unworkable. Reviewing RIDOT’s plans makes clear that transfers would be made more difficult, harder to navigate, and a more time-consuming problem which would be imposed on a greater number of riders.

This Raimondo administration project just isn’t needed. Although Governor Raimondo will not formally leave her current role immediately, we are fully aware that you have a crucial role in whether the plan advances over the coming weeks and years. A selection of media coverage and letters of opposition from professional and advocacy organizations has been collected on ritransitriders.org/news for your review.

Our coalition consists of bus riders, neighborhood organizers, housing and justice advocates, and regular, common-sense Rhode Islanders. Far from opposing investments in transit, we believe that an improved public transportation system is vital to the future of Rhode Island. Unfortunately, we don’t believe this project has anything to do with improving transit. We have made numerous attempts to work productively with RIDOT and Governor Raimondo’s office, but have been rebuffed. We would very much like the opportunity to work with you on transit issues
that genuinely improve public transit for riders, contribute to Rhode Island's economy and help mitigate global warming now and in the future. However, given the turbulent nature of the pandemic, we don’t believe the ill-advised, expensive, and unwanted reconfiguration of a bus hub that currently works well should be a matter cluttering your desk.

Because RIDOT’s presentations and statements on these plans have often been distorted or misleading, we ask to meet with you directly at your convenience, either by videoconference or after the pandemic has subsided.

Thank you very much for your attention,

Patricia Raub, Coordinator, RI Transit Riders

Cityside at the Wheeler School
COYOTE RI
Green Energy Consumers Alliance
Groundwork RI
Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE)
Jewelry District Association
Observatory Neighborhood Association
RI Bicycle Coalition
RI Homeless Advocacy Project
RI Organizing Project
Smith Hill Community Development Corporation
Sunrise Providence
South Providence Neighborhood Association
West Broadway Neighborhood Association

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