

April 10, 2024

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Acadia Center Support of H7590 Funding for the Transit Master Plan

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

Acadia Center appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill H7590 authorizing a bond referenda for \$100,000,000 to provide funding for the implementation of the state's transit master plan, Transit Forward RI 2040. Acadia Center is a non-profit research and advocacy organization committed to advancing economic and environmental policies that will have the greatest impact on carbon emissions in our region. Our work is grounded in impactful data analysis and inclusive partnerships and collaboration, at the intersection of government, industry, grassroots organizations, advocates, and communities.

Transportation pollution accounts for the largest source of emissions in the Northeast and in Rhode Island, at over 40% of the Northeast's total CO₂ emissions and 38% of all economy-wide emissions in Rhode Island¹. Gasoline-powered cars and trucks comprised the largest share (64.7%) of transportation emissions and were responsible for 24.6% of Rhode Island's total emissions². Further, Rhode Island's transportation sector is not on track to meeting its proportionate Act on Climate mandates. In its recent Carbon Reduction Strategy, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) acknowledges that its existing programs do not move the needle on carbon reduction. RIDOT's transportation emissions forecast demonstrates that a much more aggressive shift to reducing vehicle miles traveled and modal shift will be needed to come close to achieving the 45% reductions by 2030, 80% by 2040 and net zero by 2050.

Time is running out to establish the policies and make the investments necessary to achieve significant emission reductions from the region's most stubborn sector: without urgent action to reduce vehicle pollution, the state's climate targets will be unattainable. Transit Forward RI is projected to achieve 80% of the state's 2050 target for reducing vehicle miles traveled and related emissions³. Implementation of Transit Forward RI will help (a) decrease the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips by promoting and investing in alternative modes of transportation and (b) reduce the length of single-occupancy vehicle trips by encouraging higher-density patterns of development or changes in behavior. The plan is projected to increase transit ridership by over 60%, with most of this increase due to a shift from single occupancy vehicles.

¹ Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. 2020 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. October 2023.

² RI DEM. 2020 RI GHG Emissions Inventory. October 2023.

³ Grow Smart RI. <https://growsmartri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/TMP-VMT-Reduction.pdf>

Beyond addressing climate change, our outdated and underfunded transportation system hinders economic opportunity, has devastating public health impacts, and overwhelmingly burdens the most marginalized populations: low-income communities, communities of color, and rural communities lacking mobility options. At its core, transportation is a basic social need affecting the lives of all residents. Environmental justice communities have been particularly disadvantaged in transportation planning and face restricted mobility options; this investment in the state's transit master plan is an investment in a more equitable and just transportation system.

As emphasized in Transit Forward RI 2040, Rhode Island's economic health and quality of life are directly tied to the strength of its transit network. The plan, and therefore the implementation of this plan with bond funding, is designed to achieve four major goals:

- Make transit attractive and compelling
- Connect people to life's activities
- Grow the economy and improve quality of life
- Ensure financial and environmental sustainability

Thank you for your consideration of this important bond referenda. I hope you will allow the people of Rhode Island to vote on funding its statewide transit system this general election.

Sincerely,

Emily Koo

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