

Next speaker signed up is Barry Schiller.

MR. SCHILLER: Thank you for coming. My name is Barry Schiller. I'm an active member of the RIPTA Riders Alliance. RIPTA is the abbreviation for Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, which is a bus system.

And I think bus passengers in our alliance want to see improved rail, because if there is a better rail system, a better public transit system, then there is more passenger potential for our bus system and more interest in improving transit generally.

But it's also the other way around. If you could help in your design to improve our bus system, it helps feed people into the train system instead of driving or flying.

So what we would like you to pay attention to in Rhode Island is, first of all, at Providence Station, which is highly utilized, there is a voter-approved bond issue for a bus hub adjacent to the train station. You really have to make that work. It's important for our bus system as well as, of course, for the rail passengers. And so any improvements that you make should be compatible with a bus hub at Providence Station.

Related to that is our frustration with the bureaucratic difficulty of having unified fares. RIPTA has a fare system. The MBTA, Amtrak, they all have separate fare systems. In the highway mode, we know that there's E-ZPasses that go across state boundaries. It shouldn't be insurmountable to help us rail passengers by having a more seamless system.

We also have bus connections at Kingston which provides a market perhaps for travel to Newport by taking the train to Kingston and changing, but there's no real coordination between bus and train schedules. Anything you could do, not just on the fares, but to encourage coordination as part of the operating plan, that would be helpful. And there's even a little bit of bus presence at the Westerly station.

Also, bus passengers are not especially wealthy relative to travelers, and anything you could do to keep the fares down would be appreciated, especially on the Boston end of the Northeast Corridor rail market, where, because it's so New York oriented, there are a fair number of empty seats on many runs. So operationally, if we could sell more seats to people who can't afford high fares, if there was some discounted way to do that and cooperate between Amtrak, the MBTA and RIPTA to fill the seats and get the environmental benefit, especially with bus passengers who are very price sensitive, I think, that would be good.

In general, though, we like that you've come here,

and we hope that you continue to coordinate efforts with Rhode Islanders.

We did spend a lot of money on the freight rail improvement program. And one of the things that the RIPTA Riders Alliance notices is, in Rhode Island there's a number of very ambitious, expensive infrastructure suggestions that never materialize. Rather than the operational improvements -- we just heard another suggestion this way. So rather than spending a lot of time on what's not going to happen, it's better to spend time on infrastructure improvements that are incremental, that really help.

We spent a lot of money on this third track. The bus passengers are aware that that's going down the spine of Rhode Island. Pawtucket through Warwick is where the population lives and where we have congested roads.

So the opportunity to use that for more rapid transit is something that I hope, whatever improvements you make, preserves our ability to do that, because we have that in mind as part of our transit system here in Rhode Island.

Thank you.