



Conservation
Law Foundation

For a thriving New England

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Via Electronic Mail

March 10, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Room 35, State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: CLF **Opposes** House Bill No. 7491 – Rhode Island Public Transit Authority

Dear Chair Abney:

The Conservation Law Foundation (“CLF”) appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill No. 7491, which would authorize the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (“RIPTA”) to move forward with a proposed new transit center project. CLF opposes this bill.

CLF is a member-supported non-profit advocacy organization working to protect public health and the environment and build healthy communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England. CLF supports policies that increase services and ridership on RIPTA’s bus transportation system and help to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reduction mandates of the Act on Climate.

H-7941 authorizes RIPTA to enter into necessary contracts to construct a new transit center.¹ This bill also authorizes RIPTA to issue bonds, temporary notes, or other obligations for the transit center project. These bonds may have maturity dates of up to forty years and are not subject to a statutory provision that prohibits RIPTA from issuing bonds that exceed eighty percent of revenues during any fiscal year.²

On January 30, 2024, the RIPTA Board of Directors unanimously voted to approve a contract with Next Wave Rhode Island Partners for Phase 1 of a public-private partnership to design and construct a new transit center in Providence.³ It is no secret that the preferred location of this new transit center is a 2.15 acre site between Friendship and Clifford Streets—known as Lot 35—in Providence’s I-195

¹ See House Bill No. 7491 at § 39-18-1.

² See House Bill No. 7491 at § 39-18-7(a)(2).

³ See New, Innovative Providence Transit Center, A Proposal for A Growing RIPTA: Providence Transit Center; <https://www.ripta.com/transitcenter/>.



Redevelopment District.⁴ This choice is supported by the Governor,⁵ but noticeably lacks support from RIPTA riders—the people who would be using the new facility and would be most affected by the decision.⁶ The preliminary cost estimate for this new transit center is \$77 million dollars.⁷

H-7941 would make it possible for RIPTA to enter into a “public/private partnership” with New Wave Rhode Island Partners to build a new transit center. In this deal, RIPTA carries all the debt, and New Wave Rhode Island Partners makes off with all the profit. Moreover, this bill is being proposed at the same time that the proposed budget leaves an \$8 million hole in RIPTA’s 2025 operating budget and RIPTA is proposing cuts to critical transit services. This begs the question: why is the General Assembly being asked to pass a bill that benefits a few wealthy and influential local interests while leaving the RIPTA ridership—many of whom are from underserved, marginalized, and economically disadvantaged Rhode Island communities—with underfunded and reduced essential transportation services.

CLF implores you to stop listening to the wants of big developers and address the needs of the many. Please reject H-7491 and instead pass H-7774, a resolution to fill the hole in RIPTA’s 2025 operating budget and take the steps needed to make RIPTA work best for all Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Stang", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Richard Stang
Senior Attorney
Conservation Law Foundation

cc: Members of the House Committee on Finance
Darrèll Brown, Vice President, Rhode Island, Conservation Law Foundation

⁴ See *RIPTA gets first dibs on 195 land as it looks for new bus hub site*, No public comment allowed at I-195 Redevelopment District Commission meeting on agreement to take lot off market, Rhode Island Current, February 26, 2024; <https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2024/02/26/ripta-gets-first-dibs-on-195-land-as-it-looks-for-new-bus-hub-site/>.

⁵ See *RIPTA finally owns up to wanting I-195 land for new bus hub*. No one is surprised. I-195 Redevelopment District Commission to consider request to reserve lot for next eight months while details worked out, Rhode Island Current, February 22, 2024; <https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2024/02/22/ripta-finally-owns-up-to-wanting-i-195-land-for-new-bus-hub-no-one-is-surprised/>.

⁶ See *RIPTA moves ahead with bus hub privatization plan, ignoring its duty to riders*, Steve Ahlquist, January 31, 2024; https://steveahlquist.substack.com/p/ripta-moves-ahead-with-bus-hub-privatization?r=4I5bq&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true; see also *Grow Smart RI seeks commitment to funding basics of transit service before proceeding with any new hub facility*; <https://growsmartri.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/An-Open-Letter-to-the-Governor-Speaker-Senate-President.pdf>.

⁷ See Rhode Island Current, *supra* note 5.