



GrowSmartRI
Sustainable Economic Growth
& Quality of Place

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Testimony before the House Finance Committee

May 13, 2024

RE: In Support of H-7678 – Rideshare Vehicle Surcharge

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

I write in support of House Bill 7678 and thank Representative Morales for introducing this innovative funding proposal to support improved public transportation and the network of sidewalks that enable pedestrians and transit patrons to safely get about their neighborhoods and communities. Massachusetts was the first state to adopt such a policy in 2016.

Grow Smart RI is Rhode Island's statewide smart growth advocacy organization. We represent a big-tent coalition of business and civic leaders and community stakeholders committed to strengthening and growing Rhode Island's economy in a sustainable and equitable way. We work with community partners across the state to integrate smart land use, transportation and housing policies in a way that uses resources most efficiently and that creates thriving, vibrant and opportunity rich places.

Investments in quality public transportation are investments in Downtown and Main Street revitalization, transportation fairness and justice, climate action and helps to boost housing production through transit-oriented development.

One suggested amendment is to follow Massachusetts' example by assessing the surcharge on each transportation network company rather than on the fare charged to each customer.

RIPTA currently relies on a declining source of gas tax revenues to support operations. It has been well-documented that several new sources of funding are needed for incremental, predictable and meaningful investments over this decade and next. And this proposal is one that we support.

Here's what we know:

- **Rhode Island already has a publicly vetted and adopted vision for the future of transit** that will get more Rhode Islanders where they need to go, when they need to get there, conveniently, safely and with dignity.
- **There's never been more federal funding available** to help states improve transit, but state matching funds and operating funds are essential.
- **State Funding:** RI ranks among the lowest in 2021 per capita state funding of transit (\$18.51) especially when compared to other urbanized states in our region, including CT (\$67.84), DE (\$100.86), PA (\$120.24), NJ (\$142.93), MD (\$198.72) and MA (\$238.76).
- **Transit and Climate:** Fully implementing RI's Transit Master Plan would achieve 80% of RI's 2050 target for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and related emissions.
- **Access to Transit in RI:** 77% of Rhode Islanders already live within a 10-min walk of a transit stop, making improved service appealing to a large majority of the state's population.

Yours truly,

John Flaherty
Deputy Director