



RIPTA: Opportunities and Challenges

by Barry Shiller, Transportation Advocate, and Chris Wilhite, Chapter Director

For public transit in Rhode Island it is the best of times and the worst of times.

The best: ridership has skyrocketed over the past four years, creating a growing awareness of public transportation's importance in reviving our core cities, combating global climate change, and keeping our energy dollars within Rhode Island. The City of Providence is conducting a major study to expand service to include bus rapid transit or light rail.

The worst: RIPTA faces a \$12.3 million deficit in the current fiscal year.

Unless our leaders design a designated and sustainable funding stream that grows with demand, that deficit is projected to rise to \$25.8 million in four years.

RIPTA gets 7.25 cents of RI's 31-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax and that accounts for a large portion of the RIPTA budget. Although it's hard to believe, RIPTA's main state funding source actually shrinks with demand. As fuel prices go up, and people reduce their fuel consumption, the revenue RIPTA receives from the gas

tax decreases. Ironically, this makes riding the bus cheaper than driving, but the bus system has less revenue to meet increased demand. Clearly we need to find a better source of funding for transit that grows with demand and keeps up with inflation. In addition, the Rite-Care program that, until recently, paid the transit fares for a lot of low income people, has been cut back significantly.

The result is that RIPTA is considering a drastic 20% cut in services to balance its budget. This

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Fall Ramble

Saturday, October 25, 2008
9:00 am

We will be doing a fall ramble in the Parker Woodlands Audubon Refuge. Check out the autumn colors, cairns, old farmhouse foundations and Turkey Meadow Brook. Please sign up beforehand. Parker Woodlands, Coventry. The walk is approximately 4.0 miles.

Leader: Mike Condor
condor@gmail.com
(401) 783-5228

Co-Leader: Angie Flynn

Lightbulbs to Leadership: A Call to Action!

By Beth Perry, Conservation Committee Co-Chair, and
Dick Graefe, Conservation Committee Member

How many of you have started using energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) in your homes and businesses? Chances are you have, just like thousands of other Rhode Islanders who have tried to decrease their dependence on fossil fuels by making changes in the way they live, the kinds of cars they drive, or how they commute to work.

And while the energy choices we make as individuals are important, as a state and as a nation, we need to do much more than replace our light bulbs in order to solve global warming and achieve energy independence. What we really need

now are the kinds of far-reaching changes that can only be brought about by bold leadership from our elected officials. To achieve this goal, two strategic areas to focus on are improving our state's public transit system and creating a "green" economy.

This summer, the Conservation Committee mobilized to send a message to Governor Carcieri that we want to see action! As governor, Carcieri has the power to make real change happen in Rhode Island, and more quickly than trying to make

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RI Chapter Executive Committee 2008

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Chris Wilhite

Chapter Director

**Sierra Club RI Chapter
17 Gordon Avenue
Suite 208
Providence, RI 02905**

(t) 401.521.4734

(f) 401.521.4001

www.ri.sierraclub.org

From the Chair

By Maggie McCormick

I've been thinking about change. This is hardly a surprise, as the leaves turn, the hours of daylight shorten, we get ready to settle in for another New England winter, and it's been election season [seems like] forever. While the urge to start hibernating is strong, there's too much going on to sleep just yet. In fact, there's so much going on, it's hard not to be restless.

Most notably, the news everywhere is dire: housing market collapse, financial market collapse, the threat of another hurricane every week As much as ever, we need people with hope and vision and strength to step up and take action.

I ask you: "Who are these people?"

The answer is simple.

You and I are these people.

What action should we take? That answer will--and should--vary among us, for we have varied concerns, interests and talents. But, I urge you--as I remind myself--do something! Call or write our legislators to ask that they fund RIPTA and support clean energy. Write a letter to your local paper voicing support for green jobs. Think about your consumption habits. Take another look at what you can and do recycle. Get the facts, talk with others, and vote in November. Join the Sierra Club RI Chapter Conservation Committee, Political Committee or Fundraising Committee. You can make a difference.

Now I hope *you* are thinking about change.

Lightbulbs to Leadership

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changes at the federal level. And much the same as California's strict clean car standards were a model for standards adopted in 14 other states, solutions developed here in RI can lead the way for other states to enact clean energy choices.

Energy Independence Month

Along with other Sierra Club chapters nationally, we declared July as Energy Independence Month. Conservation Committee members and chapter staff wrote op-ed articles and letters to the editor. They were published throughout the month in local newspapers throughout the state and in the *Providence Journal*.

We held house parties in Providence, Newport and North Kingstown. The primary message at

the house parties was the need for green jobs in the new energy economy. Mayor Cicilline attended our flagship house party in Providence and spoke about the role of clean, affordable transportation choices in building a clean energy economy with thousands of green jobs in Rhode Island. At the house parties, we discussed the problems facing our state related to our dependence on fossil fuels:

- Gasoline prices topping \$4 per gallon.
- The "export" of \$1.5 billion out of Rhode Island to other oil producing nations of the world.
- 40% of the Rhode Island's greenhouse gas emissions is caused by transportation.

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Political Committee Wins Primaries for the RI Environment

by Ben Jones, Political Committee Chair

With the environment a hot issue in this election season, Sierra Club RI Chapter Political Committee members had their hands full evaluating dozens of potential candidates campaigning for Rhode Island House and Senate seats. After extensive reviews of candidate questionnaires and interviews for non-incumbents, the Political Committee recommended endorsements in only five primary races, including:

- Incumbent David Segal in House District 2, which includes Fox Point, and parts of downcity and East Providence;
- Incumbent Grace Diaz in House District 11, on Providence's south side;
- Incumbent David Caprio in House District 34, in Narragansett;
- Open seat challenger Chris Fierro in House District 51, in Woonsocket; and
- Open seat challenger David Bennett in Senate District 31, in Warwick.

Segal has been a champion for the environment in his first term in office, co-sponsoring House Bill 7377, the State Employee Commuter Choices Bill and the UPass Bill 7857. Diaz supported all of the Sierra Club's priority bills. In addition to having a nearly perfect voting record on Sierra Club priorities, Caprio also had the distinction of being the first candidate in Rhode Island offsetting the energy costs of his campaign with green energy certificates.

As a policy analyst with the Carpenter's Union, Fierro has been a long-time partner with the Sierra Club on Green Jobs, and made the creation of green jobs a critical campaign issue. We expect him to be a strong ally in the state house on transportation issues.

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Endorsees for the general race include:

House

4H	Fox
18H	Handy
19H	McNamara
22H	Ferri
35H	Rice
36H	Walsh
62H	Dennigan
69H	Gallison
72H	Rice
74H	Long

Senate

3S	Perry
11S	Levesque
12S	Gibbs
13S	Paiva-Weed
22S	Tassoni
28S	Miller
32S	Bates

The State of Hope: News from the Legislature

By Chris Wilhite, Chapter Director

During the 2008 Rhode Island Legislative Session, I worked closely with the Chapter Political Committee and our allies, including Clean Water Action, Grow Smart Rhode Island, Environment Rhode Island and Conservation Law Foundation to advocate for new laws that would reduce our dependence on dirty, imported energy and protect our coastal environment. The Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter legislative slate consisted of the following bills:

- Long-term Contracts for the Renewable Energy Standard
- Improved Net-Metering for Renewable Energy
- Global Warming Solutions Act
- State Employee Commuter Act

- Transit Signal Priority Act
- UPass Act

Let's start with the victories.

Through the Green Jobs Alliance, we worked to get the renewable energy bills passed. As a landmark partnership, the Club co-authored a commentary in the *Providence Journal* with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO about the need to move forward quickly on renewable energy development so that Rhode Island can be the center of New England's "New Energy Economy."

The "long-term contracts" bill would set the stage for National Grid to agree to long-term contracts on renewable energy, thus investing and encouraging large-scale wind development. The "net-metering" bill would allow individuals to receive full

compensation from National Grid for any extra electricity that one generates with privately owned wind turbines or solar panels. So, if you are generating more electricity than you use with your solar array, you will get compensated by the electric company. Both the long-term contracts bill and the net-metering bills passed at the end of the session.

We also worked to pass a slate of bills that would reduce pollution from traffic with better transportation choices for state employees and public college students. The Transit Signal Priority Act would allow buses owned and operated by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA)

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RIPTA

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would result in the total elimination of seven routes and eight park-and-ride lots. Six more bus lines would lose some or all weekend service, and 12 lines would be shortened to end very close to city limits. All holiday service and virtually all evening service after 7 p.m. would be eliminated. Remaining routes would run with reduced frequency and para-transit "RIde" services for people with disabilities would also be eliminated.

Cutting public transportation flies in the face of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship. To avert the service cuts, the Sierra Club is working to convene a stakeholders group of business, community, and government leaders to find a solution.

We mounted a grassroots campaign to turn out bus riders and concerned citizens at public hearings RIPTA held across the state. Hundreds of Rhode Islanders spoke out against proposed

bus service cuts at fourteen public hearings held over two weeks.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Step 1. Contact your local legislators. Demand adequate funding for the public transit system—funding that grows with demand for energy independence.

Step 2. Come to a RIPTA Board of Directors meeting. The next one is scheduled for Monday, October 20, 12:00 - 2:00 p.m. at RIPTA Headquarters, 265 Melrose Street, Providence, RI.

Step 3. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper that lets public officials know that service cuts are unacceptable and voice your support for adequate RIPTA funding.

For more information or to find out how to plug into this effort, please call the Sierra Club office at (401) 521-4734 or visit www.ri.sierraclub.org/volunteer.

The State of Hope

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to automatically keep green lights green in order to smooth and speed up bus trips. This is a successful technology used by transit systems across the country with national safety standards. The UPass Act, in its final form, would have allowed students of Rhode Island's state colleges to purchase RIPTA tickets for half-price. The State Employee Commuter Act would set up a process for state employees to commute to work through ride-sharing, carpooling, and public transportation.

Then there are the vetoes. Unfortunately, Governor Carcieri set us back by vetoing the Long-term Contracts bill, the UPass Act, and the Transit Signal Priority Act. The Governor's reasoning for these vetoes has puzzled and frustrated many renewable energy and public transit advocates, especially since these bills would have made the public transit system more efficient and affordable and put the development of renewable energy on the fast track towards the new energy economy.

The only way to move forward is for the General Assembly to return for a veto override session. Please, contact your local legislators and urge them to override Governor Carcieri's vetoes of these three important bills.

The next Legislative Session is only a few months away. The Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter has vowed to get global warming solutions passed into law in order to protect our coastal environment and broaden the prosperity of the Ocean State with green jobs, transportation choices, and energy independence.

Primary Victories

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Bennett offered a challenge to the existing Warwick political establishment, running against the outgoing 40 year incumbent's pick, and operating a strong grassroots campaign. While his race went to recount after a 789 to 750 election day win for Bennett which turned into a narrow 858 to 847 victory for Lynch, the campaign showed what the hard work of grass roots political work can do.

All the incumbent races remained relatively safe. The hard work and support of Sierrans helped propel Fierro to victory in a tight five-way race, and surprised the establishment in Warwick. The recount of that tight race in the 31st Senate is still underway

as this article goes to press, hence the 4.5 out of 5 wins.

The focus of the general campaign season will be to target a few races where Sierra Club support can have a strong impact, and work to build up some financial resources so the Political Committee can start mobilizing for the 2010 gubernatorial race.

If you want to learn how you can help elect green candidates, please contact Ben Jones via phone, (401) 598-6639, or email: ben@leftbrain.net. Keep posted on politics and elections on the web site at <http://ri.sierraclub.org/http://ri.sierraclub.org/politics/index.html>.

Lightbulbs to Leadership

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- An *increase* in bus ridership as commuters seek alternatives to automobiles.
- A *decrease* in RIPTA services as an attempt to solve the State's fiscal crisis.
- A sagging economy that relies on dirty energy.
- Delays to clean-energy development and to the creation of a "green" economy.

At the house parties, we also discussed the broad range of solutions available to Governor Carcieri to solve these problems, and we wrote letters to the Governor to ask him to take action to bring about change in Rhode Island. Here are some of the talking points we included in our letters:

For Expanded Public Transit

- The average rush-hour commuter spent 62 hours stuck in traffic in 2000, compared to just 16 hours per year in 1982.
- The estimated cost of driving a single-occupant vehicle is between \$4,826 and \$9,685 per year. By contrast, the annual average cost of public transportation for an adult ranges from \$200 to \$2,000.
- 30,000 passengers can be carried on a single US subway line in one hour. Ten additional highway lanes would be needed if those riders drove instead.
- In Denver, 50 percent of light-rail commuters previously drove to work, and ridership on the light-rail system is 60 percent ahead of projected levels.
- Commuting in a RIPTA bus is more fuel-efficient per passenger than commuting individually even in hybrid cars.
- Europeans have dealt with much higher gas prices than we have seen in the US by using a good public transit system that is accessible to those who need it.
- A robust and well-financed public transit system will attract more employers to Rhode Island. With increasing gas prices, employers want a strong public transit system that employees can use to commute to their jobs.
- Roads cost a lot more to maintain than railroad tracks.
- Public transit reduces roadway-related costs by an estimated \$1 billion to \$1.7 billion per year. From 1980 to 1994, Atlanta's transit system saved \$2.2 billion by providing motorists a public transit alternative.

For the Development of a Green Economy

- Today, with millions of people unemployed and the average duration of unemployment lasting for weeks, spending transportation dollars effectively should be an important component of boosting the economy. How about creating new jobs by expanding public transit?
- Public transit projects do better than highway projects when it comes to creating jobs. In a 2004 study, the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) found that investment in public transportation creates 19 percent more jobs than new road or bridge projects.
- Transportation creates jobs not only through new construction, maintenance, and operation, but also through development and revitalization that occurs as a result of new or improved transportation systems. For instance, the DC-area Metro has generated nearly \$15 billion in surrounding private development. Between 1980 and 1990, 40% of the region's retail and office space was built within walking distance of a Metro station.

Take Action!

Help us keep the pressure on Governor Carcieri to show bold leadership to improve public transit and create jobs with the growth of a clean energy economy. Write to the Governor at:

Governor Donald L. Carcieri
Office of the Governor, State House, Room 115
Providence, RI 02903

Phone: (401) 222-2080, **Fax:** (401) 222-8096

E-Mail: **Click on the e-mail Governor Carcieri link at the web site <http://www.governor.ri.gov/contact/>.**

Tell the Governor that you're writing to request that he invest in clean energy and create green jobs to help revitalize our economy and fight global warming. Use the talking points above or find more information on-line. And feel free to include personal information about why this is important to you.

For more information about the Lightbulbs to Leadership initiative, or to find other ways to become involved, contact Beth Perry at bperry29@cox.net or at (401) 741-4286.



Sierra Club/Rhode Island Chapter
17 Gordon Avenue
Suite 208
Providence, RI 02905

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RI Chapter General Meetings

Free and open to anyone interested in
the Sierra Club in RI.

Tuesday, October 14
6:30 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.
Peacedale Branch
South Kingstown Public Library
1057 Kingstown Road
Peace Dale, RI 02879

Thursday, November 6
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Sierra Club Office
17 Gordon Avenue
Providence, RI 02905