Dear Governor Raimondo:

We write to voice our serious objections to your administration’s latest plan to relocate most bus riders away from the central hub at Kennedy Plaza, and we call on you to suspend further planning for now.

We see no advantage to a plan that would spend most of the funds voters approved in 2014 for “statewide” transit improvement to move the central bus hub in Providence to a much less desirable location on Dyer Street and will only partially replicate what we already have in Kennedy Plaza. The intent of the 2014 Transportation Bond was to “fund...infrastructure throughout Rhode Island...to improve access to multiple intermodal sites.” Spending money voters intended for multiple projects across the state on a single project is wrong and shortchanges passengers outside of Providence.

While we welcome your stated intention to expand transit, as mentioned in your State of the State speech, we believe that the effective implementation of that goal requires working collaboratively with all stakeholders, especially those who actually use public transit.

Indeed, the State’s Transit Master Plan now under development has been a model for engaging successfully with stakeholders as was the City of Providence’s 2017-2018 process for re-envisioning Kennedy Plaza. RIPTA too has held many hearings and workshops on its various plans, most recently, for the Downtown Transit Corridor. On the other hand, RIDOT’s new proposal was developed without public input, and while we appreciate your staff assistant Nicole Verdi inviting us to a Zoom presentation of the plan, it is slated for implementation on an accelerated schedule without ever having a public hearing or workshop. This should be unacceptable to your administration, and we are sure you value accountability and want projects done right.

What we are asking for at this time is to suspend planning for the Dyer Street hub until such time as there is an opportunity for a robust public process that includes all stakeholders, including the business, environmental, planning, social and racial justice communities, and of course the transit riders. We don’t yet know what the post-Covid world will look like, and this is not the time to make changes in Providence’s public transit system that will remain in effect for decades. There is no reason to rush to spend a lot of our limited transit funds on major changes that may prove to be harmful to transit riders.

We do believe a strengthened mass-transit system can help reinvigorate the downtowns of our core cities, strengthen Rhode Island’s economy, fight climate change, and improve the mobility of the many Rhode Island residents who cannot or choose not to drive. But for public transit to help realize these goals, transit users must be fully in the loop as the plans are developed and be allowed to be heard in public hearings.

Sincerely,

Patricia Raub, RI Transit Riders