Mobility

Goal: Provide a range of quality choices for getting around Providence with options that are safe, affordable, convenient, sustainable, and resilient. Strengthen access to opportunity and spaces for community interaction, regardless of mode of travel. Boldly embody our values in Providence's mobility initiatives and become a leader in people-first mobility.

Providence's transportation and mobility options not only determine how and where people and materials move throughout the city; they also impact the ways in which residents, visitors, and commuters interact with nearly every facet of their built environment. Multimodal transportation systems, which integrate different forms of transport such as cars, buses, trains, bicycles, and pedestrian paths into a cohesive network, play a crucial role in supporting and sustaining Providence's quality of life and continued growth.

In and around Providence, an intricate network of highways, railways, and public transit systems currently link residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial zones, educational institutions, and recreational areas. This infrastructure supports everything from local businesses and tourism to housing and community services, shaping the city's economic landscape and the quality of life in every neighborhood. As transportation infrastructure continues to evolve and expand, Providence aims to strengthen access to multimodal transportation that is safe, affordable, convenient, sustainable and resilient.

These improvements offer a range of benefits to enhance quality of life for residents. Improved infrastructure, such as better-lit roads and safer pedestrian paths, reduce accidents and crime rates. Safe and secure mobility options encourage more people to use them, which further enhances safety through increased public presence. Creating an "All Ages and Abilities" bicycle network provides residents and visitors of all demographics, regardless of age or mobility limits, a safe, convenient and sustainable option for navigating the city. Enhanced transportation and mobility also allow residents to enjoy more time, greater accessibility, cleaner environments, and more cohesive, integrated communities and neighborhoods.

By improving links between residential areas, business districts, industrial zones, and recreational assets, multimodal transportation systems are key to supporting a Providence that is better positioned for resiliency and growth. Cities with modern multimodal systems are attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses. Enhancing Providence's infrastructure will draw new industry, talent and investment, advancing the City's goals for furthering economic prosperity and innovation. The City of Providence has outlined numerous strategies to support these developments, including bus service improvements,

greater train connection to Boston and TF Green Airport, and infrastructure enhancements throughout the city to improve connectivity and safety for all.

Mobility and Transportation

There are subtle but important differences between the terms “transportation” and “mobility”. “Transportation" focuses narrowly on how people and goods move from A to B, whereas “mobility” looks more broadly at how ease and access affect how people and goods move around a city. Transportation networks, policies and infrastructure should provide safe, convenient, and affordable options which allow individuals to move through the city, while helping to reach goals of resiliency, efficiency, safety and affordability. As Providence plans for the coming decades of growth and development, the city’s mobility system must ensure access to the places people need to go, while prioritizing safety, sustainability, and equity.

Why a multi-modal transportation system?

A multi-modal transportation system allows residents, visitors, and employees to make the choice about how to move around the city in the way that best suits each individual. In a small, compact city like Providence that is poised for growth, it would be impossible to accommodate new cars with each new resident that chooses to live in the city. A multi-modal transportation system that is safe, convenient, and affordable to get around without a personal vehicle helps to relieve congestion, improve air quality and enhance the quality of life.

With limited ability to expand roadways or add extensive numbers of new single-occupancy vehicles to the city’s roadways, improving traffic in the city is primarily possible by shifting trips normally taken by car to other modes of transportation. Dependence on private automobiles limits the types of growth and development that can happen in the city due to the requirement to provide large amounts of parking and roadway infrastructure. A multi-modal transportation system limits the need for parking and allows greater density in housing and commercial/retail development, which can also enhance tax revenue to the city.

A multi-modal transportation system also contributes to safety for all road users. Virtually all roadway fatalities and serious injuries involve at least one motor vehicle. Most collisions occur at intersections, where deference is given to the efficiency of moving private vehicles through more quickly rather than ensuring pedestrian safety. When more people are walking, biking or taking the bus, fewer cars are on the road and drivers become more aware of other road users, creating a safer environment especially for those more vulnerable road users.

Multi-modal transportation networks help to decrease carbon emissions and help the city and state reach adopted climate goals. The transportation sector is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, with 97% of Rhode Island’s greenhouse gas emissions generated from private motor vehicles.

Providing a multi-modal transportation system provides additional benefits, including enhanced affordability for residents, improved public health outcomes, less carbon emissions pollution, and cost savings due to less roadway damage and lower infrastructure costs.

Aligning City Policy with State and National Goals

The U.S. Department of Transportation promotes a "Safe System Approach" to mobility as part of its National Roadway Safety Strategy. This approach is widely embraced in the field of transportation planning and engineering, and incorporates six principles:

- **Death and Serious Injuries are Unacceptable:** A Safe System Approach prioritizes the elimination of crashes that result in death and serious injuries.
- **Humans Make Mistakes:** People will inevitably make mistakes and decisions that can lead or contribute to crashes, but the transportation system can be designed and operated to accommodate certain types and levels of human mistakes and avoid death and serious injuries when a crash occurs.
- **Humans Are Vulnerable:** Human bodies have physical limits for tolerating crash forces before death or serious injury occurs; therefore, it is critical to design and operate a transportation system that is human-centric and accommodates physical human vulnerabilities.
- **Responsibility is Shared:** All stakeholders—including government at all levels, industry, non-profit/advocacy, researchers, and the general public—are vital to preventing fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways.
- **Safety is Proactive:** Proactive tools should be used to identify and address safety issues in the transportation system, rather than waiting for crashes to occur and reacting afterwards.
- **Redundancy is Crucial:** Reducing risks requires that all parts of the transportation system be strengthened, so that if one part fails, the other parts still protect people.

These principles have become the basis of widely-adopted Vision Zero policies, which the City adopted in 2024, to ensure Providence's transportation system and policies work to eliminate deaths and serious injuries on its roadways.

In addition to the above national principles, many state and local plans have outlined goals related to mobility in Providence. Notably, the 2020 Providence Great Streets Plan and RIPTA's 2020 Transit Forward Transit Master Plan contain many recommendations for infrastructure and policy. Other plans also incorporate occasional mention of mobility goals as well, and many of these plans are referenced below, where pertinent.

The State of Rhode Island's adopted Long-Range Transportation Plan envisions "a multimodal transportation network that connects people, and communities, provides access to jobs and services, and promotes a sustainable and competitive Rhode Island economy." The plan identifies five high-level goals, which can be summarized into: support economic growth, promote environmental sustainability,

strengthen communities, maintain transportation infrastructure, and connect people and places. The goals and objectives put forward below seek to align City policy with State adopted plans.

Mode, Congestion, and Emissions

When considering mode share in Providence and possible improvements in line with City, State, and Federal goals, it is helpful to compare Providence's existing "mode split" with national and global benchmarks:

	2022 Level	National context	Global context
Driving alone	62%	Lowest 22% (NYC)	Lowest 12% (Tokyo)
Carpooling	8%		
Bus	2%	Highest 33% (Union City, NJ)	Highest 53% (Brussels)
Train	1%		
Walking	8%	Highest 28% (Cambridge, MA)	Highest 45% (Zaragoza)
Bicycling	1%	Highest 17% (Davis, CA)	Highest 40% (Amsterdam)
Taxi or other	2%		
Working from home	17%		

Traffic congestion and total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are influenced both by the percentage of trips occurring by car and a city's overall population growth. Just to keep traffic congestion the same as Providence's population grows, the percentage of commuters getting to work alone in a motor vehicle or the total number of trips would need to decrease.

To meet the goals and mandates of the Climate Justice Plan, RI Act on Climate, and other policy documents, transportation emissions will need to be dramatically cut via reduction in VMT through mode-shift and an increase the percentage of car trips taken in electric vehicles (EV). The chart below shows the **annual tons of carbon dioxide equivalent** based on various EV and VMT scenarios:

EV transition	Same traffic	10% VMT reduction	15% VMT reduction	20% VMT reduction
2% of vehicles	454,500	409,000	386,300	363,600
5% of vehicles	443,600	399,300	377,100	354,900
10% of vehicles	425,600	383,000	361,700	340,400
20% of vehicles	389,400	350,400	331,000	311,500
40% of vehicles	317,000	285,300	269,500	253,600
80% of vehicles	172,300	155,100	146,500	137,900

Carbon Dioxide Emissions Scenarios: EV Transition and VMT Reduction

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE M1: BUS
Encourage bus service improvements such that it is a reasonable transportation option for many trips in Providence and makes up a higher share of trips than in 2024.

Strategies:

A. Encourage RIPTA and the State to improve the transit experience in Rhode Island
B. Advocate for sufficient funding to not only maintain existing service levels but increase them in line with the recommendations of the state-adopted Transit Master Plan ($250-$400 million per year)
C. Advocate for expanded eligibility for free or reduced fare bus passes provided that the overall system is adequately funded
D. Advocate for increased frequency of bus service in line with the recommendations of the state-adopted Transit Master Plan
E. Advocate for new bus routes between neighborhoods and stopping at grocery stores, including on Valley Street (N7 in the 2020 Transit Master Plan), along Dean Street from the VA Hospital to RI Hospital (N9), and between Olneyville Square and Eddy Street (N13)
F. Advocate for reduced emissions from buses especially in environmental justice areas through the introduction of more electric buses
G. Advocate for frequent service on more routes later into the evening
H. Improve infrastructure to prioritize buses and bus passengers especially on the highest-frequency corridors including the creation of dedicated roadway right-of-way to the exclusive use of buses in high-frequency corridors
I. Establish and implement clear standards for prioritization of curb uses, including the preference for bus stops, where needed, over on-street parking
J. Ensure sufficient sidewalk and ADA infrastructure exists at bus stops and to access bus stops
K. Encourage large employers and institutions to offer subsidized transit passes
L. Ensure that the bus hub feels clean, safe, and welcoming for all users
M. Focus residential growth around existing high-frequency transit corridors, such as North Main Street
N. Support RIPTA in its process to establish a new, world-class transit center that meets the needs of RIPTA operations, transit users and Providence's planning and economic development goals

OBJECTIVE M2: RAIL
Encourage an effortless connection to Boston and RI TF Green Airport by train, such that rail makes up a higher share of trips than in 2024.

Strategies:

A. Encourage RIDOT and MBTA to provide more frequent and faster regional rail service to Boston and RI TF Green Airport, especially in off-peak hours
B. Focus growth within ¼ miles of Providence Station
C. Advocate to electrify MBTA line to enable faster service with reduced emissions

OBJECTIVE M3: WALKING
Make walking a plausible choice for many trips in Providence, such that the share of commute trips made on foot is higher than in 2024.

Strategies:

A. Improve safety where pedestrians must cross motor vehicle traffic, prioritizing pedestrian safety over traffic flow.
B. Update all traffic signals to provide pedestrian phasing such as Leading Pedestrian Intervals or exclusive pedestrian phasing and keep signal cycles short and efficient to minimize waiting and unsafe crossing
C. Where possible, restrict right turns from a red light at any location where unrestricted turns are detrimental to pedestrian safety
D. Add crosswalk markings and accessible ramps to every crosswalk location where they are absent
E. Work with RIDOT to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrians on highway crossings
F. Install sidewalk bump-outs at corners to increase pedestrian visibility and enforce illegal parking rules adjacent to crosswalks, where possible
G. Create more and better spaces that are designed for walking.
H. Improve maintenance of sidewalks so that accessible paths compliant with federal ADA and Public Right of Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) are available throughout the city
I. Improve design standards for street trees to both provide more shade to sidewalk users and avoid trip hazards created by tree roots up-lifting the sidewalk
J. Focus residential and commercial growth in locations within ¼ mile of commercial districts
K. Improve policies around clearance of snow from sidewalks and bike lanes
L. Create a clear and implementable strategy to mitigate issues where tree growth is reducing sidewalk accessibility.

OBJECTIVE M4: BICYCLING
Make bicycling a plausible mobility choice for many trips in Providence, such that bicycling makes up a higher share of trips than in 2024.

Strategies:

A. Provide a connected, safe and intuitive "All Ages and Abilities" network of spaces to bike without fear of car traffic within ¼ mile of all residents, by implementing and updating the Great Streets Plan
B. Increase the number of intersection crossings that provide dedicated bicycle signal phases
C. Work with RIDOT to improve the safety and comfort of bicyclists on highway crossings and state-owned roadways
D. Continue and expand programs that encourage more people to make trips by bicycle.
E. Establish a program to assist private property owners in upgrading bicycle parking to a useable standard
F. Continue to provide shared micromobility services, improving parking compliance and service levels; consider establishing a city-owned bike share system
G. Encourage events such as Cyclovia and social bike rides accessible to a wide range of residents
H. Consider supplementing State incentives for e-bikes with a City incentive

OBJECTIVE M5: DRIVING
Reduce the share of commute trips taken in private automobiles by encouraging and investing in alternatives, while still maintaining quality infrastructure and connections, such that driving alone makes up approximately half the share of commute trips that it does in 2024.

Strategies:

A. Mitigate negative impacts driving has on quality of life and quality of mobility options.
B. Consider traffic congestion mitigation measures at any locations under City jurisdiction in the RI Congestion Mitigation Plan
C. Consider lowering statutory speed limits on local residential streets to 20 mph.
D. Expand the use of Speed Safety Cameras, which reduce speeding in school zones by 63%, crashes on urban principal arterials up to 54%, and fatalities and injuries by 20% to 37%
E. Expand camera uses to enforce other moving violations namely, blocking the box.
F. Improve driving behavior, potentially by working with the state and local driving instructors on Driver's Education
G. Prohibit right turns at red lights in more locations.
H. Work with industrial stakeholders to reduce diesel emissions in frontline communities
I. Upgrade all city vehicles and school buses to electric
J. Advocate for sound barriers and pollution-mitigating features such as vegetation between urban highways and abutting residential areas
K. Discourage the development of new gas stations within City limits

L. Encourage the installation of electric vehicle charging stations when existing gas stations are updated/rehabilitated
M. Restrict the development of new drive-thru businesses, particularly in high priority growth corridors
N. Improve Overnight Parking Permit program to increase participation
O. Eliminate parking minimums for new development and considering the establishment of maximum parking levels.
P. Discourage new surface parking lots while encouraging the redevelopment of existing surface parking lots
Q. Expand snow parking pilot to allow reverse-side parking during snow events
R. Encourage employers that offer free or subsidized parking to offer workers the option to cash-out their parking on a daily or monthly basis.
S. Create and implement standards to increase the frequency of accessible parking spaces and loading zones in business districts.

OBJECTIVE M6: FREIGHT
Improve the efficiency of freight traffic in Providence, while reducing or eliminating negative impacts on quality of life.

Strategies:

A. Improve facilities to facilitate more efficient movement of freight within Providence.
B. Pursue creation of consolidation facilities to allow large vehicles organized by supplier to distribute goods into smaller vehicles organized by destination, of a more suitable scale for Providence's streets. Such facilities could be located at the periphery of the urban core with easy access to regional freight routes.
C. Work with RI Statewide Planning and stakeholders to designate truck routes and feasible restrictions on other streets including such policies as specific hours of use and parking limits
D. Implement the State's EV truck charging plan, including installation of charging infrastructure for heavy-duty trucks at the Port of Providence
E. Consider improving access from the Port of Providence onto I-95 South. According to the State Freight Plan, "Solution could add direct access to I-95 SB, identify alternate route, or add pavement/ restriping to improve turning radii. Would improve marine port access, reduce truck activity on local roads, and improve operational efficiency for trucks accessing the port."
F. Consider improving access between Route 146 and West River Street: According to the State Freight Plan, "Trucks serving the USPS RI Central facility and West River industrial area have difficulty turning left off Route 146 onto Admiral, due to need for wide turn which conflicts with auto traffic."
G. Advocate for improved infrastructure to ensure freight rail traffic through Providence Station can be made efficiently and safely
H. Work with Port of Providence stakeholders to ensure access roads to the Port of Providence are in adequate state of repair
I. Mitigate negative impacts freight traffic has on quality of life and other modes of travel
J. Enforce idling regulations to minimize unnecessary tailpipe pollution.

K. Utilize existing rail right-of-way to allow freight traffic to avoid city streets.
L. Encourage the use of and advocate for requiring Lateral Protective Devices (LPDs) on large trucks to minimize risk to vulnerable road users.
M. Establish incentives to shift freight deliveries on city streets to less congested times of day.
N. Encourage the use of urban-scale delivery vehicles such as cargo bicycles, medium-duty trucks, and light-duty trucks for last-mile deliveries within the city by creating regulation and incentives for companies to down-size their fleets.
O. Develop an active curbside asset database showing the location and size of existing loading zones, curb cuts, hours of operation, and other pertinent infrastructure, markings, and signs.
P. Evaluate and modify traffic patterns to reduce emissions in frontline communities: Work with the state and frontline communities to reduce transportation related air pollution, beginning with areas of high cumulative pollution. Conduct a study of truck traffic and identify corridors and neighborhoods where truck routes and related infrastructure should be eliminated or rerouted to reduce diesel emissions burden in high residential and air pollution areas. Ensure involvement of frontline community members in future corridor planning, especially related to on-ramps and other major highway projects.
Q. Advocate for reducing emissions from trucks: Identify resources and programs to improve efficiency and EV infrastructure for buses, garbage trucks, construction and other commercial trucks working in Providence's frontline communities.
R. Incentivize more efficient shipping practices including infrastructure for more fuel-efficient vessels coming in and out of the Port.
S. Set short-, medium- and long-term emissions reduction targets and create plans to meet targets.
T. Work to reduce fossil fuel and other hazardous materials import and export.