

A STATEMENT FROM THE KENNEDY PLAZA RESILIENCY COALITION ON PUBLIC HEARINGS

January 17, 2022

Dear Governor McKee, Director Alviti, Mayor Elorza, and Scott Avedisian,

As changes are being proposed to the transit hub in Kennedy Plaza, we write to you to urge that transit riders be listened to more seriously throughout the process – especially since their voices have so often been neglected on this issue before.

The Kennedy Plaza Resilience Coalition was formed in January 2021 in order to bring the diverse stakeholder groups representing users of Kennedy Plaza together as the State and City are proposing to make significant changes to the area’s public space.

Our coalition is mindful of the fact that the majority of those who use our public transit system on a regular basis are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as members of other historically excluded groups. As the final decision with selecting one of the proposed transit hub plans will impact them the most, the public participation process must be designed and executed in a way that meets their needs and allows them to fully participate. This may mean going above and beyond the minimum legal and procedural standards. In order to foster equity and inclusion in the engagement, assessment, and decision-making around our public transportation system, our coalition recommends implementing the following standards and practices in the public participation process:

- A minimum of two (2) weeks for advance notice of public meetings.
- Hybrid meetings (accessible both online and in person) to promote COVID-19 safety and virtual participation, as well as in-person participation for those who feel comfortable.
- Multiple meetings in multiple locations across the state.
- All in-person meetings in ADA-accessible locations.
- All in-person meetings in locations easily accessible by public transit.
- Varied meeting times in order to allow for the participation of people with different work/school schedules to attend.
- Virtual “office hours” with project managers offered to collect feedback from people who are unable to attend public meetings.
- Language translation for both virtual and in-person meetings offered, as well as childcare services for in-person meetings.
- Multiple methods of multilingual meeting notification: on-bus, in-person outreach in Kennedy Plaza, and via RIPTA, RIDOT, Governor, and Mayor’s digital communications channels.
- Any organization, business, or school using RIPTA’s Eco-Pass program encouraged to notify their transit pass users.
- Multiple methods of testimony allowed at public meetings: written, voicemail, and in-person.

We ask that you use these 21st century public involvement methods in order to hold a credible, respectful, and legitimate process.

The outcome(s) of this process must also reflect the feedback provided during the participation period, especially from those using public transit on a regular basis. This is particularly important for a project that has so far lacked adequate engagement. For example, the meetings about Kennedy Plaza held by ARUP on behalf of the City between December 2020 and June 2021 showed a real lack of genuine public engagement: although many bus riders expressed serious concerns at those meetings, it was clear that their concerns were never taken seriously, as the outcome of the meetings was a plan that very much disregarded riders' needs.

Public trust in government is severely undermined when public participation is viewed as a box to check and a waste of people's time rather than a strong factor in decision-making.

We thank you for your interest in building a better public transportation system for all, and we will do all we can to ensure robust participation in the upcoming hearings.

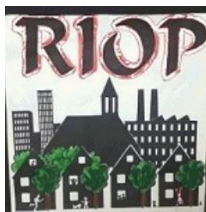
Sincerely,

The Members of the Kennedy Plaza Resiliency Coalition

KPRC Members:

Conservation Law Foundation
Gather Together United As 1
Providence Preservation Society
Rhode Island Transit Riders
South Providence Neighborhood Association

Direct Action for Rights and Equality
Green Energy Consumers Alliance
Rhode Island Organizing Project
Roots 2Empower



For additional information about the contents of this letter or to follow-up, please contact **Dwayne Keys** at 401-369-1334 (southprovneighbors@gmail.com). Thank you.