

Providence Streetcar Alternate Route and Station Justification

Submitted to FTA Region 1 Office on December 4, 2014; Modified based on comments received from FTA Region 1 and submitted to the Office of the Secretary on March 24, 2015

Background

The City of Providence was awarded a \$13M FY14 TIGER grant for the initial (Phase 1A) segment of the Providence Streetcar project connecting the Hospital District and College Hill through downtown Providence. Future extensions for Phase 1B were identified to Providence Station (Amtrak and Commuter Rail station) and along Dudley Street in the Upper South Providence neighborhood.

Requested Modifications

The City requests consideration of two modifications to the TIGER VI project definition: the first to include Providence Station as a terminus for the initial Phase 1A segment rather than College Hill and the second to make a minor route adjustment in the Jewelry District. The Providence Station modification would adjust the TIGER-funded Phase 1A alignment to connect the Hospital District directly to Providence Station through downtown Providence, with a subsequent extension of the route through Phase 1B to serve College Hill. Based on stakeholder feedback, a secondary, minor modification to realign the route through the Jewelry District is requested to improve the directness of the route and increase its frequency without sacrificing access to critical destinations.

The proposed modifications will ensure a stronger Phase 1A project and enable the streetcar project to better coordinate with near-term State, RIPTA, and City priorities and other recent federal investments:

- The streetcar would connect to a proposed multimodal transit hub at Providence Station. RIDOT was awarded a TIGER VI planning grant to advance this project. The development of a transit hub at the train station, coupled with ongoing growth of intercity and commuter rail service, will generate an increased amount of multimodal activity at the train station. The streetcar project, as noted in the TIGER application for the Providence Station Transit Center, is uniquely positioned to support a coordinated effort to boost mobility options as well as development opportunities at this important regional transportation hub.
- Refocusing Phase 1A streetcar service supports RIPTA's recently-developed plans to redesign downtown transit around multiple hubs, with Providence Station being one of the centers of transit activity. The revised initial streetcar alignment provides a unique service that complements other transit routes.
- From both the City and State perspectives, providing a direct streetcar connection to the train station enhances the marketability of the Link District (the land recently made available for redevelopment due to the relocation of I-195) by providing a high-quality transit connection to the important Northeast Corridor. Focusing more attention on establishing an initial connection to the train station builds upon the tremendous value already created by this critical rail asset.
- The proposed modifications enable an improved service frequency (every 10 minutes rather than every 12 minutes), which has been noted as an important priority in feedback from transit riders.
- The proposed modifications would also result in a reduced capital cost for the initial Phase 1A segment (from \$117.8M to \$100.2M), which will help to fill the gap between the TIGER VI funding request (\$29M) and the TIGER VI grant award (\$13M).

Details of Proposed Phase 1A Alignment Change

Alignment Length: 2.1 miles (current); 1.6 miles (proposed)

End-to-End Travel Time: 15 minutes (current); 11 minutes (proposed)

Peak Frequency: 12 minutes (current); 10 minutes (proposed)

Number of Stations: 12 (current); 11 (proposed)

Two stops (at the bottom and at the top of the bus tunnel to College Hill) would be deferred to Phase 1B of implementation. One stop (at Providence Station) would be added to Phase 1A. One stop in the Jewelry District would be moved approximately 450' to the east.

Typical Distance Between Stations: No change (approximately 800')

Vehicles Required: No change (3 plus 1 spare)

Capital Costs (in 2018 dollars): \$117.8M (current); \$100.2M (proposed)

Annual Operating Costs: No change (\$3.2M in the first full year of operations)

Implications of Proposed Alignment Change

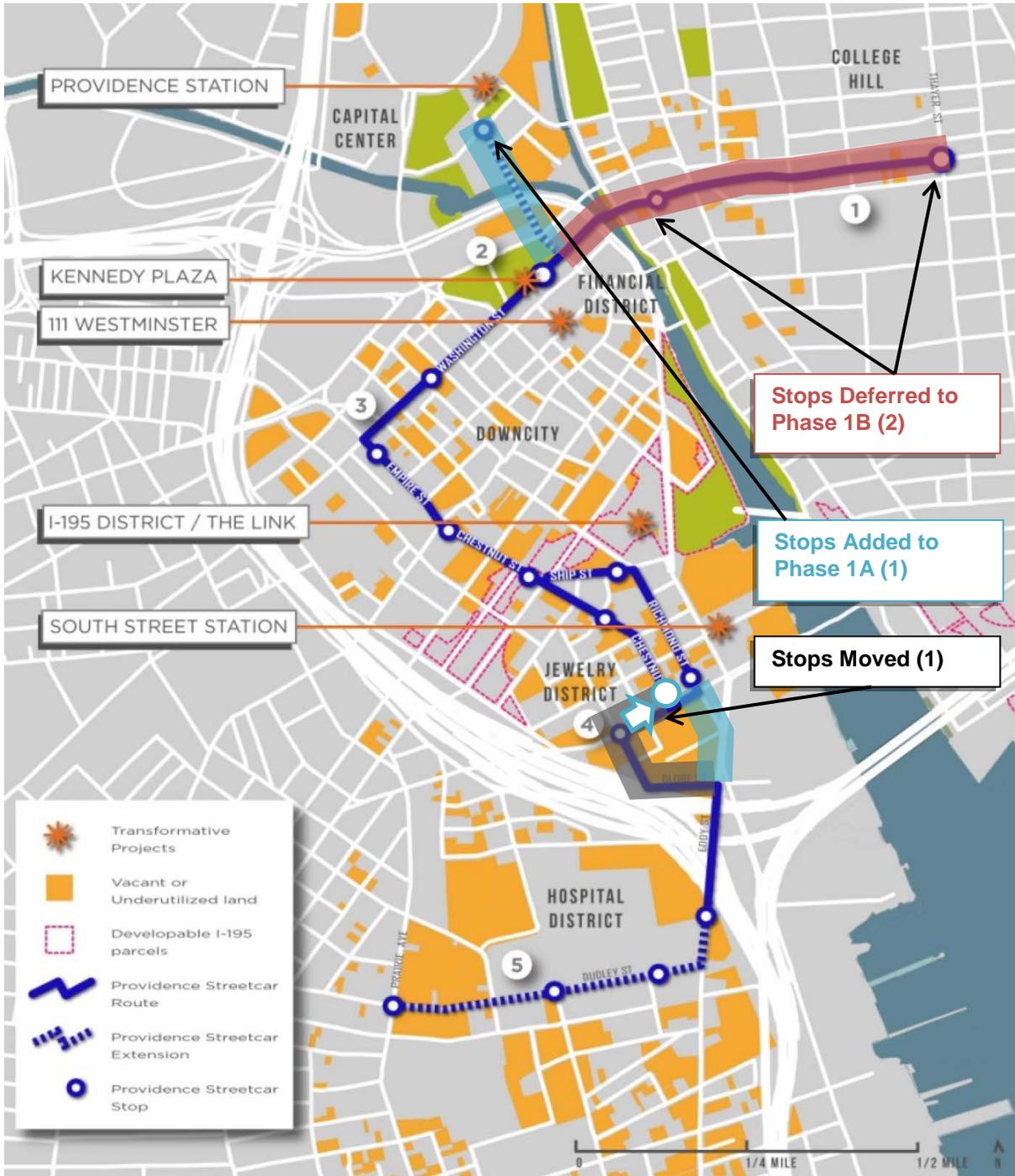
Ridership

Modeling conducted during the Alternatives Analysis indicated that a route serving Providence Station would have marginally higher opening year ridership as compared to College Hill. Although Providence Station was forecasted to generate more long-term (horizon year of 2030) ridership due to future intercity and commuter rail growth, College Hill was viewed as being a more mature transit market in the short-term.

		Daily Ridership (Boardings)	Annual Ridership (Boardings)
Build 1	Free Boarding, Free Transfer	2,899	869,700
(College Hill)	Boarding Fare \$2; Transfer \$0.50	2,619	785,700
Build 2	Free Boarding, Free Transfer	3,188	956,400
(Train Station)	Boarding Fare \$2; Transfer \$0.50	2,896	868,800

However, previous ridership forecasting did not reflect the presence of a RIPTA transit hub at Providence Station. Although it is unlikely that a new transit hub at the train station will be in place prior to the opening of the streetcar, re-orienting the initial streetcar service to Providence Station would generate additional momentum for the train station transit hub (currently beginning TIGER-funded planning activities) and may generate higher streetcar ridership in the early years of revenue service.

The proposed route realignment in the Jewelry District would provide more direct and visible access to the large-scale South Street Landing project that is now under development. Access to the Coro Center (research and administrative facilities associated with Rhode Island Hospital) would be accommodated by a stop located within approximately 600 feet of the facility entrance (~400 feet farther than the current stop location).



Map of Requested Modifications



Economic Development

Although the modified streetcar project would connect to the state's second largest employment center (College Hill) as part of Phase 1B rather than Phase 1A, connecting directly to Providence Station creates a high-quality connection from the Link District (former I-195 parcels now being developed) to points beyond Providence in the state and region. This access will enhance the marketability of these critical development sites. In addition, the proposed train station terminus would enhance development opportunities in the Capital Center Special Development District, which is consistent with the development goals cited in the TIGER-funded Providence Station Transit Center planning study.

Environmental Justice

The southern terminus of the proposed TIGER streetcar project (on Eddy Street near the main entrance to RI Hospital in Upper South Providence) does not change, resulting in no new Environmental Justice considerations.

Environmental Review Status

The Environmental Assessment (EA) included consideration of the impacts of the extension going to Providence Station, so no additional analysis is needed for the proposed realignment. Some minor additional technical work may be needed for the southern terminus at Rhode Island Hospital and for the new proposed stop on Chestnut Street and turn from Chestnut Street to Point Street. Rhode Island Hospital was proposed as the terminus for purposes of the TIGER grant, but the EA did not view this specific location as an end-of-line station.

Financing

The capital costs of Phase 1A would be reduced from \$117.8 million to \$100.2 million. The geographical boundaries of the TIF District are proposed to remain the same as currently drawn. By encompassing the area that would be served by both Phase 1A and Phase 1B, local funds that can be applied to development of Phase 1B will be banked from the outset, encouraging rapid construction of these extensions.

Project Support

It is likely that the proposed route realignment will help to build political support for the project from the business community who has strongly advocated for a more direct connection to Providence Station, and from the State, as the proposed change now aligns directly with RIDOT's priorities of enhancing and growing a multimodal hub at Providence Station. It is also likely that the realigned route will help to build greater support from Brown University, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island because of the improved direct connection between the South Street Landing project that they are involved in and Providence Station.