

STEAMED

Warm and humid today with highs in the upper 80s; patchy fog overnight. Forecast, A10

The Providence Journal

MONDAY
JULY 7, 2008

75¢
Home Delivery 401.277.7600

projo.com

Soaring fuel costs taking a toll on RIPTA

Facing a \$5.7-million deficit, the transit authority looks eliminate, shorten or reduce service on as many as 160 routes.

BY BRUCE LANDIS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Short of money and expecting continued deterioration of its finances, the state's transit system is considering a broad cut in service just as high gasoline prices are pushing people out of their cars and onto buses.

The service cuts, which would go into effect in December, would eliminate or reduce service on more than 160 bus lines or sections of lines to save \$9.7

million per year, and Rhode Island Public Transit Authority officials say that more cuts are likely to cover growing budget deficits. The cuts described are already large, amounting to about 10 percent of the authority's budget for next year.

The apparently bizarre situation — the prospect of cutting bus service just when increasing ridership and rising gasoline prices suggest that more service is needed — grows out of the way the authority is financed. It relies heavily on revenue from the state gasoline tax. But as people buy less gas, that revenue stream is dropping at the same time the authority is suffering from a dramatic run-up in one of its biggest expenses, diesel fuel.

Officials say soaring diesel-fuel costs could lead to a \$5.7-million deficit in the current fiscal year unless spending and service cuts are made.

The plan largely involves three kinds of service reductions: the elimination of some routes entirely, the elimination of sections of routes, for example stopping routes that now serve the suburbs at the Providence city line, and the elimination of evening service on many routes. Some buses would also run less frequently. The authority is also looking into ending free service for some elderly and disabled persons, who would instead pay 85 cents per ride, about half fare. That would require action by the governor and General Assembly.

RIPTA Planning Manager Tim McCormick said the agency staff used four criteria — the number of passengers per trip, per hour, and per mile and the amount of fares collected — to rank the routes and identify those whose reduction or elimination would have the least impact. He said RIPTA is also trying to eliminate duplicative service first, and to preserve trips to work and to hospitals and medical centers.

He said it is difficult to protect trips to work because practically all of the bus routes take people to work. The plan would elimi-

nate service after 7 p.m. on weeknights on 27 routes, but McCormick said, "Most of the people using the system at night are working."

At this point, the plan is a staff recommendation to the authority's board of directors, which has taken no action on it.

However, when the subject came up at the board's last meeting, Vice Chairman John Rupp said, "We're going to have to look at service cuts."

The service reduction plan arrives along with a novel political situation. After failing ever since he was elected to gain a majority on the RIPTA board, Governor Carcieri saw his appointees take control in April, unceremoniously ousting Providence City Plan-

ning Director Thomas Deller from the chairmanship and installing Robert D. Batting, a retired business executive and Carcieri appointee, in his place. That leaves the governor's appointees to deal with RIPTA's intensifying financial problems.

The governor didn't offer much hope of financial support in a statement Thursday. While he supports RIPTA's "core mission," Carcieri said, "RIPTA needs to see fully the challenges of doing more or even the same with less."

The service cuts contained in the plan may be just the beginning. They would save an estimated \$9.7 million per year, but

SEE RIPTA, A7

ADVENTURES AT HAND

A SUMMER SERIES

Facing high gas prices and less money to splurge, many people are choosing to stay close to home for vacation. This summer, The Journal will help you find some activities and outings nearby. Some may be old favorites, while others you've never tried.



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / ANDREW DICKERMAN

Owen Fox, 8, of Providence, speeds across the surface of the Cranston Veterans Memorial Ice Rink on a recent sweltering day. Public rinks throughout the state offer summer hours for figure skating, playing hockey or simply sitting and savoring the coolness.

Putting summer on ice

BY TOM MOONEY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Theresa Fox is a mother of two, a middle school English teacher and a rat.

A happy, self-admitted rink rat, that is, an endearing term reserved for aficionados of ice.

projo.com

Your turn: What are three of your can't-miss Rhode Island summer favorites? To respond, and for more of this series, go to projo.com

"We have all the rink schedules on the refrigerator at home," she says as her 8-year-old Owen, a hockey player, carves up the ice at the Cranston Veterans Memorial Rink. "We do Pawtucket, we do this one, we did the Thayer rink

[in Warwick] yesterday."

Outside, the summer sun threatens to turn the asphalt to goo and the air is heavy with wilting humidity. But inside the rink, the air feels like a misty daffodil morning in April, the temperature a steady 55 de-

grees.

Fox digs into her duffel bag, pulls out mittens for 4-year-old Nola and a fleece for herself, and together they clomp across the rubber mats in their figure skates to join Owen on the frozen white



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / ANDREW DICKERMAN

Nola Fox, 4, of Providence, dons her gloves before going onto the ice.

SEE SKATING, A7

sheet.

"This is glorious to me," she says. "I'm Camp Mom. I have to find things to do with the kids this summer so this is great. And you don't get sand in everything."

Rhode Island is never more the Ocean State than on a steamy summer day. But scattered from South Kingstown to North Smithfield are also a half-dozen domed structures that stand in humming tribute to the joys attained at temperatures below the freezing point.

While thousands baste along the water's edge on any given day, the rink rats pack their jackets and shin pads and head to the nearest rink. For an average price of \$5, they can enjoy a skate, practice their double axels or hone their hockey skills. Five of the rinks are municipal buildings where people can go for free, watch the skaters and get some respite from the heat.

Not many people seem to know that, says Jim Dorney, Warwick's recreation facilities manager.

For instance, the Thayer/Warburton

Prints tie terror suspects, U.S. pasts

Officials express surprise that so many detained overseas have American arrest records.

BY ELLEN NAKASHIMA
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — In the 6 1/2 years that the U.S. government has been fingerprinting insurgents, detainees and ordinary people in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Horn of Africa, hundreds have turned out to share an unexpected background, FBI and military officials said.

They have criminal arrest records in the United States.

There was the suspected militant fleeing Somalia who had been arrested on a minor drug charge in New Jersey. And the man stopped at a checkpoint in Tikrit, Iraq, who claimed to be a poor dirt farmer but had 11 felony charges in the United States, including assault with a deadly weapon.

The records suggest that potential enemies abroad know a great deal about the United States because many of them have lived here,

SEE PRINTS, A4

Questions linger over school's room

BY KATIE MULVANEY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

School officials created a room in the basement of the Block Island School as a last resort for a student with mental health and behavioral problems who needed a place to calm down, according to a spokesman for the attorney general's office.



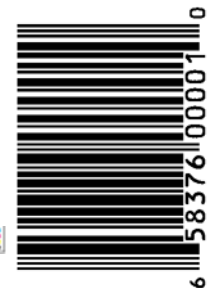
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The room in question in the basement of the Block Island School.

The room was used four or five times with one or two school staff accompanying the student, two during more violent episodes, in which he was observed through a small window on the door, Michael Healey said during a recent interview.

"Appearances notwithstanding, it seems to be a good-faith effort to try to deal with a young boy with spe-

SEE SCHOOL, A6



INSIDE TODAY

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5 SECTIONS

Ask Amy	D4	Lifebeat	D1
Bridge	D4	Lotteries	B4
Business	A8	Obituaries	C2
Classified	E1	People	D1
Comics	D5	Rhode Island	C1
Crossword	D4	Sports	B1
Editorial	D3	Television	D6
Kidsbeat	C3	What's Happening	D4
Legal ads	E3		

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DOCTORS BALK AT PAY CUT

With Congress so far unwilling to reverse a 10-percent cut in Medicare payments to physicians, doctors across the country are either shutting down their practices or refusing to treat patients. A2

A LONG TIME COMING

It took Peter Gabriel 17 years to finally complete his long promised world-music album, *Big Blue Ball*. D1



A MATCH FOR THE AGES

Rafael Nadal, left, wins his first Wimbledon title, beating five-time champion Roger Federer in a five-set championship match that was the longest in the tournament's history. B1