

Newport *this week*

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RIPTA Chronicles: #14 Express Rides On

A few weeks ago, I began writing about the 14 express bus, (#14) to Providence. I rode the #14 nearly every weekday. Rising at 6 a.m., I would walk, ride a bike, or hitch a ride with my wife to the Gateway Center in downtown Newport. The bus leaves at 7:10 a.m., makes one stop in Saunderson (just over the Jamestown Bridge); then



Aaron
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deposits passengers at various outposts around the capital city. In the late afternoon I would catch the #14 home, returning most evenings to Newport by 6:10 p.m. The #14 also makes additional trips to and from Providence throughout the day. My articles focused on the #14 express which makes just one trip in the morning and again one in the afternoon. Over the course of two previous articles, life on the bus was documented by focusing on the people who use public transportation in their daily life. This final installment highlights a few tips and tricks for those interested in putting the car keys away and hopping on the bus. Tip 1: Know the route and cost. Paul, a driver for RIPTA for ten years, shares his advice. "Start with the basics. Research the route. Sounds silly, but I constantly find riders who fail to realize we do not stop where they would like. It's often too late before they find they'll be walking further than they originally hoped. If you

have Internet access, the RIPTA Web site is very helpful. You can also stop by the Gateway Center downtown and pick up maps for all the local routes," he says. He went on to add, "Know how much the bus costs (currently \$2 per ride) and whenever possible have the correct change. You can't imagine the number of riders we see complaining about the limited options we have for money above fare. It's not like I have a cash register and can make change. If you get on with \$20, you end up with a pretty big fare card. Don't expect to receive cash back." Tip 2: Stay alert. "People get comfortable or just lazy and begin developing bad habits." Tony, a 15-year veteran RIPTA driver, went on to say, "Riders should always pull the yellow (I want to get off the bus) cord before standing up and moving toward the front of the bus. If they don't pull the cord, the bell doesn't sound and I don't know whether they are getting off, stretching their legs, or something more sinister. When folks pull the cord, I can tell the oncoming riders to wait until my passengers are able to hop off. Without that simple gesture, we have a traffic jam at the front of the bus with riders trying to get off, new folks attempting to get on. It's a mess." Tip 3: Bikes on the bus and special seating. Each RIPTA bus is outfitted with a bicycle mount on its nose and can ac-

commodate two bikes. Most buses have seating, just behind the driver, for those with disabilities. The bench seats face each other and offer riders more legroom and space to sit. There are also areas designated for those using wheelchairs. Tip 4: Ask questions. "I have found most drivers and riders are willing to help," said Leah, a veteran RIPTA rider. "Even if someone is reading or listening to music, I find most, not all, are happy to offer advice. iPods and MP3 players have changed bus culture. They definitely allow folks the ability to escape the noise or activity

more of us can and should use buses, trains and subways. We cling to our cars, believing that we need the freedom a personal vehicle provides. It is true that riding a bus can be more inconvenient than driving a car to the front door of the mall. It is also true that most of need more exercise, and could use a few extra minutes each day to read, think or just sit quietly.

Aaron and his wife, Lisa, have lived in Newport for nine years. A 2001 graduate of URI, Aaron is a freelance writer, bike messenger, drummer, and lover of books.



Doug Riggs enjoys the newspaper on his way to Providence on the "14". around them. But, they also separate us from our fellow riders. Sometimes I miss the conversations that took place on the bus. Not that every bus is quiet, far from it, but with so many people moving through their day with tiny white plugs in their ears, I wonder if they are missing out?" I realize that public transport isn't for everyone; family or work commitments can place special demands on our time and flexibility. But, I also know that