Testimony by John Flaherty, Director of Research & Communications, Grow Smart Rhode Island, to the Rhode Island House Committee on Finance in support of H-5416 excluding RIPTA commuting costs from taxable wages and compensation

April 26, 2007

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is John Flaherty, and I’m the Director of Research & Communications for Grow Smart Rhode Island. Grow Smart is a diverse alliance of community leaders from the business, labor, academic, housing, environmental, development and faith communities promoting a variety of reforms to achieve sustainable economic prosperity for Rhode Island.

In its nine years of existence, Grow Smart has championed a number of incentives and tools to steer future growth to revitalized, efficient and transit-friendly urban, town and village centers while safeguarding our state’s farms, forests and environmentally fragile coastline. And indeed, over the last several years we have witnessed a surge in the revitalization of our traditional centers as attractive and appealing places to live, work, dine, shop and recreate. More still needs to be done though to link these centers efficiently and make their services more accessible to more people. We are convinced that a better public transit system offering more transportation choices to residents will help Rhode Island capitalize much more fully on our compact scale and size—and in so doing will improve our economy and air quality while reducing traffic congestion.

That’s why Grow Smart was among the early supporters advocating for passage of the 2006 Transportation Bond Referendum that provided funds for commuter rail and repair and replacement of RIPTA buses. It is also why Grow Smart is a participant in the new Public Transit alliance and the City of Providence’s Transit 2020 Working Group, both advocating a greater role for public transit in Rhode Island’s future.

It is from that perspective that Grow Smart Rhode Island is here today encouraging passage of House Bill 5416. We support this bill for the following reasons:

- We believe it would strengthen incentives for greater use of public transportation over single occupancy vehicle travel which is clogging our highways and posing a threat to continued economic development.
- We believe that investments in public transportation help to keep transportation dollars within our state versus flowing out-of-state to foreign oil companies.
- We believe this bill, if passed, would establish state government, as a major employer leading by example to encourage public transit and its many economic and environmental benefits.

Grow Smart will continue to be a strong advocate for public transit improvements as a way to keep Rhode Island on the move.

Thank you.

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John Flaherty
Director of Research & Communications, Grow Smart Rhode Island