



PO Box 603172, Providence, RI 02906
info@ippfriends.org, www.ippfriends.org

WHAT'S AT STAKE: Burying the Waterfront Power Lines

If left overhead, the high-voltage wires will continue to be a **blight on the Capital Region's landmark waterfront**, significantly detracting from its potential as a signature public space and an economic driver for tourism and development for the foreseeable future.

Providence is well-known for having revitalized itself over the last 40 years by removing railroad yards, relocating rivers, rerouting I-195, developing prime downtown parcels, constructing major sewer projects to reduce water pollution, and building pedestrian bridges across both rivers, as well as creating the parks and riverwalks that made Waterfire possible.

Yet **the scar remains of unsightly wires** and massive electrical towers dominating our waterfront and I-195, a major gateway to the city used by 60 million cars a year. It makes no sense for the power lines to continue to obstruct the only water views seen from interstate highways in the Ocean State, which depends on tourism as its second largest industry.



First view of Providence for people disembarking from the Newport Ferry near India Point Park.

How would Providence and Rhode Island benefit from burying its waterfront power lines, just as San Antonio, Chattanooga, Louisville and other cities have benefited for decades:

- Ten million through travelers speed past Providence every year on their way to the Cape and the Islands. If just 1% of them were enticed by an upgraded waterfront to stop and spend \$100 here, they would add **\$10 million** to our economy.
- Multiple studies show that prominent power lines **can reduce property values by as much as 30%**. If these wires remain overhead, the opportunity cost for Providence and East Providence of lower waterfront property values and a reduced tax base for generations would be incalculable. Exhibit A: new condos at River House on the Providence River.

An “**embarrassing sham of a process**” is how former Attorney General Patrick Lynch describes National Grid’s strategy of delay and obfuscation that has dragged this process out for 19 years. For example:

- National Grid and the Energy Facility Siting Board have **discounted or ignored** more than \$18 million raised for burial, recent waterfront developments, major advances in burial technology, the need for a cost-benefit analysis of burial, and multiple consultants’ **findings that burial IS feasible**.
- **National Grid reimbursed itself \$587,000 in burial funds** to pay its engineers and attorneys to **argue against burial**, The Board approved paying \$414,000 in burial funds to consultants who found that burial is feasible, and then failed to call them to testify on the record about burial’s feasibility.
- During hearings over the last five years, the Board and National Grid **almost never mentioned the impact of overhead power lines on economic development**, tourism, or the environment, although state law requires that the Board’s decisions “will enhance the socio-economic fabric of the state,” and “will not cause unacceptable harm to the environment” (RIGL 42-98-11(b))(3)).

Meanwhile, National Grid has charged statewide ratepayers for burying power lines elsewhere in RI, at Fidelity’s executive offices in Smithfield, on I-195 parcels in Providence, and for a 5-mile line from Providence to Johnston. **Investor-owned utilities in other states have been burying** strategically located power lines in the public interest for decades:

- **California** established a program 50 years ago that has provided substantial regional ratepayer funding of burial projects that are in “**a civic area or public recreation area or an area of unusual scenic interest.**”
- In 2003 the **Maine** Public Utilities Commission approved burying power lines under the York River next to the Maine Turnpike (I-95) because the state “receives considerable benefits from tourism” and therefore has “a legitimate concern about the scenery visible at the beginning of the turnpike.”
- The utility in **South Carolina** has buried two power lines under Charleston harbor, and has spent \$30 million over 15 years burying lines in 19 other cities, recovering the cost the cities and statewide ratepayers.
- National Grid in the **United Kingdom**, the parent company of National Grid/RI, is spending more than \$1 billion to bury power lines in national parks and other scenic areas, **so that “the mistakes of the 50’s would not be repeated,”** according to a company official.

Support for burial includes 2,100 petition signers from all 39 cities and towns and statements from 78 organizations: 11 city and state governmental bodies and more than 65 citizen groups. Multiple business, labor, environmental, and community organizations are on record supporting burial.