The University of Rhode Island Transportation Center (URITC) named Justin Messina as its 2011 Student of the Year. Messina will receive his award at the Transportation Research Board’s Annual Meeting in January 2012 in Washington, D.C.

“Receiving the Student of the Year award is a great honor,” said Messina. “Being invited to TRB’s annual meeting is a great opportunity for anyone interested in the transportation field.”

Since September 2010, Messina worked on the project, “Studying the Bottleneck Issue at Work Zones and Assessing the Effectiveness of a Portable Dynamic Lane Merging System in Promoting Zip Merging Behavior.” The project is co-sponsored by the URITC and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT). Justin conducted his research under the supervision of Dr. Jyh-Hone Wang, professor of Mechanical, Industrial and Systems Engineering at URI.

“I learned a lot about how the DOT operates in the area of advisory message and work zone merge configurations and setup,” said Messina. “Though the unit ultimately was not employed in the field, my time in the RIDOT facility working with the Congman Dynamic Lane Merge System unit provided great insight into new developments being proposed for advisory messages.”

Messina has also assisted Dr. Wang and Dr. Valerie Maier-Speredelozzi in the URITC-sponsored project, “Developing Training and Educational Materials for the TranSim IV Driving Simulator.”

“Conducting tests using the driving simulator was rewarding for a couple of reasons,” recalled Messina. “It allowed me to interact with teenagers in a pilot study for the Rhode Island drivers’ educational classes and it fulfilled my interest in statistical methods and the design of experiments.”

Due to his research accomplishments, Justin was awarded a Transportation Fellowship by the New England University/Transportation Center in spring 2011 and a research assistantship by URITC in the above projects for summer and fall 2011.

Based on the research results, Messina presented a poster at the UTC Spotlight Conference in Washington, D.C. in September 2011. He also wrote a paper titled, “Assessing the Message Design on Variable Message Signs in Mitigating the Bottleneck Issues at Work Zones,” which was submitted to TRB.

As an M.S. degree candidate in systems engineering, Messina has a 3.65 GPA.

“The systems engineering program has gone a long way in preparing me for challenges in a variety of fields,” stated Messina. “Using the tools taught in the program, I’ve been able to take a systems approach to challenges in life, which has been very valuable.”