

RTD Access Live – Natalie Menten
October 17, 2019

- Pauletta Tonilas: Good evening, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this special live telephone town hall meeting, hosted by the Regional Transportation District, also known as RTD. I'm Pauletta Tonilas, Assistant General Manager of Communications for RTD, and your moderator this evening as we talk about the latest from RTD, including a new effort that we've just launched, called Reimagine RTD.
- Pauletta Tonilas: We're taking a look at how we provide service as we design the mobility of the future. More on Reimagine RTD in a couple of minutes. Joining me this evening is Natalie Menten, RTD Director for District M. Also sitting in to answer your questions are Brian Welch, Senior Manager of Planning Technical Services, as well as Dave Menter, Senior Service Planner and Scheduler.
- Pauletta Tonilas: We're here to listen to you, folks, and answer your questions. Your opinions are very important to us, that's why we're on the line with you tonight. This is your opportunity to share your thoughts, ask us questions about our service, tell us about your concerns, and tell us how you think we should reimagine the future of mobility.
- Pauletta Tonilas: Now, if this is your first time on a telephone town hall meeting, this is how it works. To ask a question or to give us a comment, you just press *3 on your keypad, and you'll be transferred to someone who'll take down some basic information and get you in the queue. Again, that's *3 if you'd like to get into the queue, to ask us a question, or give us some input. Then you just stay on the line, listen to the conversation. When I call your name, then that will be the time for you to ask your question live.
- Pauletta Tonilas: We asked you that you please keep it brief because we want to get to as many of you as possible this evening. We also will be asking you some questions through our live electronic polling, where you'll use your keypad and to answer the answer that you favor with the questions that we asked you. Again, if you want to get in the queue to ask us a question, you can press *3, now or at any time during the call, and we'll get you in the queue to ask us some questions.
- Pauletta Tonilas: Now, this has been a big year for RTD. We're celebrating our 50th anniversary. Just last week, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of light rail. RTD opened its first light rail line 25 years ago. Hard to believe it was 25 years when we opened the central quarter light rail, which went from I-25 in Broadway, to 30th in Downing. We were created back in 1969. In those 50 years, the Denver Metro Area has really grown quite a bit, and RTD has grown right along with it.
- Pauletta Tonilas: We now are a region of 3 million people. We have a service area that spans over 2,300 square miles. That is the largest service area for a transit agency in America. We serve 40 cities, in eight counties. We offer about 100 million rides a year. It is now my pleasure to introduce RTD Director, Natalie Menten, for District M. Director Menten, thank you very much for being on the line with us tonight. We really have seen a lot happen in the last year, a lot of progress in expanding our system.

Natalie Menten: Yes. Thank you very much. Thanks to everyone who's joining us this evening. In addition to what Pauletta covered, we also have some brief updates. We have the G Line opening on April 26th of this year. The EF&R Extension opening was May 17th. That's now six transit corridors in three years. N Line, which is up north, is under construction. The opening date has now moved to May or August 2020. There's some specific milestones that need to be met before an opening date can be determined and announced. Keep an eye on our newsfeed to find out more about that later.

Pauletta Tonilas: Director Menten, we're going to jump right in to talk about subsidized transit. We're a public transit agency, which means public transit means that we subsidize the service that we provide. A lot of people don't understand this. Tell us a little bit about what does subsidizing our transit trips mean, so that people fully understand how it is that we fund our service and how we provide it.

Natalie Menten: I'll start with, RTD is funded, for the most part, our biggest chunk of revenue is sales tax. Then fares come in secondary, and there's certain standards that we are supposed to follow. Then there's federal grants, advertising, some other miscellaneous type of revenues. When we're looking at the subsidy, what we're doing is measuring basically how the system is performing and even boiling it down to specific routes.

Natalie Menten: Now, for those of you who like more information, please feel free to visit rtd-denver.com. You'll scroll down to the bottom. Under reports and policies, click on that. Then you're going to go to a page that has a variety of different areas within the RTD district. One of those are service development. You'll again see a link and it says, "Click to visit service development."

Natalie Menten: If you click into there, then you're going to be able to get to these performance reports that I'm going to speak about right now on this call. What we measure, first of all, one is we're taking, as an example, a FlexRide service, which in the old days, we called Call-n-Ride. That's one of those little green shuttles. It used to be a green shuttle. Actually, now it's our traditional colors of blue, red, and kind of a brownish, orange-ish color. We call it FlexRide. That is service within a limited boundary.

Natalie Menten: Let's say it's the Green Mountain flex service. What we'll do, once a year, is look at the previous year's boardings, and then take the dollar figure of what it costs to operate that specific service for a one year period, we will then have the revenue that we... We do use stats on this because there are many people who are going to be using more than one vehicle during their trip, one way. They may get on Call-n-Ride and thinking on doing a regular fixed-route service, go from there.

Natalie Menten: The revenue is estimated on what was brought in by, in this case, Green Mountain FlexRide. I know I'm going to call it Call-n-Ride until the end of my term, but it is FlexRide. Then what we're doing is taking what is the amount of

boardings. When we use the word boarding, that means a single individual getting on the train or, in this case, a FlexRide shuttle, or fixed-route.

Natalie Menten: Using all of those financial statistics, what we are doing is boiling out of that, how is the system performing, how many boardings per hour, and the real nuts and bolts of it is, what is the subsidy per boarding? Now, I don't know that any other directors covered subsidies in any of the telephone town halls. For me, it's very important. To me, having been on RTD board for so long, I'm surprised when people think we're actually making a profit, because there is no way in the world that that is happening.

Natalie Menten: We are subsidizing each and every route. But what we need to look at is, what is that level of subsidy? Because our mission at RTD really is to provide cost-effective service and efficient service. I'm going to go through a few examples of some of the highlights in the subsidies. What I did, again, is, you can get to this report at rtd-denver.com, go to the bottom, reports and policies, drill on down, you're going to get to this report that I'm talking about.

Natalie Menten: This is the 2018 service. What I did was I took it, and since I'm more familiar with spreadsheets, just did a sort, which took a little cleanup to do, but sorted it by the highest down to the lowest. We're not going to go through every single one of these routes, but some people may be a little bit surprised at what we'll find in the top level of the highest subsidy per boarding.

Natalie Menten: Again, that means every time somebody, a single person, steps onto that vehicle, whether it's a bus, shuttle, train, whichever. At the top of the subsidy list, I almost wish we had like a call-in and people would be able to guess, and we'd have a prize to give them if they nailed it and they didn't cheat by going to the report. Access-a-Ride, let me start with Access-a-Ride, is our highest subsidy per boarding. I am not focusing on Access-a-Ride tonight, we're going to be talking about regular service.

Natalie Menten: The regular flex service, Lone Tree is the highest one that I have on the ranking. Each time somebody steps on to the Lone Tree FlexRide, the subsidy is \$39.70. Now, let me give a comparison, because the Lone Tree, Dave Menter here can chime in in a little while, we have to cover a few of these. He's taken out his papers to get right on board with me here. All right.

Natalie Menten: Again, Lone Tree, each and every time somebody gets on there, it's \$39.70. I don't think the average person would even take a guess at that high. Let's look at a comparison. In 2015, I don't know how long Lone Tree FlexRide or old Call-n-Ride has been around. But one might expect that, as more people know about the service, the more the subsidy would drop. But that is not the case with this example.

Natalie Menten: In 2015, I showed a \$22.35 subsidy per boarding. That's \$22.35 three years ago, compared to \$39.70 right now. Now, if we look at the next sized one, that's

Louisville. That's \$38.17 in current, the 2018 service. Three years ago, that was \$23.16. We look at Thornton, third highest, \$29.86 subsidy per boarding. Three years ago, that was \$25.58.

Natalie Menten: Now, I could keep going down this line, but I would think that, in general, a majority are going to show the same trend. At least with these FlexRides and some of the other routes, the subsidy continues to go higher and higher. What does that mean? That means that RTD is less and less sustainable, in my opinion. Again, that's just my opinion as RTD Board Director that we need to address this.

Natalie Menten: What are the options out there? I've mentioned over time that perhaps now with the huge demand and the huge amount of available service with transportation network companies... That was a long term. Most of you know it by Uber, or Lyft, or shared ride service. Those are readily available. Those perhaps would be a better option when we're looking at a FlexRide.

Natalie Menten: The FlexRides have a very tight boundary. They're not traveling from Lakewood over to Aurora, they're traveling in a very tight short distance. I'm going to ask, what is it? Maybe three, four miles from center to outside of the radius? Dave's shaking his head here.

Pauletta Tonilas: Go ahead, Dave.

Dave Menter: Yeah, that's right. This is David Menter. Yeah, for a common FlexRide service, or Call-n-Ride, typically, the boundaries of the area are a square, three by three, or four by four. Some may be elongated based on different types of service models. But that's roughly correct. Yeah.

Natalie Menten: Yeah. If we are looking at that route... I'll keep going then. For that short amount of distance, to subsidize somebody \$40, or \$35, or even \$20, or \$25, I have to ask the callers that are listening in here, please, chime in. Do you think that's an acceptable subsidy rate? I'd love to hear your opinion on that.

Natalie Menten: Again, I don't think it's a sustainable way to do business, and there are alternatives out there. Perhaps we should look at a voucher, where we would give somebody, upon proof that they live within the district, perhaps, and we know it's a certain area, a certain Call-n-Ride, that we do, perhaps, a pilot, and we say, "For everybody who is a resident, pay sales tax, maybe even businesses, paying a sales tax and you have some a proof method, we give you a voucher."

Natalie Menten: The voucher is worth, let's say, \$5, maybe \$8. You're able to use that on whatever other transportation you might want. Maybe that's an Uber ride, maybe it's a taxi cab, maybe other alternatives where we would be able to take that route out, take that FlexRide out. But we're providing an alternative. We're going to talk a little more later in this town hall about a problem that we're

having at RTD, where we don't have the drivers to maintain all of these routes that we've got going.

Natalie Menten: We really, absolutely, have to find some solution. I think I've covered the subsidies pretty well. I can tell you, this is absolutely my favorite report that we get at RTD. I'm asking about it, April, all the way through August, September, October, right when we get it in there, because we do have to have our books audited before we can even put it out. Anyway, I'm always anxious to see what are the real... for us financial numbers geeks, this is a stuff that makes you happy to look at.

Dave Menter: I can just jump in just a little bit more. This is one of the things that Director Menten's talking about that my department looks at closely. The general taxpaying public wants value for their taxpaying dollar, and that's exactly what Director Menten is talking about. One of the challenges we have in the RTD district is, at the periphery, we have a lot of low-density suburbs that have been built, which are difficult to serve with a fixed-route bus.

Dave Menter: In certain instances, it does make sense, probably if you're going to provide some service, to have some sort of Call-n-Ride, and we have metrics for those services. But the ones that Director Menten has called out are low, and we are looking at those in particular. The one, especially in Lone Tree, is competing currently with a FlexRide service that the City of Lone Tree's been operating. But that they say that they are getting out of... They have said, as far as I understand, with the opening of SERE, the Southeast Rail Extension. We'll be looking at those during the next year especially.

Natalie Menten: Oops. I keep forgetting to hit the mute button, folks... unmute. All right. This is something that will be a topic of conversation. If you keep a close eye on RTD and the news, right now we're talking about where should the service be for RTD? Should it be spread across the whole system? We do have our challenges. Dave mentioned we have a lot of rural areas, where there just isn't the density.

Natalie Menten: Frankly, in my district, which covers Lakewood, Golden, Wheat Ridge, many of you in that area are very aware, the Lakewood residents voted to put in building limits, growth limits. Golden has growth limits. If you talk to the many, many citizens, we don't want to be Downtown Denver. We do not want the density per square acre that one would find Downtown. We didn't move to the suburbs to be like downtown.

Natalie Menten: Where do we go with that data? Do we keep running the service, where I'm looking at the Route 21 is it goes by, just a little bit from my house, I can't think of any time that I've ever seen more than five people on that bus. Many times, it's one or two. That is one driver, who, as we'll talk about later, might be being mandated to work the six-day of the week. He's driving around one or two people, that's just not working very well. You want to chime in.

Pauletta Tonilas: Director, Menten, thank you so much. I will say, in knowing Director Menten for several years, she does her homework. She does amazing research to get down to the layers of fully understanding herself, all of the particulars, so that she can be a steward for the public. Folks, this is your director, and I am just commending her for the information gathering and research that she does do to make sure that she is putting forth the role that she's in an upstanding way. We're going to go now to our first caller. That is Chris. Chris, you're up. Go ahead and ask your question.

Chris: Yeah. I was calling to ask about Express Lanes for the trains. You're talking about how buses are mostly empty, but here in Golden, a lot of people I talk to, we've talked about RTD as an idea of public transportation rather than being one. Because you can drive someplace in 30 minutes, but if you want to take a rail or take a bus, it's going to take you an hour-and-a-half from here.

Chris: What are you guys doing to speed things up, especially on the train? Two hours to get to the airport, two hours to get to the east side of town, that's four hours back and forth if you're commuting. RTD is not viable transportation for working people. Express trains with to help out with that, a 40-minute ride just to Union Station. It takes us 20 minutes to drive there. What are you guys doing to create these Express Lanes and make RTD actually much easier to use?

Natalie Menten: I'm sorry to cut you off there, but I think I got the gist of where you're going here with this. All right. This has been a long standing problem. It's been an issue since day one. I want to say, I call it the trolley, because that's what it's like, it's a slow ride. Before I go into more of this, I want to do tell you that W Line, because we're going to just keep going every time we get a question about one of the lines, I believe the W Line, \$6.27 subsidy per boarding. We're just going to keep hitting those whenever we get asked a better route.

Natalie Menten: But as for time, yes, it is very slow. You can see, using that line, you are traveling, what, 20, 25-feet away from people's houses, you have so many grade crossings. That is a challenge because you can't be whipping through there like you would be perhaps on the A Line going out to the airport, which is much faster. It is two different types of trains.

Natalie Menten: But here's the biggest problem with the question that you had, when are we going to have express service? Problem is, again, with such tight areas, right next to the tracks, we would have to have a pull off. I always forget the right name for it. What is it, guys?

Dave Menter: Passing track.

Natalie Menten: Passing track, okay, somewhere you would just pull over. The slow train that's going to stop at every single stop, we'd be able to pull over, and then the fast guy would be able to just zoom on through. Where would we put that passing track because we have such tight build up to the tracks? Then, besides that

problem, there's two other big ones. That is, that would take probably substantial capital investment. Here's the truth of the matter. The promises made in 2004, to the voters, a big long list of them, have not all come true.

Natalie Menten: Would it be fair to invest more capital in the W Line when others have not even gotten what they were promised at all? At all or a majority, we can have that argument. That, to me, would be some of the main things. Then there's one last third thing. Where would the express train stop, and where would it pick up? Because I know we would have a royal battle, on the W Line, that you should not be skipping my Perry station, you should not be skipping my Garrison station.

Natalie Menten: I would welcome to have this conversation because we've been talking about this since 2013 when the line open, and it's the W Trolley. W Line, W Trolley, whichever way you want to call it, it's slow. I feel for you, I really, really do. But those are the challenges that go through my mind as I think through it.

Pauletta Tonilas: Thank you very much, Director Menten. That's Director Natalie Menten, for District M, of the RTD Board of Directors. We're going to go now to Debbie. Debbie, you're up next. Go ahead and ask your question.

Debbie: Okay, great. Thank you. Hi. I live in Lakewood, Colorado, near 20th Avenue, and I absolutely loved the 20 bus Routes. I use the W Line during the week because I traveled the University of Denver. But on the weekends, I wish I could use the 20 to go to the children's museum, or the zoo, or things like that, because it drops off so close to there. I realize subsidy is obviously a concern.

Debbie: But I was wondering how you measure the usage for the weekends when it's not open on the weekends, and what would the possibility be of it ever opening again on the weekend? Again, I just absolutely love that route, and I just would hope to be able to use it on the weekends.

Dave Menter: Hi, Debbie, this is David, RTD Service Planner and Scheduler. Boy, it's nice to hear from a bus rider who's a fan, and so, we appreciate that. Hey, Route 20 is performing fairly well. On weekdays, he's below his subsidy targets, and he's meeting his or her boardings per hour targets. Typically, when we look to add Saturday service, we do look to see some really strong ridership numbers. You're getting there on Route 20, but you're still below 30 boardings per hour in terms of your productivity on Route 20. That is something that we could take a look at.

Dave Menter: Next year, there could be a problem with our budget. We've had been in a situation here in the last five years with operator shortages that have been a serious issue. But that is one that we don't have Saturday service on now, that, at some point, we could take a look at. To a degree, Route 20 suffers a little bit because she's in the shadow of the Colfax Route 16. The market has overlapped

slightly, so it's always going to be a little bit of a concern for us in terms of adding service on the 20.

Dave Menter: It's more likely that the Colfax bus would get extra service at some point. But that is something that we certainly could take a look at. Director Menten might have more information to talk about in terms of the subsidy and the boardings per hour. But the route is not doing too badly. At some point, that could be something that we would look at.

Natalie Menten: Yeah, I will. We're going to follow a thread here. Okay. Subsidy for the 20, we've got 2018, subsidy of \$5.51 per boarding. Comparison, 2015, \$4.67. That's a much more reasonable subsidy. I want to say, didn't we do some adjustments on the 20 to help bring down efficiency about three years ago? Bring up efficiency, I don't think I said that right.

Dave Menter: Right, we've been doing some tweaking, I believe, on the East Side.

Natalie Menten: Oh, East Side, okay.

Dave Menter: Yeah.

Natalie Menten: Oh. All right. Maybe it's at 28 I was thinking of. All right. Hopefully we answered that.

Pauletta Tonilas: Yeah. That was good. Thank you very much. We're going to ask our first electronic polling question of the evening, folks. The way this works is you're going to push the number on your keypad, on your phone, to court respond with your answer. The first question that we have for you tonight is, how satisfied are you with RTD services? Press one for very satisfied, press two for somewhat satisfied, press three for somewhat dissatisfied, and press four for very dissatisfied. We will tell you the results of that question in just a couple of minutes.

Pauletta Tonilas: If you want to get in the queue to ask a question to Director Menten or to give us any feedback, press *3 on your keypad and we'll get you in the queue. We're going to go now to Sharon. Sharon, go ahead and ask your question.

Sharon: Hi. This is about the W Line. I was wondering why the Courthouse is almost twice as much as Red Rocks, which is only three miles down the line. Also, the high price is driving people... they've simply just to drive five miles to the Federal Center to go Downtown.

Natalie Menten: We have had a lot of discussion, to say the least, about the difference in the Jefferson County Government Center pricing, compared to, as an example, the Federal Center station. I remember when I first got on the board, I stayed out in Golden. At that time, we had a different structure. That was called a regional route, from Golden. When I got on the board, the pricing was \$5 or \$5.25. But

then, a couple years into my term, we decided, I think it was 2015 actually, we really revamped our fare system, and we got rid of the fare structure that had been...

Natalie Menten: Sorry. I told you the regional was, it's to Golden, at Jeffcoat Government Center. I'll try not to call it Taj Mahal. Federal Center station was called Express, and that was for \$4.50 if I recall correctly. In 2015, we merge these up, and I call them REX because it was Regional Express. But what it was doing was taking down the price for certain routes, and Golden still got classified as a regional, along with some other light rail stations that are outside of, what, the 12.1, 12 miles roughly from the core. Is that not the boundary?

Brian Welch: Yeah. Director Menten, this is Brian Welch. Yeah, the regional fare starts if you're more than 9.5 miles from Denver Union Station. That puts the end of the W Line into what we now call Regional.

Natalie Menten: Thank you. I'm sorry, I forgot. That is 12.1 miles out to Jeffcoat Government Center, and so it's 9-point, would you say, one or four?

Brian Welch: They're concentric rings as the crow flies. It's to be fair to rail lines that curve and change, we did it in a manner that it just looks at the 9.5-mile radius. The track length could be longer, but it unifies the system, the zones. That particular station is beyond that 9.5-mile, so it fell into the regional category rather than the local category.

Natalie Menten: Thank you. All right. What I would say in response to the issue with Golden is, number one, if cost is such a factor, the actual buses, the 16L that goes into Golden, is a local fare, and it does take a little bit more time. But, at some point in time, we may look at system-wide because the W Line at Jeffcoat Government Center is nothing the only one that's a regional fare. I know there's some that think they're the only ones, they're special, there's bias, or something. But there are other stations, quite a few, for the count, that face that regional fare.

Natalie Menten: At some point in the future, perhaps we will look at that. I know it won't be during my term. I'm on the board for one more year. It's not going to happen. Last time we did this, we started the public outreach. At first, we were going to get rid of zones, and we were going to do it based off of time. But we were on that route, then everybody said, "No, we don't want to do it that way, and we need to go back to the zones." But the mission was to make our fare system more simple. I do not know if we accomplished that. But we gave it a good shot.

Pauletta Tonilas: Thesis are very complex. Whenever you're talking about fares, fare products, it is a very difficult topic, no question about that. Let's give you the results of the electronic polling question we just asked you, how satisfied are you with RTD services? 30% of you said very satisfied. 41% said somewhat satisfied. 19% said

somewhat dissatisfied. 10% say very dissatisfied. Thank you very much. We'll ask you another question in just a couple of minutes.

Pauletta Tonilas: If you would like to get in the queue to ask a question, just press *3 on your keypad and we'll get you into the queue. Director Menten, we had talked about this a little bit earlier, but we really do have a critical situation on our hands with an operator shortage. We are down close to 60 light rail operators and about 80 bus operators. The good thing is that the economy is doing well. We have low unemployment. But that has a negative effect for jobs like bus operators and light rail operators. Because the pool of people who are looking for jobs are not going into these types of jobs, even drivers for trucks to deliver goods or what have you.

Pauletta Tonilas: It's not a pleasant situation when we have to drop trips. We don't like to have to do this because this is what we're here to do, it's our core mission. What kind of insights or perspectives can you offer to the folks out there who are frustrated when they see these trips dropped?

Natalie Menten: It's hard to give them anything that's going to really make them feel better. They were counting on a trip, they here really, in large part, a lot of time, from my perception, towards the last minute that something is being dropped. How do you plan around that? I know that I'm getting emails, probably every three days, I hear from a constituent, the W Line has been suffering that. What I am hearing is that the trip that gets dropped doesn't show up. You've got twice as many people waiting for the next one. There's not enough capacity to suit them in their normal way, where they're going to get a seat, perhaps.

Natalie Menten: Then they're standing, which, to us, we consider that an ideal situation, we max it out. I know the rider doesn't think it's ideal. But from RTD standards, to us, that's perfect as well. You know why? Because that subsidy is going to go down. But I believe that one of the things that may help somebody if they are very close to a route, and this depends whether you're going to work or you're coming from work, because one way, it works, and the other way, it doesn't, is to use our app, the next ride service, which you can get on and see, through your mobile device, whether that bus is actually going.

Natalie Menten: When you are on that mapping system, the difference is, if you see the little flashing... what is it, flashing icon? You know that that is real-time. Not just, okay, here's the normal bus route and it's going to be coming by, and here's the publish schedule. When you see that little flashing icon, you know it's live, you know the buses coming to you. The train, that won't. It does work with it. Okay. We've been moving through all of these different technology advancements.

Natalie Menten: That works great, in my opinion, if you're leaving home, and it's, say, 7:00 in the morning, and you plan to catch your 7:26 bus. Because then you can say, "Ah, I see the buses coming, I don't need to go get in my car, I don't need to call an Uber." Now, if you're Downtown and you're getting ready to go home,

obviously, you're not going to have your car. Then you're limited to choices. There are still choices out there. But for the heads up, that is one way to get a little bit of advanced notice. It doesn't solve the whole problem.

Natalie Menten: Right now, I will recommend this. If somebody wants to get a little bit of a heads up on this, you can go to Colorado Public Radio because I know they know what discussion we're going to be having here starting next week and into the next month. That is what Pauletta was talking about. We have drivers, mostly bus, but also train, where over the last four years, it has ranged between roughly 45% with the light rail, up to the 60s and 74.4%, where we have told drivers, they don't have a choice, they must work six days a week.

Natalie Menten: We don't have enough drivers. As I stated, there's not enough people, with this great economy that we've got, thank God, that are wanting to come in and work for RTD, coupled with the fact that it's not your five day job right now. If you're a newbie, you're low on the totem pole, you're going to be, probably, the first one that has to take that six-day work day mandate, and you don't get a choice.

Natalie Menten: What we're going to be having is a very, very intense discussion. What is going to probably come forward is a substantial reduction in service. Although, Keep in mind, it possibly will be temporary, but nobody can forecast the future. If things continue as they are, with a great economy, and employers battling all over the place for drivers... Honestly, frankly, if I know that King Soopers' short on getting food to the grocery store, unfortunately, I'm going to hope that King Soopers actually gets a driver.

Natalie Menten: Call me selfish. But that is a challenge. Everybody is facing. It's in the schools, it's in the guys that are transporting oil, food, medical supplies. It's not just a problem RTD is having. We have to deal with this. When we have drivers who are working six days a week missing events that are with their family, having peaceful time for themselves, like we all like to have, I don't know anything about that, but it eventually can become a safety issue. It certainly does not create a happy workplace. You will be hearing more about this.

Pauletta Tonilas: Thank you very much, Director Natalie Menten. Really, all of this fits into the equation of us looking at our whole system. We're looking at all of our service, we're looking at our financial situation, our workforce, and that is the whole premise behind our Reimagined RTD initiative that we just started launching. Because we're taking a holistic look at how we provide service and what is the best way to provide it in the future? Does it look like a different model? How do we look at the financial sustainability of the agency?

Pauletta Tonilas: What we are doing is taking an input and listening right now, as we kick off Reimagine RTD. We want your feedback, folks, we want to hear what you have to say. We're going to go to our next electronic polling question because this is part of the feedback we'd like to get from you right now as we start this. What can RTD be doing better? Press one on your keypad if you would like us to

improve reliability. Press two for enhanced bus rail connections. Press three for provide better technology and apps. Press four for improved safety and security on our system. We'll share the results in just a couple of minutes. Okay, we're going to go next to Kevin. Kevin, go ahead and ask your question.

Kevin: Hello? Can you hear me?

Pauletta Tonilas: Hi, Kevin?

Kevin: Hey. I live in the Green Mountain area. I am for the first time today finding out about the FlexRide option that serves the area I live in. I'm wondering what you guys are going to do to increase your visibility for that service. If you're planning on integrating that into the RTD app, I could see that as a way to increase ridership as well as visibility and appreciation of RTD throughout the city. Yeah, what are you guys going to do to broadcast yourself?

Natalie Menten: Okay. Green Mountain service, actually especially with the Federal Center, has, I would think, actually, quite a bit of advertising. Myself, I'd say that. I'd have to look at the line item or the advertising just for that specific route. I would say, what I would ask of you, Kevin, is call the city of Lakewood, who has a channel eight, and taxpayers are already paying that through taxes through Comcast. We already have, looking at Lakewood, taxpayers are already funding that, and ask...

Natalie Menten: Let's see. If you're in Green Mountain, you're in ward four or ward one depending on what side of the mountain you're on. Talk to the city counselors and suggest that. We use existing resources to advertise the Green Mountain FlexRide. Because the Green Mountain FlexRide, let's go back to subsidies, 2018, the Green Mountain, \$27.22. That's definitely not acceptable.

Natalie Menten: But I will not personally authorize or want RTD be spending more money on that when we're already stretched and focusing on fulfilling promises from over 10 years ago. As the city already has existing resources, channeling the newspaper they send to us, what, twice a year or four times a year, have them partner up to advertise with that. To answer your one other question, because I can see your question, folks, and we may whip through some of these, where we just answer them right off the bat because we want to answer as many questions as possible.

Natalie Menten: If we go to this and that, we can do this faster. I am being told by Brian, and he can tell you real quick, that we do have a FlexRide app. Since I rarely use the apps on my phone, he can tell you a little more.

Brian Welch: Yeah, Director Menten, this is Brian Welch. We have recently added an app that will allow you to book your trip on FlexRide using a smartphone. Please take advantage of that.

Natalie Menten: Okay. You would go to, let's say, rtd-denver.com, then go under services at the top, and spot out, again, FlexRide, not old Call-n-Ride, FlexRide, and you should be able to spot something. Good old Google gets you pointed to wherever you want these days. All right. Can we just start to whip through some of these questions? I see William, you're on the phone next. You want to know what's been done about the lack of drivers.

Natalie Menten: Okay. We have, in the last collective bargaining agreement, we increased pay. We have a bonus sign up. Those are two of the major things. There's also perks. We've got these drivers who do split shifts. That's a real toughie, I think, or maybe it's a real benefit. You're going to be working a couple few hours, then you take a break, then you work a few more hours. If you've got the right lifestyle, you got to go pick up your kids, something like that, that works great. But if you don't, that's a tough shift.

Natalie Menten: What else have we done for the drivers? Really, really quick. One thing that we did was work with our unions... excuse me, and we actually increased pay for our operators. Sorry, I've got a frog in my throat. You actually can start out at least \$20 an hour if you come on board working for RTD as an operator. We also have really compressed the time for the application process and the training process. We help you get your CDL. That process in and of itself saves people big time money and it's a ready set process for you.

Natalie Menten: We've tried to make it as easy and convenient for folks to be able to come in the door and work with us. Yeah, we're doing all we can in taking a look at how to maybe target to certain sectors of the community that we think would be interested in these jobs. We just continue to look for ideas. If you have any, we'd love to know.

Natalie Menten: Let me give you really quickly the results of the last polling question. We asked you, what can RTD be doing better? 37% of you said improve reliability. 37% enhance bus rail connections. 5% provide better technology. 21% improve safety and security on our system. Thank you for that. We're going to go now to Kevin. Kevin, real quickly, if you could ask your question.

Kevin: Yeah. Am I on?

Natalie Menten: You are, Kevin. How are you doing?

Kevin: Good.

Natalie Menten: Please, ask your question.

Kevin: Yeah. The question would be, to solve all the problems that you guys have been talking about over the phone for the last half an hour or so is, get rid of the RTD bus, because they're dinosaurs. They're outdated, they tear up the streets, they cause routine traffic delays, and put two to maybe three short buses in its place.

You could hire more drivers, and you could probably get them in the seat without a CDL, and they could drive, and then people could get to work on time because there'd be two buses instead of one in the same timeframe than a large bus.

Kevin: Now, granted, keep the bigger buses for Downtown and where you know you have to have them because they're full. But then when it gets to a certain timeframe, get rid of those buses, take them off the streets, and put two small buses in their place. I know you already have them. Then, now it's all five of your problems right there. Plus, the state doesn't have to pay to repair the roads. The cost would drop drastically all the way around in a circle twice.

Kevin: Get rid of the RTD in the locations where there's two people on them, and put two smaller buses, and then people are probably going to take the bus more. You can have Route 17 and have route 17A and B. Then the A would go this way, and B would go that way, and then people could get closer to their homes.

Natalie Menten: All right, Kevin, thanks for providing your suggestions. I could see, I don't know if you did catch. Maybe you didn't catch this last part of the discussion we were having, we have a major driver shortage. While I would love to see the smaller buses, especially because it's a little bit easier getting around them when they don't have a pull off and don't perhaps take as much room, and there is the impact on the roads, first and foremost, the problem that we have is drivers.

Natalie Menten: I know two small shuttles in the place of one, we just doubled our problem. But I do agree with you, and I've brought it up, that for cost, I mean, I used to be in the automotive business, so I know a 215-size tire versus a big old monster tire, there's a clear price difference. A diesel engine and Allison transmission, far more than what's in the little one. But staff has stated to me that with having the flexibility and not knowing where one bus is going to be, yes, Downtown one day, and it's zero, and it's filled to the max, it is a little bit of a scheduling challenge to say that bus always has to stay out in the zero.

Natalie Menten: But Kevin, I truly appreciate your suggestions. We're going to be having a lot of discussion. Feel free to come down and talk to our board. Board meetings, public comment starts at the beginning. We're at 1664 Blake Street. Anybody who doesn't make it into night, then come down and see us about later this month. Okay, Tyson. All right, we're just going to whip through these, because we only got, what, like 11 minutes left, right?

Pauletta Tonilas: Yeah.

Natalie Menten: All right. Tyson, so instead of me getting on phone, I see here what your question is, about improving bus lines. I live by the 44 and stopped writing as it needs improvement. Actually, put him on the phone, I want to know what does he mean really quickly by improvement. Tyson, are you there?

Tyson: Yeah, I'm here.

Natalie Menten: Hi?

Tyson: Hi. I can ride into Downtown fine. Hey, I just got really frustrated with your comment that if we're having problems with the bus, we should use the app. The app's not going to make the bus be there on time, so I could not rely on it to be there. Yep, I can't rely on it to be there if I can't [inaudible 00:48:54].

Natalie Menten: I agree with you. What was our polling on that? Reliability and connection, where did we come in now? Sorry I'm cutting off. I am really breaking things around here. All right. This is my life. All right. Okay. Tyson, I didn't mean to be breaking the conversation there. Reliability and connecting is very important. Back at the beginning of this whole conversation, we do know that the majority of the riders are not one vehicle trips.

Natalie Menten: What's the breakdown on it? Riders take in 2.2 or something. I'm going off memory. But that connectivity is very important. Traffic is a challenge. I will note, Dave's here, he's in service planning, and maybe you can speak to the 44 a little more.

Dave Menter: Yeah. This David in service planning. On Route 44, we have had a problem in the last year that we've known. It's been getting worse with its delays. In the last run board, we did add another bus into the service to add some more slack time into the schedule so that he had better, or she, the route would have better recovery.

Dave Menter: We also have a new terminal on Route 44 at I-70 and Ward Road Park-n-Ride. The Route 44 has trouble in as much as it's a long route. At some point, it may be broken in half. When we have long routes to go through Downtown, all the way across from the West Side to the East Side of town, they are prone to subject to the laser. Especially like on baseball game days, the Route 44 is one of the routes that is impacted more directly than others.

Dave Menter: To a degree, it's a factor of the long route. But we did add just another vehicle in it because we saw that it was popping up on our late bus reports. I hope that helps going forward.

Natalie Menten: Yeah. Thank you very much, Dave. Okay, Ian, are you up? You're next, Ian. If you could keep it quick, that'd be great.

Ian: Yeah. Hi, there. Can you guys hear me?

Natalie Menten: We can. Go ahead.

Dave Menter: We can.

Ian: All right, great. After hearing all these different facets of the RTD system, a lot of what I've heard tonight is based off of promises made in 2004 even though it might not make commercial sense at this point. Are there any periods in the upcoming future where you would reconsider maybe the priorities of RTD's development? I know that's part of this initiative, but as far as reorienting, I maybe think some of those priorities might be outdated.

Natalie Menten: That's a very good question. Because if we were going back in time, in our little Lamborghini or whatever that car was, and we went back 2004 and tried to envision that transportation shared network companies, like Uber and Lyft, would have taken off like they did, I don't think many people would have predicted that that would happen.

Natalie Menten: As we move forward now, we need to even start to contemplate where autonomous vehicles are going to go, self-driving vehicles. I remember watching The Jetsons as a kid, and now that may become a reality, where we're talking about airspace rights. Already government, of course, government loves to make rules, we're already trying to figure out what we're going to do to combat some of these new technologies coming up. I don't think any of us know what the future holds long-term.

Natalie Menten: But we're trying to get as much input as possible about this Reimagine RTD. It's called Transportation Transformation. It's got, of course, multiple names. We do need input. We have this problem with the drivers, we have two highest subsidies, yet we have people in the rural area, who are paying into RTD just as much as the person living Downtown next to the zero. What is fair? How do we make a cost-efficient service? How do we be responsible to taxpayers?

Natalie Menten: There are a lot of questions. The core of it is, we made promises on parts of line, in the fast track system, that do not make financial sense. They just don't. We need to consider when there's promises made by government to taxpayers, and then things change. What should we do? That's the right question there.

Pauletta Tonilas: Thanks very much, Director Menten. Real quickly, one final question. Other than this telephone town hall meeting, how would you be most likely to stay involved with RTD and our Reimagine RTD effort? Press one to use the interactive online engagement tool on our RTD website. Press two for read emails or e-newsletters. Press three for attend a public meeting. Press four for taking short surveys at stations and transit centers. Okay, we're going to go back up to Jim. Jim, you are up, but please keep it quick because we don't have much time left.

Jim: Yeah. My concern is the cost. We're one of the highest, if not the highest, average transit cost in the nation. I just don't understand, we keep saying the subsidies are high, and we have drivers shortages, and we can't pay the drivers, nothing has been said about the debts that we're carrying, the contracts that we have, the infrastructure costs. A lot of this has been created in the past and we've been saddled with inefficient creation of the infrastructure. Sure, your

operating costs are going to be tough because we already blew it by setting up the system.

Natalie Menten: Oh. Sorry about that, Jim. I will agree with you. With a fast track plan, we have maxed on debt. We can't even go borrow anymore, and yet the promises have not all been fulfilled. We are one of the most expensive fares in the United States. At least I haven't actually fact checked that. But enough people said it, I'm going to go with that one. People are shaking their heads in the room here. Yes.

Natalie Menten: We do have our challenges because RTD is so spread out. Again, we talked about some of us don't want to have 3,000 people per every two acres or whatever acre it is, the density. At the end, we have a lot of challenges. The fast tracks was, a lot of people got promised things during that time. Personally, I know that I would not get this endorsement from the rest of the board, and staff, I'm not going to ask them about this, but we made too many promises, unable to deliver.

Natalie Menten: It was a buy-in from some of the cities. I'm going to say it, this is especially in the Northwest, for them to buy into it, they needed to be promised something. But was it the right thing to do? I don't think it was. I might be in the minority, very well could be in, I'm completely comfortable with that. I hope I answered your question. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas: Three minutes.

Natalie Menten: We got three minutes here, by the way. We're going to whip through these. All right. Tina, you've got a question. "Doesn't understand driver shortage with so many people moving to Colorado." Well, I would say, number one, there are a lot of different jobs out there. Driving a bus some routes, you get a lot of nice people. There's probably maybe people bring their cookies, and they're very nice to you. There's some routes where it's a little bit rougher.

Natalie Menten: You've got shifts throughout the day, you have to split shifts, and now we've had this mandate day-six work days for going on four years, there's a lot of jobs. If somebody can have a cushy job, where they get a sit down, they don't have to deal with a lot of rabble-rousing and all of that, arguing over whether the fare prices right or different things, it has just been a challenge. I think the employers, all the way across the board, not just drivers in the transportation industry, are facing challenges.

Natalie Menten: Okay, one more minute. A guy. We've got Jules asking, "How can we get bus drivers along 38 Avenue to drive the speed limit instead of driving and 20 miles per hour? They're holding up traffic." That one somebody else is going to have to answer.

Dave Menter: This David Menter in service planning. In terms of what an operator has to deal with every day on the street, elderly people, maybe some standees, people with special needs on a street, our primary thing is for safety for the riders every day. There may be instances where the operator has special needs riders on the bus that they're really looking out for and other safety concerns on that. I don't have any more information on that. We can look into that later.

Natalie Menten: Thank you, Dave. Do we have GPS on the buses?

Dave Menter: Oh, yeah, we do have GPS on buses. If we had specifics on date and times, then sort of thing, we could all go research.

Natalie Menten: To give you a little more about that, just look at my name. It's natalie.menten, M-E-N-T-E-N, @rtd-denver.com. If you ever have a complaint or concern, and this is for everybody, what you need to do is note the direction of the vehicle. Whether it's a train or a bus, is it eastbound, westbound, southbound, whatever?

Natalie Menten: There's also an identifying number, not the route, and we need the route too, but there's actual identifier on the bus. It'll say the digits. If you give us those specifics, we can nail it down and figure out what's going on. Go ahead, Pauletta.

Pauletta Tonilas: Yeah. Yeah. Director Menten, we've come to the end of our town hall meeting. I want to just give our director a chance to offer some closing comments. We thank you for being on the line with us tonight. If you did not have a chance to ask a question or you have a comment or concern, you can stay on the line, or press *9 and you can leave us a message. But Director Menten, why don't you go ahead and close this out?

Natalie Menten: I just want to thank everybody for joining us tonight. We covered quite a bit of questions, some new ones, the ones that we've just been unable to resolve for some years. Example, like the Express train, I don't know when we're going to get a speedy W Line. It'll be nice. But I don't think it's going to be happening anytime soon. I always love to hear from constituents. If you have problems, again, the more specifics you can give us, the more we're able to address what you are asking.

Natalie Menten: As we look at whether we divide our service... or not divide our service, but whether we continue to have such a spread out service, with high subsidy, or we concentrate on high usage routes and make them more frequent, those are some really tough decisions that we've got coming up. The workforce shortage, and a potential substantial reduction in service, is beyond the radar of all the riders, so they know what we're discussing.

Natalie Menten: Feel free to come down to our board meetings, we're at 1660 Blake street, and 5:30. Take a look at our calendar, rtd-denver.com. Tuesday. Yeah, not any 5:30

p.m., just Tuesday night. Anna's like, "Yeah, the door would be locked on most nights." I'm sorry. Take a look at the calendar at rtd-denver.com, scroll down to the bottom of the page, you'll see Board of Directors.

Natalie Menten:

There you'll be able to get my contact information, any of the other board of directors. You can look up your address to tell what district you're in if you don't happen to know. There you'll also see our draft agendas, our past actions, the video links. It's really exciting stuff. You can watch us hash out these exciting things for two, three, four hours. Fun stuff. Thanks for joining us.