

Regional Transportation District
District F Director Bob Broom
May 7, 2020

Pauletta Tonilas:

Good evening everyone, and thank you for joining us for this live special 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 I'll be your moderator this evening as we talk about the latest of how RTD is addressing COVID-19. But we're also here to talk about anything else related to RTD. Welcome, folks. We hope that this finds you in the comfort of your home, safe and healthy.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Joining me this evening on the call is Bob Broom, RTD director for District F. Also sitting in, Michael Ford, chief operations officer, Dave Jensen, assistant general manager of rail operations, and Jeff Dunning, senior service planner and scheduler. Now, we're here to listen to you and to hear your questions. What you have to say matters a lot to us. That's why we're on this telephone town hall meeting, to answer your questions and talk about what the future looks like.

Pauletta Tonilas:

If this is your first time on a telephone town hall, here's how it works. To ask a question, just press star three on your keypad, and you'll be transferred to someone who will take down some basic information and then put you in the queue. Again, that's star three if you'd like to be in the queue and ask us questions or even give us some comment tonight. And this can be about anything related to RTD, but we know that COVID-19 is on a lot of people's minds right now. And then all you have to do is stay on the line and then wait for me to call on your name, and then you can ask your question live. So keep it brief when we come to you, because we do want to get to as many people on the phone as possible. And again, that's star three to get in the queue.

Pauletta Tonilas:

It is now my pleasure to introduce RTD director Bob Broom for District F. That is your RTD district. Director Broom, thank you so much for being on the phone with us tonight and taking time out of your evening so that we can talk with your constituents. We really have had a lot going on since COVID-19 hit. Why don't you walk us through a little bit of that, Director?

Bob Broom:

Thanks, Pauletta. District F is in Aurora. It's south of Colfax and east of 225. But of course, we're here tonight to talk about any part of RTD, not just my district. Well, good evening, and thank you for joining us this evening. COVID-19 has had a big impact on all of our lives. As RTD holds its core value of safety, it is especially important during these difficult times that we focus on keeping our passengers and our employees safe and healthy. RTD provides a vital service and is a lifeline to many people in the community, and it is crucial that we continue operating for the public that relies on us. We are in close contact and cooperation with state, regional, and local authorities about best practices, safe operations, and communication with the public.

Bob Broom:

RTD public transit as a critical infrastructure continues to operate for essential travel. Essential travel includes trips for groceries, to get necessary healthcare and medications, or to reach an essential job.

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Essential workers in healthcare, public safety, food production and distribution, utilities, and government operations rely on RTD every day. We need everyone's help to keep the transit system safe. Please don't take unnecessary trips. Please limit time spent in RTD stations to about 10 minutes, and as often as possible, keep a distance of six feet between yourself and other passengers. There is a lot to cover tonight, and we are here to answer your questions. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Director. That is Director Bob Broom, and that is your RTD director for your district. And we are RTD, and we're hosting live telephone town hall meeting to talk to you about COVID-19 and how we're moving forward to move people across the region or anything else that you'd like to talk to us about tonight. And again, star three is what you press on your keypad if you would like to get in the queue and ask us a question. All right, we already have someone in the queue so we're going to go to Adam. Adam, you are first in the queue, so go ahead and ask your question. Good evening, Adam.

Adam:

Hey, how's it going? Yeah, my question is sometimes I see the buses, they say they're full and they can't pick anybody else up. I'm wondering if maybe you guys can kind of send an extra bus or something like that, because I have an essential job. Right now, we're working for the United States Air Force, and some of those people on the bus shouldn't be on there, but I can't say, "Hey, you've got to get off the bus." But maybe if the drivers who say, "Hey, we've had a few full buses on this route. Can you send another couple buses behind me," or ... You know what I mean?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, absolutely Adam, and thank you very much for that. And what you have asked us, we have been asked a lot as we've been doing these telephone town halls for each of our RTD board members. I'm going to pull in Michael Ford, who is our chief operations officer, because we have a whole plan of how we are monitoring our operation and making adjustments. Michael, how would you like to go ahead and tell Adam and others how we're managing that?

Michael Ford:

Yes, thank you very much Pauletta. Obviously, your safety is important, and our employees' safety is important as well. But we really are having resources positioned strategically in our service areas to help address overload or potential overload issues. As you may know, there's a 15-passenger limit on a 40-foot bus and 20 passenger limit on an Arctic or a regional bus, and 30 on a rail car. What we do is we use a lot of data. We have operators providing this information on a daily basis, our operations supervisors, our security officers, and we have automatic passenger counters that give us information so we can deploy resources where they're needed. And so we continually monitor that. We're doing that actively right now and we're able to put additional resources out there in the field, well positioned to address overloads and crowds because we want to keep the social distancing happening with our passengers and protection of passengers and our operators.

Michael Ford:

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So if there are particular times you are riding or a particular route, we can get that information from you after the call. But again, we are on this vigilantly about trying to ensure that we have enough resources out there to match whatever services are in need of extra sections. So I really appreciate the call, and rest assured, we're on this. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks very much, Michael. That's Michael Ford, RTD's chief operations officer. Again, if you would like to get in the queue to ask Director Bob Broom or any of us RTD staff on the line, press star three on your keypad, again, star three, and we'll get you in the queue. All right, we're going to go up next to Jacob. Jacob, good evening. Go ahead and ask your question.

Jacob:

Good evening, guys. I was just wondering. I ride RTD often. I have to do it with mostly with my little sister, and all my family mostly rides it. But my question is, why do they insist I have to wear a mask? I totally understand that masks may be provided, but if a driver doesn't wear a mask and then we ask about it, then they get all mad and defensive with us. What do we do with that?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Jacob, thank you very much for that. So you're asking why are we requiring riders to wear masks, but the drivers don't have to. Actually, we have a requirement where we are having our operators wear masks or face coverings. There are some instances where our operators might have a particular condition where it's not great for them to wear a face covering. There are those situations, but what I can tell you is with the orders that have gone out in many cities, we are asking our riders to please wear face coverings, and we're hoping that everybody uses good judgment and follows these orders in the spirit of how they're intended, because it's not only for his own safety, but the safety of those around you. Now, I'm going to pull in Director Bob Broom to just give some perspective to this. So Director, we've talked a lot at RTD about how it's really important for the public to be our partners in safety, right?

Bob Broom:

That's right, Pauletta, but it's hard to find masks. I've been looking in stores around whenever I go out to buy masks, and they're always out. And so, I've ordered some over the computer, but they haven't come in yet, so I have to get out a bandana and put that around my face when I go into a store. So you have to make do until masks become more readily available.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Director, thank you so much, and I know people are doing very creative things to have some kind of a face covering. People are using bandanas, like what Director Broom said. Some people are using those sheets that they use when they're snowboarding or skiing. Other folks are just pulling up their t-shirts. So again, we're not saying you have to have a specific mask, but that is what the guidance is. And so we're really hoping that people do abide by that. I'm going to pull in Dave Jensen, who is our assistant general manager of rail operations. Dave is on the line with us tonight. Dave, thanks for being with us, but why don't you give folks an idea of some of the things we're doing internally to protect our

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employees, to protect our operators, but also just other facets of what we're doing for internal measures, Dave.

Dave Jensen:

Yes, good evening. I'm Dave Jensen, the assistant general manager of rail operations for RTD, and thank you, Pauletta, for that. So let's chat a little bit about the measures that we're taking internally within the agency. Our employees are being reminded to practice social distancing. We are asking our employees to stay home if they feel ill. And those who are able to, we are asking to work remotely, work from home. So we are providing supplies to our employees, like hand sanitizers, the face masks that we've been talking about. The agency is providing for our front line employees and other personal protective equipment, such as gloves. We are requiring our employees all to wear masks, which is an agency policy now, relatively new to the agency. Within the last week, we've implemented the actual requirement as opposed to a suggestion to wear masks while on duty or on RTD property.

Dave Jensen:

And I do want to reassure everyone, because we get asked about this a lot, that we do have enough masks, we do have enough hand sanitizer for operators, and we are providing those to our employees. If an employee does need that or if they are out of it, then they simply need to speak with their supervisor and they'll be able to get what they need. As far as the agency goes as well, we are providing daily updates to all of our employees and the board of directors and our union leadership so that everybody within the agency is apprised of what we're doing and how we're handling things.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Dave, thank you so much. That's Dave Jensen, assistant general manager of rail operations. If you'd like to get into queue to ask us a question or even just to give us a comment or an idea, press star three on your keypad. Okay, we're going to go to [Sherri 00:13:09]. Sherri, good evening. Go ahead and ask your question.

Sherri:

Yes, good evening. My question was, what change have taken place on the Access-a-Cab and Access-a-Ride services?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, Sherrie, thank you very much for that, and we're happy that we're still providing Access-a-Ride service, but we also have a new type of service through Access-a-Ride. Michael Ford, who's our chief operations officer, I'll pull Michael in to tell us a little bit about Access-a-Ride.

Michael Ford:

Thank you. In addition to getting your service the next day, which we've moved towards, we also have teamed up with other store chains to provide grocery service to folks through Access-a-Ride services as well. So we're trying to make it more convenient for people to get their essential needs and have it delivered to them from the operator. We continue to monitor the resources that are needed to provide this service. Again, a lot of the things that Mr. Jensen just talked about, the cleanliness of the vehicle,

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people wearing masks, and all those things are also part of that process. So again, want to just help the grocery delivery opportunity that we've been taking advantage of during this time and probably beyond, and also that we are continuing to ride the service or provide the service, depending on the demand. So it's still up and running. Obviously the ridership is not where it was pre-pandemic, but the service is still operating to serve you and your needs. So thank you very much for the question.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Michael. All right, we're going to go next to Vivian. Vivian, go ahead and ask your question.

Vivian:

Yes, I have two questions. My questions is, I'm a driver, and when passengers come on without a mask, are we supposed to say they can't get on? And also, once you come full circle with RTD again, would the drivers have some kind of protection, like plexiglass around the fare box and so it would protect the driver as well?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Vivian, thank you so much. Two great questions. I'll take the first one, and then I can bring Michael into it. So you were asking about what are operators supposed to do when people don't have masks. We really want people to be responsible and to wear face coverings at this point. We do not want our operators being enforcers. And with the rear door boarding, it's very difficult anyway for operators to have to take that on. And so, we want our operators to be focused on moving people safely and on their own safety, and so again, this is about personal responsibility and we're hoping that people can do that. We do not have enough transit police or enforcement officers out there to go to all major stations or popular routes and make sure people have masks before they hop on board. So yeah, this has got to be a partnership. And then, I will ask Michael to address the question about plexiglass or some other shield, Michael, because I know you guys are looking at that.

Michael Ford:

Yes, thank you very much, Pauletta, and obviously your protection is very, very important to us. What we've been doing right now is working with our designers and engineers to create some kind of a barrier mechanism that would protect the driver. We have mocked up several different buses. We're currently working on the Arctics right now, and we think we've come up with a design that can work that will be safe for the driver, allow them to get in and out, but also secure the protection that they're needed. So we have some more work to do on that, but that prototype is actually being installed in some of our buses right now, and we're looking at the materials, design, and the cost and how long it will take to do that. But in this new normal, we're definitely headed in that direction to put these type of safeguards in for our operators.

Michael Ford:

So we're on it. We're working on it right now, and you should probably see some more of those guards or protective areas. And it may be plexiglass, or it may be some other type of material. We just want something that's going to be durable and safe for our operators. So thank you very much for the question.

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Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks, Vivian. Director Broom, did you want to add anything? Have you heard much? I know some directors have really heard a lot from people who have concern for our operators. People really respect the job that our operators are doing. Do you have anything you'd like to share with folks?

Bob Broom:

Only that it's really difficult now for operators since we're using the back door entry. Normally, they'd have a chance to address people when they got on the vehicle, but now they can't do that. So we're just having to learn and do the best we can as we go. So comments from the public are certainly welcome because that way, we can make needed changes. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Director Broom, you bring up a good point about, we have to really make decisions as we go. I like to call this we're building the plane as we're flying it, because there's no instruction manual that came with how to deal with COVID-19, and I think that's one thing we're all doing is just having to really be nimble and pivot and make the best decisions we can every day with the best available information that we have, and just keep on moving forward. So we are partners in that. Okay, Gene is next in the queue. Gene, we'd like to hear your question. Go ahead.

Gene:

Well, it's kind of a problem that I've had, and it consists all the time with Access-a-Ride. I'm limited vision, and I know other ladies have limited vision. And we put on my thing, and she does too, that when you come and get you at night when you don't see them, you have this policy, better be on the bus at six minutes, right? Well, how does a person with limited vision know when they're parked in the back or on the side or whatever, okay? And we can't see them. And then, a few times I've called a manager, and they had to go get the bus. And then even [inaudible 00:20:09] they parked in the back. We don't even know they're there, or they parked about not quite a half a block away. We can't see them. Not only a person with limited vision or with handicapped or needs special attention, and it is difficult. But there's no reason why the driver with limited vision can't come to the door, right by the door or open the door and say, "I'm here."

Bob Broom:

Well, I-

Gene:

I find that some of the drivers-

Bob Broom:

My comment to that would be, maybe we could explore having the driver placing a phone call when they arrive at your address. I mean, if you could be identified as being sight impaired, then that might make sense to do it that way. I don't know that they'd necessarily know which door to go knock on, but if they had your phone number, it seems like it'd be simple to use their cell phone to give you a call. So maybe we can look into that.

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Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Director, that's great. Michael, what about that thought?

Michael Ford:

Yeah, I think we can do that. This sounds like a really good communication opportunity, and the callers or the people that are delivering the service usually should know the status of their clients and what their special needs are. So we can get your particular information once we get off the call. We can do that. I think this sounds like an opportunity to improve particularly in the areas of folks with low vision or sight impairments and making sure that our drivers are sensitive to those issues and they have implicit instructions of what to do when they arrive, or making advanced calls or notifications before they get there. And so I'm happy to help you out with that and to look into this a little bit more and also to help communicate these issues more broadly in our service so that we can make sure that we correct whatever deficiencies might exist. Really appreciate the call. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Michael. If you'd like to get in the queue to ask us a question or even just to give us a comment, press star three on your keypad. This is a live telephone town hall meeting being hosted by Director Bob Broom, RTD director for your district and RTD. We're going to go to Betty who is in the queue next. Betty, go ahead and ask your question.

Betty:

I was delighted to hear somebody previously deal with the issue of Access-a-Ride and Access-a-Cab. How are you dealing with getting the information out to the people who need it? Because you can have the best service in the world, but if nobody knows about it, nobody comes.

Bob Broom:

Well, to start with, this is Director Broom, the board made the decision up front that we weren't going to make any changes or reduce the services at all for Access-a-Ride, that that particular population really depends on RTD. So your question really goes to, how do we normally talk with the public and educate them about this particular service and how to use it, and perhaps somebody from staff can talk some more about that.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Of course, Director Broom. Thank you so much. And this is Pauletta Tonilas. I'm your moderator and I'm also the head of RTD's communications department. And so what our strategy is with whatever big news we have to share is we layer that information out through as many channels as we can. So we use traditional channels like news releases that get picked up by the local media. They are great partners in sharing information. We also use our web site. We keep our web site very updated with all information. Also, social media. We use stakeholder groups that we send information to who then send information out through their channels. We have databases of literally thousands of people, people who sign up to get information for us on certain routes or certain rail lines or to get our newsletter, the Read and Ride. Elected officials, stakeholders, so we send information out to all those people.

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Pauletta Tonilas:

And in the case of Access-a-Ride, we do send information out to the people who are our Access-a-Ride customers, to the best of our ability through the contact information that we have. And I'll ask Michael Ford, am I missing anything, Michael, about specifics on how we make sure that Access-a-Ride customers get information?

Michael Ford:

I think you've covered a lot. I think the groups, the working groups that we have, we also tell you information out through them as well. And I know, I was talking to Larry and Paul the other day, and they issue bulletins and work with the contractors to make sure that they get information in their hands and passed on verbally from their supervisors that are working with them as well. So we use a lot of different communication tools to try to be effective in getting the information out to all our passengers and operators about changes that are coming up. So I appreciate the opportunity.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Michael. Okay, we're going to go to [Venna 00:25:55]. Venna, you're next in the queue. We'd like to hear your question.

Venna:

Hi. So I wanted to ask you guys, I know that you guys have the automated phone service that you use to be able to see if your bus is coming and kind of give an estimate. I don't know if you guys can implement a way of letting people know when there's a full bus next in line, or ... I know Google Maps has a ... I don't know if you guys work with them directly, but they have an estimate on time. I don't know if you guys can give them that sort of information. I'm personally an Uber driver, and I've been picking up a lot of people lately who have had to resort to other measures to get to work or where they're going.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Wow, Venna, that's great. I love that. And I have to say, we haven't looked into our channels of how we could do that, but we do have some third-party apps that work with us and share our information. Transit and Google, of course, and others, and that is very interesting. And I vaguely remember someone from my team sent some information around about apps doing this type of thing, and I would like to have my team look more into that because I love your idea. And gosh, that's great. Thank you so much for that. I appreciate it. All right, we're going to go to Steven next. Steven, go ahead.

Steven:

Good evening, and thank you for this venue. And you're actually doing a really good job with facilitating it, so congrats. The CARES Act provided transit \$25 billion. How much was allocated to RTD and how is RTD going to apply those dollars?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, that's great, Steven. Thank you very much. I'll start, and then I'll toss it to Director Broom who can talk a little bit about our funding situation and our federal assistance. Yes, through the CARES Act, which is a federal stimulus package, there was \$25 billion that was included in that act for transit agencies

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across the country. And RTD is going to receive about \$232 million, and that is based on a model that has to do with population of areas and the vehicle miles traveled and many different data points to determine how much each transit agency gets. That is to help us offset the significant revenue loss that we are going to experience from right now, not collecting fares because we have rear door boarding and we've suspended fare collection, and also sales tax revenues that we are going to see a significant drop in like anyone who relies on sales tax revenues.

Pauletta Tonilas:

That is based on a reimbursement basis, so as we expand the funds, then we submit for that to the federal government, and we get reimbursed. So we don't just get handed over a check for \$232 million, but it is going to significantly help us, and I think this is something that transit agencies are very thankful for. Director, would you like to add to that?

Bob Broom:

Well, the only thing I'd add to that is that the board is going to get an update from the finance department on Tuesday night on sales and use tax collections that we're now beginning to see how bad of a problem that we're going to have. Some of the things we're seeing is that Amazon, for example, their business has gone way up, and so their sales tax remittances are also going way up. And so they're making up some of the difference for all of these stores that have been closed down. People have simply instead of going to their local store to buy things, they're ... Just like I was doing with masks, you go on the computer, and I went to Amazon to buy masks. So we can't really answer definitively, but we know that this isn't going to take care of itself overnight. And hopefully, this \$232 million will get us through this year. We're going to have to tighten our belts probably and in order to maintain the kind of service levels that I think we'll see that we're going to have to provide as people go back to work.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Director. That's Director Bob Broom, who is your RTD director. All right, we're going to go up next to Cindy. Cindy, go ahead.

Cindy:

Okay, my question is, at night, when the light rail quits running and the buses, what steps are they doing to clean the light rails and the buses to keep people safe?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Cindy, thank you for that. Well, we've got a couple guys on the line with us that know all about that. Let's start with Dave Jensen. Dave Jensen is the head of all rail for RTD. So Dave, why don't you explain what we're doing every day?

Dave Jensen:

Yeah, so, and I can speak in part to what the bus does as well because we're in contact with one another. So the short answer is yes, we are cleaning every single rail car in the evening, and the buses are as well. But to elaborate on that just a little bit, all of our employees have been specially trained to be able to work with different disinfectants that are appropriate for the situation. We've had to change

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the types of different disinfectants we're using. We've had to change the methods that we're using in order to clean the trains. It takes us longer, but obviously it's well worth it. And we are focusing in on high touch areas and some of those nooks and crannies on the vehicles to make extra sure that they are cleaned. And we have that capacity to clean the vehicles during the day, so if we become aware of a hazard on a train, we can take the rail car off of the line, replace it with a clean car, and then clean the vehicles during the day.

Dave Jensen:

So you can be confident that are vehicles are cleaned at least daily on light rail. Maybe one more thing worth noting is that we even have employees in the field, we've reallocated personnel just to make sure that the vehicles are clean. So we're using personnel in the field on trains cleaning them while they're in service when they get to the terminals. So that is a high focus area for us.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Dave. And Michael, do you want to add anything to that, anything on the bus side or just overarching?

Michael Ford:

Well, I would just echo what Mr. Jensen said in we're doing the same thing on the bus side in making sure that we do a thorough cleaning and continuing that process when those buses come back to the garages as well. And we just take it very seriously. We've trained people. We provide them the protection that they need, and as more resources are available, if we can do even more, we will, so ... But I appreciate your question, and we're working on this because we want everybody to be safe and we want our equipment to be clean. So thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks, Michael. If you'd like to get in the queue, still time to do that. You can press star three on your keypad. And we're going to go next to Laura. Laura, go ahead.

Laura:

Thank you. Thank you. I am calling ... I'm going to ask. I work at the airport as an essential employee, and I have to be there at 6:00 in the morning. So the 169 out suspended services, and I am finding out I have two choices. I can ride the 169 to 40th and Airport and take the A line, or I can ride the 130 to Nine Mile to take the SkyRide AT. But neither one of those two gets me to work at 6:00 AM from my area off of ... I live in Buckley. Is there any way to either get the 169 or the 130 to come at least a half hour earlier?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Laura, thank you so much for that. Jeff Dunning, who is one of our senior service planners and schedulers, is on the line with us. Jeff, that's a perfect question for you.

Jeff Dunning:

Yes it is, Pauletta, and thanks for that question. As you may know, we dropped a lot of that very, very early morning service as part of the COVID plan because there was so little activity at DIA. But as travel

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comes back and employment comes back, we definitely plan on restoring that service, hopefully sooner rather than later. We are working right now on kind of the next service bump up as the society opens up, we'll say, and at the top of our list is that early morning service to DIA. Yours is not the first comment we've received about that, so we know that's very important to our customers. Thanks for calling in, though. Hopefully we can have that for you soon.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Jeff. That's Jeff Dunning with our service and scheduling department. All right, Lindsay, you're up next. Go ahead.

Lindsay:

Oh hi. Well, the previous caller actually kind of addressed my question sort of, but more specifically. I was ... Also, hi. I hope everyone is doing well. Thank you for just being RTD. My life would be so much more difficult without you guys, so I'm eternally grateful for you all. But I have two small questions, and the first one is, if ridership is showing a projection to where you might be able to ballpark a time where the schedules might return to normal. Because I live off of Quincy and Buckley, not far from the previous caller, and the bus that I need doesn't start for two hours after I need it. Which, I mean, I get it. The world doesn't revolve around me. But I was just wondering if the projection shows a ballpark time that you might be able to return to normal, or ... And my second question is if you think that masks will remain required through the summertime, because COVID is not going to go away just because warm weather is here completely. It's just going to go down a little bit. I'm sorry, I rambled. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

No, Lindsay-

Bob Broom:

Well, I'll start-

Pauletta Tonilas:

That was great.

Bob Broom:

I'll start to answer that-

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, go ahead.

Bob Broom:

A little bit. Really, the big changes won't take place until after people start back to work, and that's going to occur during this next week. There will be a lot of businesses that will open. Offices I guess are going to be allowed to open with 50% of their employees coming back in, and dental offices and optometrists are going to be able to open and so forth. So beginning next week, we will begin to see how many more riders we're going to pick up as people shift into that next mode. And then it'll probably be a month or

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six weeks later before it's relaxed even more so that more people can end up going back to work. But to make a guess now as to when those things are going to happen is pretty difficult.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Director. That's Director Bob Broom, and as far as the ... None of us has a crystal ball, so it's really hard to tell when ridership is going to get back enough for us to bump up service levels, when people are not going to have to wear masks, when we're going to start the regular boarding and collecting fares again. This is such a dynamic situation, and Michael, I'm going to bring Michael Ford in, our chief operations officer. And Michael, that's why we're closely monitoring all of these things because it could happen very slowly, or it could happen very rapidly, right?

Michael Ford:

Oh, that's correct. So again, we are monitoring on a day-to-day basis. Again, our drivers are a wealth of information, our automatic passenger counts, our supervisors, our security officers. And then we deploy people who periodically just to see what things are going on. So we can be nimble and rapid in a variety of necessary resources that we can provide to address those needs. As Director Broom said, things are in flux right now, and we really don't have a crystal ball. But we're doing everything that we can to position ourselves to be ready and effective and able to move when we have more information that we can actually make some adjustments based on sustained ridership changes. So as next week unfolds, we're going to continue to monitor that and make the necessary adjustments and see where the stabilization continues, and we'll continue to watch it and provide those service that people need to get to where they want to go. So thanks a lot.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Michael. Okay, Bob is up next. Go ahead, Bob.

Bob:

Good evening. My question is with all the unemployment and the shortage before the pandemic happened, are you guys continuing to hire bus drivers and train operators during this pandemic so when it's over that the routes and everything can go back to normal?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Bob, that's great. That's a great question. I'm going to ask Dave Jensen, who is the head of rail operations, to touch on that first. And then we'll have Director Broom and Michael weigh in as well just about the overall operator shortage that we've been experiencing over the last few years. And actually, we're in a much better position now on some regards. So Dave, why don't you start?

Dave Jensen:

I'll start by saying that in the current condition, we are still hiring. What has happened, though, is the training of some of our employees has slowed because we've had to make sure that we have appropriate PPE for them so that we can train them safely. So that might push some of the projections and getting to the number of employees we want, that may have pushed it out a little bit. But we are on track and we are on pace to be able to get to a point where we have the number of operators that we

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would have liked to have had pre-pandemic. So I know that's kind of a lengthy answer. The short answer is yes, we're still hiring. We are working towards getting fully staffed so that we can restore full service. I do want to temper that some of that with the unpredictability of the future. So we don't know what the future holds for us, but our current plan is to get to that place.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, and Michael, you might just address quickly that because of our significantly reduced service plan right now, we're able to give our operators a break and not have to mandate many of them to work six days a week, which is helping, right?

Michael Ford:

Absolutely. They're not having to be mandated, which means that they've been having to force to be working on the six day. And we're also able to use this time to do additional training or deploy resources in different areas to do special projects like cleaning and other things like that. So we're trying to take advantage of this time. And again, we are still wanting to hire and train. Some of the class sizes may be a little smaller because of the social distancing, but again, we want to take advantage of this opportunity to restore our resources. As many may know, we've had a driver shortage for a number of years, and we need to continue to hire and continue to build up our resources so we can always deliver the level of services that we are projected to put out there. So we're continuing that process. It may be a little bit slower than in the past, but we are definitely hiring and continuing down that road.

Bob Broom:

Yeah, I'd might add-

Pauletta Tonilas:

And Director Broom-

Bob Broom:

Bob Broom-

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, go ahead.

Bob Broom:

That the economy has really changed. In February when we were bringing a lot of new operators on, we were also losing a lot of operators because the economy was so hot and the employment levels were so high that people were leaving for other jobs. Well, that's not going to occur for a while because there's so many people that have been laid off in the economy. And it's going to take the economy quite some time to come back. So that should give us time to catch our breath. But a little of this is a chicken and the egg situation. As we talked earlier, we'd like to add service back to take people that are being called back to work to work, but you can't see ridership going up because we don't have the service there for them to use. So some of this is going to have to be just our best guess as to when we should put some of these routes back more robustly for service levels. Thanks.

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Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Director, thank you so much for that. And right along with what we were saying earlier about we're asking people to be our partners in terms of wearing face coverings because that's what's being asked, social distancing also. And that's a tough one to enforce as well because people want to get to wherever they're going, and so people might hop on board when we already have the capacity limits that we're trying to manage. And so that's why on the bus side, we're staging buses in areas along our routes that are more popular so that when a bus driver sees that there's a lot of people, they can call and another bus will be shortly behind him or her. So again, a lot of this is about our folks being partners with us. If there is a bus that pulls up and it looks a little too crowded, hold off and don't get on that bus because another one will be shortly there behind.

Pauletta Tonilas:

And on the rail side, we're trying to limit each rail car, 30 people per rail car, so either maybe go to another rail car or don't get on. Because again, it's about safety, and it's just, it's a tough one for us to all manage, and we're all doing the best we can I know. So let's go to Charles next. Charles, you're in the queue.

Charles:

Thanks for taking my question. The question I have is, will the shopper's special that comes through Heather Gardens on Fridays continue, and if so, at what time should we expect it?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Charles. Jeff Dunning who's our senior service planner and scheduler. Jeff, do you have an answer for that?

Jeff Dunning:

Yes, Pauletta. As I understand it, all senior shoppers are operating as normal and should be there at the regular time, and I don't have that information on hand. But if he's been using it before, he should be able to use it as before.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Great, Jeff. Okay, thank you so much. It's still not too late to get in the queue, folks. If you'd like to ask us a question, press star three on your keypad. Also, we'd like to just hear from you. We're doing an online survey right now that is on our RTD web site, because we want to gauge what people's riding habits have been here over the last several weeks. And then we're asking folks, what will it take for you to feel safer hopping on transit? Because again, we want to know how people feel about this because we're here to serve the public so we want to hear what people have to say. So tonight, if you have a comment for us, it'd be great to hear that, and just press star three. And when we call on you, you can give us your comment. Okay, we're going to go to Marcy who's in the queue up next. Go ahead, Marcy.

Marcy:

Yes, thank you, good evening, for taking my question. I wanted to know how you guys going to protect us. I drive the AT and I have very close contact with my passengers, and there is no way that they can

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board in the back because we only have one door where they board. And we have no protection like regular buses.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Marcy. Well, thank you first of all, I must say, for the service that you provide to the public. And Michael can first weigh in and talk about what we're looking to do for drivers, and right now especially on our buses where they don't have a rear door and people can only board through the front. Michael?

Michael Ford:

Yes, thank you very much, Pauletta. We're asking the operator to come off the bus and let people board. I know that might be a little bit of an inconvenience, but we want to protect the customer and yourself, so where we only have one door, that's what we're indicating or have been training our operators to do. Obviously, wearing your mask, having people being wearing their masks, having your gloves and your protective gear is also important. It's important to this. All that goes hand in hand in the overall protection of you and your passengers. So those are the things that we have been instructing our operators to do to minimize that contact. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

We've had a couple of operators on the line with us who have been in the queue asking questions. Director Broom, would you like to share any insights or thoughts to our operators out there who are doing this amazing essential service?

Bob Broom:

Well, sure. First of all, I appreciate them calling in because it's really the only way the board can get information directly from employees is when they call in this or they call us through the regular course of business on the phone. And so I encourage you to do that. It's not like, well, we don't want our employees to call in and complain in public because we're here to solve problems. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Director Broom. Okay, Eric is up next. Go ahead, Eric.

Eric:

Hello. My question is for anybody on the panel in general. Okay, so my question is, on April 14th, 2020, a DUS security model change was submitted to the board of directors, and on page nine, it said, "Identify areas designated for free speech activities." My question is, can anyone on the panel elaborate what constitutes a free speech activity that people would be forced to move into a designated free speech zone to take participation in?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you for that, Eric. And you're talking about our customer code of conduct. That did go before the RTD board of directors a few weeks back. It was a revision to the customer code of conduct that already existed, and there were some different revisions in there. And as it relates to freedom of speech, because we are a public entity and we operate through support of public tax dollars, our facilities, our

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public facilities, and we do have areas that can be designated for freedom of speech. For instance, if people wanted to have a demonstration or they wanted to gather for a rally or what have you, there are ways that people can do that. We establish a designated area for freedom of speech types of activities. Obviously, all of these intending to be peaceful demonstrations or rallies or what have you. Michael, do you want to weigh in any more on that?

Michael Ford:

No, I think you covered it. There's a designated area, and we work with whatever groups that want to present through whatever mechanisms that are available. But I think you covered this very well. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, and I will just add one other thing, that the reasoning behind establishing a designated area is because we just want to make sure that there would be nothing that disrupts the activity of us providing transit service, because obviously the spaces, whether that be stations or whether that be major transit centers or what have you, are intended for transit use. So we just would always need to make sure that any activity would not deter us being able to do that. And Director Broom, do you have anything more that you would like to add about code of conduct and the purpose of that?

Bob Broom:

Well, the board when they were discussing this, I even brought up this First Amendment right. It's something we're all very aware of and we're all trying to protect. But by the same token, you've got to be able to allow people to get on trains and get off trains. If you have a demonstration going on, it doesn't serve anybody's best interest.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you so much, Director Broom. Okay, we're going to go next to Debbie. Debbie, go ahead.

Debbie:

Hi. I'm not sure this is Coronavirus related, but it is safety related. I'm concerned about snow around the bus stops. As I travel around Aurora, I see the snow's piled up around the bus stops, and if people even could get to them, they couldn't get from there to the bus because there's so much snow around them, specifically Chambers and Dartmouth in Aurora. Do you have any comment about that? Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Sure. Yeah, a few of us could probably weigh in. Jeff, do you want to start talking about snow removal and responsibilities, and then we might have ... Director Broom might be able to jump in too.

Jeff Dunning:

Sure. If it's an RTD facility, obviously we do the snow removal, or one of our contractors. And certain major corridors with shelters I believe we do some snow removal. But in general, a bus stop that's in the public right of way by law, the adjacent landowner is responsible for clearing the snow. It's something I'm really sensitive to, because I have to walk about a third of a mile from my home to my bus stop. And

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I think all the municipalities in the area have rules regarding clearing snow from sidewalks within usually 24 hours after a snow storm. If you have a specific problem, I'd recommend calling your municipality and complaining, and they'll send an inspector out. I know I had to do that at my bus stop more than once. But it had worked and they had to do a better job now clearing snow. Hope that helps.

Bob Broom:

Well, the only thing I would add, and I served on the Aurora city council for 12 years, is that in the most recent years since I got off city council, the council has purchased some smaller equipment that can be used to remove snow on the shady side of the street on arterials. And so it's much better today than what it was, and I know the city's trying to make every effort to continue to improve upon that service. But that's what I would do if I were you. I would call your city councilman and make the same type of complaint and encourage them to spend more resources on doing those arterial streets. Because you're right. If they're not cleared pretty quickly, that stuff just turns to ice, and then the only way you can remove it is to bring a road grader in. And those are very expensive to operate.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Director. Okay, we still have a couple more minutes, so we're going to go to Cheryl. And Cheryl, go ahead, and we ask you to keep it brief and we'll try to answer your question.

Cheryl:

Okay. So my question is, do you guys have any idea about how long it'll be before you begin charging on the bus line again?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, that's a great question, Cheryl. We don't know that. That's one of those that we just do not have that information yet. What I will tell you is that it is a lot easier for us when we do that at the beginning of a month. And there's various reasons for that, but one of them has to do with our fares and for instance, the monthly passes. We had many people that we had to exchange passes when we had people's lives affected by COVID-19. So to get all those monthly passes out to people, it takes a little while. So we look at the beginning of a month. Now, that's a really strong guide for us, but I can't say for sure that that's going to be June 1st. But the first of the month is something we're trying to target, whatever that month is. And so I hope that helps you out. Real quickly, we're going to go to Joan. So Joan, if you can keep it quick, we'll try to answer your question before we have to wind down.

Joan:

Thank you. Thank you very much for having this tonight. My question had to do with if a passenger or a driver tests positive for Coronavirus, how are other passengers or that driver notified?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Oh yeah, that's great. That's a great question, and there's a simple answer for that. We keep a very close tracking of all of our employees, and we're very lucky actually at RTD that we've only had a handful of employees who have tested positive for COVID. And the great thing is that most of those folks, they were not even at work when they started having symptoms. And they either had come back from travel

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or they were not working, and then they stayed home and monitored, and then they took tests and we were able to then get those confirmed. One thing that we have to do is go to our state health and county health officials, who have to then qualify it and confirm a case when someone has taken a test. And so we have to wait to hear back from health officials before we can even deem it as a positive case. But the notification will happen, of course, with anybody who was around that person if they were working. But as I said, we've been really very fortunate at RTD that we have not really had that complex issue to deal with.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So we have just about come to the end of our telephone town hall tonight. I want to thank all of you for being on the line. Great questions and comments, folks. You can always find information on RTD's web site at rtd-denver.com. We also encourage you to sign up for rider alerts. You can do that through our web site. You can sign up for information about certain routes or rail lines, and that keeps you informed. Follow us on social media, and of course, you can always call in to listen to our RTD board meetings, which we're doing like we are with this telephone town hall tonight. And I am going to turn it over to Director Bob Broom to close things down for us tonight on the call. Director?

Bob Broom:

Well, thanks Pauletta. I think we ought to all take a moment or two and thank all of the essential workers that are out there, whether they are policemen, firemen, EMTs, even our RTD operators who are on the front lines of this pandemic. A lot of us get sent home and kind of watch it from our TV set. But those folks have to get up and go to work every day, and they're taking a risk, and it just goes with the territory. But we all need to take some time and thank them for doing that. And then I'd like to thank all of you tonight that have called in with your questions. And please feel free to call us. You don't have to wait for a telephone town hall meeting. We're always available. And my name, Bob Broom, is in the phone book, so you can always find me. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Director Broom. Director Broom for District F RTD district. And folks, thank you so much for spending time with us tonight, and a good evening to you.