

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Pauletta Tonilas:

Good evening everyone, and thank you for joining us for this special live telephone town hall meeting hosted by the Regional Transportation District, otherwise 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.

Pauletta Tonilas:

But we're also here to talk about anything else you'd like to talk about related to RTD. So welcome, and we hope that this finds you in the comfort of your home, safe and healthy.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Joining me this evening is Ken Mihalik, RTD Director for District G. That is your RTD district. And also sitting in tonight to answer your questions are Michael Ford, Chief Operations Officer; Dave Jensen, Assistant General Manager of Rail Operations for RTD; and Cooper Langden, Service Planner and Scheduler.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Now, we're here to answer your questions, folks. What you have to say matters. That's why we're on this telephone town hall meeting. So, we're looking forward to hearing from you. Now, if this is your first time on a telephone town hall, here's how it works. To ask a question or to provide us with a comment, you just press *3 on your keypad and you will be transferred to someone who will take down some basic information and get you in the queue. You then stay on the line, listen to the conversation, and when I call your name, you can then ask your question live. And we do ask you to keep it brief because we want to get to as many of you on the phone with us tonight as possible.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Again, to get in the queue to ask us a question or give us a comment, press *3 on your keypad. It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce RTD Director Ken Mihalik for District G. Director Mihalik, thank you so much for being on the line with us and taking time out of your evening, excited to talk to your constituents. We really have had an extraordinary time. Tell us a little bit about how COVID-19 has been affecting RTD.

Ken Mihalik:

Hi Pauletta. Yes, thank you. Good evening, and thanks everyone for joining us this evening. I normally have the pleasure of joining my colleagues in person for these types of events, but absent of that, it is nice to hear some familiar voices. And I read somewhere that America is in the midst of a walking Renaissance right now. I know that's true in our neighborhood. And people, certainly myself, have been putting on a few extra pounds, but I think everyone's dogs have never been in better shape than they are right now.

Ken Mihalik:

But in all seriousness though, it's an understatement to say that this virus, COVID-19, has had a significant impact on all our lives, and RTD continues to uphold its core value of safety. And it's

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

especially important during these difficult times that we have laser focus on maintaining the safety and health of our passengers and employees. RTD provides a vital service. It's a lifeline to many people in the community, and it's crucial that we continue operating for the public that relies on us. Even though a number of people are working at home, there's still quite a few people that have to still go into their place of employment. And RTD is operating to give those people that lifeline.

Ken Mihalik:

We are in close contact and cooperation with all of the states, regional and local authorities, any of the health authorities, any of the agencies you can think of, are keeping close communication with all of them about the best practices for operating in the way that we do. Trying to use all the best practices, the safe operation, and how to communicate all those things.

Ken Mihalik:

RTD is critical infrastructure, and it continues to operate for essential travel. And that definition might be different to different people, but essentially, it's trips to the grocery store, it's to get necessary health care and prescriptions, or to reach that job that I mentioned earlier. That essential job. There are certainly essential workers in health care and public safety, food production has become a more important thing, or at least more highlighted recently. Utilities and government operations rely on RTD to get to those jobs. So, we need everyone's help to keep the transit system safe.

Ken Mihalik:

As you can imagine, there's many, many trips. And all the vehicles and all the people that they come in contact with, it's imperative that we try to do what we can to keep that as safe as possible. So, don't take those unnecessary trips. Please limit your time in the station to no more than 10 minutes. And just like the grocery store or on the walking path or saying hi to a neighbor or something like that, keep the distance. Keep that six-foot social distance between yourself and other passengers. And that's just kind of a high level, but there's a lot that we'll get to tonight, and we definitely want to hear from you. So if you do have questions, please start sending those in.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you so much, Director. That is Director Ken Mihalik for District G. And again, *3 if you'd like to ask us a question or provide us with a comment. We've got some RTD staff on the line as well.

Pauletta Tonilas:

We're going to go up to the first person in the queue, and that is [Millie 00:06:59]. Millie, go ahead.

Millie:

... you, sir. How are you maintaining any safety for our RTD drivers or cleanup crew, et cetera, when there are no tests in the state of Colorado? Obviously they're not being tested, and that's not a safe way to operate a transit system. Our transit system. Excuse me. What are you doing?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Yeah, thank you, Millie. Thank you for that. We actually are doing several things internally to protect our operators. And so I'm going to turn first to Dave Jensen, who is our Assistant General Manager of Rail Operations. And Dave can start, and then Michael Ford, our Chief Operations Officer can follow up. So Dave, go ahead.

Dave Jensen:

Yes, good evening. I'm Dave Jensen, the Assistant General Manager of Rail Operations for RTD, and maybe I'll start by elaborating on some of the internal measures that we're taking to protect our employees. We are doing the same things that you would expect that everyone is doing. We are reminding our employees to practice social distancing, we're asking them to stay home if they feel ill, we are asking those that can to work from home. We are requiring all of our employees now to wear masks while on duty or on RTD property. Other social distancing is a challenge.

Dave Jensen:

We are providing supplies like hand sanitizer, face masks, and other personal protective equipment to all of our front-line employees. We do have enough masks and sanitizer for our operators. And it's very simple for our employees to get the supplies they need. All they need to do is ask their supervisor. And then, maybe it's worth mentioning as well, that internally what we're doing is we're providing daily updates to all of our employees, the board of directors, and our union leadership. So, thank you for asking that question.

Pauletta Tonilas:

And Michael, let's bring you in because the person in the queue was asking about testing in specific. We're not testing, so we aren't doing broad testing. Number one, there's not enough test kits available, but can you elaborate a little bit more?

Michael Ford:

Yeah, we're not testing, but obviously if people are not feeling well, we tell them to stay home. There's a process for them to do that if they have to care for a loved one, so we've made that very clear to people. We're not penalizing them for any time off if it's related to COVID, so they have some more flexibility in their schedules and being able to take care of themselves and their loved ones. Again, we are all in this together. People have to take responsibility for their behaviors. In addition to everything that Mr. Jensen spoke to, we do heavy cleaning on all our buses and all our rail vehicles. We provide protection that people need to navigate their day-to-day lives. Gloves, sprays, wipes, and everything else, so they can have some confidence in their work environment and protection.

Michael Ford:

And also, we encourage the public to do their part in terms of protecting themselves. We reduced the number of people that can be on a bus, 15 on a 40-foot passenger bus. We have rear boardings. We don't collect fares at this point. And on our larger buses, it's about 20-passenger capacity there that we require. And then on our trains, no more than 30 on a vehicle. And then, in addition to that, we have strategically placed vehicles and resources in areas to help with overloads. We use a lot of information from our drivers, from our supervisors, from our security officers to minimize these issues that are out there with regard to COVID so we can ensure our public and our operators we're doing all that we can to

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

protect them. So, again, it's everybody working together on this issue, and people taking personal responsibility as well. So I really thank you for the question.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Michael. If you would like to get in the queue to ask Director Mihalik or any of us questions, you can press *3 on your keypad. Again, *3, and we'll get you in the queue, and you can ask us about COVID-19 or anything else. If there's something else you're curious about with RTD, we're happy to answer your questions.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Okay, we're going to go up next to [Adam 00:22:27]. Adam, you're next in the queue. Go ahead.

Adam:

Yes, thank you. My question is about commuting to downtown and using the mall shuttle. Currently the mall shuttle is not running, which provides for good pedestrian space. And my worry is that the mall shuttle, because of the limits on how many passengers can ride in one vehicle, won't provide the right amount of space, and so we'll need more pedestrian space. I'm wondering if the mall shuttle will remain shut down so that there's more space for pedestrians to walk down the streets in a safe way?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much for that, Adam. I am going to turn to Cooper, who is our Service Planner and Scheduler who is on the line with us, and he can start and then we might have others weigh in. Go ahead, Cooper.

Cooper Langden:

Yes. Currently the mall shuttle is planned to be shut down. We don't have any date when to implement it again, and as you touched, it is a difficult service to bring back with social distancing taken into account. The driver really doesn't have any direct contact, other than a speaker, with riders, so it's very hard. And we got three doors, and the way they open it's very hard to keep... I'm assuming on the mall shuttle it would be 15 as well. So we're really in control for that. And that service is pretty much set up for a vibrant downtown area with a lot of morning and afternoon commuting and whatnot, so right now it wouldn't make much sense. And just like a lot of things, we're kind of in a wait-and-see attitude. We're monitoring it weekly, and we'll bring it back when we think the need is there, and of course with the guidance of RTD officials and city and county and state officials as well.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Cooper. Literally all of us are having to be very nimble and be ready to pivot because this is a very dynamic situation. And it really is changing so quickly, and we have to change with it. There's no instruction manual that came with how to deal with COVID-19. So, that's why we're continuing to monitor our operations and make decisions with the best available information we have at the time. I will bring in Director Mihalik to just weigh in a little bit about just how much we really do want the public to be our partners in safety, and that we want folks to use good judgment when they're out using our system. Right, Director?

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Ken Mihalik:

Absolutely. It's like any other time that you're out. You want to look both ways before you cross the street. And so, this is just a heightened level of it. And I'll tell you, RTD has been... You brought up the word nimble, Pauletta, and creative, and the idea that constructs that existed yesterday aren't there today. And while the guidance is changing, RTD is certainly following that and trying to anticipate things. And so, absolutely challenging. And supplies are limited, they're hard to come by, and so encouraging to see, impressive to see, how RTD has been able to locate and source all the products they do have access to right now.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Director. That's Director Ken Mihalik for District G. I'll tell you a little quick story about one way we've pivoted at RTD. So, we have an upholstery shop. They started making face coverings for our operators and our maintenance crews because we had had a shortage of face coverings, right? Well, so they started making these face coverings, and so, it's just been fantastic.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Also, another RTD board member, so a fellow board member to Director Mihalik, Director Natalie Menten, she initiated a whole mask-making project. And she and her mom and dad and her aunt, and she put the call out to the people, and there were various volunteers that were part of this mask-making project. I called them the sewing strike force, and they put together 1,700 face coverings that she delivered to all the various divisions. The facilities where our operators and our crews work out of.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So, again, this is about people, right? And it's about people coming together and all of us doing what we can. And so, those are just a few little stories that I wanted to make sure you knew about.

Pauletta Tonilas:

If you want to get in the queue, please press *3 on your keypad. Did you have something you wanted to say, Director?

Ken Mihalik:

I was going to point out the idea that, or at least Director Menten's project. I had called her right after she started doing that, and she said "I'm just overwhelmed with volunteers. I can't organize everybody." All the people wanted to help, and there were more people and more sewing machines than there were supplies available. All the fabric stores and things like that were closed. I think she even said people... She was trying to match people up. Someone had fabric. Someone had a sewing machine. She was doing all this coordination and was just overwhelmed by that outpouring from the community.

Ken Mihalik:

And we'll need more of that as we progress through this. And so, it's that shared responsibility of continuing those social distancing guidelines and limiting to, really, those necessary trips.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Yeah. Thank you so much, Director. You know what I think, is everybody should be keeping a journal because we all are going to have so many stories to tell in the future. I mean, I try to imagine five, 10, 25 years from now all the stories that we're going to be telling from this time. And there are a lot of heartwarming stories out of this as well. Okay, we're going to go next to [Grace 00:22:27], who is next up in the queue. Grace, good evening. Go ahead.

Grace:

Hi. Thank you. I was just wondering with the sheltering in place kind of being lifted in various places in Colorado, I guess when and what's the plan for maybe kind of getting back to something more normal? Do you have any estimates of when things might go back to, I guess, pre-COVID conditions, or what the process would be?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Grace, thank you so much. That's a great question. I'm going to turn to Michael Ford, our Chief Operations Officer. Michael?

Michael Ford:

Yes, thank you very much. I'm going to have to continue to monitor people's migration patterns. We're going to be poised and ready to have resources available when we see changes occurring. We currently are doing that now as we speak. We have our resources out there. We have our operators as a source, our road supervisors, our security officers, we have data from our automatic passenger accounts. We take a cumulative approach with all that information to make the best informed decisions on what's going on and where we need to deploy resources.

Michael Ford:

It's really hard to say what's going to happen. We know that things are going to open up next week, but again, we're monitoring as we speak right now. And once we get more information, that will help us determine how we need to deploy the resources, and making sure that we have the resources, being the operators, to accommodate those needs.

Michael Ford:

So, we've got to balance both of those ends of the bookend. But again, I don't have a timeline, but we want to do a good job of communicating with you, providing you advanced information. That will also help us determine when we address the fare issues or the rear-door boarding issues. And other things that we need to continue to work to resolve with social distancing and additional cleaning opportunities. So, it will be a different world too. So we're going to have to continue to all work together, monitor the situation, and do our best. But we'll be ready. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks, Michael. Michael Ford, our Chief Operations Officer. Folks, if you'd like to get in the queue, press *3 on your keypad. We also would like to hear from you because we're doing an online survey right now that's available on RTD's website. So if you go to RTD-Denver.com you can take our quick online survey because we want to hear what people have been doing. Have you been riding RTD? When

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

do you think you'll start to ramp back up riding RTD? And what needs to happen in order for you to feel safe riding RTD? So, we want to hear what you have to say about this. And tonight, we're happy to have you start telling us. So, it would be really helpful for us because it'll inform our recovery plan as we move forward and start to ramp service back up. So again, press *3, and we'd love to hear from you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Okay, we're going to go up next to [Carla 00:22:24]. Carla you're next in the queue. Good evening. Go ahead.

Carla:

Good evening, and thanks for having this call. My question actually is related to your survey that you were just asking about. I know that a lot of our vulnerable population uses RTD for transportation. And I also know that we have different counties that are requiring wearing of masks and some that are not. And I also know that some people just don't social distance. And so I'm wondering if you're going to require passengers to wear the masks to help protect the vulnerable population.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Carla, that's all great. First of all, I'll start because we actually are required... We have a "use of face covering" policy within RTD, so we're requiring all RTD employees, when you are out in public and you're on duty, to wear a face covering. And that includes our operators. Now, some people see operators that don't have a face covering on. There could be a good reason for that, okay? So sometimes people might have a certain condition or whatever where it's not a good idea for them to wear a face covering all day long, so those are individual situations. But we also are asking our riders to wear a mask. And we want people to be our partners in safety because it is literally impossible for RTD to have somebody on every bus or train monitoring who can get on whether they have a mask or not. So, we're really asking people to be our partners in safety, to please wear a face covering. It's for your safety, for the safety of those around you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

And one thing that's happened, and you mentioned about the certain cities have face covering orders and certain ones don't. This creates a challenge for us as RTD because we're a regional transit entity. Which means we serve eight counties, 40 cities, and they don't all have the same orders or guidelines. And so, for us, we have people that hop on and off at different points and they traverse across different cities and counties during their travel. We also don't want our operators to be enforcers. Director Mihalik, I'll ask you to step in here real quick. It really does create an interesting situation for RTD, given that we are a regional entity and have 40 cities that we serve.

Ken Mihalik:

Yeah. And my hope is, and of course it's just a hope. Who knows. But this is a diversion from normal, and we get back to what we knew as normal just a couple of months ago, but the mask thing may be something that is part of the new normal. I don't know whether grocery stores require it, and other places might require, movie theaters, things like that. And so, I think it's going to become more commonplace. I don't know if there are competing or divergent county rules, which one RTD defaults to, but it's certainly something that these various municipalities in addition to RTD are trying to figure out.

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Ken Mihalik:

And I don't know what the answer is, but if you've got a good answer or a good solution, please share it with us.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Director. Thank you so much. I will bring in Michael Ford. Michael is our Chief Operations Officer. And Michael, I had mentioned we really don't want our operators having to be put in the very difficult position of trying to enforce riders wearing masks. Tell folks a little bit about that.

Michael Ford:

Yes. Obviously we have a concern for our operators. They have a lot on their plate as they're doing their job every day. And to be in the enforcement game is not what we want or imposed on them in any way, shape or form. Our job is to ensure their safety and protection.

Michael Ford:

But, again, if we're having folks... We want them to, we encourage to wear masks and do their part. If we're seeing that we're not having that kind of compliance, there's law enforcement that can be summoned or supervisors that can help augment some of those issues for us.

Michael Ford:

But our drivers are not in that position, nor do we want them in that position to be some kind of an enforcement unit. They have enough to deal with on their own in doing their job. But we will deploy necessary resources if we're having problem areas. There's a lot of data that we collect that we can make sure that we have presence and the ability to counteract those issues.

Michael Ford:

So, again, our drivers are not ever asked to be put in those kind of positions, and we will deploy what necessary resource is needed to help curtail that. But again, when you really think about it, it comes down to everybody doing their part and being responsible adults in this whole arena that we're in right now. So, hopefully we can continue to see more compliance and everybody will do the right thing for the right reasons. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you Michael. And I will say, while we're doing rear boarding, which is what we're doing now, we actually instituted rear door boarding in April to help protect our operators so that there would be more space between our operators and passengers. And with rear door boarding we suspended fare collection. And so while we're having rear door boarding, it makes it almost impossible for our operators to really be able to address people wearing masks when people are boarding from the rear doors. So, I want to just make sure folks are connecting the dots on that one.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Okay, we're going to go next to [Jude 00:28:57], who is in the queue. And good evening, Jude. Go ahead and ask the question.

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Jude:

Well, good evening to everybody, and thanks to everyone at RTD for providing service in these very challenging times which change every day. I'm a user of Transit app, and Transit app has some synergies currently with some transit agencies in the USA. Akron, Ohio and Erie, Pennsylvania come to mind up top of my head, and I think one of the Canadian cities. I think Toronto. And they're able to provide real-time info on seating availability for individual buses that are currently en route.

Jude:

And I'm kind of wondering if RTD is communicating with Transit app at all in order to provide this kind of data for those of us here in Denver. So with the current limitation on the number of passengers in these vehicles, it sure would be helpful if we had that on Transit app to know if the bus we're waiting for is at capacity. And then maybe we can kind of regroup for a plan B or wait for a follow-up bus or some alternative means.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Jude. Thank you so much for that. And we are aware the Transit app is doing that. We actually team up with them for different things, and they actually have a banner or something on their app about our online survey. So I mentioned earlier that we're doing this online survey that's on our RTD website, and so that's making it easier for people to take our survey. So Transit is a great, great tool, and we are aware of that. I would love for us to be able to have them do that for us. And so, we actually have had some of our on my team because I head up the communications team at RTD, and we've actually had some communications about this. But thank you so much for that Jude, and I totally agree with you. It's a great tool, and we'll see if there's not some way we can do that with RTD.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Okay folks, we would love to hear more questions, so press *3 on your keypad and we'll get you in the queue. Right now, though, we're going to go to [Deion 00:31:19]. Deion, you're next up. Good evening. Go ahead.

Deion:

Yes. Good afternoon and thank you for having this call. My question is, kind of prior to COVID, we were having issues. There were issues with driver shortages which led to train delays and kind of over-packed trains. So, as we start moving to a more, I guess if you want to call it normal, normal status, where more and more people are starting to go back to work, what do you see about how to prevent the, or if there's going to be any change in the driver shortages or ways to prevent that, so that also keeps down the number of people that have to pack onto certain trains. Especially during peak hours in the morning and in the evening.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Well, thank you for that, Deion. That's a very thoughtful question, and you made some great comments. I'm going to turn to Michael Ford, our Chief Operations Officer to start, and then Dave Jensen, the head of our rail operations can weigh in as well from the rail side. Michael, go ahead.

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Michael Ford:

Yes. I really appreciate your question. As we continue to put out service, we want to make sure that we have the necessary resources to do that. We are currently training operators as we speak right now. You were right to mention that we were down a lot of operators, but we're using this time to really rebuild our manpower so we have enough. So as we start to put out more service, we're going to do it in conjunction with the resources that we actually have to do that. So, again, you'll see that we want to be methodical about this, we want to be smart, and we don't want to put ourselves back into the hole that we were in with driver shortages.

Michael Ford:

Right now, we're conducting training classes right now. We want to continue that, and we want to continue to build up our reserves of resources so we can deliver effective service. So that's what you'll see from us going forward, and again, we're working on two angles on this. One is the delivery side, and the other one's the resource side, and we're going to monitor them both so we can continue to provide effective and efficient services for our customers. So thank you very much for the question.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Dave, would you like to jump in and talk about the rail side and how your staffing is going right now?

Dave Jensen:

Sure, I would love to put my two cents in. Excuse me.

Dave Jensen:

At the risk of being overly optimistic in this situation, one of the things, the silver lining has been it's given us an opportunity to really kind of pause, take a breath, and rebuild. And so, during this time, we have been able to build up our staff. We've got a very large number of people in class currently. And as Mr. Ford has been saying that the restoration of service for us is going to rely on a number of things.

Dave Jensen:

Ridership, of course, will dictate to us when we bring our service back, but also the ability to provide our service reliably is something that'll be key to us so that our passengers can rely on it. I know, Deion, you spoke about overcrowded trains. So the strategy for us on that is to stay as aware of the situation as we can by getting as many passenger counts and putting people in key locations and listening to our customers inform us of what their riding experience is.

Dave Jensen:

So, we do have the ability to make our trains larger, and we do have the ability to put trains in service in places where large loads are being encountered. So we have some ability to be nimble. It's really just a matter of whether or not we've got the personnel and the resources to provide that. Maybe, in summary, we do have a lot of people in class right now that should graduate shortly, and it's our intent and ability to be nimble moving forward that I think you'll find that our service is even better than before coming out of this.

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Dave. That's Dave Jensen, who is the Head of Rail Operations for RTD. If you'd like to get in the queue folks, we could use a few more people because we're here to listen to you, to hear your questions, your comments, so press *3. And it could be about anything. It doesn't have to be just about COVID. It just so happens this is a big deal to everybody right now.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Okay, we're going to go to Margie now. Margie, go ahead. You're next up in the queue.

Margie:

We used to take a bus, AT line from Arapahoe Station to DIA and vice versa, from DIA to Arapahoe. With the COVID-19, does RTD still offer this bus line?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes ma'am, Margie. I'm going to bring in Cooper Langden, who is one of our service planners and schedulers, and he can talk to you about the AT and why we are doing what we're doing now, and what that outlook could be as we start to ramp back up. So, Cooper?

Cooper Langden:

Yeah. I just wanted to double check. I actually went into our current production run. I'm looking at it right now, and yeah, we are currently running the AT. I'm not directly involved with the online aspect of it, but as far as I know, it is currently on our online schedule. And as far as long-term, of course we'll bring everything back to... Well, in a stepped approach, is my assumption, to normal schedule once restrictions are lifted and people are back to a normal work schedule. But, long story short, the AT is currently running to the airport.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Cooper. And just a reminder to everybody that we're currently running a Saturday and some enhanced Saturday service on the bus service, and Sunday service on our rail side. And that is really because of the dramatic drop in ridership we have been experiencing over the last several weeks. Typically on a weekday, RTD would be providing about 380,000 trips a day. And a trip is a one-way travel, right? So that is like if you're going to work or to school or to a doctor's appointment. But right now, we have about a third of that happening across our system. So, we're still moving, oh, about 120,000 trips a weekday, which is still a fair amount of people, but we do have quite a reduced level of service to reflect the drop in ridership and the drop in demand.

Pauletta Tonilas:

One thing I would like to mention is the assistance that we're getting from the federal government. And I will ask Director Mihalik to weigh in on this because with us suspending fare collection, that is a big revenue hit to us, but so is the decrease in sales tax revenue that RTD is experiencing. And so the federal government is assisting transit agencies, as they are many other folks, to help us stay afloat and accommodate the loss of revenues that we're having. So, Director, would you like to tell folks a little bit about the CARES Act and RTD's assistance through that?

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Ken Mihalik:

Absolutely. I will tell you what I know. Correct me if I get anything wrong. And yeah, RTD is supported by the sales and use tax. And while a lot of people are doing a lot more of their shopping online and there's tax from that, or whether they collect the sales tax on the other. The car sales are way down, and all kinds of other shopping... Malls have been closed until just recently. So, economic impact isn't known. [inaudible 00:40:09] the exact economic impact. We know it's going to be big, we just don't know how big. So, of the CARES Act, that's the acronym for Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security, that was passed at the end of March. RTD will receive about \$230 million. There's all kinds of stipulations on that. One of the things that, and as you said, you have to try to keep RTD afloat, and also mentioned that this is also a good testament to why government agencies down to families and individuals should have a little bit of a rainy day fund, so RTD has reserves. And so it's probably a time when those will come into play.

Ken Mihalik:

But the CARES Act, or the funds from the CARES Act, can be used for retroactively. So expenditures from January 1st forward. And then also, there's an expectation that they would be used as soon as possible. And as the funds are also expended on a reimbursement basis, meaning they'll be reimbursed once they're spent, and so that's some of the odd federal accounting stipulations that it can be used for any operation costs associated with COVID. And that includes salaries and expenses, and all the protective equipment and cleaning supplies. And so it's a broad range. I don't expect that there would be any money left over from that. I think RTD, with that definition, will be able to use all those funds.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Thank you very much for that, Director Mihalik. And one of the questions that we've gotten a lot over the past several weeks is, "Well, when are you going to start collecting fares again, and is there any way you can hold off on collecting fares because so many people have lost jobs and they might need transit to get to job interviews," or what have you. And we will reinstitute fares when we feel it's the right time. We do not have a set time for when we're going to do that at this point, however one thing I will say is when we are collecting our regular fares, it's about \$12 million a month. So \$12 million a month is the revenue that we're losing by not collecting fares.

Pauletta Tonilas:

And so, when we're talking in millions like that, it just helps to provide perspective for people. If you'd like to get in the queue, it's not too late, folks. You can press *3 on your keypad and either ask us a question, or again, as I was mentioning earlier, give us some feedback on what would have to happen or what do you need to make you feel safer riding RTD. And we know mask wearing and social distancing are what's on a lot of people's minds.

Pauletta Tonilas:

But Michael, I'm going to bring you in because can you tell folks a little bit about what we are looking at doing when we try to ramp service back up? What are some of the ideas that you guys are working on?

Michael Ford:

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Well, we want to make sure that we're covering our service area as we're doing now with our pandemic plan right now. So, making sure that there's services that are out there getting to hospitals, drugstores, universities, social service agencies. We want to make sure that our service continues to be well rounded in terms of where we're providing the service. We've been continuing to look at our data and information to make sure that we're delivering where people want to go. So, it's a fluid process, it's a nimble process, but it's really driven by what we're seeing out there in terms of ridership. And many are new, emerging markets that might be surfacing.

Michael Ford:

So we want to be flexible to that, and look at how we're delivering our services and all of the different ways we need to deliver our services to make that work for our people. So it's really being in tune to the environment, and also thinking about the future as well, with the Reimagine RTD and how that fits into all this.

Michael Ford:

As we come back from this, there may be different ways in which we deliver service. And having people, and our customers, stakeholders, and others involved in that process, will help us get to a new level of focus on service. Not just for today, but in the future as well. So we're looking kind of that angle as well as we continue to try to recover and figure out where we're going to be based on what the human condition is and what people are thinking and what they're wanting.

Michael Ford:

And also, the other thing is, we've got to continue to make sure people see our service is safe and reliable, and that we're doing everything we can to protect our employees and our customers. So with all that, we're going to continue to work through that, and we invite your comments and your participation to help us even be better than we are now. So thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you. Michael mentioned Reimagine RTD, and just to kind of summarize, last fall, RTD initiated the Reimagine RTD process where it is us taking a holistic look at how we provide service and looking at what is the best way to provide service moving forward. And there are many ways that you do this in the transit industry to take a look at how you provide service to the best of our ability and serve people in the best way with the resources that we have.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So how do we optimize the resources we have to re-look at service and how we provide it. And I really think that Reimagine RTD couldn't come at a better time because as we look to start ramping service back up, when things start to get back to whatever the new normal is, this is right in alignment of Reimagine RTD. And it is the very intent to make sure that we are using resources to the best of our abilities. So, Reimagine RTD actually does come at a really helpful and valuable time for RTD.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

If you'd like to get in the queue, there is still time. Press *3 on your keypad and we're happy to hear what you have to say. Dave Jensen, who's the head of our rail operations, I'll bring Dave in. And Dave, tell us a little bit about what the demeanor has been of your rail operators. I mean, this is a tough time, and our operators are on the front line, and they are just doing amazing work out there as essential workers. What has been the feeling and the morale of your operators?

Carla:

I'm glad you asked that question. It's something that we are very, very much interested in is the morale of our staff. And overall, the employees feel a sense of pride. Understanding what they do brings value to the community and brings personal value to the people that live here. And so they feel a sense of responsibility to continue to provide service. To get people where they're going in a safe manner. And so, I couldn't be more proud of our employees and how they've all stepped up.

Carla:

So I would say, all things considered, morale is very high. Of course, there's a lot of concerns about their protection and their families and their employment. And so we're doing the best we can to communicate with them and to provide the PPE that they need and the protection that they need and answer the questions that they have because they're going through it with all of us, and they really are on the front lines.

Carla:

And so, it is important to us that we're communicating with our employees in a way that helps them to reassure them that we will take care of them. But again, to answer your question, I feel a sense of pride amongst the operating staff that they're on the front lines of this, and they're proud to be doing what they do.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, thanks for that, Dave. That's nice to hear. And our operators are so front and center, as well as our service and cleaning crews who are out there cleaning our buses and trains every day, our maintenance folks who are keeping our vehicles in good working condition so that they can be out there. But there are a tremendous amount of other RTD employees that are just putting forth amazing effort too, behind the scenes, to help make everything happen. So, it really is a whole team effort at RTD right now. It's been really interesting to just see, like we were saying at the top of the show, how people are pulling together. And just really the human spirit coming out.

Pauletta Tonilas:

One thing that we want to make sure you do, folks, is check our website because we keep it updated with the latest of what we have going on with COVID and everything else. RTD-Denver.com. We have a dedicated web page to COVID-19. It tells you everything we've been doing. It gives you a lot of great links to resources, including a lot of health organizations. The CDC, WHO, the World Health Organization, different resources and guidelines. And so you can find all that on our website.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Also, follow us on social media. One of the things that we've been trying to do is to pay tribute to our operators and our employees on the front line. And we do periodic thank yous to these folks with their pictures, so you guys can put a face and a name to our workers. And we also are doing a Virtual Experiences campaign, where we are featuring places virtually that are accessible by RTD transit to give folks a diversion. Because this is all about let's try to give each other a little bit of a break and a diversion. So we're doing that. And we're doing a special thing for Mother's Day, too, this weekend with employees. So, we ask you to keep your eyes peeled for that.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So, Director Mihalik, we're getting close to winding down our telephone town hall. What would you like to share with your constituents about RTD, anything related to RTD that you think would be helpful for the people of your district?

Ken Mihalik:

I'm trying to think exactly... Well, no, it was just earlier this spring, actually, that we were talking service cuts and things like that, and there was concern about certain routes being cut. But I think we've shifted from that to we don't know what it's going to be. But at least my opinion, I think it'll be different than what it was. How different, I don't know yet.

Ken Mihalik:

But just going back to what you were saying, Pauletta, earlier, and Mr. Jensen, on all the employees and stuff. Some of these types of events have a tendency to change our perspective, shift our perspective. So, I know there's a lot more of appreciation and recognition for certain jobs. And I know teachers, for one, are getting that because of all the parents that are having to homeschool their kid. And then, the grocery store workers and the Amazon delivery person, and now certainly the RT operators. And absolutely, the cleaning and service crews that are doing all that. So there's a lot more appreciation for those people that there may not have been before.

Ken Mihalik:

But, I hope this evening has been, or at least this telephone session has been helpful to those that are listening, and I appreciate all the questions. And we'll just say it just remains to be seen what it looks like the other side of this.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Director. Thank you so much. We are going to go to another person in the queue and try to answer another question before our town hall ends for the evening. And we're going to go to Jude. Jude, you are up next. Go ahead.

Jude:

... will be used to determine when to resume service on routes that are not currently running. So, for example, the 169L is not currently running, so it's kind of hard to monitor ridership activity as it is, say, on the 135 or the regular 169. It's easy to kind of keep track of passenger counts, and you notice it's increasing, but on a route that's not currently operating, there's no measurements or metrics available.

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

So, I'm kind of wondering what's going to be used as the determinations for resumption of routes that are inactive at this moment.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Michael, do you want to jump in on that? So, routes that aren't operating, how do we see monitoring the need to bring those back?

Michael Ford:

Well, I think customer input. Hearing from you right now will gear us a heightened awareness of areas that we need to pay close attention to. I think going into those communities and being receptive to information. When we do service changes when we are out, we have designated folks throughout our district that are always providing us information. So it's talking to our constituents, our stakeholders, our customers in different areas. It's being out there and understanding the environment that we're working in and what people's needs are. So even though maybe some of those services aren't running, I think we have such an open door way in which we will work with folks and are working with folks to gather that information so we can prepare ourselves to do our unique things. And given that we're in this COVID process right now, it might lead to other opportunities for services we hadn't thought about before.

Michael Ford:

So, again, I think we are very receptive to what people have to say, what their needs are, and we have various ways in which to be contacted or informed about needs. So we'll continue to make sure that happens. Thank you so much.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, thank you so much for that, Michael. Before we start to wind down, I did want to say there was a lady on the phone earlier in the call that was talking about testing, and why are we not testing all of our operators and doing broad testing. And we've been asked that a few times, so I just thought I'd add a little more information. That the supply of tests is not super plentiful, still, and we're not getting access to have widespread testing for all of our operators. But when somebody is feeling symptoms, we do ask them to stay home and monitor themselves, and then if they go ahead and get test, then we of course work closely with them to make sure we know whether the test was confirmed as positive or not. But that is how we're handling the situation.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Well, we are just about out of time tonight, folks. Thank you so much for being on the call with us. We do appreciate your time, your patronage, and all of your thoughts on this. And as Michael was saying, we are open ears all the time. And we are happy to take whatever comments that we can get from you, either through email or through our customer care center. The line number is 303-299-6000. That's the number for our customer care center. And so, I will turn it over to Director Ken Mihalik for some final words tonight. Director?

Ken Mihalik:

Regional Transportation District
District G Director Ken Mihalik
May 7, 2020

Thank you, Pauletta, and thank you Misters Ford, Jensen, and Langden. I'd like to thank and particularly recognize all the employees, the operators, mechanics, security, and those working to keep the vehicles and facilities clean. There was always a regimental cleaning schedule, but it's even more so now. It's even more important than what it was. So, thank you to all of those that are doing that. And for the people that were listening tonight and participated tonight, thank you. And we're looking forward to your feedback in the survey and other means to provide that feedback. Social media and whatnot. But, thanks for joining us, and hope to hear from you soon.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks so much, Director, and thank all of you, and a good night to you.