

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 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 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 RTD is doing to address COVID-19.

Pauletta Tonilas:

But we're also here to talk about other things related to RTD, joining me this evening is Natalie Menton, RTD Director for District M, also sitting in to answer your questions is are Michael Ford, Chief Operations Officer, Mike Meader, Chief Security Officer and Miguel Aguilar, Service Planner and Scheduler.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So good evening everyone, and we hope that this finds you in the comfort of your home, safe and healthy. And we're so happy to have you on the line with us because we're here for you, we want to listen to what you have to say, answer your questions about anything related to RTD but we know that COVID-19 and how RTD is addressing it, is on a lot of people's minds.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Now, if this is your first time on a telephone Town Hall meeting, here's how it works: To ask a question just press *3 on your keypad and you'll be transferred to someone who will take down some basic information and get you in the queue.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Again, all you have to do is press *3, to get in the queue. Then you just stay on the line, listen to the conversation and when I call your name, then you can ask your question live. And we do ask you to please keep your question or your comment brief because we do want to get to as many of you as possible this evening.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So it is my distinct pleasure to introduce to RTD Director, Natalie Menton for District M, that is your RTD director district, so Director Menton, thank you so much for being on the line with us. We appreciate you spending time this evening on the call so that you can answer questions to your constituents and really this is such an extraordinary time so Director Menton, why don't you start us off about how RTD is dealing with this?

Natalie Menton:

Yes, thank you to everybody who is joining us this evening, and COVID has definitely presented challenges. I as one, am excited that in Jefferson County the stay-at-home order is going to be lifted this Friday at midnight, so that people can get back to work supporting themselves.

Natalie Menton:

I've been participating in the 8PM Howl but I'm going to make this Friday's 7PM Howl to the small business owners who have really taken a big hit during the challenge of COVID, and I hope that everybody will think about shopping local businesses so that we can get our economy back up and running.

May 6, 2020

Natalie Menton:

So I'm going to start by answering some of the most frequently asked questions about how we are dealing with COVID at RTD.

Natalie Menton:

The first is as many of you might know, we are currently running a reduced service pandemic plan, which is about 40% of our previous regular weekday schedule. Service on the 16th Street Mall shuttle downtown and the free metro ride have been suspended.

Natalie Menton:

The A-line to the airport is still running every 15 minutes, we have not made reductions to Access-a-ride, which serves per transit, but we have eliminated the five-day advanced booking and switched to next-day booking only.

Natalie Menton:

To best plan for your trips make sure... If you're not aware of what you have available do visit our website, RTD-Denver.com. You've got the option of using the trip planner which you'll find on the front page, where there are also transit apps that you can use.

Natalie Menton:

Now prior to COVID, you may recall having heard news reports and RTD Agency were facing an operator shortage and we board had approved a reduced service plan so that we could address the mandated overtime facing the bus drivers and train operators. And little did we know, right around the corner that COVID was going to come around and smack us.

Natalie Menton:

So under this reduced service pandemic plan, it is ultimately addressing two issues. One it has helped, as far as I know, eliminate the mandated overtime, it may be severely reduced but I think it's eliminated right now. And also the fact that due to COVID, ridership decreased by at least 70% within this area. It's very limited ridership so under the reduced service plan, the silver lining is it did take care of the mandate problem.

Natalie Menton:

And because of this dramatic drop in the ridership on public transits, I'll just head off a question that we do get, and that is we do not know when regular service levels will be re-instated.

Natalie Menton:

And later on in the Town Hall, I do want to take a few moments to speak about transit in the future of where we go from here. So I hope you're going to stick through the entire call so that you can hear that discussion.

Natalie Menton:

Now moving onto another frequently asked question, and that is safety and cleaning of RTD facilities and our fleet. So all of that has been stepped up. Vehicles and the facilities are being cleaned daily in

May 6, 2020

accordance with public health recommendations. RTD employees are required to wear face coverings and we have enough masks and hand sanitizer for our operators.

Natalie Menton:

Now, I'm going to put a little disclaimer in there and this is a really hot topic, probably throughout the world, definitely in the United States, definitely in Colorado and that's a requirement of face masks or face coverings.

Natalie Menton:

Not everybody is able to wear a face covering, and that should really be considered. And this is in the case of some RTD drivers and with the American Disabilities Act or other health potential related issues, there can even be some other reasons for not wearing a face covering.

Natalie Menton:

There is a certain amount of individuals that it is not in their best interest, and considering ADA and the ability of privacy of protection of health information, I hope that everybody will take that in consideration if they should happen to see a bus driver or a train operator without a face covering. That has gone through protocol, but a huge, huge chunk of our drivers and operators are wearing those coverings.

Natalie Menton:

But the same could be held true with passengers, and even people that you see out on the street. So please consider that, I think our community has gotten into a position of shaming, but until we've walked in somebody's shoes, we don't know the reasons for what they may be doing.

Natalie Menton:

Now on the riders' end, another thing that I have heard is that perhaps we should be providing sanitizer and face coverings for riders, and I am going to stand up for personal responsibility on this issue and encourage you to wear a face covering and also suggest carrying your own sanitizer.

Natalie Menton:

Right now the dispensers that you might see at certain stores and different facilities, I just looked again yesterday, these are much on a back order situation and I don't know when we would even be able to put that onto the fleet. So right now it's personal responsibility. For me personally, I carry a Ziploc bag and I got some paper towels that are saturated in a disinfectant which includes at least 60% alcohol. Yes, if you feel the need, that is a good thing for you to carry with you.

Natalie Menton:

One other thing that I have asked the agency to investigate and look at, explore, is removing the cloth seats from the buses and trains. And this was something on my mind even before COVID. We've all been on the trains and seen people who put their feet up and you got to wonder, would you be putting your shoes on your own couch?

Natalie Menton:

May 6, 2020

So with the cloth seat in our fleet, I know this takes quite a bit of cleaning and with COVID as an additional, perhaps reason, perhaps to have a look at it now. I hope that the agency might look at that a little more closer in the future. And maybe not as a retrofit but potentially in our next purchase, which right now we have a scheduled purchase for some 16th Street Mall buses.

Natalie Menton:

And I should be clear when I'm saying to remove the cloth seat, that would be to put in plastic, hard seats which would help us to do better sanitization, deep cleaning. There may be few tradeoffs, I'm interested to hear your feedback on that.

Natalie Menton:

And as a reminder, if you want to get into the queue to speak, please press *3, that's one topic that's on my mind.

Natalie Menton:

Let's go into additional operating modifications, RTD has switched to rear-door boarding and exiting on most buses as well as we temporarily suspended fare collection. And that provides another layer of social distancing between the operators and the riders, but if you are in need of ADA, wheelchair, or walker lift, or perhaps some other reasons related to ADA, you can still use the front door.

Natalie Menton:

I know that can a little bit challenging right now, depending on where the bus driver is able to pull up, but we're all having to display a little more patience than usual in this current environment, but keep that in mind. We do now have plastic chains that rope off the air between the operators and the wheel secure man area.

Natalie Menton:

Because of the reduced service, operators are calling dispatch if they see buses becoming crowded and that is just another thing that we're having to deal with. It comes down to, if you see something come along and it looks too crowded for you, you have the option to get on. But if you feel concerned then you have the ability to, for one, sign up for our transit app and you can find that at RTD-Denver.com and if you should see some crowding that you feel uncomfortable with, you are able to call in and address that.

Natalie Menton:

You can use the transit app at our website, there is caller number, a text number and also the app itself. But our plan is to limit ridership to no more than 15 people per standard bus, 20 per larger bus and 30 people per train car at a time.

Natalie Menton:

And again, if needed and if possible we will provide additional buses on routes where we're experiencing larger loads. In District M, probably the only route where we're going to see potential issues, that would be the 16 running along Colfax. Down in the area that I'm at, closer to the Wadsworth, Jewell area, I don't believe we're having any problems with overcrowding here. We are running very light ridership.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Natalie Menton:

Additionally, we're asking riders limit time spent in our TD stations, 10 minutes and keep a distance of six feet between yourself and other passengers.

Natalie Menton:

Now I'll move on to one other update, and then were going to go to questions, so I want to get all that out of the way, thank you for your patience with that. But as an update, you may remember that our former RTD General Manager [Dave Genova 00:12:05] retired effective January 2020, and we hired [Pop Ballard 00:12:11] who's right now serving as our temporary or interim general manager. We have really done a hard kick off on this search for a permanent general manager and this effort is headed up by our GM search committee, which consists of myself and six other board directors.

Natalie Menton:

We hope to finish this selection process by November this year. And then the entire board will be voting on this election and the compensation. Our committee meets tomorrow, where we'll finalize the job description and where we'll be advertising an outreach, and I expect within a few days we'll be accepting applications and the deadline will be June 30th. If you should know of somebody who would be qualified and interested in serving as the RTD General Manager, please have them visit RTD-Denver.com so they can keep up with that process.

Natalie Menton:

So, I know that was a lot to digest but I did want to get a lot of the frequently asked questions out of the way.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much Director Menton. That is Director Natalie Menton, RTD Director for District M. Again if you'd like to get in the queue to ask us a question or give us a comment, just press *3 on your keypad. We have several people waiting in the queue, so we're going to go up first to Gary. Gary, you're first in the queue, go ahead.

Gary:

Hi, I addressed the questions that lady talked about face coverings, and I accept her explanations to a point, but it seems the bus driver's got way too much space. It's like everybody's herded to the back of the base and I'd say it's over half the people every single day that don't have a mask on, generally young people. And I work in an assisted-living place, I get my temperature taken every day, but this could be time where someone could be asymptomatic walking into my work and I'm going to get a bunch of people sick.

Gary:

And I think we can do a better job. We got to get people to cover their face somehow. It's just not a matter of, "Yes I wear them myself." That's about all I have to say. Go ahead.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Gary. Thank you so much for that. Go ahead, Director Menton.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Natalie Menton:

Gary can you tell me what route you usually use?

Pauletta Tonilas:

I think he dropped out of the queue, Director Menton.

Natalie Menton:

Oh, okay.

Pauletta Tonilas:

We do have his contact info though, we can get it for you and you can follow you with him for sure. That's no problem. Mike Meader, who is our Chief of Safety and Security, Mike you may want to address the challenges with enforcing people wearing masks on our system.

Mike Meader:

Sure, I'm happy to. This is Mike Meader, Chief Safety Officer at RTD. Right now, of course the mayor of Denver just issued a mandatory face covering order. So, there is certainly a requirement for everybody to be wearing a mask when they're out in public and specifically when they're riding RTD. We also do require that all of our employees wear masks. Anytime both on the vehicles, in the offices, as well, everywhere. The challenge that exists, and it is a fair challenge, is the ability for us to try to enforce that for everyone getting on the bus.

Mike Meader:

We don't want our operators to be the enforcement arm. We want our operators concentrating on safely driving the bus and getting you to where you're going. And we don't have the resources to put a law enforcement officer or someone on each bus and train in order to try to enforce that. We have signage on the buses, we have signage on the trains, all of our facilities, reminding people that it's a requirement to wear masks. We rely on people to take it upon themselves, obviously to protect themselves and others with that as well.

Mike Meader:

I know that the city is trying to step up some of their efforts, to put more visibility, put law enforcement out in areas where there's large gatherings. They're working with us as well in areas that we can identify to try to again, get that message out, encourage people to do it. And hopefully we'll see an increase in the mask usage as more of these orders are propagated out there.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you, Mike. That's Mike Meader. Director, did you have something you'd like to say?

Natalie Menton:

Yeah. I will just add in, that Jefferson County, and I've been very close contact in listening to the discussion about a face covering requirement. And it simply comes down to in Jefferson County that is not required, or let me say... Yeah, in Jefferson County and Lakewood, it's not required. The health department has put a lot of thought into that, and they're hoping there will a voluntary effort by folks. But there really is no law right now. And RTD if you can imagine on the W Line, if we would have a train

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

operator with three cars, being required to have people wear masks, our trains aren't going to go anywhere. So, that's a simple short answer to that.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, thank you Director Menton.

Natalie Menton:

Okay. Should I read out the callers? Sorry.

Pauletta Tonilas:

You absolutely can, we can share that duty. But go ahead, you can call up the next caller.

Natalie Menton:

Okay. Well we have Felicia on the line. I do want to ask of them especially, Felicia?

Felicia:

Yes.

Natalie Menton:

I see in the notes here you've got a question about Route 21 getting crowded, and I'm especially interested because that runs especially close to me.

Felicia:

Yes. Yes. You had said Wadsworth and Jewell, so when this new schedule came in... I'm a high risk 53-year-old, so my husband has to take the bus to and from work, he's an essential worker. And, he used to be able to just walk to the bus stop, well now it's two and a half miles away. I can't drive because of my condition, so somebody else has to do it, but that's not my real reason. I'm just letting you know the inconvenience that it's causing to people that have no other option.

Felicia:

But he goes east on Jewell, he catches it at 06:00, and then by the time he gets to right before Sheridan, it starts getting packed. And it's definitely more than 15 people and a lot of them don't wear masks. And you addressed that, I understand that part, but the safety chain where they have people away from the bus driver, which I understand that too. Why is there so much space on there? That's my first question. Why's there so much space between the driver and where it cuts the bus off to where the people can stand and be?

Natalie Menton:

Well, I can take a guess at that, and it's simply because of the amount of space that we would need in case of wheelchairs, because there's a lot of sizes of wheelchairs and some of them can be a little bit larger. But perhaps either Mr. Meader or Mr. Ford might want to chime in on that one also.

Michael Ford:

May 6, 2020

It's Michael Ford, COO. That area is designated for folks with disabilities, and typically we are having to accommodate wheelchairs, that isn't necessarily a disability.

Felicia:

Right. I'm on a walker, so I understand that, yeah. So, that's the space there, because it gets really... I mean to where they're standing and my husband wears a mask, because like I said if I get COVID I'm going to die. That's just the way that it's going to be and so he's very conscious about protecting me and then all that. So what you're saying is that in Utopia world, everybody would be responsible and wear a mask, but that's not reality. They're not wearing them. There's nothing being done about the overcrowding. And you said that it's the individual's choice to do that.

Felicia:

I really think that you need to get the governor to talk about this. Because my husband, with your schedule change, my husband is now being docked \$75 a week in pay because of it.

Michael Ford:

Okay, just to answer your question a little more directly, we are trying to monitor our buses so we don't have overloads. We're practicing social distancing. We're cleaning our equipment. Our drivers are outfitted with gloves and masks, so facial coverings. Again, we do a heavy clean on our buses. We obviously designated the area for ADA sections, so people could be accommodated through the front door because it's where we do our boardings right now.

Michael Ford:

But again, your issue is a great one and everybody's got to do their part and wear masks. We've got signage up on our buses right now and drivers will be making announcements and we'll be having some automated announcements that will continue to encourage people and basically state the ordinance that needs to address the adherence to wearing masks, or some kind of face covering.

Michael Ford:

So we're trying to do everything we can, but we need all people to participate. And then obviously there are resources that we can bring to bear to help with enforcement. But that's not the driver's job, that would be more of the law enforcement, security folks. And if we see issues or concerns in those areas, those resources will be deployed to help impact those situations that you mentioned. So I really appreciate your question.

Natalie Menton:

And I will say that when the 21 comes by, the area that I'm in, which is little more west, it's empty. It's empty. So, if this crowding is occurring east of Wadsworth, I will go out tomorrow. I'd love to know what that time block was because just so I can narrow it down, focus. But, I will follow up on that just in case you're still on the phone, Felicia. So we'll move to the next call now, and we've got Mike, in regards to reduced service standards and hurting the low income people.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Mike go ahead. You're in the queue you can... Yeah, Mike. You can ask your question.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Mike:

Okay, I was just asking about the reduction in service. My brother is disabled and he relies on the bus lines to get where he needs to go and since RTD is basically taxpayer funded, why don't you guys take it back to full service? Because the people that need the service the most are really being hurt.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, thank you so much for that Mike.

Natalie Menton:

Which-

Pauletta Tonilas:

Go ahead Director.

Natalie Menton:

Is there a couple of routes that your brother especially uses?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Mike might have dropped off the line, we can follow up with him?

Natalie Menton:

Okay.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, we can follow up and make sure you get that information, Director. Michael Ford, do you want to try to address some of his question?

Michael Ford:

Yeah, I believe the concern with there's not enough service out there, we're trying to match the number of services with the demand that we're seeing, based on the passenger counts. And again, we are doing our diligence in trying to ensure that we're addressing the routes. We know the numbers, we get the automatic passenger counts, we have supervisors and operators reporting information along with security folks.

Michael Ford:

So, we do take these issues very seriously, and we want to do the best we can. Particularly during this particular environment that we're in, to provide the optimum service that we can. But we also have to manage that with the resources that we have and the resources that are out there. And if people aren't riding, because our ridership is down, we've got to put our resources in the areas that we're seeing the demands and the issues.

Michael Ford:

And I think we've tried to spread out resources adequately so people can get to their schools, the grocery stores, the hospitals, the other essential areas. That was really part and parcel of the plan itself.

May 6, 2020

So, again all those considerations were made in this process and as we speak right now, we're adjusting daily to accommodate the needs based on the data. So I really appreciate the question.

Natalie Menton:

Right. Thank you very much Michael. All right we're going to go next to Karen. Karen you're up next in the queue, go ahead.

Karen:

Hey, hi. I have noticed this over the last few years, but I get the feeling that I've been told as a passenger that I'm the one that's going to have to correct people when they want to sit down, when their feet are all over the seat in front of them, or when they bring food and drinks into the bus. And, I was wondering is that my job as a passenger? Yes, I'm a frequent passenger, I don't drive cars. So RTD is my main mode of transportation.

Natalie Menton:

Our code of conduct does state that people shouldn't put their feet up on the seat. The way the light rail is set up, makes it more different because their feet are facing one another, versus commuter rail where you just really don't have that option. It's a tough call. I've certainly faced it myself, do you want to have a conversation? Do you want to start off with, I would just really, really love to know that when I sit down, I'm not sitting on what your feet were treading on?

Natalie Menton:

But ultimately we don't have the manpower with the ability to man security guards, on every single light rail car to address that. So it really comes down to if you're able to comfortably say it in a way that would avoid confrontation, I have done it myself. I'm not going to say it's an easy thing, to ask somebody, "Could you please, please keep your feet off the seat?"

Natalie Menton:

But I can say, I hope you heard earlier in the conversation where I started off, that one of the things I would like to do is, especially as we move forward, to remove those cloth seats, so at least we can clean those things a little bit easier. I'm sorry, that's probably not the answer you wanted to hear, but that's what I've got for you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you Director. If you'd like to get in the queue, you can push *3 on your keypad and we'll get you in the queue to ask us a question. All right, we're going to go next to Rita. Rita, go ahead.

Rita:

Hello, my question is for Director Menton, regarding the masks for the drivers and some possible other options that you might be able to explore. I was on a call with the Department of Public Health for Jefferson County last weekend. Incidentally all of the studies on the efficacy of masks has been on influenza. And that was well stated in the call. And they're not specific to this disease, and so I want to know what your thoughts are, Director? And if you could talk about what your concerns might be about creating a false sense of security if we're asking everybody to use masks.

May 6, 2020

Rita:

Because I think that's one of the challenges for making these policies. And to that point I would really like to know what, if we're really invested in safety, what's the possibility of testing the drivers with a COVID test. Because if we're talking about true viral loads, true cotangent that's going to be exposing other people, and active virus in the body, how can we make policy decisions based on science here? What other things could we do to do that?

Natalie Menton:

Rita, I was on that call also, and glad to hear your questions. And I'm going to be very, very, very blunt about how I feel about masks. And this will sound very odd coming from somebody who was very involved with getting masks for operators and drivers. It was a little bit depressing to me to hear some of the callers on a previous town call and tonight where I've heard people say their doctors told them, that they are going to die if they get COVID.

Natalie Menton:

The facts are that a majority of the people, have very mild symptoms, if any. And looking at what this COVID has done to our economy, and the shutdown, depresses me to no end. Now you want to know about the masks, well I've done a healthy amount of the research. I can remember as kid, eating... I won't go into that, but let's just say that some of us feel very secure in our immune system. And I find it actually quite hard to say the words, that everybody should wear a mask.

Natalie Menton:

Because when we are breathing our own CO2 and not breathing in a normal way. Now, it's one thing to wear a mask for 10 minutes going into a store, versus wearing one for eight hours. I don't personally think that's very healthy actually. Now I said I would have a very honest discussion about this. A false sense of security, we know that the cloth masks don't do what the N95s do. So, I don't know what other methods we... I'm going to just say this, probably be called out for it.

Natalie Menton:

Even myself, who feel that our best chance at survival is building our immunity to things such as COVID. And this is not the first instance in all of humanity where we've had to face this. I don't believe that this is the end of the world. So, I don't know if Rita's still on the phone. But, I've been wanting to share that information for several weeks now, about my real feelings about COVID. And I find it extremely distressing, extremely distressing, how the government has mandated a shutdown that will have far-reaching harm to our economy.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Director Menton I do want to ask you a question, because again you went through an extraordinary effort, and took an initiative of a mask-making project for our operators when we were really in the crux of mask shortage, and really went through quite an effort at having a mask-making project where you had quite a bit of participation from other folks. So, can you just touch on that whole process and what that was like? You guys ended up putting together about 1,700 masks I believe. So tell us a little bit about what that was like and the people that all came together to be a part of that.

Natalie Menton:

May 6, 2020

Sure. To start with it was a very odd situation to begin with because the CDC was saying don't wear a mask, unless you have symptoms don't wear masks. And we knew at RTD that things were starting to roll, and the disinfectant and all of the different supplies were getting to be in very short supply. On top of that when purchases were made they were diverted or hijacked and those things did not materialize. FedEx did not show up.

Natalie Menton:

So, knowing that and knowing the challenges, I took it upon myself to lead, I think what you nicknamed as the mask strike force. I would have never thought of that name.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, that was what I called you guys.

Natalie Menton:

Okay. Yeah.

Pauletta Tonilas:

The sewing strike force.

Natalie Menton:

Okay. So the first problem was there was no elastic. No elastic. Everywhere you looked it was two months out and then we heard these things you can order but you won't really get it. So, the very first thing I had to do was figure out, well how do I get around that problem? Because it's not like you're going to duct tape the thing to your head, right? So, custom [inaudible 00:34:29] pattern and what supplies were available which happened to be oversized rubber bands.

Natalie Menton:

These rubber bands are big enough, they'll stretch around a trash can. So they'll certainly fit around the head very comfortably. And coming up with a pattern, and then there was the problem how do you sew around this? Well then that took a special tool. So I had to go through all these steps to figure out how do you do it? Because you can't go to a volunteer and say, "Here figure it out." So, had to go through all that.

Natalie Menton:

And my mom was one of the first ones I called, and she was so gung ho, she was like, "Give me the pattern now. I've got to do it. I've got to start sewing it. I've got to have it done tomorrow." And then my aunt, and other people and then the media team helped out with CBS Four Story. And all of a sudden it grew to where there was probably about 60 volunteers, and I just had a mess around my house.

Natalie Menton:

Sewing machines, and cloths, and donations. The masks would be rolling in they'd just show up on my porch and then there's a whole packaging process. So ultimately we ended up with about 1,700 masks. I still got a few people who called up in the last two days and said, "I've got more masks." And I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. I don't know what to do anymore." but that's the mask story. So I know that sounds really strange considering I feel masks should be voluntary.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Natalie Menton:

And I would hope, as one person put it, Utopia, that people make that choice. But that was the mask project or the mask strike force as you called it.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes. Yes. That was the mask strike force, but it was an honorable effort and I know many of our operators thank you for that, Director Menton. So we're going to go next to Geoffrey, who's in the Queue. Go ahead Geoffrey. Hello there, Geoffrey are you on the line?

Geoffrey:

Oh, yes. This is Geoffrey. So, well firstly my channel's dead if you could subscribe to [Kenyard 00:36:33]. A great silence approaches at high velocity, how does that relate to the driver of a bus during these times?

Natalie Menton:

I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch the question. How does it relate? How does what relate to the bus driver?

Geoffrey:

So, firstly again, just subscribe to Kenyard and then a great silence approaches at high velocity. So, how does that and the rest of the infestation of rodents relate to the driver of a bus?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Geoffrey, I'm not quite so sure how to answer that. So, yeah. I think Director Menton, if you want to take a shot at that? I think when it comes down to the drivers, I think it's our responsibility, do all we can to keep them safe and to keep our passengers safe. If anybody else wants to chime in about our operators?

Natalie Menton:

Well, I got confused with the rats. I'm not sure what that meant. Let's go on to the next question, because I just didn't quite catch that one.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, sure. We can go onto Valerie. Valerie you're next up in the queue.

Valerie:

Hi. My question falls in line with the caller before, I live in Lakewood, I take the number 20 into downtown. I'm also high risk, I have to walk quite a ways to get another bus to go into downtown, starting Monday. And I was wondering if there any way you can schedule these buses that are not running all the way west, can you put during the high peak hours... Is there any way you can put some buses on for us people that need to go out to that area? And we can't get to the other buses that we need to get to, to get to downtown.

Natalie Menton:

So your comment is about the 20.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Valerie:

Right.

Natalie Menton:

Because we're on the Saturday schedule, so the 20 doesn't run down town. Can I ask, are you somewhat close to Colfax or...

Valerie:

Colfax, the Colfax bus, well I'm in between the Colfax bus and the number 28. But either way it's too hard for me to get to either one and the timing of the buses doesn't coincide with the timing that I have to be to work and I come home. I mean I'd have to leave at 6:30 in the morning and wouldn't get home till 7:00 at night. And, it's like waiting at a bus stop for an hour and then if the driver feels there's too many people on board, he's just going to keep going and I have to wait for the next one.

Valerie:

So this is what I'm not understanding. Is there anyway during the high peak hours for those of us that do work downtown that can get a bus in to work. [crosstalk 00:40:08].

Pauletta Tonilas:

Maybe Miguel Aguilar, who's one of our service planner and schedulers might have some info, Miguel, do you have anything you can offer?

Miguel Aguilar:

I was going to offer something similar to Director Menton about, if you're closer to another route, we have several other routes that could direct you down south towards the W Line and catch the W Line into downtown, or catch the 28, which is the next one north of Route 20. Those are other options that you'll be able to catch but in understanding that it doesn't line up with the timing of getting to work, and getting off work. This is something that maybe we can look at a schedule and see what we could offer with the 20 if that's possible.

Miguel Aguilar:

I know as ridership fully increases, we're adjusting our schedule so that way we can accommodate social distancing on all of our buses. And going along with that, this is maybe something we can also look into when adjusting our schedule.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks Miguel. Director Menton, did you have anything else that you want to offer for Valerie?

Natalie Menton:

No. Just I think we have the phone number, because I haven't honored a couple of the riders that have help find solutions for, that didn't really think about the north, south, that they could transfer, that was more along the Wadsworth area but I would like to reach back out to her, tomorrow, and see what other alternatives we could find for her.

Pauletta Tonilas:

May 6, 2020

Director, we'll get you information for sure. Meanwhile, let's go to Cheryl, who's next in the queue. Go ahead Cheryl.

Cheryl:

All right, I have a quick question. I am a little bit disabled and I have trouble stepping up into the bus. So I was wondering if there's any way... I don't have a cane or a walker or anything, but I have that orange curve for the... So, can I show that to the driver and maybe at least get in, in the front rather than in the back. I almost hurt both of my hips every time I get into a bus, and it is my only transportation.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Michael Ford, what about her being able to show her card at the front? She should be able to access through the front in that case, right?

Michael Ford:

Absolutely. I would show your card, just let the driver know that you need assistance and this is the boarding that you need to have to address your issue. And they should be more than willing to help you with that. So, the card along with just letting the driver know that you'll need assistance should give you the help and the support that you need. If this is happening at a particular time of day or something, we can do some further analysis.

Michael Ford:

But again, I would just let your intentions known and show them your card and you should not have any problem whatsoever. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Michael. Yeah, Michael, thank you for that. Okay, we're going to keep rolling. Let's go to Frank next. Frank, go ahead.

Frank:

Hi, I just had a quick question about the W Line going from Wadsworth Station down to Union Station, I believe they're on a Sunday schedule, but I'm not quite sure, does that mean one train an hour coming to the Wadsworth Station? And I'm wondering is there a limit on the train cars, of how many passengers are allowed on? And then would I have to wait for another hour to catch the next train going down to Union Station?

Natalie Menton:

Miguel, can you turn in. I'm looking at the schedule right now, but you know it by heart, so.

Miguel Aguilar:

Okay. [crosstalk 00:44:21] I'm doing my search too. The W Line, that's for a Sunday service schedule and by looking at the schedule that looks like it should be every half an hour. I'm seeing every 15.

Natalie Menton:

That's what I'm seeing.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Miguel Aguilar:

Yeah, I'm seeing every 15. So, currently it still is that, every 15 minutes heading into down town from the Lakewood, Wadsworth Station going into Union Station.

Pauletta Tonilas:

All right. Thank you very much for that Miguel. All right, we're going to go up next to Elaine. Elaine, go ahead.

Elaine:

Yes. Hello, this is Elaine. Hello?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, ma'am. Go ahead.

Elaine:

Oh. Okay. I'm calling, I haven't been on the bus for quite a while I used to be on it regularly. But, I am 70 years old and I have a disability not related to mobility but I have allergies, seasonal allergies, and I have asthma. And my biggest problem were some people smoking at the bus stop, smoking cigarettes. And I would have a coughing fit, and it feels like it's taking my life's breath away and I'm not a doctor, but I know that side stream cigarette smoke is not healthy.

Elaine:

In fact, it contains four times the carcinogens, cancer causing agents, and this has been proven scientifically, as does the drag the smoker's taking. So I'm wondering, are there any rules about not smoking at the bus stops?

Natalie Menton:

As far as I know, that's mainly a municipality's jurisdiction. In other words, let's say you work in Lakewood, they would have a set of rules, Golden would have a set of rules. So it would really depend on where you are, and that would really be... I don't know that we... Let's put it this way, if you had an issue like that, that would be a local police jurisdiction. And Mike Meader you may have a different answer, but that's my understanding.

Mike Meader:

No, you're right Director Menton. It is. It's based upon the municipality. There are some you mentioned Golden and Lakewood, Boulder's another one I know, where they have specifically banned smoking at transit stops. It's specifically written into the law. It would depend upon the prohibition in particular area the bus stop is located. Bus stops are typically on public property, they're not RTD property as a general rule. And so that's where the rules would apply, as far as bus stops are concerned.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Okay. So, I'm great. Thank you. Go ahead, Director.

Natalie Menton:

May 6, 2020

Yeah, we've got 12 minutes left. And I've done this in a previous Town Hall where I'm just going to look at the list of questions that are on the screen here, and try to hit them very rapidly. So that we get everybody through, okay? So the next caller we have is Harriet, but I see the question is that the airlines have done things about putting in air ventilation improvements to make the air safe, and is RTD doing something similar to that?

Natalie Menton:

Mike Meader, could you address?

Mike Meader:

Sure. Sure. The air on the bus is circulated, the HVAC system takes exterior air and moves it through, so it's constantly exchanging the air inside of the train or the bus, with the outside air. We are looking at some technology moving forward with some newer buses and things we purchased to have some greater filtration on there. The airlines typically re-circulate the same air, but they do filter it through the HVAC system.

Mike Meader:

So, even opening windows on buses certainly as the weather's getting warmer, those kind of things will help recirculate the air, replace the air, and keep it from being stale.

Natalie Menton:

Thank you. Sam is next in the queue, and the question is will the homeless continue to ride for free? Right now we have the rear boarding, which means we have eliminated fares temporarily. I do not know if we have the answer as to when that situation is going to change. Either Michael or Mike, if you want to chime in, if you know differently?

Michael Ford:

Yes. Michael Ford, COO. Yeah, we're continuing to monitor that. We have not made any decisions on that, we're going to have to monitor conditions. But one thing that we will do is make sure that we have advanced notice of any changes with the rear door boarding and the free fare which is pretty much connected together. So, we'll have to monitor that and then come up with a strong communication strategy to alert people how that will take place and when. So that's where we're at right now. Thank you.

Natalie Menton:

Yeah. Thank you. We've got John, and I'm sorry to kick over here, but I do want to get in about Reimagine and the transit situation. And so we've got limited time here. We've got a caller who wants to know what will happen when people stop wearing face masks. I don't know, I think there's going to be a certain part of the community that will be wearing them for a long time.

Natalie Menton:

We all know that there's some people who are not going to wear them right now. Whether that is health-related, and we do have one other caller, who has commented and said, as a family member that due to certain health issues has a breathing problem cannot wear face masks. And that's what I was speaking to earlier, when I went off a little bit about masks, that we don't know everybody's situation.

RTD Director Natalie Menten

May 6, 2020

Natalie Menton:

So, it's hard to say what's going to happen when people stop wearing face masks. We do have a caller who has stated, retired law enforcement, and supports masks, and I thank you for sharing that with me. Caller RTD staff, do they get hazard pay right now? No. Our financial situation at RTD right now, is figuring out how we pay the bills and continue the service that we have right now.

Natalie Menton:

Based upon the financial situation, due to the economic shutdown, sales tax has gone through the floor. So hazard pay, no. Can we place cool signs or stickers to encourage masks. I think we do have signs. I don't know definition of cool, but [crosstalk 00:51:59].

Pauletta Tonilas:

Well maybe they're not as cool as they could be, but you know.

Natalie Menton:

We do have some?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes we do.

Natalie Menton:

We do. Okay so, I think I went through the list of everybody in the queue, and I do want to address just a couple of things really quick. And this has been of interest to RTD because ridership was decreasing. And part of that, and this is pre-COVID, part of the reason was we started the fast track system, it was my first year on the board in 2013. And then in 2014, this revolutionary transportation method, actually not revolutionary because it's been around the world, but called transportation network companies and those are known as Uber and Lyft.

Natalie Menton:

They started to provide service that many people found very convenient. I'll give an example, coming out of the RTD building, I'll perhaps get on the number one bus, right across from our headquarters. Wait for the bus, meanwhile there's one of our other board directors who will take Uber or Lyft occasionally. She lives quite a bit farther away, she's also sight impaired. That Uber or Lyft would be there within one minute and take her right to her door.

Natalie Menton:

So it served part of the community, and there's nothing we can hold against them for doing that but it meant a decline in public transit. So we have to address that. We have to change, we have to figure out what is going to work best for the Denver Metro Regional Area because we continue to take sales tax, and so with those factors, what we kicked off prior to COVID, is a service optimization plan called Reimagine.

Natalie Menton:

And part of the reason we needed to do that, although I disagreed with the amount of money we're spending on the study, is because we only have a certain amount of money to work with. And I can say

May 6, 2020

that I get, although I have many people who say you don't provide enough bus service, I also have a competing factor, where I have taxpayers who say to me, "Why do you keep running around empty buses?"

Natalie Menton:

And so I have to answer for both sides. And I think a majority of the RTD board directors, get caught in that and maybe not, maybe I'm the only one, but I doubt it. So we have to figure out what to do, what is the best service for the taxpayers and the riders of the district and that's what kicked off Reimagine.

Natalie Menton:

We are going through this process and we hope to by the end of this year, have the board approve a service optimization plan. And I hope for everybody who's still on the line listening, that you're going to understand that this is going to be a pretty big deal. It could mean a dramatic change in the regional transportation district. So how do you keep up with it? Well first of all visit our website, RTD-Denver.com/reimagine. You'll find information there. There are also two committees, one is a technical working group. One is an advisory committee. And especially now it's easy to attend those meetings because you can do it by remote call in. You'll find that information at the RTD website.

Natalie Menton:

At the end of the day, we need to figure out what is the best service plan for the region? And it takes a community discussion to do that. I'm going to bring to your attention, one thing I ran into just a few days ago, and it's quite interesting. In April IBM, big corporation IBM, surveyed 25,000 people about transportation in this post-pandemic environment and the survey results indicate that 17% of those surveyed, from now are going to use personal transportation more.

Natalie Menton:

And out of those using public transit, 20% said they will no longer use it and 28% said they will use it less. And one of the silver linings of COVID is learning a lot of people can work remote. That is going to affect transportation. It's going to mean less traffic perhaps. It's going to mean changes in public transit. So, I encourage everybody who's listening right now, to get involved with the Reimagine process.

Natalie Menton:

Remember it's partly budget driven, but it's also partly, why are we running empty buses through areas? Should the service be going to only demand. Well then what do we do about taxpayers in the rural area, who are still paying in but don't get the service. Those are these complex things we need to weigh out. So, I know we've got three minutes now, I would have loved to have a discussion about a concept that I'm interested in, which is transit vouchers.

Natalie Menton:

But considering we're almost out of time, I'm going to have to, just like the mask project, figure out how to work around all of these different things and come up with a way to have a very robust discussion about transit vouchers, and how that may work in parts of District M and in parts of Jefferson County and perhaps even the regional transportation district.

Natalie Menton:

RTD Director Natalie Menten
May 6, 2020

And I don't know Pauletta, if you've got anything to chime in, but I think I got in the main components that I wanted to, here at the end.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. A lot of great information, and much to think about, for sure folks. As Director Menton was saying, transportation is going to evolve, there's no question about that. So I think that it will be very helpful for us, if you stay engaged as director said with our Reimagine, RTD process because what it's really all about is us optimizing the use of the resources that we have to the best of our ability. And so we will be putting out more information about the engagement and outreach process for Reimagine RTD, so you can look for that.

Pauletta Tonilas:

You can also always check our website, RTD-Denver.com, where we keep information updated about Reimagine, about COVID-19. We have a dedicated COVID-19 webpage on our website and of course follow us on social media. We push a lot of information out every day on our social media channels, and I just want to thank you all for being on the line with us.

Pauletta Tonilas:

For giving us some of your time to learn more about what we're doing at RTD. I can tell you that our whole RTD Board of Directors and all of our staff are super committed to you, because we all work for you, and it's all about you. And I will go ahead and turn it over to Director Menton to wind us up tonight and to say a farewell for the evening. Director?

Natalie Menton:

Big thought on my brain right now is the economy and support your local businesses as much as possible. I feel so strongly that we perhaps have not... The damage that's been done, it's going to take a long time to get over. So, just as you go to shop and maybe you're clicking online, maybe search out that local business, who's also your neighbor and spend your money as local as you can.

Natalie Menton:

That's not how I wanted to end the call. But, boy I feel strongly that we've really got to get back on track. So, thank you to everyone, I'm in my last year on RTD and I've really, really been honored.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Director, thank you so much for your commitment. You have been a champion for the people of your district. And as you depart RTD's board at the end of this year, thank you very much for your service. And folks, thank you again for being on the line with us. And a good night to you.