

Regional Transportation District
District L Director Shelley Cook
April 30, 2020

Pauletta:

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 of how RTD is addressing COVID-19. But we're also here folks to talk about other RTD related matters and anything that is on your mind or you want to ask a question about. So, thank you for joining us tonight. We hope this finds you in the comfort of your home safe and healthy.

Pauletta:

Also, joining me this evening is Shelley Cook, RTD director for District L. District L is your RTD District. Also, sitting in tonight to answer your questions are Michael Ford, our chief operations officer and Dan Merritt, our service planner and scheduler from our service planning department.

Pauletta:

We're here to listen to you folks and to answer your questions and it's very important for us to hear from you. So, this is how it works if you've never been on a telephone town hall meeting before. To ask a question, all you have to do is 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 to ask us a question. That's *3 on your keypad if you would like to get in the queue to ask us a question. Then you just have to stay on the line, listen in on the conversation and when I call your name you then ask your question live.

Pauletta:

We do ask that you keep it brief because we want to get to as many of you on the phone tonight as possible. So, if you'd like to get in the queue once again, press *3 on your keypad and you'll be able to ask us a question. It is now my pleasure to introduce RTD director Shelley Cook from District L and Director Cook, thank you so much for being on the line with us, for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this telephone town hall with us tonight. It is extraordinary times for us, Director Cook. So, welcome. Why don't you tell us a little bit about how our RTD is addressing COVID-19.

Shelley Cook:

Thank you Pauletta. Good evening everybody. I joined Pauletta in thanking you for joining us tonight. As she mentioned, well COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all our lives of course, but what I'd like to start by saying is that as RTD upholds its core value of safety, it is especially important during these times that we focus on keeping our passengers and employees safe and healthy.

Shelley Cook:

The RTD system is critical infrastructure and it continues to operate for essential travel. Even now with reductions in ridership of up to 70%, RTD is still carrying about 125,000 passengers daily. Many of them are people who rely on transit to get to essential services such as grocery stores, medical appointments or pharmacies for example. And others are essential workers in those places.

Shelley Cook:

Our operations and the people behind the scenes are providing a vital service and lifeline to many residents in the community right now. We're in close contact in cooperation with State, regional and

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local authorities regarding the best practices, safe operation and our communications with the public. We need everybody's help to keep the transit system safe. What we say is, don't take unnecessary trips, please limit time spent in RTD stations to 10 minutes, we're face coverings in our facilities and on board the vehicles and as often as possible, keep a distance as six feet or more between yourself and other passengers.

Shelley Cook:

Well, there's a lot to cover tonight and we appreciate your time very much. So we're here to answer your questions. Let's just move on to that. Thanks Pauletta.

Pauletta:

Thank you very much Director Cook. That is RTD director Shelley Cook for District L. This is a live telephone town hall meeting being hosted by the regional transportation district. Folks, we're here for you. We want to hear what you have to say as many of you as possible. So if you want to get in the queue, once again, press *3 on your keypad. *3 if you'd like to get in the queue to ask us a question or even just to give us a comment.

Pauletta:

We're going to go now to our first person and that is John. John, go ahead. Your first up. Let's hear your question.

John:

My question Shelley is, if RTD can require people to wear shoes when they transit, why can you not require them to wear masks? Thank you.

Shelley Cook:

Thanks very much for your question. I do know that this is a conversation that's being held regionally right now. That is a discussion that's being held by authorities and in the municipalities and so forth. I can tell you my personal opinion is that we ought to require it, but I will turn it over to Michael Ford to talk about some of the issues associated with that. Go ahead, Michael.

Michael Ford:

Thank you very much. I appreciate your question as well. We want everybody to be safe and we really encourage people to wear masks. We actually have signage on our vehicles but in terms of enforcement, we really don't want our operators to get in the middle of trying to enforce something like that. It really is up to each municipality to make those types of decisions so they can actually execute or address those issues. But we want everybody to be safe. We obviously have our employees wearing masks, we highly encourage people to wear masks, but really it's at a municipality level decision to really put that down and reinforce it for the people that are riding those different jurisdictions.

Michael Ford:

Again, we want people to be safe. We want you to exercise social distancing, that's really about everybody doing their part to protect each other. So, I really do appreciate the question and I hope I answered your question as well. Thank you.

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Pauletta:

Thank you very much, Michael. Again, if you'd like to get in the queue, press *3 on your keypad and you'll be able to ask us a question. All right. We're going to go up next to Ken. Ken, go ahead.

Ken:

I think RTD is doing a great job with COVID protocols and everything and I know that not everybody has a mask. So, if you decide to wear one, that'd be great. But I was just wondering what the impact to tax revenues and fare and everything is... How is that going to impact the long-term planning of RTD to expand on the system? And has there been any action taken on that unsolicited bid to extend the B Line to Boulder and Longmont?

Pauletta:

Yeah. Ken, thank you so much. That's a lot of great info and some great questions that you asked there. As far as the financial impact, I'll start and then I'll ask Director Cook to weigh in.

Pauletta:

Obviously, it has been a financial impact to RTD and as one of our protective measures to protect our operators, we started rear door boarding, which means we suspended collecting fares. So, losing out on fare revenues right now is tough. It's all in the name of safety, so that's most important. But we generate about \$12 billion a month from the fares that we collect. So, that just gives you a little bit of a frame of reference. Then also the sales tax revenues that are being hit right now because people are not out buying goods, that's going to be another hit to us. Director Cook, do you want to talk a little bit too about the aid though that we're getting from the federal government?

Shelley Cook:

Sure. Thank you very much Pauletta. And thanks very much for the question. It's center for the agency right now. As Pauletta mentioned, we're working currently to get our arms around what we will be facing in the way of financial shortfalls and so forth. Obviously a lot of that depends on assumptions we make. When does the economy begin to pick back up? How much does it pick back up? What happens to ridership and so forth? But fortunately we were able to access \$232 million in federal support through the CARES Act. This will be explained a little bit later, I think, but that's done on a reimbursement basis. In other words, it's not just money that's gold out to us, the expenses that we claim need to qualify and we file for reimbursement. Thanks Pauletta.

Pauletta:

Yes, thank you very much Director Cook. That's director Shelley Cook, RTD board member. And the question also that the gentlemen before asked was about whether or not any decisions were made on the unsolicited proposal. That's for the B Line, the extension up to Longmont of the Northwest rail. Director Cook, I don't know if you want to weigh in at all about... We have some fast tracks projects that we don't have funding for, but we haven't made any decisions at all. Do you want to continue with some more information?

Shelley Cook:

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What I know is limited now. There's a process that's followed whenever the agency gets an unsolicited proposal and that's handled mainly at the agency level at this point. So, it's not something that is yet coming before the board and I can't myself providing much information on that except to say that, it is going through the processes that are laid out for what happens when we get an unsolicited proposal.

Pauletta:

Yes sir. I think you were talking about the Rocky Mountain rail proposal to finish it. We did get that. We were starting to evaluate it and then COVID-19 hits so there hasn't been really any other decision making about that. It all comes down to obviously the funds to which RTD does not currently have to finish the Northwest rail. All right, we're going to go up next to Laura. Laura, you're next in the queue. Go ahead. Go ahead, Laura, you're on the line.

Laura:

The one thing I was wondering about, which doesn't have to do with the virus is, I'd like to get something for the disabled. I'd like to be able to have a bus come to my house. I guess Ms... I don't know. I've heard... That's all.

Pauletta:

Yes. Laura, thank you very much. We do have our Access-a-Ride service, which is a really valuable service. Director Cook, do you want to start and then Michael can carry on and talk additionally about Access-a-Ride?

Shelley Cook:

No. Thank you so much, Laura for asking because I'm hoping that Michael will be able to connect you to that valuable service. I'll just turn it over to Michael. Thank you.

Michael Ford:

Thank you Director Cook. It would probably be helpful to get your name and contact number because we do have an eligibility process for folks that are disabled or elderly and we can get you registered through that process to try to ensure that you get the ride that you need for that service. So, we probably need to get some contact information and then ensure that you qualify for that and then I think we can work with you on service options for you based on your needs and where you want to go.

Michael Ford:

So, I think we need to start really with getting some information from you. I think there are folks on the line that probably can get your contact information and then we can follow up as early as tomorrow and get some more information from you and try to help you navigate this process. Thank you.

Pauletta:

Thanks very much. Thanks Michael. If you'd like to get in the queue, just press *3 on your keypad and we will call upon you in a few minutes. We're going to go up next to Kirk. Kirk, go ahead.

Kirk:

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Good evening. Thank you for taking my call. I really appreciate the service that you do. It is needed and they are frontline workers, so thank you. My question is, I live on Alison Street. Shelley, I know you. My name is Kirk A. Story of city of Arvada. The buses go like 40 miles an hour down my street and I've talked to... I can't remember the guy's name, but he's the liaison between the administration and the bus drivers. And they had some guys come out here and measure some speeds, but the 72 is the most proficient offender, just going crazy fast and the speed is 25. I don't know how to make this change, but it's a new route. I think they started this thing in November or something and it's really frustrating because my house is 10 feet from the street. So, I was just wondering if there's any way we could get the bus drivers to not go that fast.

Shelley Cook:

I'll kick it off right quick Kirk by saying thank you. It's great to hear from you and I do of course remember you. You knew probably that there were actually two routes on Allison Street, the 55 and the 72 which began their route on that street last fall actually with the service changes associated with the G Line. And now the 55 with the recent service cuts that were enacted last month, that eliminated the 55. So you're right, what we're talking about now is the 72. I'll turn it over to Michael Ford who would be the person to handle that. Thank you.

Michael Ford:

Thank you for your question. You've got excessive speeds going there. We can definitely get out and monitor that. We have some ability to make sure that happens. I really do apologize. I'll have to look into that. We do also have service planning on the line, but we will definitely make a note of it during this conversation and begin to monitor or reinstruct folks if we're having issues of that nature that you just mentioned out there. That's not acceptable and I'll look into it and see what changes we can immediately impact so that doesn't happen. I appreciate your call.

Pauletta:

Thank you. We'd like to get more callers in the queue so if you want to ask a question, give us a comment, press *3 on your keypad. We're going to go up to Austin. He's next. Go ahead Austin.

Austin:

Okay. I just wanted to say first of all, my question isn't really in relation to the virus, but I do appreciate that you guys are taking precautions and it seems like you guys are really trying your best to do everything that you can. But nonetheless my question is in pertinent to the G Line specifically in Olde Town Arvada going from Miller to Olde Wadsworth. The crossings on Miller, Independence, Garrison and Olde Wadsworth, it seems like the timing on the arms is really odd.

Austin:

For example, I've pulled up to Independence about 6:20 when I'm going to work. The arms will go down right as I'm pulling up, and then they stay down for probably about three, four or five minutes until the train finally comes, and then they're still down for another two minutes and then it says another train coming and then that train passes and they still don't go up until another two, three, four, sometimes five minutes later.

Austin:

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And then specifically over on Olde Wadsworth, it's so bad that traffic will back up all the way to 58. I don't want to be bashful of you guys. This has been an ongoing problem. I thought that just at first with the G Line opening it was testing, but now it seems like it might be an actual problem. I just wanted to see if you guys were aware of it or if anybody else had even mentioned it or if I'm just crazy. I don't know.

Shelley Cook:

Pauletta I can take that.

Pauletta:

Yeah, absolutely. You bet. Go ahead.

Shelley Cook:

Okay, sure. Thanks Austin. Thanks very much. I've taken down your number and also the crossings you indicated and I'll ask the staff who liaison with DTP to check into the data we have on that and to make sure that there isn't something unusual happening there.

Shelley Cook:

I do know for Olde Wadsworth, one of those that there are special issues associated with that one because it's so close to the Olde Town station first of all and it's in a single track section and because of the level of activity, the things that will trigger the gates and then delay actual trains running through there are many. But I'll ask the staff to look into that and see if we can get back in touch with you. Thank you so much for letting us know.

Pauletta:

Thank you director and thank you Austin for the question. We're going to go right to Gloria and Gloria, you're next. Go ahead.

Gloria:

Hi. I have a question about, I called the Call-n-Ride but it's actually the FlexRide now. I wanted to know if that's available in Arvada, Colorado. I live off 80th on course.

Shelley Cook:

I can reply. I don't mean to hog all the time here, but [crosstalk 00:18:41] it's not currently available within the town limits of Arvada. I'm hoping that as we go through our re-imagined process over the next 18 months to two years that we can look at the applicability of a demand driven Call-n-Ride or a FlexRide like that for areas of Arvada. Actually Jesse Carter had indicated that in fact we could do that. So, I'll leave it to Michael Ford to chime in as well. Thank you.

Michael Ford:

Thank you Director Cook. We'll definitely we'll look into that and I will definitely follow up with Jesse Carter on your comments and obviously as we continue to look at re-imagine RTD we'll definitely have a focus on these and other services. So, I'll do some follow-up and we'll be in contact with you. Thank you.

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Pauletta:

Thank you Michael. And just to weigh in a little bit more about reimagine RTD and what that is. Back in September, RTD launched the Reimagine RTD initiative, which is looking at, how do we look at doing service in the way that is going to be most sustainable and effective across the whole region. So, RTD has really been taking a deep look at ourselves and our service and our resources at how we do that. And actually it couldn't come at a better time than right now as we're facing COVID-19 and we had to have a major service reduction, but then as we start to ramp back up and add service back and look at how we best serve the region, Reimagine RTD actually is at the right time because it's about looking at our resources and putting those to the best use possible so that we can be as effective as possible. So, you'll hear more about reimagine RTD in the future. We're going to go next to Marcel. Marcel, go ahead.

Marcel:

[inaudible 00:20:48]. Hello.

Pauletta:

Go ahead Marcel.

Marcel:

My questions were, I know that you offer a discount card to elderly and disabled, but I was wondering why that was not one issued to homeless because most homeless people are disabled or seniors. And also my second question, I know I have two, but the other one is out \$12 million worth of revenue that you make approximately a month, is there any of that ever donated to any of the facilities that helps the homeless and disabled and seniors?

Pauletta:

Thank you very much for that Marcel. I can start and then maybe Director Cook might want to weigh in as well. So, RTD does offer a series of discounted fare products for various groups. We do have a 50% discount off of the regular fare for seniors, for older adults and for the disabled and then we just, this last year implemented what we call the live program, which is a program that is an income based discount of about 40%. And then we also have a youth program that's a 70% discount off of the regular fare price. So, we do offer those discounts for some of our most transit dependents.

Pauletta:

As it relates to the homeless, we don't have anything specific and we haven't donated anything to homeless groups, but we are working with a number of homeless organizations to help see if we can't connect the homeless who are around the RTD system or using the RTD system connected to resources that can help them. And this is a big topic to the board of directors. They've had a lot of discussion about this, but Director Cook, do you want to weigh in a little bit about that?

Shelley Cook:

Yeah. Thank you Pauletta, I appreciate the fact that you mentioned that, that effort was underway. As Pauletta mentioned, this does come before the board and there's always a lot of discussion and concern about it. I think the general thought so far has been, it's still relatively new. We're trying to give it a

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chance to get on its legs and evaluate and see what changes might need to be made. But that's definitely an area that has been and is of concern and being looked at. Thank you for that.

Pauletta:

Thank you Director Cook. You can still get in the queue to ask us a question, you just press *3 on your keypad. And for those who joined us a little late, this is a live telephone town hall meeting being hosted by the Regional Transportation District and RTD, director Shelley Cook who represents District L. We are going to go next to Marty. Marty, go ahead.

Marty:

Hi. Thanks for taking my call. Hey, just to start out with the conversation, I certainly enjoy as a recently retired guy, the G Line and taking it down to Old and not having to fight traffic and parking and such, but of course since the COVID virus, I've been shying away from it and not using it.

Marty:

Mine is a two part question. The first part is, how much ridership is down on the G Line and what effects has been caused by the virus on our ridership. And then the second part is, have we been able to up staff enough driver operators and train operators and staff now because I know that was a real problem. Thanks.

Pauletta:

[crosstalk 00:24:46]. Go ahead director. I was just going to say you can start and then Michael can jump in.

Shelley Cook:

Okay. I think that we've talked about the ridership generally being down 70%. I believe it's true and Michael will know the particulars, that it's been down even more on rail. The G Line, I don't know the specifics for that one. I haven't seen the ridership numbers since the COVID and the stay at home orders and so forth, but I believe I've heard even up to 90%. However, I have heard that recently ridership has begun to see an uptick. I guess I'd leave it to Michael if he's got some actual numbers. Go ahead, Michael.

Michael Ford:

Yes. Thank you, Director Cook. I don't have actual numbers, but I've heard those statistics around 75 to 80% of the services down at this point. We are continuing to experience light loads and I think as Pauletta mentioned, we're right about a third of our normal 350,000 a day. We're about 120,000. So, that's being played out. Obviously we were hoping to see more ridership in the coming weeks, but at this time I believe those numbers are about right, but we can dig into some more statistics and provide you the specifics. We can get your name and number and we can definitely get back to you. But roughly around 75 to 80% right now.

Pauletta:

Thanks Michael. You'd like to get into queue? I want to remind you to *3, I know it's easy to forget and you can get in the queue. We're going to go to Karen. Karen, go ahead. You're up next. Hi there Karen,

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go ahead. Karen, are you on the line with us? We might've lost Karen. She might've had to hang up. All right, we're going to go up next to Christopher. Christopher, go ahead.

Christopher:

Yeah. Hi there. I'm a daily rider and so with was my significant other here, we are mostly right out of the Olde Town Arvada station and we really want to just say thanks for all that you guys are doing to keep the services going here.

Christopher:

We obviously have been working from home as everything's been locked down and I was just curious as to what the plan is to schedule back up, which services are going to go back to normal schedules. If you could just help address that.

Pauletta:

Yeah. Thank you very much for that Christopher. I'm first going to turn to Dan Merritt who is our service planner and scheduler who's on the line with us. And Dan can start in talking about just the things that we look at as we monitor service and how we would look to ramp back up. So Dan, you can take a first shot at that.

Dan Merritt:

Thank you very much Pauletta. We are staying in constant communication with the local governments around the state as well as the state government trying to keep tabs on as cities are lifting restrictions, what we will need to be doing to bring back services. And so we're looking at ridership, we're trying to keep an eye on everything and unfortunately we don't have any hard data at this moment as far as which days things will be coming back. But we are looking at a tiered approach to bringing back service where we will bring back service for areas that need it the most to try and prevent overcrowding and keep things safe for the passengers as they continue to ride RTD.

Dan Merritt:

I know this is a very fluid situation. We wish we had more hard information but we're just trying to adapt and stay mobile and be ready to serve the city's needs as best we can.

Pauletta:

Great. Dan, thank you very much. That's Dan Merritt, one of our service planners and schedulers. Director Cook, I'm going to bring you in and ask you to address some of the things that we have been doing, some safety measures to protect people and to ensure that our system is safe. There's a whole host of things that RTD has been doing that I think would be helpful for the folks on the line to know about. You want to go through some of those?

Shelley Cook:

Sure Pauletta, thank you. Well, first of all, all vehicles and facilities are being cleaned daily in accordance with public health recommendations from the CDC and the state and local public health providers. For now, what that means is that bus and rail vehicles are being cleaned daily, including wiping down the handrails and other high touch surfaces within an industrial strength disinfectant and antibacterial

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cleaner. And actually I want to add something here. Paul Ballard informed the board on our Tuesday meeting this week that new vehicles we've just now ordered have a feature. I don't remember the particulars of it, but it will provide for more continuous disinfection. So I'm looking forward to hearing more about that.

Shelley Cook:

Secondly, RTD has switched to rear door boarding and exiting on most buses as well as suspended the fare collection to provide another layer of social distancing between the operators and riders. There are plastic chains that have been installed to rope off the area right behind the operators and the wheel securement area. The operators are calling dispatch when they see buses becoming crowded. And currently the plan is to limit ridership to no more than 15 people per standard bus, 20 for a larger bus, the articulated kind and 30 per train car at a time.

Shelley Cook:

Now again, the operators can call dispatch regardless of that actual number if they see the buses becoming more crowded. Also, resources are being diverted when possible to provide additional buses on routes experiencing larger loads to help maintain social distancing is something that's really interesting to board members too and we've been following some of that data and I'm eager to hear too about the added coverage that we're able to provide to help to assure the ability of passengers to space themselves appropriately.

Shelley Cook:

And then finally that just underscores, there's a continued need for the community's help. We ask that you share the responsibility of following those distancing guidelines, again, wearing face coverings and by limiting trips to necessary travel. Thank you Pauletta.

Pauletta:

Thanks very much Director Cook. There's a lot of talk about masks, we get a lot of questions about are we requiring our operators to wear masks? Are we requiring the public to wear masks before they hop on board? We do have a face covering policy at RTD that we've developed just through this COVID pandemic and we are requiring our operators to wear masks or face coverings and we are urging our riders to wear face coverings.

Pauletta:

Now there is no law or rule or anything statewide that people have to wear a mask or a face covering, and so we're urging people to be our partners in safety and wear a mask or a face covering. We definitely don't want to get into the enforcement business of putting our operators in the position of having to enforce that with our riders and we're not able to have enough transit police everywhere to make sure people have face coverings before they board. So, we urge that... We hope everybody takes personal responsibility. I just wanted to weigh in on that because we are taking this very seriously and urging people to the greatest extent possible to please wear a mask or a face covering before you hop on board. We're going to go next to Jamie who's in the queue. So Jamie, go ahead.

Jamie:

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Hello?

Pauletta:

Yes, Jamie. Go ahead.

Jamie:

Hi. My question is not concerning the COVID-19, it's concerning the drivers that are hitting pedestrians and taking their lives and no action is being brought to them.

Pauletta:

Yes, Jamie. Well, first of all I would say I'm very sorry to hear that. And our hearts go out to anybody who's affected by any incidents that involve RTD vehicles or our systems. So, I'm sorry for the situation that you've had to experience. I will ask Michael to weigh in on when we do have accidents, the protocol that we go through when there has been an accident and there is going to be then an investigation. Michael.

Michael Ford:

Yes, thank you very much Pauletta. We work with the municipality at hand that where the accident happen, we do an investigation, we pull out cameras, we pull videos to ensure that we have a good thorough understanding of the situation. We interview the operator between the situation there. We may have a drug and alcohol test done. Supervisors on the scene. We're working with local law enforcement there. Safety and security are brought out to the scene too, to also do their part of the investigation.

Michael Ford:

Also, there's a comprehensive process in getting and gathering information and interviewing witnesses and subject matter folks. Sometimes we also bring out somebody to do a total analysis of the issue at hand and what happened. So, there's a lot of components that go into that. We do some after action briefs as well. So, there's a thorough process to determine the issue of liability, what actually happened, are there mitigating circumstances? And then obviously we'll need to address the concerns at hand.

Michael Ford:

So, I don't know particularly the situation that you're talking about, but there are a lot of components that go into it and if they're retraining or other mitigating things that we need to change in the system, we also make provisions for that as well. So there's a very comprehensive approach to any type of accident or incident and review and study so we can improve and if we need to do more retraining I use that as a retraining opportunity, we do that as well. So, I just want to assure you that there's a lot of thought and a lot of ways in which we approached this to make sure that we get better at what we do. Thank you for the question.

Shelley Cook:

Yeah. And for my part... This is Shelley, I can say that there's nothing more heartbreaking than to hear of a pedestrian or other accident that involves injury or death. And are as a board informed immediately anytime something happens and we follow closely with monthly reports, in fact in a quarterly update on

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accidents as part of our operations committee. So, I want to just underscore the fact that we genuinely and deeply care about all such incidents. Thank you.

Pauletta:

Thanks very much Director Cook and Michael. Jamie, again, our thoughts are with you. If you'd like to get in the queue folks to ask a question or even give us a comment, press *3.

Pauletta:

One of the things that would be really helpful for us to hear from all of you is, as we start to ramp back up and stay at home orders start to be softened and people start moving around the region more, what would make you feel more comfortable about hopping back on board RTD? What kinds of things should RTD be thinking about? What would make you feel more comfortable? So, if there's even a comment or a suggestion that you want to give us in that vein, we would love to hear that as well. So, just press *3 on your keypad.

Pauletta:

Director Cook, I'm going to ask you to just briefly touch on our Access-A-Ride service and something that our Access-A-Ride staff that manages our Access-a-Ride or paratransit service came up with during this COVID-19 time to help our Access-a-Ride customers.

Shelley Cook:

Sure. Thank you very much. Well, at this point I'm happy to say we've not made reductions to Access-A-Ride. And to reduce demand for staff and better serve customers who need the service we've moved from a five day advanced booking to next day only, and that's until further notice.

Shelley Cook:

What Pauletta was talking about though is a really special feature right now that I'm glad to say we're able to offer. We have free home delivery group service for groceries that's available to all of RTDs current Access-A-Ride customers, and those groceries can come from King Soopers, Safeway, the Community Ministry, Southwest Food Bank, The Senior Hub Senior Solutions and the Adams County Food bank. And as additional food bank and grocery store locations are made available, that will be shared on RTDs website.

Shelley Cook:

And that just makes all kinds of sense. I mean, Access-A-Ride is there for you if you need to make a trip to a medical appointment or to get groceries. But for many people who qualify, they may have underlying conditions that actually heighten risk of going out. So, I'm so pleased that our staff came up with a way to actually reverse that and get the groceries to you.

Shelley Cook:

Now, to get that food delivery Access-A-Ride customers can contact their local store or food pantry and they'll coordinate a pickup time and then relay that to RTD and then our drivers will be there to get the food order and they'll bring it to your door. Finally, the Access-A-Ride customers can continue to book the trips they need for the essential purposes, including to purchase groceries. Thanks Pauletta.

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Pauletta:

Thank you Director Cook. And if you have a pen or a pencil handy folks, I will give you the Access-A-Ride phone number, the number that you can call to get any information about Access-A-Ride. And that phone number is (303) 299-2960 again, (303) 299-2960.

Pauletta:

We were talking about masks a little bit ago and I was going to mention this because it's been really heartwarming to see how people have reached out to RTD to provide us with face coverings and masks because there's been such a shortage. Obviously this has been a worldwide shortage of masks and personal protective equipment and it has just been enlightening to see so many folks reaching out and helping RTD in this situation.

Pauletta:

One of them is one of our own RTD board member who came up with a project that really became so successful. Director Cook, do you want to touch on that with one of your fellow directors?

Shelley Cook:

Sure, I'm glad to. Director Natalie Menten on her own commenced a voluntary effort to make masks for our operators and other personnel who need the protection and yet the agency wasn't able to supply them in the numbers needed. So, as of right now, she's been able to provide 1700 masks, I understand. I want to acknowledge too the other directors for example, Director Peggy Catlin, actually the other night, couldn't sleep and sewed an extra six masks and Director Geisinger has worked with Patagonia to secure access to that company's revamped manufacturing process to provide several thousands.

Shelley Cook:

We have our non-profit agency partners in the community, for example, Mile High Connects. They've worked with Yeti and Red Line to secure masks for us. And I noticed on the website we've got individuals who've been donating. So, it really has been an extraordinary effort that shows how a community comes together to provide that vital equipment. Thank you.

Pauletta:

Thank you Director Cook. And our RTD upholstery shop has even pivoted and is taking on a different activity in making cloth masks. And so that's been really a new thing too, is to see our own RTD employees who work in our upholstery shop start sewing cloth, reusable masks. And so that's what this time is all about, is people thinking differently, having to do things differently. So, we want to make sure and mention that.

Pauletta:

We've got have about 15 minutes left and we could use some more people in the queue. So if you would like to make a comment or ask us a question about anything related to RTD, we're happy to hear from you. Press *3 on your keypad of your phone and we'll get you in the queue to ask us a question.

Pauletta:

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Then I'm going to turn to you, Dan Merritt, who's one of our service planners and schedulers. Dan, there's a lot that goes into doing a service reduction like what we put into place April 19th. And there's various factors that you all as service planners have to consider when you go through this type of an exercise. It might be helpful for people to hear what some of that is.

Dan Merritt:

Thank you very much. We started with looking at the Saturday schedule on bus side and the Sunday schedule on rail side because those are steps down from our weekday service but still provide a fair amount of coverage to the district. Once we did that, then we went back and looked at areas that were missing coverage that we did still want to get coverage to and added in some of those expresses and regional trips, the things the commuters would still be needing, routes that went by areas that were still going to be big draws, hospitals, major grocery stores, things like that where the community needs to reach, and try to do our best to make sure that while we didn't have the coverage that we do at a normal time, we still had a way to try and provide as much coverage as we could to the general population.

Dan Merritt:

We would maybe cut back from half an hour between trips to an hour between trips or cut back instead of a route going until 2:00 AM trim it back to midnight. Just the little things we could do to try and provide some safety and security for our operators, they're exposed a little less, as well as still providing coverage to the city.

Dan Merritt:

And as many people do know, before this started we were going through a process of mandating our operators to work six days a week and once the April 19th day hit, we've now been able to give those operators some relief from working an extra day each week and provide extra buses staged around the city that can help out when overflows are happening to try and provide good social distancing measures for everyone.

Dan Merritt:

So, when an operator sees that his bus is getting full, they can hit a button on their dashboard, dispatch will get the message and we'll get a bus out there as quickly as we can to try provide an alternative for people versus crowding all into one bus. And this is a learning process. We're going through this just like the rest of the world, first time for us. So, there are a few little things we have to work out, but we're trying to adapt on the fly and get things as good as we can for the population to keep them and our operators as safe as can be. And with that I'll hand it back to you.

Pauletta:

Thank you, that was great information. I think that's one thing that I talk about a lot when we work with members of the public or the media is that, we're all making decisions with the best available information we have at the time. And it is like building the plane as we're flying it because none of us have ever been through anything like this before. So, we might make one decision today and we might have to make a different decision tomorrow.

Pauletta:

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Dan was talking about our operators shortage that we have experienced over the last few years and that has been more critical over the past several months. And interestingly enough, through this COVID pandemic, we have seen an influx of applications of people who want to be bus or rail operators. And so that is where we might be able to get some help to help us with the operator shortage. And Michael, I'm going to turn it over to you a second here and just talk about some of the things we are looking at doing to address the operator shortage and the things that we've been doing over the past year.

Michael Ford:

Yeah, thank you very much Pauletta. We've been very actively working to bring more folks in, doing a lot of recruiting and going to other places that we normally haven't gone to. We reduced the bus driver age down to 19. That doesn't mean every 19 year old would qualify, but that's one thing that we've done. We don't require a commercial driver's license to operate a rail car on light rail, and that's also opened up another portal of opportunities.

Michael Ford:

So, we're looking to expand ways in which we think about bringing people into the organization and other opportunities to think outside the box in terms of recruitment and retention. During this time, we've been able to continue our training efforts on both light rail bus and commuter rail to bring people in so we can ramp up more.

Michael Ford:

We've been deficient operators for a number of years and we've had to mandate them and that means they would have to work on a particular day on their day off. So, this has given us an opportunity to straddle the line and making sure that as we build up, we build up enough resources so we can deliver the services that we have resources for. So, there's been a lot of work, a lot of education, a lot of communication, a lot of visiting colleges and universities and different ethnic communities and just doing everything we can to let people know that we're hiring. You might see posters, billboards and other things like that. And then just using social media and technology and everything like that to really try to ramp up our opportunities to deliver the services that everybody needs each and every day.

Michael Ford:

So, those are some of the things that I can mention around communication and recruitment and retention efforts. Thank you.

Pauletta:

Thank you very much Michael. Michael has worked extensively with the union leadership. So, the union that represents many of our operators and mechanics and many of our other staff, we have a contract with the union. And so Michael's worked extensively with the union leadership to make sure that through this crazy time that none of us have ever experienced, that we've had to change things from the way we typically do business.

Pauletta:

Anything in particular Michael, that has been an effort that you're particularly proud of that you'd like to share through that effort?

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Michael Ford:

I think just the collaboration and both realizing that we need to change the way we think about how we approach the work that we do. Times are changing, we're in a new dynamic, how do we make the service work? How can we be more productive? How can we help well with social distancing while trying to bring more people on? How do we protect each other? How do we protect our public? I think all those things resonate for obviously both of us.

Michael Ford:

And we really have taken an effort to make sure that we're doing everything feasibly possible to protect our operators and also looking at the contract and looking at provisions and seeing how we can work better together. Having part-time rail operators or just doing innovative things that will give us more flexibility so we can utilize resources differently and just looking at how we schedule work and maybe some other opportunities that we'll have in the near future. So, I'm just really proud about the relationship and the things that we're doing and there's more to come. Thank you very much.

Pauletta:

Thanks Michael. If you have a question, *3 on your keypad, we'll get you in the queue because we just have about seven minutes left. Director Cook, I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to you a second because in this time, is there anything that you would like to say to your constituents of your district in how we just all come together and get through this very difficult time that is really pressing of us to do things very differently?

Shelley Cook:

Yeah. Thank you Pauletta. Actually, if I could before that, I'd add a couple of quick updates that may not have cropped up in some of the questions that I know people have asked about. And one is an effort that folks both within RTD and at Denver Transit partners have underway to try to attenuate the noise associated with the crossing bells.

Shelley Cook:

We were all focused on the train horns and from time to time, those still are impactful, but what surprised us in some ways was the impact of the bells. So RTDs staff, I'm just really proud of this part too, we have a fabrication shop and what we are experimenting with at the one private crossing along the G Line where the quiet zones are in place at Rob, is a way of covering some of the apertures through which the bells emit noise and making sure that it's still safe, that people who are nearby would still be aware and hear the crossing warning signs, but that we would have some attenuation for the many homes that, that line decoder in the second two thirds of the route.

Shelley Cook:

So, I did want to let you know that we're hoping that within the next two to four weeks according to a recent update from the folks at DTP, that we can work through a trial at Rob Street, collect some of the data that we'd probably need to present to, for example, the PUC and then hopefully be able to extend that measured to the other crossings where we have homes that are pretty close by and we're heading into the warm months now. So, that was one thing.

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Shelley Cook:

I also wanted quickly to provide an update about the in mine. Now, the in mine stations are not within District L, but one station at least at the 88th Avenue, abuts District L and so many of the residents up in that part of Adams County will be looking forward to that project. And so if it's okay, I'll provide a quick update on that as well.

Shelley Cook:

It's considered essential infrastructure and a construction project that gets to go through even with the stay at home orders. So, just quickly, it started multiple train testing and the major testing milestones will require approval from the regulatory agencies to demonstrate that the line is safe and operating as intended. RTD is currently training its own operators and we'll proceed with revenue service demonstration that's a term of our RSD of the line upon regulatory approval and a substantial completion of construction.

Shelley Cook:

Meanwhile, the RTD commuter rail operations continue with the handover process to perform handover from the contractor who built the line to us who will operate it to perform baseline inspections of the alignment. Maintenance of rail personnel are working to gain familiarization with the track, the overhead catenary and signal systems and we are on track to open this year. Thank you for allowing me that extra time.

Shelley Cook:

Now, with regard to what you're saying, I can only offer that, it is in fact up to us. I took a walk around a nearby reservoir and people are painting little rocks that say, stay strong and you can do this and this too shall pass and own the way you are and just all kinds of inspirational messages. And if you've noted people are going out of their way to be considerate of one another and to smile and to offer kind remarks on social media.

Shelley Cook:

And I think that just shows we recognize, we know what we have to do right now. That carries through to our public transportation, our operators. I always try to give them a wave as I see them riding by on the street just as a way to say, hey, thank you. And I noticed too that passengers aboard our trains and buses are likewise being extra considerate. I think we're doing that sort of thing and I'm so grateful for it and hoping we can see that continue to show we will. Thank you Pauletta.

Pauletta:

Director Cook, thank you for all those updates and the poignant words. I would also invite everyone to make sure you're following us on social media. We're having a very active time with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn to try to keep the information flowing and to bring people into a little bit of a virtual experience by posting things of locations that are assessable by RTD transit that are currently closed like museums, the zoo and other special destinations and giving people a diversion.

Pauletta:

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Also, we have a campaign called everyday heroes that is paying tribute to our frontline workers and so we invite you to follow us on social media, check our website. We keep information regularly updated and we have some interesting thought provoking stories also on the new stop, which is our online newsroom on our website and that's rtd-denver.com. Also we have a dedicated webpage to COVID-19, so that's a great resource for you also to keep track of what we have going on at RTD and how we're trying to keep you safe.

Pauletta:

We have just about come to the end of our timeframe here for this telephone town hall, I want to thank you for being on the line with us and taking time out of your evening to give us your thoughts and to listen in and let us share some information with you. I'm going to turn it over to Director Cook to give us a farewell and take us out. So Director Cook, you could go ahead and close out the night.

Shelley Cook:

Thank you Pauletta and everybody for tuning in tonight, we really appreciate your input and comments. What I would like to offer is my number and email address so that if something comes up that you didn't think about or didn't dial in, in time please get in touch with me.

Shelley Cook:

My phone number's (720) 935-9224, that's (720) 935-9224 and my email address is shelly.cook@rtd-denver.com. And that's all. I just want to say thanks too to the folks who have been helping to put these calls on, there are 15 directors and many of the same people are attending each one. So, I want to thank you Pauletta and Michael and Dan and all the other folks who have been helping as well.

Pauletta:

Thank you very much Director Cook. And once again, thank all of you and we hope you stay safe and healthy and good night.