

Regional Transportation District
District J Director Vince Buzek
April 30, 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 of what RTD is doing to address COVID-19. We also want to hear your questions, your comments, so this is about anything. This is your chance to ask us about RTD business, anything that's been on your mind. Joining me this evening is Vince Buzek, RTD Director for District J, that is your RTD district. Also, sitting in on the call to answer your questions are Michael Ford, Chief Operations Officer, and Sage Thornbrew, Service Planner and Scheduler.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So we welcome you hopefully from the comfort of your home where you are safe and healthy. We're here to listen to you folks and to answer your questions. Your opinions are important to us and we want to hear what you have to say. Now, if this is your first time on a telephone town hall, here's how it works. To ask a question, just press star three on your keypad and you'll be transferred to someone who will take down some basic information and get you in the queue. We ask you then to stay on the line, listen in, and when I call your name live, you will then be able to ask your question. We ask you to please keep it brief because we want to get to as many of you as possible tonight. It is now my pleasure to introduce RTD Director, Vince Buzek for District J, Director Buzek, thank you so much for taking time to be on this call with us tonight to talk with your constituents. Tell us a little bit about how we're dealing with this extraordinary situation of COVID-19

Director Vince Buzek:

Thanks Pauletta. And thanks everybody who is participating and listening in. And if you're listening in, you probably know where District J is, but just real briefly, I'll let you know that District J is comprised of the communities of Westminster, Northglenn, Federal Heights, western Thornton, and parts of unincorporated Adams County. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all of our lives and also on RTD. As RTD upholds its core value of safety, it's especially important during these difficult times that we focus on keeping our passengers and employees safe and healthy. RTD provides a vital service and are a lifeline to many people in the community. It is crucial that we continue operating for the public that relies upon us. We're in close contact and cooperation with state, regional, and local authorities about best practices, safe operation, and communication with the public.

Director Vince Buzek:

RTD public transportation as critical infrastructure continues to operate for essential travel. Essential travel and includes trips for groceries, to get necessary health care and medication, or to reach an essential job. Essential workers in healthcare, public safety, food production, and distribution, utilities and government operations rely on RTD daily. We need everyone's help to keep the transit system safe. Don't take unnecessary trips, please limit time spent in RTD stations to 10 minutes, and as often as possible, keep a distance of six feet between yourself and other passengers. There's a lot to cover tonight and we're here to answer your questions.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you so much. That is Director Vince Buzek, RTD Director for District J. We're so glad you're on the line with us folks. If you want to get in the queue to ask us a question or just give us a comment, please

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press star three on your keypad. Again, that's star three on your keypad, and we'll get you in the queue so that you can ask us some questions. I'm going to ask Michael Ford, who is our Chief Operations Officer for RTD to join us and tell us a little bit about what we're doing to keep our operators safe and this operation running. This has been an amazing time, Michael. So tell folks a little bit about how we're dealing with things internally.

Michael Ford:

Thank you, Pauletta. Michael Ford here. Our employees are being reminded to practice social distancing, staying home if they're not feeling well. If they're able to work from home or work remotely, we're asking them to do that as well. We're doing a lot of things around distribution of supplies, like hand sanitizer, face mask and other personal protective equipment that are available to our frontline employees. We want them to remain safe and protected. We also require all of our employees to wear a mask or some type of face covering while on duty on RTD property where social distancing is a challenge. We have enough masks, and sanitizers, and gloves for operators and for those who need other materials, they can get those from their supervisors. We make that readily available to them. And we provide communication, daily updates on what's going on with the COVID virus, and we want to make sure that everybody's informed and have the information they need to safely navigate. So those are some of the things that we're doing on a constant day to day basis. Thank you very much.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks very much, Michael. That is Michael Ford, RTD's Chief Operations Officer. One of the questions that we have been getting a lot and as we've been doing these telephone town hall meetings here over the last week, we've gotten them from many folks on the line with us, is about our suspension of fares and how long that is going to last. And I'll just go ahead and answer that right now because we have been getting that question a lot. It's on people's mind. We don't know yet how long we're going to suspend fares collection. Obviously, while they're still say at home orders and people are not out and about as much, and we're still respecting social distancing, and wanting to provide that level of protection for our bus operators, we will continue to do rear door boarding. And with that rear door boarding, we have to suspend fares because the fareboxes at the front of the vehicle as people enter through the front door.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So we aren't sure yet how long we will be suspending fares, but we will of course be putting that information out in a great way when that is going to start back up. Again, if you'd like to get in the queue to ask us a question, press star three on your keypad, and we'll come to you live soon. We're going to go first to Lindsay who is in the queue. Lindsay, go ahead and ask your question.

Lindsay:

[inaudible 00:07:17] will be doing any senior hours or at risk hours for people who are at risk or senior citizens, are there any special areas that you guys might be able to allocate just for them that less people will be transferring on the bus system?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Lindsay, thank you so much for that question. That's a great question. And Michael, do you want to talk a little bit about the way that we are serving seniors right now?

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Michael Ford:

Yes, if you're part of Access-A-Ride, you can actually have groceries delivered to you. There are identified store outlets that can help you. We don't have a specified time just for seniors to ride, but we do have paratransit services that are obviously separate from our fixed route service. And if you qualify for that, that's an opportunity there. Obviously, our frequency is down during this time. So I would continue to monitor the loads and probably pick the opportunities that may work best for your schedule, but at this time we don't have specific times where only one part of the population ride, but there are different types of ways we can get you where you go depending on your qualifications of service. And paratransit is one way that could potentially work for elderly, and senior, and disabled people.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. I'll put you back on to that, to what Michael was saying, we also continue to operate the senior shoppers service so that senior shopper service is intended for older adults. And we do operate this to approximately 50 facilities to assist seniors in getting groceries and prescriptions. So you can always go to our website at rtd-denver.com to get information or call our customer care center because our customer care agents I have a plethora of information to share with you and they're there to serve you. And the phone number for the customer care center is (303)-299-6000, (303)-299-6000. Okay, we're going to go now to Tony. Tony, go ahead.

Tony:

I was just wondering when the North train ... I know it's testing right now, but it's supposed to be a silent crossing up here where I'm at and they haven't been observing that. I'm just wondering when they're going to start observing the silent crossing.

Pauletta Tonilas:

So yeah, I'm going to actually go ahead and bring in Director Vince Buzek who has been anxiously awaiting the arrival of the N Line. He can share some information with us about the N Line. Director Buzek.

Director Vince Buzek:

Thanks Pauletta. Yeah, I'm anxious and eager. But yeah, the silent crossings, those come later. Those come after we're through all of the testing of the trains and the timing of the crossings and so forth. And I understand, I've gotten emails and calls from constituents over the last several weeks because testing is really ramping up and that's a good thing. The downside is, of course, at every crossing these trains are required now to sound their horns or at any other time they think there's a safety concern. And until we get through the testing phase and we get all the approvals from the Federal Railroad Administration and the Colorado Public Utilities Commission, we have to keep that up. Eventually, like on our other lines, all of our crossings will be silent crossings.

Director Vince Buzek:

So just hang in there, try to be patient. I'm sorry for the inconvenience that it causes the people, but it really is a necessary and required element of our testing. And the mere fact that it's happening more frequently, it's horrible for you, but really it's a good sign because we're moving further and further

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along the testing line. And I'll give you some more update on the N Line as we get a little further in the process here. Thanks Pauletta.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Director Vince Buzek for District J. And again, if you'd like to get in the queue to ask us a question, or give us a comment, or even tell us what would make you feel safer riding RTD, if you can give us those thoughts, those would be incredibly helpful to us as we look to then ramp back up and add service back as we welcome more people on our service. So even if you have a comment, folks, about what it would be for you to feel safer riding RTD, we would love to hear that as well. And you can do that by pushing star three on your keypad. Okay, we're going to go now to William. William, you're up next.

William:

Okay. Okay. Hey, how're you doing? I had two questions here. The first one was how many people do we have riding per ride on average? And the second one is how much is it costing to keep everything running right now?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Thank you very much for that William. So you want to know how many are riding now and how much is it costing. We are still moving about 120,000 trips a day. That's about a third of what we typically move on a regular weekday before, of course, COVID happened, but about 120,000 trips. And a trip is a one way trip, right? So that's how many folks were still moving across the region. Michael, do you want to weigh in and add any more information?

Michael Ford:

No. That is about right. We have different load capacities and running additional sections where they're needed, but we have a limitation of about up to 15 people on a 40 foot bus and 20 on regional and articulated. Those are thresholds that we've held to, to keep the social distancing going. In terms of the costs, I don't have a figure for you, but if you leave your name and number, we could probably get more information, roughly about 20 to 22% of our revenue comes from our farebox. But at this time, we're not collecting fares. But we can get you more detailed information if your question is about cost, is it cost per trip or cost per service hour? Just wanted to make sure I was clear.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Michael, I think William asked how much it's costing us to run the service right now, so we'll make sure, and take notes, and get back to William with that information. So thank you very much for that. All right folks. This is a live telephone town hall meeting being hosted by the Regional Transportation District with RTD Director, Vince Buzek. If you'd like to get in the queue to ask Director Buzek or any of us a question or to provide a comment, press star three on your keypad now. And we're going to go up next to Ella. Ella, you're in the queue. Go ahead.

Ella:

Hello? Are you [crosstalk 00:14:53]?

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Pauletta Tonilas:

Hello, there Ella. Yeah, you're on. Go ahead Ella.

Ella:

Okay. I have a different name. But anyway ... All right. My question is I ride RTD a lot, but obviously haven't ridden it during COVID. And I'm wondering once we get back to more of a normal situation, are people going to be required to wear masks? Because I would be very hesitant to be on a normal bus if I'm packed in as we usually are during rush hour.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, that is a great question. I was talking to Director Buzek earlier today and we were talking about this very thing because RTD does require our operators to wear a mask or a face covering. We have a face covering policy and we are strongly urging our riders to wear a face covering when they ride although that isn't a law, or a rule, or any mandate or whatever. So Director Buzek, I'll bring you in to lend some perspective to this.

Director Vince Buzek:

Thanks Pauletta. Yeah, and I understand the concern. It would be great if everybody took personal responsibility and followed the recommendations that are out there and wear a mask. But as Pauletta said, it's not a law. I mean, there's no enforceability action to that. And then the question becomes for our operators, do they now also become enforcers of a mask policy if there even were one? And if so, how do they do that? It really would be problematic and put a lot of extra burden on our operators to not only drive these buses and trains safely, but to also try to be the policy enforcers. And if someone refuses to get off a bus because of that, what do they do then? We don't have enough security personnel to enforce that as well.

Director Vince Buzek:

So unfortunately, it's a tough situation for us. We don't have a rule that requires riders to wear a mask. The City of Denver is considering something. I don't know if they're passing something yet, but yeah, it's a sticky wicket and it's a tough thing for us to have to deal with. We hope people will take personal responsibility. And when you ride, please, wear a mask. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks very much, Director Buzek. Yeah, it really is tough. And think about it, if our operators are in the front and we're asking people to board from the rear door, it would be really tough for those operators to do much about saying you can't get on. And again, we don't like to put them in those kinds of adversarial situations. So we totally get that. And we are doing all we can to urging all of our riders to wear a mask or a face covering and also to respect the social of at least six feet of space between you and other people.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Michael Ford, who is our Chief Operating Officer is on the line with us. And Michael, I will ask you to weigh in and tell us a little bit about the work that you've done with the union leadership as we've had to modify things. We have a contract with the union for many of our staff members. And its rules and

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regulations of how we have to operate, we've had to change things as this COVID situation has really changed our lives. So Michael, do you want to weigh in a little bit about how that work has gone and partnership with the union?

Michael Ford:

Yes. We've been working hand in hand with the union around this COVID events and normally a service change take several weeks to do. And we were able to modify this one that was implemented in April of this month, or I guess this month is almost over, but April 19th, and it's been about a week, going on two weeks now. But it takes a lot of work because not only are you trying to address the assignments that the drivers have to bid for, there's communications, there's payroll issues, there's a lot of IT related issues, that all have to come together so we can communicate effectively. We've also had to implement the social distancing, the rear door boarding for free fares, the separations of the cab and the front for ADA passengers to help with the social distancing. So all that took a lot of work in coordination with the union and education as well, and providing them the PPE and all the things that they need.

Michael Ford:

So this has truly been a collaboration with the union to gain some flexibility to relax or relook at certain rules and regulations, so we can make things happen much more quickly. And that's been a very good partnership. And also, they've been very instrumental in helping to cure mask and other things that have been helpful in the operations as well. So very good partnership and strong communication efforts that have gone into this as well between both sides.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Michael. That's Michael Ford, RTD's Chief Operations Officer. You can still get in the queue by pressing star three on your keypad. This is a live telephone town hall meeting being hosted by RTD Director, Vince Buzek and RTD. And we're going to go ahead to Arlene now. Arlene, your next up. Go ahead.

Arlene:

Thank you. My question is ... I have two parts. One is the regional buses obviously don't have back doors, so any procedure changed with boarding or onboarding?

Pauletta Tonilas:

That's a great question, Arlene. And yes, the exception would be our regional buses are over the road coaches that only have a front door bus. So Michael, do you want to offer some tips of what we're asking for folks who have to enter through the front?

Michael Ford:

Yeah, we tried to have the driver come off the bus and let folks come into the bus, and then the driver comes in after that. That's a very different situation given that the one door in the front, but again, practicing social distancing, having your masks and doing your part is also very, very important. But we really try to focus on the social distancing and the separation. So that's how we're trying to handle that situation at this present time.

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Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks Michael. Okay, we're going to go up next to Wallace. Wallace, you're next in the queue. So go ahead and ask your question.

Wallace:

I was wondering when you're going to start the N Route into operation because when you first started this deal, well, you were supposed to have it done by 12/17, and then start testing in 12/18 then have it up and running after your testing. And here it is 2020 and it's still not into operation. So I was wondering if you could give me a time when you're going to physically put it into operation.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, that's a great question, Wallace, and very applicable. Director Buzek can share some info about the N Line and where we're headed.

Director Vince Buzek:

Thanks Pauletta. Wallace, thanks for the question. So the startup date is, I don't know, but really I understand it's way behind schedule. And we're going on close to three years behind schedule, but a lot of things have happened in the near past here that are really important. Back in February, we had a difficult meeting with the contractor on this project because the contractor was arguably well behind schedule. Since that February meeting, our chair, Angie Rivera-Malpiede, senior leadership team were involved in the discussions with the contractor. Since that time, the contractor has been working diligently on getting their job done and getting the construction end of things done. We are now in control of the guideway, where the train runs, and are doing aggressive testing.

Director Vince Buzek:

This line will open in 2020. We don't have a specific date yet. As soon as we do, we are going to get that date out there. But be assured it's going to be in 2020. I've been hearing possibly the September timeframe, but we haven't put a fixed date to that yet. And whenever it's ready to open, we're going to open it. Typically, we try to open these lines in conjunction with our three times annual changes to bus routes and things like that. But with this line, whenever it's ready, even if it doesn't coincide with one of those traditional time changes, we're going to get that thing up and running. So believe me, I'm as eager as you are to get this thing going. And I know everybody up here on the North end wants this to happen. So we're pushing really hard. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks Director Buzek. Director Buzek has been a steadfast champion for us marching forward to get this N Line opened. There's so much that goes into these projects and each one of them is so unique and different, the characteristics of the line and the challenges that we face. And I'm going to ask Michael Ford to weigh in because Michael being the head of operations, his folks in commuter rail and our commuter rail operation, have been busy with many pieces including hiring and training our commuter rail operators. So Michael, you might just touch on some of what's involved to get us as an agency ready for opening up a new line.

Michael Ford:

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Yes. As Director Buzek said, there's been a lot of work being done in the contractors as well, have brought more resources to expedite the process. But there were some lag in the process. On the operational side, a lot of the focus has been on training, and hiring, and getting people in, and getting them all trained on various aspects of the operation. So we've been very heavily involved in recruitment, retention, and training, and getting people out and accepting portions of the alignments, and getting those things resolved where we have some issues that need to be addressed. So a lot of ... out there in the field, making sure things are sound, behind the scenes during a lot of the training, and the education, and the reinforcements of rules and regulations on how they need to operate.

Michael Ford:

And that's been a big part of our time right now. And making sure that we're in compliance, putting standard operating procedures together, compliant with FRA related issues, testing issues. So it really runs the gambit. And that's been the focus over the last several months and we're making very good progress. There's a lot going on, but I'm happy to say that we feel good about where we're at right now operationally. Thank you.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks very much, Michael. Michael Ford is the head of operations for RTD. Director Buzek, we do get a lot of questions about our Access-A-Ride service and one of the things that the RTD board members were very adamant about when we were looking to do our service change related to addressing our operator shortage before COVID-19 ever hit was making sure that we did not impact or reduce the Access-A-Ride service. And now that COVID-19 is upon us, we have had to change our Access-A-Ride service a bit, but we actually have started a certain service that many people have really gravitated to. Do you want to talk a little bit about Access-A-Ride?

Director Vince Buzek:

Yeah, absolutely, Pauletta, thanks. This is a critical service for RTD and for the constituency that it serves. So far at this point we have not made any reductions to the Access-A-Ride service. To reduce demand for staff and to better serve customers who need this service, we have moved from a five day advanced booking to a next day only booking until further notice. And we've also implemented free home grocery delivery service for all of RTD's current Access-A-Ride customers and services from King Soopers, Safeway, Community Ministry Southwest Food Bank, Senior Hub, Senior Solutions, and Adams County Food Bank. And as additional food bank and grocery store locations are made available, information will be shared on the RTD website.

Director Vince Buzek:

To get food delivery, Access-A-Ride customers can contact their local store or food pantry, and coordinate a pickup time, and relay that information to RTD. Our drivers will then be there to get the food order and bring it to our customers. Access-A-Ride customers can continue to book trips for essential purposes including to purchase groceries. And I think this food delivery service has been a big hit and has been used pretty robustly since it's been introduced. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks very much, Director Buzek. Folks, we could use some more people in the queue. So if you would like to ask us a question, give us a comment, give us your thoughts, and let us know what it is that would

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make you feel safer or make you more apt to hop on board when we get the region moving again as we try to overcome COVID-19. Please press star three on your keypad and we'll get you in the queue so that you can ask the question or give us your comments. One question that we get a lot is what are you doing to clean your system and how are you cleaning it, keeping it clean and disinfected? And we are a lot about keeping the system clean. So Michael, why don't you just tick through some of the things that we're doing on a daily basis?

Michael Ford:

Yeah, thank you very much, Pauletta. One of the thing is cleaning our vehicles. We really take a very serious approach to that, utilizing chemicals that help mitigate the virus. So we've had to purchase other types of chemicals that are cleaning solutions. And we clean up buses from top to bottom, very thorough cleaning. And we're able to deploy some other resources that haven't been needed in other areas to do even deeper cleaning. So we really try to do a good job with that from the stanchions to the roof, to the floors, to the windows, everything that we can, the driver's area as well. And obviously, we want to make sure our people are protected, so they are garnering the masks and other things like that, wipe downs, providing our operators Lysol, and wipes, and masks so they can be protected.

Michael Ford:

I think we can't stress enough the cleaning of our vehicles on the bus and rail side is really an important component to making people feel safe and to provide a safe and well run system. So we are doing extra duty on that. And then there's areas where we may have layover. And when and if we have the resources, we are deploying other folks out in the field, particularly on the rail side, to do a quick cleaning while that services out of railroad point when we have the available resources, and we're trying to do more on the bus side. But again, when those buses are coming in to be refilled, we also try to clean them again. And again, they leave a yard every morning with the highest level of cleaning possible. So again, I just want to assure the public that we want you to know that we're doing everything we can to make those buses clean and sanitary and well-suited for riding our system. Thank you, Pauletta.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you very much, Michael. Okay, we're going to go to Larry. Larry, you're up.

Larry:

(silence) be here at 6340, she was waiting for about 48 minutes. She's had me on the phone discussing how she could get the ride. I don't know. And they never did show up for her. And that's what I wanted to mention. Someone should look into that. We're at 6340 West, 38th Avenue. And that was this morning. And also another issue, has anyone determined how this virus gets into our body other than nose or mouth or has anyone ever talked about getting into your ear?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Larry, thank you for all of that. That's a lot of great question and comment. As far as getting it into the ear, I'm not really sure about that. I haven't heard that. I know what people have said is that there's really no telling how far particles can go or what have you. It's more the mouth and the nose. I don't know. Director Buzek, have you heard anything at all about that?

Director Vince Buzek:

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Pauletta, I have not, but I think it's just important that people know that we're following all the CDC and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment guidelines. So if we hear from them that that is an issue and that there's something that we can do about it, we will definitely, definitely take some kind of action. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

And Larry, I do also want to let you know if you have specific questions about Access-A-Ride or concerns that you've had, if it didn't show up or anything else related to Access-A-Ride, you can always call our customer care center at (303)-299-6000. And our agents are there to help you and answer whatever questions that you have. So that's a great resource for you. If you'd like to get in the queue, please press star three, and we'll get you in the queue. And we're going to go up next to David. David, you're next. Go ahead.

Speaker 11:

Okay. Well this is not David, but hold on one second and I will get him. Dave?

David:

Hello.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Hey there, David, how are you doing?

David:

All right.

Pauletta Tonilas:

It's your turn to ask a question.

David:

Okay, that's fair. Yeah, I'm trying to work in the yard. Hey, so now that all these buses going up and down 36, and they're literally empty, and I think that if one of the ways to this transmission is to reduce the number of people to come in contact with and with reduced ridership especially now, it would be very beneficial to have vans going up and down in certain routes rather than buses. I know that's a capital cost, but I think that it also reduces your operating costs to some degree at any rate. And this just isn't a normal situation. I wonder if there's a way to rent vans or something like that in a short term way that that reduces costs. And I guess the other question I have is, can you sell masks at cost on the bus? Because it does a couple of things. It gives people an out if they don't have one and it applies some gentle social pressure for people who wear masks. And if it's sold at cost and there's at least some incentive to buy because it's cheap. So those are my two questions.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, that's great, David. Really good questions too and very good ideas by the way. I would say with both of those, using the vans instead of buses and selling masks on the buses, it's the logistics of it that I

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think are always going to be a challenge. Director Buzek, do you first want to make some comments? And then we can pull Michael in too.

Director Vince Buzek:

Yeah, sure. So I understand you noticed that the buses on 36 are relatively empty and you know what? Unfortunately, during this pandemic time, that's what we want to see. Then we are not worrying about social distancing and getting too many people on a bus. And if you reduce the size of a vehicle to a van, now you've got an overloaded metal container in which this virus can likely spread pretty easily. So yeah, I understand the question and the comment. I think now that we're happy to have fairly empty buses when we can just for the safety of our passengers and our riders.

Director Vince Buzek:

And in terms of selling masks, great idea. You're right, some people might say, "Oh yeah, that's great, maybe I'll do this." But once again, it puts our operators in a difficult position. Right? To the extent that they're going to have to interact face to face with a co with a client that doesn't have a mask, we're just ramping up the possibility of virus spread and we don't want to do that to our operators. So I think that's what I have. I don't know, Michael, if you have any other additional comments on this.

Michael Ford:

No, I think you've covered that very well. The only thing I would add would be just we've had trouble getting masks in the past and to have a stable supply that we could sell or give out to our customers until we probably get a better source of supplies and extra supplies that might be problematic because we want to make sure we have enough for our employees for training and for the people that are cleaning the buses. But if there is an opportunity that we come upon a lot of extra masks, there may be some opportunity. But as a Director Buzek says, we do not want to put our drivers in harm's way, but maybe there's something that we can donate to our public at some future point if and when we're in a position to do that. But I appreciate the question. Thank you very much.

Sage Thornbrew:

Thanks Pauletta. I'd like to join in real quick just to kind of respond to the question about operating costs. I think we get this question outside of the COVID schedule as well. We've received it in the past and it's not the vehicle that is the biggest cost operating the route, it's the driver. So it doesn't necessarily matter so much what size of vehicle you're operating, the biggest cost is the person that you're putting behind the wheel. I know that it kind of seems as though if we had smaller vehicles on some routes that maybe had lower ridership, it might make more sense, but it just doesn't work that way.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, Sage, thank you so much for that. That is Sage Thornbrew. He is one of our schedulers and service planners. Sage, while you're there, I want to ask you to weigh in on just some of the perspectives and the thought process that goes into doing the type of service reduction that we've just had to do to reflect our serious drop in ridership because of COVID-19. Tell folks a little bit about what goes into having to make choices about that kind of a reduction.

Sage Thornbrew:

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Okay. That's a very good question. I would say that one of the biggest things is making sure that we still provide service, especially in the quarters that are highest ridership because those are the ones that are going to be servicing hospitals, especially connecting people to medical facilities, grocery stores, all sorts of stuff like that. And that's where you also get, apart from fixed route and the train planning, getting those on a schedule that makes sense with the amount of people that are going to be boarding. But that's where you can utilize resources such as Access-A-Ride to do like we're doing with the grocery delivery. So I mean, there's a lot that goes into it and the main thing is that we don't want to leave people stranded out there with absolutely no resources at a time when people need to get to medical facilities, people need to get to their food. So that's, I would say, the big issues that kind of go into it.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Great. Thank you so much for that, Sage. Sage is one of our rock star service planners and schedules schedulers. So thank you. If you'd like to get in the queue, it's not too late. Star three on your keypad will get you in the queue. And we're going to go up next to Wendy. Wendy, go ahead. Hey there, Wendy, are you on the line with us?

Wendy:

Oh yeah, I am. Can you hear me?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes ma'am. Go ahead.

Wendy:

Oh gosh, I'm sorry. I've had a lot of questions, so I thought that it was going to be a recording of my question. But one of my questions right now would be how are you handling with the homeless people population? I mean, I don't know a lot about what they're doing to keep them, but their health isn't up to par and they don't have safety, they're not going to be able to buy masks for anything. So even if you're selling a mask, they can't afford their [inaudible 00:42:04]. So how are we going to handle that? Or is there already been something put in place? I don't know how well you're working with the homeless population, but that's a huge thing with the transportation systems.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Wendy, thank you for that. And yes, we are doing several things and working with different homeless advocates just in general, not just for this COVID-19, but to try to connect to resources that could help them. Director Buzek, would you like to take the first shot at talking about the issues related to homeless riding our system?

Director Vince Buzek:

Yeah. You bet Pauletta, thanks. Yeah, we're seeing a big increase in homeless population using transit and principally as a shelter now that we've waived and suspended our fares. And as Pauletta said, that's not what we want because we want the homeless population to get the service they need and to get the help that they need. So we are working with a number of entities and agencies out there to help the homeless population get the help and service they need. It's a tough challenge for them, for us, for everybody. But we're working as hard as we can to address that. Thanks.

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Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Thank you, director. And Wendy, one other thing that I would say to address, which you've brought up is what we see in Colorado when we have snowy weather and it gets really cold during the winter months, sometimes we have homeless folks who use our system as shelter and we understand that, right? Because it's tough out there, right? When you're outside in the winter weather. And yet, what we try to do is, first, connect people with resources. Secondly, make sure that it's safe for everyone and that the system is being used as intended. And those could be tough issues sometimes. And our board members do have a lot of discussion about that. But thank you for your thoughtful question and we are doing a tremendous amount. Michael, I don't know if you want to weigh in any more about addressing the issue of homelessness.

Michael Ford:

Yeah. I think it's a societal problem that we're addressing, but we're working with community partners to help us with that. We've got some taskforce that had been assembled and again, working to get the help that folks need so they can bring about their skills and their abilities to properly navigate through all of this. So again, we're reaching out. This is not just a transportation issue, it's a societal issue and we're bringing resources to bear, opportunities, and working collaboratively with others that have more expertise in some of these areas, so we can properly help get people the support and help that they need. So we're working on that. We've been working on that and we're trying to address it as these issues continue to arise.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Thank you very much for that, Michael. Masks come up a lot. Not only tonight, have the topic of masks come up a lot, but we've heard that a lot lately. And something I'd like to share, a couple of poignant stories that are helping us in this situation where there's been such a shortage of masks is our upholstery shop at RTD has started making face coverings, cloth reusable face coverings to help fill the gap for our employees. So that's been a neat thing to see them pivot and be able to do a service like that. But then also an RTD board member, Director Buzek, one of your fellow board members took on a whole mask making project and that was quite successful. Do you want to just tell the listeners a little bit about that project?

Director Vince Buzek:

Yeah, sure, sure. Director Natalie Menten saw this issue early on and undertook to put together a group of people that made masks to give to our operators. I don't know the number that she made. I mean, probably in the millions, but I think it was a large number of masks. And you've got to hand it to her, she saw an issue because everyone was having difficulty getting these personal protective equipment, masks, and she stepped up and she got a group together, they sewed these cloth face protectors, and distributed them to operators and other personnel. And it was a great effort on her part.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, thanks Director Buzek. It really has been neat to see these heartwarming stories of people stepping up. RTD actually has had several individuals or organizations come to us and provide us with face masks or coverings. And it's just been really neat. There's a couple of the Cohen family who made 50 masks and got them to our head of procurement, and he went and picked them up and brought those in for our operators. So it's just been really very heartwarming to see how people have reached

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out to RTD. Okay. We're going to go up next to Larry. Larry, you're in the queue. Go ahead and ask your question.

Larry:

Hello. This is Larry. Am I on? Hello?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes.

Larry:

Hello?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, there. Go ahead, Larry. Yes, go ahead, Larry.

Larry:

Yes. I would like to announce that we ... I was going to before, but I got off somehow. Here at 6340 we're making masks and giving them to people who need them. All they have to do is stop by or call Highland West Community and get a free mask. Also, I would like to say what I've been doing since 1978, I discovered serendipitously that by putting hydrogen peroxide in your ear, you'll wake up the next morning as if you've never been sick from the flu? I'm not sure, but I believe I had the Coronavirus here a few days back and I went to the doctor without realizing it, and they told me that I had a temperature. So when I came home, I did notice that my face felt like it had a sunburn, and I live in my apartment all the time, so I put the peroxide in and the next day I got up, I did not have a temperature.

Larry:

So this is a suggestion to save lives. It may be possible for people to look into that to see if that is what's working. But it does work for the flu. I saved my stepfather's life back in 1982. He had both ears bubbling up like kids make a baking soda and vinegar, those volcanoes ... what they make out of that, that's how it came out of his ear. And he got up the next day waking me up singing Neil, Rugged Cross. So I believe in that and that's why I'm saying it to the public. Go ahead.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Well, Larry, thank you very much for that. Home remedies, people have been using them for many years, sometimes for centuries. So I think it's great to hear what's been successful for other people. I do think that people are trying a number of different things and obviously we always like to make sure people are going to their health professionals and inquiring about what is the right thing for them. But thank you very much for that, Larry. If you'd like to get in the queue, we still have six minutes left. It's not too late folks. You can press star three on your keypad and we'll get you in the queue. Director Buzek, why don't you tell us a little bit about what you've been hearing from your constituents, the people listening to us right now on this call, during this whole COVID crisis, have you been getting emails or phone calls from folks asking about issues with RTD?

Director Vince Buzek:

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Of course, yeah. People have been asking a number of questions from the schedule before our COVID-19 schedule went in, how that was going to impact people and so forth as well as questions about safety and how we're going to keep passengers and operators safe. And I think we've addressed a lot of those so far in our discussion tonight. So yeah, I think people are just rightfully concerned about the safety of transit and so forth. And I've given a lot of thought about what happens when we come back out of this, and how we entice people back into transit, and make sure that we help them understand that at one point it's going to be safe again and it'll be safe to ride. So yeah, it's been an interesting time for sure. Thanks.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah, thank you very much director. And we are monitoring our operation to see how things go. And as more starts to open up, and more stay at home orders soften, and people start to get out and about moving around the region, we will look to see when is the right time for us to increase service and enhance service and what is the right way for RTD to operate moving forward. What is our new normal going to be? And actually this is why right now it's the perfect time for RTD to be doing our Reimagine RTD effort, which we kicked off last September. And that is really us taking a look at how do we best optimize our resources that we have to provide service in a way that is going to best benefit the region.

Pauletta Tonilas:

And this exercise of Reimagine RTD really couldn't be coming at a better time because it's already in motion and it's a launching point for us to look at how we best structure RTD service moving forward and what is the financially feasible and sustainable way for us to do that. So I just want to remind all of you out there about that. So we are almost at the end of our time, but we're going to go to Lynn next who is in the queue. Lynn, go ahead.

Lynn:

Okay. Can you hear me?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, I can.

Lynn:

Hello? Can you hear me?

Pauletta Tonilas:

Go ahead, Lynn.

Lynn:

Okay. Okay.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yes, yes. Go ahead.

Lynn:

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Well, I just thought has there been any thought into possibly putting some plexiglass around the drivers, some sort of a removable glass that could easily get around or removed to get out of their seat? I think that would be long-term a good protection thing for drivers. And then another thing is I totally understand that service is cut because of COVID, but has it been thought into how we're going to phase back into bringing some services back? For instance, I normally take the 122X down to Civic Center. Of course, that's been taken away. So I take 120X and then I try to take zero down to Civic Center and back. But the Zero gets pretty full these days because of the whole, you'd have to have a max of the bus. So I'm a little concerned when more and more people start going back to work, how to get from Union Station to Civic Center Station to the area where I work.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Yeah. Well, thank you for that, Lynn. And real quickly, I guess I would ask Michael to address the plexiglass question. We've gotten that a few times, whether or not that's feasible. Michael.

Michael Ford:

Yes. Thank you very much. We are looking at some demos right now. Plexiglass could be one avenue or some type of other protectant. So we're doing some mock ups right now, working with our engineer and design folks right now, and some of our operators that do this kind of work. So I can tell you that that is something that we're definitely looking into, obviously for the long term as well as the short term and the new normal. And then we're also just looking at other areas where we can create some more distance and barriers to address when people do come back to work. And we want to be able to balance that with the resources that we have available. We're still doing training and hiring. So we have enough resources, so when we are able to bring services back, we can do it in a very strategic and responsible manner so we can match the resources, what we have to the needs that we have.

Michael Ford:

So that means really looking at the data, looking at the information and having the flexibility to move resources where they're needed at the time they needed. So those are some of the things that we're currently doing right now. And obviously, anticipation of other changes that may take place in the next couple of months, we're also looking at that as well. So trying to be flexible, trying to be nimble, and trying to address the new normal is something we're definitely focused in on right now and working diligently to try to come up with ways, and means, and methods to do that along with the communication of we have a safe system and it's okay to ride RTD because you will have the continuity of cleanliness and safety and everything else that comes along with good transportation.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thanks Michael. Well, folks, we have come to the end of our time for tonight's telephone town hall meeting and we want to thank you for staying on the line with us and providing us an opportunity to share information with you. And I will turn it over to Director Buzek to close out the program tonight. Director.

Director Vince Buzek:

Thanks Pauletta and I want to thank you, and Michael, and Sage for also participating in this. I want to thank everybody that listened in. And perhaps you didn't get a chance to have your question answered, please send any one of us in an email with your questions and we're always happy to do that. I also want

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to give some compliments to the board of directors. There's 15 of us that represent this gigantic RTD district and every one of us is concerned about what's going on, what's happening with this virus, how we keep people safe. So there's not any one or two individuals that are leading the charge. We're all involved and all working with our senior leadership team, and our senior leadership team has done a great job. And it's a crisis like this that really shows what people are made of. And I'll have to say that without exception, every one of our senior leadership team has stepped up, and done a great job, and ensured that you, the transit riders and our operators, are safe and try to stay as healthy as we can. That's all I have right now, Pauletta. Thanks again.

Pauletta Tonilas:

Thank you. And everybody have a great night.