

Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis *Customer and Community Meeting #1*

Date: April 21, 2022

Time: 6:00 – 7:15 PM

Location: Zoom Webinar

Participants: 44 unique participants overall

Overview

The purpose of the first community meeting was to provide a high-level overview of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis, goals and process to customers, the community at-large and interested stakeholders. In addition, the meeting was used to gather feedback from customers and community members on the current fare structure and pass programs.

The summary below reflects key points of the discussion as well as feedback and responses to questions received during the meeting. The RTD study team will incorporate the polling results as well as the questions and comments submitted during this engagement as the study continues, fare options are considered, and fare structure alternatives are developed and evaluated.

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

Andy Mountain (GBSM) welcomed the participants, introduced the presenters and shared the agenda for the meeting:

- Presenters:
 - Chris Quinn (RTD – Project Manager)
 - Carl Green Jr. (RTD – Deputy Project Manager)
 - Laura Wolfram (Four Nines Technologies – Consultant Project Manager)
- Agenda:
 - Study Overview
 - Defining Equity at RTD
 - RTD Current Fares
 - Final Questions and Answers and Comments

Participants were asked polling questions about the location of their residence, whether they plan on using RTD in the future and how satisfied they are with RTD current fares (note: the polling questions and responses to all polling questions are included in Appendix A).

RTD and Study Overview

Chris Quinn (RTD) presented the group with an overview of RTD. He introduced the current study, explaining why RTD is conducting another fare study, noting that RTD:

- Has heard feedback that fares and pass programs are too expensive and complicated.
- Is exploring ways of simplifying fares to make riding more equitable and easier to understand, while aligning fares with the value of the service.

He also explained how this approach is different than those conducted previously, explaining that this study:

- Takes a customer-centric approach.
- Is focused on promoting equity, affordability and simplicity.
- Will explore trade-offs associated with lowering fare revenue targets to accomplish broader goals related to affordability and ridership.

Carl Green Jr. (RTD) spoke to the study goals, explaining RTD's definition of the goals of the study. He explained that:

- An **equitable** fare structure supports transit-reliant/financially burdened customers and provides equitable and fair access to fares, products, and discounts regardless of race, color, national origin, income status and affiliation with other marginalized communities.
- An **affordable** fare structure aligns fares with the value of the service received.
- A **simple** fare structure makes fares easy to understand, with standardized discounts and streamlined fare payment options.

Chris Quinn provided an overview of the timeline and explained the progress to be achieved at each touchpoint.

- Spring 2022 – Gather feedback on current fare structure.
- Summer 2022 – Share and gather feedback on conceptual fare options.
- Fall 2022 – Share and identify trade-offs between alternatives.
- Early 2023 – Host formal public comment and hearing on the recommended structure.
- Spring 2023 – Request Board adoption of the new fare structure and other fare policy changes.
- TBD – Begin the implementation of the new fare structure and fare policy changes.

Participants were polled about their biggest fare-related challenges related to riding RTD and what improvements they might make to RTD fares. The study team then answered questions submitted virtually by participants (note: questions and answers are included in Appendix B; additional questions and comments not answered or addressed during the meeting due to time constraints are included in Appendix C).

Defining Equity

Carl Green Jr. (RTD) presented information on the Title VI program and how equity is being considered in relation to the fare study. He noted that:

- Equity is a core principle of the RTD mission.
- An equitable mass transit system fairly distributes the benefits and adverse effects of transit service to customers regardless of their race, color, national origin, or income status.
- The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires transit agencies to assess whether a proposed fare change would have a **“disparate impact”** on minority populations or a **“disproportionate burden”** on low-income populations.

He explained the customer-centric approach of the study, which includes:

- Collaborating with community partners.
- Conducting customer and community meetings in both English and Spanish and ensuring access to language assistance for other languages.
- Forming three Feedback Panels (Equity, Pass Program and Jurisdiction), which will use customer and community input to provide feedback to RTD on how to meet study goals, fulfill customer and community needs and balance trade-offs among all goals and needs.

Participants were polled on whether they believe financially-burdened customers should pay less for transit and whether fares should be more affordable, even if it results in less service. The study team then answered questions submitted virtually by participants.

Current State of Fare Structure and Pass Programs

Laura Wolfgram (Four Nines Technologies) presented information on the current state of the fare structure and pass programs offered, noting the complexity of the system. She explained that:

- RTD fares are split into three fare levels (Local, Regional, and Airport) – with four zones for rail trips. Fares depend on the number of fare zones traveled on rail or the type of bus service and distance traveled.
- RTD offers many fare products, discount levels and fare payment options, which have been updated most recently in 2016 and 2019.
 - Fare products include a 3-Hour Pass, MyRide Stored Value, Day Pass, Monthly Pass, 10-Ride Ticket, and Access-a-Ride Tickets, among others
 - Discount levels are provided for low-income customers (40%); seniors 65+, individuals with disabilities and Medicare recipients (50%); and youth ages 6-19 (70%).
 - Payment options include paper passes, mobile ticketing and smart cards.
- RTD provides three pass programs (EcoPass, Neighborhood EcoPass, and CollegePass), the primary purpose of which is to increase ridership. While passes appear discounted, they are priced based on the actual use by participants.

Participants were polled on whether RTD should have the same fare on bus and rail, regardless of distance, to make fares easier to understand, as well as whether RTD should have different fares for bus and rail to reflect the difference in service amenities. The study team then answered questions submitted virtually by participants.

Next Steps

Andy Mountain thanked the participants for their presence and for their continued engagement throughout the duration of the meeting. Chris Quinn provided an overview of future ways to get involved in the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis, including:

- Filling out the first online customer survey, available on the website until May 8:
<https://www.rtd-denver.com/faresstudy>
- Participating in the next public engagement, anticipated for early summer, where RTD will share conceptual fare structure options for initial feedback.
- Using the comment form on the fare study website to stay informed and to submit questions and comments.

Panelists and Attendees

RTD Staff: Bill Sirois, Carl Green Jr., Chris Quinn, Annette Hunter, Dani McLean, Christina Zazueta, Brandon Figliolino

Consultant Team: Laura Wolfgram (49T), Cyndy Pollan (49T), Andy Mountain (GBSM), Kaylie Showers (GBSM), Sid Bittman (GBSM), Virginia Garcia Pivik (GP&P)

Appendix A: Polling Results

Polling Question 1: In what county do you currently live? (28 respondents)

- Adams – 7%
- Arapahoe – 17.5%
- Boulder – 14%
- Broomfield – 7%
- Denver – 35.5%
- Jefferson – 14%
- Weld – 3.5%

Polling Question 2: In the next year, do you anticipate using RTD services? (27 respondents)

- Yes – 81.5%
- Unsure – 18.5%
- No – 0%

Polling Question 3: How satisfied are you with RTD current fares? (28 respondents)

- Satisfied – 10.5%
- Very satisfied – 3.5%
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied – 32%
- Dissatisfied – 35%
- Very dissatisfied – 17.5%

Polling Question 4: What is your biggest fare-related challenge related to riding RTD? (26 respondents)

- Fares are too expensive – 42%
- Understanding when to purchase a Local, Regional or Airport fare – 19%
- No access to location to purchase passes – 15%
- Upgrading from a Local fare or pass to a Regional or Airport fare is inconvenient – 11.5%
- On-board purchase and inspection processes are unclear – 4%
- There are too many different types of passes, making it difficult to pick – 4%
- There are too many discount levels – 4%

Polling Question 5: If you could improve RTD fares, what change would you make? (26 respondents)

- Make fares less expensive – 45%
- Provide the same discounts for seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth and low-income adults – 27%
- Expand access to the LiVE low-income fare program – 4%
- Introduce new fare passes – 4%
- More locations to purchase fares or add value – 4%
- More ways to pay my fare – 4%
- Offer the same fare for all bus and rail services – 4%
- Replace zones on rail with station-to-station fares – 4%
- Other – 4%

Polling Question 6: Do you believe that financially-burdened customers should pay less for transit fares than higher income customers? (28 respondents)

- Strongly agree – 64%
- Agree – 18%
- Neither agree nor disagree – 14%
- Disagree – 3.5%
- Strongly disagree - 0%

Polling Question 7: Do you believe that RTD fares should be more affordable, even if it results in less service? (31 respondents)

- Strongly agree – 9%
- Agree – 22.5%
- Neither agree nor disagree – 22.5%
- Disagree – 32%
- Strongly disagree - 13%

Polling Question 8: Do you believe to make fares easier to understand that RTD should have the same fare for all bus and rail services, regardless of how far you travel? (30 respondents)

- Strongly agree – 20%
- Agree – 26%
- Neither agree nor disagree – 33%
- Disagree – 16%
- Strongly disagree – 3%

Polling Question 9: Do you believe to reflect a difference in service amenities, RTD should have a different fare for bus than for rail services? (28 respondents)

- Strongly agree – 7%
- Agree – 14%
- Neither agree nor disagree – 25%
- Disagree – 43%
- Strongly disagree – 11%

Appendix B: Question and Answers and Customer Feedback

The following includes questions asked by participants in the question/answer chat and answered verbally or in writing during the meeting. The questions and answers have been grouped by theme:

Revenue and Funding Sources

Q: Using the \$53 million in federal grant money that was recently provided, what are RTD's top priorities in addressing rider concerns shared during the meeting?

A: The RTD Board is responsible for making the decision regarding how the money will be spent. In terms of needs, RTD is in the process of assessing its needs for the upcoming six-year budget cycle. One of the biggest challenges RTD has attempted to address is related to operator salaries, which were recently increased.

Q: What are the current RTD sources of revenue other than fares?

A: RTD's primary source of revenue is sales tax. In the past, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, fares accounted for 15 to 20% of the operating budget, although that has since decreased. Other sources are grants and other miscellaneous sources such as advertising.

Equity

C: My main concern is equity – which begs affordability. We owe the low-income community every possible opportunity to move up.

A: RTD strongly believes in advancing equity. RTD does provide a low-income fare program, offering discount passes for customers at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. RTD may examine refining that discount program, as well as potentially lowering fares.

Q: Does equity include the unhoused?

A: The primary focus of the study is focused on Title VI protected populations (race, color, national origin, income status). However, the study will also focus on other marginalized communities – including individuals experiencing houselessness.

Fare Structure and Policy Considerations

Q: Is RTD considering eliminating fares completely?

A: RTD is looking at other systems that may have implemented fare free policies, although a system-wide fare-free policy is not expected to be part of this study. RTD may consider having fare free customer segments (e.g., Youth) as well as examine other ways to address affordability without moving to a free fare system.

Q: Will this study look at fare-capping or pass-earning schemes?

A: RTD is in the process of implementing a new fare collection system, which will leverage the current mobile ticketing platform and will include fare capping. Customers will be able to use the mobile app or a new smart card. This is set to be implemented in summer/fall 2022.

Q: Would RTD consider a discount on the annual pass?

A: In the past RTD offered an annual pass (subscription for 12 monthly passes), but that was discontinued as part of the Fare Structure change in 2019. At this time, RTD is open to looking at this option.

Q: Are there any plans to raise the upper income limit of the LiVE program to better match the cost of living in the Denver metro area?

A: Different transit agencies define low-income in different ways. RTD will be examining the LiVE program income levels as part of the study.

Q: Are there plans to add annual/monthly/weekly passes to the MyRide card?

A: There are plans to offer daily and monthly fare capping independent of this study as part of RTD's new account-based ticketing system that is set to be implemented in summer/fall 2022. Customers will be able to use mobile barcodes on the RTD Mobile Tickets app or a new MyRide card to pay their fare with stored value and earn Day Passes and Monthly Passes as they go. Other passes may be considered as part of this study.

Q: Has RTD considered a card for all youth under 18?

A: This may be considered as part of this study.

Q: Has the idea of family pricing been considered?

A: This is something that RTD will be considering as part of this study.

Q: Can RTD consolidate to a single discount level?

A: This is something that RTD will be considering as part of this study.

Q: Has there been any thought given to making bus and rail fares the same? What about paratransit?

A: RTD is examining this as part of the study – whether the cost of rail, regional bus and local bus should all be the same, or whether customers should continue to pay more to travel longer distances. For paratransit fares, RTD follows federal guidelines regarding the maximum fare for paratransit services.

Q: Currently, monthly passes are calendar-based – it doesn't make sense to buy one unless it's the start of the month. Are there plans to make them so they expire 30 days after purchase? Or to prorate them for the unused portion of the month?

A: A rolling monthly pass may be more challenging for bus operators who visually assess passes – particularly because RTD uses paper passes. RTD will also be implementing fare capping as part of the new fare collection system, which may cause confusion if combined with this rolling system. RTD will consider whether a rolling pass option should be explored in combination with the new fare collection system.

Q: If a fare structure differentiated between service amenities, how would it assess the regional buses that are more comfortable than rail or the ability to avoid having to transfer?

A: Those are the types of amenities and advantages RTD may examine in this study – asking how to evaluate the price of a premium service compared to other services.

Q: Is RTD considering tap-on/tap-off fare collection so passengers do not need to figure out the number of zones they are traveling through?

A: The technology RTD is implementing currently does not allow for this type of system. Introducing tap-on/tap-off would require additional technology investment. This study may consider alternatives to RTD's current zoned fare structure for rail.

Q: For higher education, is there an appetite to combine employee and student passes?

A: Those are two different travel markets. There may be challenges in combining these into one, but RTD would need to explore this further.

Q: Will there be a fare reduction for college students?

A: RTD does offer the CollegePass, although not every college in the Denver metro area participates. As part of the program, RTD has convened a Pass Program Feedback Panel, which includes colleges that are currently participating as well as those that are not, to better understand how to expand the program and/or better serve this customer segment.

Fare Payment Methods

Q: Do paper passes expire? Can customers still use 2021 passes?

A: Customers that possess 2020 and 2021 10-Ride and Access-a-Ride Ticket Books may use them through 2023. However, Day Passes expire based on the date stamp and cannot be used for future dates.

Q: Will the RTD MyRide Card be discontinued? If so, is there an estimated date?

A: RTD is implementing a new fare collection system (also known as account-based ticketing). Current MyRide Cards will not work on the new system. Customers will need to obtain new MyRide Cards for this system starting this summer/fall. Alternatively, they will be able to use the new system using with a barcode on the RTD Mobile Tickets app. The MyRide branding will be transitioned to the new account-based ticketing system.

Q: Is getting rid of paper passes, especially for monthly passes, an option?

A: Yes, that's under consideration.

Miscellaneous

Q: What is the new name of the Call-n-Ride? Is it open to anyone?

A: The new name is FlexRide and the service is available to all on a first-come, first-served basis. Call our Customer Care team at 303.299.6000, option 2, to reserve your ride.

Appendix C: Additional Questions and Comments

The following questions and comments were submitted to the study team through the Zoom webinar platform but were not answered or addressed due to time constraints. The questions and comments have been grouped by theme:

Safety and Security

Q: What are you doing about safety?

C: I would pay for safety versus lower fares.

Q: What is the security budget?

C: Please consider taking the security budget and applying it to eliminating fares.

Q: Where does RTD fall on the removal of unhoused from the Union Station terminal?

Fare Revenue, Funding Sources and Expenses

Q: What percentage of expenses go towards collecting fares?

Q: How are fares a significant portion of revenue if they are less than 10%?

Q: Any consideration for changing to a revenue source like property taxes?

Q: Instead of reducing service based on reducing fares, what other revenue sources can be tapped?

Fare Payment Methods

Q: What about a QR code to pay for fares?

Q: Why do day passes that are purchased on the mobile app expire about 6 weeks after the date of purchase?

Q: What's the rationale for paper tickets being valid for multiple years, but mobile tickets expiring after 45 days?

Fare Structure

Q: Would you sell an all-encompassing pass for every destination?

C: Youth and low-income [discounts] should be the same.

C: Bus and rail should be priced differently.

C: Free transit for kids and free transit for median income and below would be good. Los Angeles has a model to copy.

C: Multiple months of fare free need to be offered to really get more people to shift modes. More support is needed from CDOT. Also partnerships are needed with homeless and service organizations.

C: Why not reduce fares across the board to encourage ridership? \$5+ is too much as well as \$10 to the airport. National averages are closer to \$2.50 and \$5. Cut RTD fares in half and get more riders as a result.

Q: Could you please make available for financially burdened passengers an option for traveling to the mountain areas?