

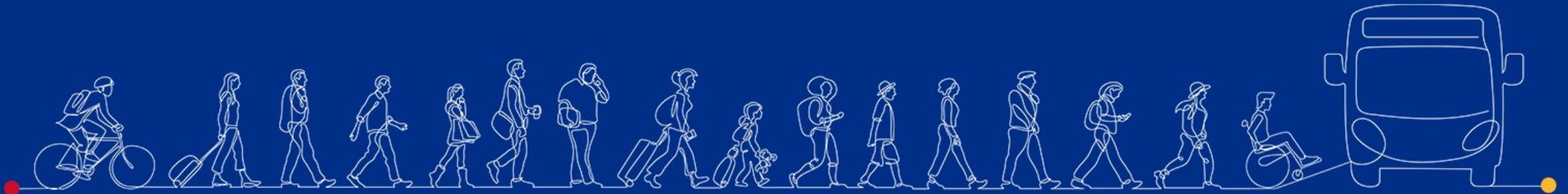
RTD

FARE

STUDY



RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

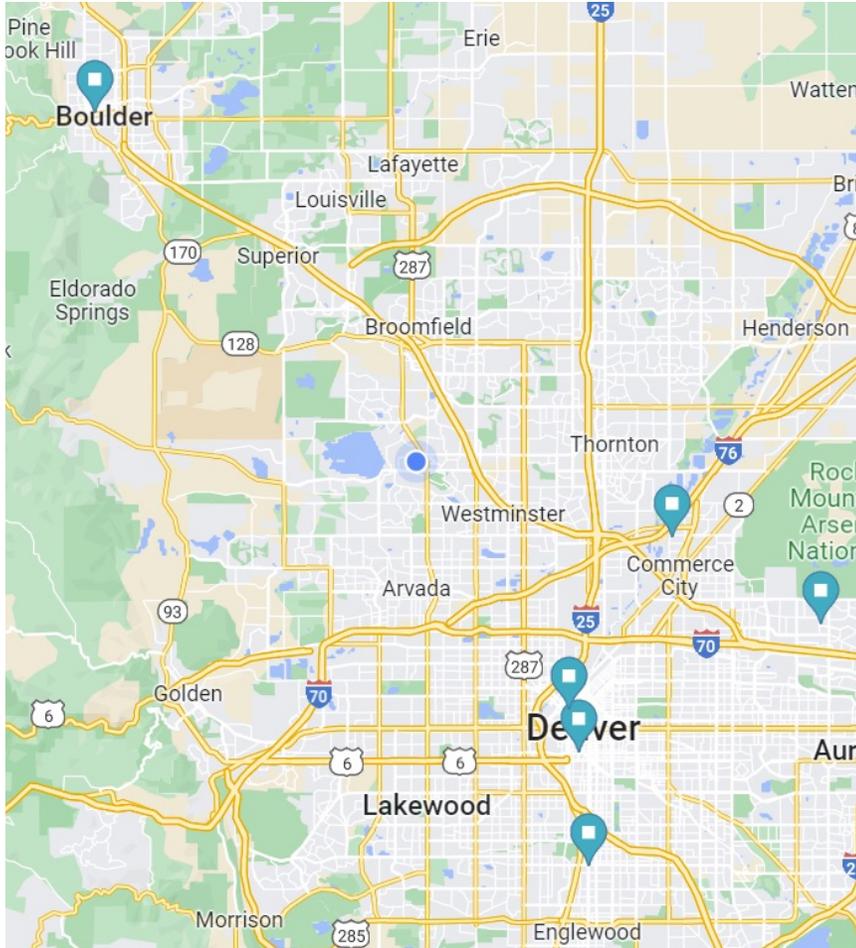




Focus Group Feedback

Themes and Insights from May 2022 Focus Groups Led by Community Partners

Focus Group Overview



- 6 focus groups were conducted by community-based organizations that have relationships and trust with community members.
 - Focus groups were held in English and in Spanish, in person and virtually, from May 9 – May 19.
- Community partners included:
 - Focus ReEntry
 - Cultivando
 - Athletics and Beyond
 - Denver Streets Partnership
 - CREA Results
 - Una Mano Una Esperanza

Focus Groups Overview

- 101 total participants participated in the focus groups, including:
 - 70 current customers
 - 17 previous customers
 - 14 prospective customers
- Participants ranged in age from high school students through senior citizens and included individuals who indicated that they:
 - Have limited incomes,
 - Are experiencing or have experienced homelessness,
 - Have a physical or cognitive disability, or
 - Speak a primary language other than English.

Fare Study Themes

Feedback focused on Equity, Affordability, and Simplicity

Systemwide Fare Study Goals



Equity

- Support transit reliant/financially burdened customers
- Provide equitable and fair access to fares, products, and discounts regardless of race, color, national origin, income status, and for other marginalized communities



Affordability

- Align fares with the value of the service received



Simplicity

- Make fares easy to understand, with standardized discounts and streamlined fare payment options

Equity

- One customer described a vision of equity for RTD as **“Everyone can afford public transportation no matter their income.”**
- Others indicated that cost should not be a barrier to individuals who rely on transit to get to critical services such as healthcare.
- Customers expressed that despite many increasing expenses and tradeoffs individuals and families must make, **“no one should have to choose between transportation and food.”**

Equity

- Across the focus groups there was nearly universal support for discounted or free fares for:
 - Individuals with limited incomes
 - Families
 - Students (including both children and youth under 18 and post-secondary students)
- There was also widespread support for discounted or free fares for:
 - Individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities as well as their caregivers
 - Individuals with mobility challenges
 - Senior citizens
 - Individuals who are homeless
- There was some sentiment across multiple focus groups that individuals who ride RTD more frequently should pay less (per trip) than those who ride RTD sporadically.

Equity

- Beyond providing discounts or free fares, participants suggested that:
 - The process for qualifying for discounts should be simplified. Customers indicated that the process to prove that one qualifies for the discount is too long and complicated. Proof of eligibility felt like a barrier for both the elderly and those who qualify for the LiVE program.
 - There should be multiple ways to sign up for the discount, particularly ones that don't require a computer or mobile phone to access. Ideally customers would be able to qualify for the discount at the station.

Equity

- In order to serve those who most need access to transportation, participants suggested that:
 - Individuals who are homeless should be permitted free access to trains and buses, especially in inclement weather.
 - ▶ Note: Those who have experienced homelessness expressed a perception that RTD keeps fares high to prevent them from riding. Those who have not experienced homelessness expressed care, concern, and empathy for those who are experiencing it as well as gratitude when they witnessed drivers paying for an individual's fare if they could not afford it.
 - RTD should work with organizations to provide free passes or EcoPasses to those who need it.

Equity

- For accessibility, participants suggested that:
 - There should be easier access to programs like Access-a-Ride. It should be easier to sign up and arrange a ride, and the rides should be free.
 - Accessibility accommodations (like those of Access-a-Ride) should be standard on traditional RTD modes of transit. Participants indicated that those accommodations would support everyone, not just those with physical disabilities. Customers expressed a concern that wheelchair access on buses is unsafe.

Simplicity

- One customer summed up their vision for simplicity this way: **“I know how much I am going to pay for where I am going to travel.”** Others envisioned **“a navigable system for all riders.”**
- Many customers indicated that they have been required to pay more to get to their destination than they had originally planned because they do not understand the fare structure. This frequently happened when customers transferred from a local to a regional line on a 3-hour pass.
- Most participants indicated that they did not understand when a fare was local vs. regional. Many suggested removing the regional tier altogether.

Simplicity

- The complicated fare structure was identified as a barrier to entry for both new and existing customers.
 - Many existing customers indicated that they only traveled to places they previously have traveled to because they know how to get there.
 - When needing to travel to new destinations, customers relied on friends, coworkers, neighbors, or family members for support in navigating.
- Customers indicated that there are “too many different passes” and some just use the \$6 day pass because it is the only one they understand.
- Some participants indicated that RTD is likely losing potential funding because purchasing the right pass is on the “honor system” and yet many customers do not understand the fare structure to select the correct one.

Simplicity

- There is a request by customers to have:
 - A simpler fare structure (many customers requested a single, flat fee)
 - Simple, straightforward language to explain the structure
 - More information at bus stops about 1) how to use the bus, 2) fares, discounts, and routes, and 3) bus times
 - ▶ This information should be in multiple languages, particularly Spanish, and customers need to be able to access this information without the use of a mobile phone.
- Many requested having a contact available to explain fares and discounts one-on-one.
 - One customer described using the customer phone number and receiving helpful service in Spanish to identify the route they needed to take to get to their destination.
 - Multiple types of customers requested that drivers be able and willing to explain the fares, including being able to speak Spanish as well as respecting those customers who are elderly or homeless.

Affordability

- Local fares were almost universally described as too expensive. There was acknowledgment that some regional fares seemed priced appropriately because of the distance traveled.
- When customers offered specific prices they perceived to be affordable, many suggested prices that are half of what they currently are (for example, \$3 for a day pass rather than \$6). Suggestions also include a \$1 flat fee per trip or a \$4 round trip.
- Many indicated that 3 hours for a pass was often not sufficient, which requires purchasing multiple passes in a day.
- One focus group raised the idea of *fare capping*, ensuring that a customer who pays separately for each individual journey does not pay more than someone who pays in advance for a longer pass. Fare capping would be particularly beneficial for those who have unpredictable or inconsistent transit needs and more equitable for customers who cannot afford to purchase a pack or pass upfront.

Affordability

- The perceived affordability of RTD services is often relative to one's situation.
 - Using RTD services to travel to the airport from downtown is perceived as a good rate compared to other options.
 - Prices feel more expensive for those who regularly use RTD vs. those who ride RTD sporadically.
 - Prices feel affordable for single travelers, but for those who are traveling with multiple riders (especially families), the cost adds up quickly.
 - Prices feel expensive for those who work hourly rates, particularly at or just above the minimum wage.
 - Those with access to cars compare the price of driving/parking to the expense of using RTD services (especially if they are traveling with multiple people) and include in that "price" the cost of their time. Often the price of RTD (when inclusive of time and other factors) exceeds the cost of driving for customers with cars.
 - The cost of the ride often includes "dual expenses" because of the limited number of bus stops at either the point of departure or destination. When a trip requires a rideshare or other mode of transportation to complete the trip in addition to the bus or train, the total cost is less affordable.
- Customers indicated that taking RTD had to be "worth it" given the price as well as other factors such as reliability, travel time, access to services, and routes, which factor into the perceived value of the service.

Reliability

- The reliability of transit was a concern for many customers, particularly those who are dependent upon the system to get to their destinations on time.
 - Participants indicated that buses are frequently late or canceled unexpectedly. Customers could be supported by having a live, accurate display of when the next bus will arrive at stops.
 - For customers, buses showing up and being on time is a matter of respect.
 - The frequency of buses was important for reliability. This was particularly true if a bus was full and they must wait 30 more minutes for the next bus. Participants suggested buses arrive every 5 – 15 minutes, particularly during peak travel times.
 - Customers suggested ways to make buses more efficient, including shorter stop times, pay before boarding, all-door boarding, and dedicated lanes for buses to avoid traffic.

Travel Time

- Travel time not only impacts customers' decisions to use RTD services, but also became an issue of equity with the extra "cost" of time that is paid by those who are transit reliant.
 - Multiple participants described using RTD services as "a journey" with multiple transfers, long wait times (particularly during transfers), and no bus stop near their point of departure or destination.
 - Many participants indicated that destinations that would take 15 minutes to travel to by car require 1.5 – 2 hour commutes on RTD. Those who can drive opt to do so, but those who do not have the means to drive indicate that the "schedule is demanding."
 - One participant said, "**Having a car is not a luxury but a necessity to reach where you need to go on time.**" Others indicated that they had to learn to drive or purchase a car because RTD services could not serve their transportation needs.
 - Some indicated that while other means of getting from point A to point B are more efficient (including walking), they take RTD because it is safer, naming that "**I sacrifice my time for my safety.**"
 - One future-focused customer explained, "**The system I imagine is a system that saves time.**" Multiple customers suggested having more synchronized schedules and more frequent buses to reduce wait times during transfers. Some participants indicated *a willingness to pay more for sequenced, high-speed travel that reduces travel times.*

Access and Routes

- Participants indicated that the convenience of using RTD services is dependent upon where you live.
 - In Denver, there is perceived inequities in access based on the neighborhood you live in.
 - Participants expressed appreciation for being able to get “anywhere in Boulder” on the bus.
 - There is a desire for more accessibility to buses in rural areas.
- Participants expressed a desire for expanded routes and destinations with a vision for “greater connectivity – public transport that reaches more places.”
 - There is an interest in more routes that travel east to west, with specific call-outs for a G line extension to Golden and being able to access the foothills. There were also requests to expand northern routes by extending the B line to Boulder.
 - Customers like the frequency, convenience, and reliability of the Mall Ride and desire an expanded free shuttle system that connects Five Points and the Auraria Campus to Union Station. There is a desire for more consistent service from Union Station to major downtown destinations such as Denver Health and Denver Public Market.
 - One customer suggested a circular or radial system so more destinations can be accessed quickly.

General Feedback

- Participants also envisioned an ideal RTD that included:
 - Clean, quiet, comfortable, and safe vehicles that make customers feel that they are traveling with dignity
 - Bus stops with shade and shelter to protect from inclement weather (rain, snow, heat) and ample seating
 - Customer service-driven drivers who are polite, patient, respectful, bilingual, trained in diversity/inclusion, and understand how to help with mobility needs
 - Smaller vehicles that run more regularly, save fuel, and reduce cost and pollution, particularly serving localities and times with less frequent demand

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