



RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

Equity Feedback Panel Meeting

May 11, 2022

Meeting Summary

Meeting Objectives:

- Approve the Feedback Panel Charter
 - Build mutual understanding of the Study purpose and goals
 - Provide feedback using customer and community feedback on the current fare structure
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RTD General Manager Welcome

Debra Johnson, RTD General Manager and CEO welcomed Feedback Panel members to the meeting.

Feedback Panel Charter

Pass Program Feedback Panel members reviewed and approved the draft Feedback Panel Charter as drafted.

Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

Carl Green, RTD Deputy Project Manager and Transit Equity Manager, provided an overview of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis purpose, goals, customer engagement and schedule. Chris also provided an overview of the current fare structure and discount levels.

Questions and Answers

- *Question:* How will the paratransit fares factor into the Study?
Answer: Impacts on paratransit fares on fare structure and/or discounts will be considered and factored into the final decision.

- *Question:* How will greenhouse gas emissions factor into the Study?
Answer: This Study will not be looking at greenhouse gas emissions. There are other efforts addressing this. There is a bill going through the Colorado legislature that would make fares free in the peak ozone pollution month (August) to help address air quality and ozone issues [SB22-180, passed May 11]. RTD is also considering greenhouse gas emissions through their short- and long-term planning processes (Reimagine project). Transit and greenhouse gasses is a complex issue. Transit does play a role but there is a question of how big of a role. Transit can help but a bigger impact is behavior change, which is why RTD is looking at this with the State.

Input on the Current Fare Structure

Laura Wolfgram, Four Nines Technologies, provided a summary of customer input on the current fare structure from the customer and community meetings (April 21 in English and April 28 in Spanish).

Informal Poll

Members took an informal poll on their thoughts on the biggest strengths and challenges with the current fare structure and possible improvements. The poll also asked about ridership and how to make fares less expensive. See Appendix B for complete results for all six questions.

Key results, from ten respondents, for a sample of the questions asked:

- The biggest challenge with the current fare system was there are too many different types of passes (40%), and the second biggest challenge was fares are too expensive (30%).
- The most supported improvement would be to make fares less expensive (40%); remaining respondents spread support over several options.
- The most supported option to make fares less expensive was to eliminate all fares (40%), with remaining support spread over several other options.
- To convince people to ride RTD, many supported more frequent bus or trains, or to have them run later in the day (40%). The second most supported option was to lower cost for fares and passes (30%)

Discussion Questions

- **What are the elements of the current fare structure that work well? [and What are the challenges?]**
 - The discounts are good.
 - MyRide Card is simple and convenient to use; a customer doesn't need technology once funds are loaded.
 - Removing transfer restrictions and transition to 3-Hour Pass is an improvement.

- The airport A line is undervalued. Before the rail line existed the bus to the airport was \$12. This line pulls cars off the road, decreasing pollution.
- Low-income discounts are good.
- Youth fares are good.
- The EcoPass works on all modes, making it simple to use.
- The flexibility of the Day Pass is good.
- Challenges
 - Confusion about:
 - Local, Regional, and Regional-with-Airport fare levels.
 - All the fare types and variability of how the different fare types and discounts can be used. People may end up wasting time getting a discount type they cannot use. For example, a customer may spend time applying for a LiVE discount, and then may not be able to use it because they can only pay cash.
 - Zones and transfers: For example, if a customer takes the W line from downtown to the community college, that is a 2-zone Local fare, but if the customer gets back on the train, within their Local 3-Hour Pass time window, to go one more stop to the Jefferson County building they would have to upgrade their pass to a Regional 3-Hour Pass.
 - Multiple discounts with different applications and ways to access. People don't know which discount is best for them – a Special Discount Card or LiVE.
 - People do not know about all the opportunities available for discounts and fares.
 - It takes too much time to apply for discounts. People with low incomes tend to be forced to spend more time waiting in lines and complete application processes, spending more personal time in line than the savings acquired from the discount itself.
 - The qualification process for the LiVE program is challenging and people do not know how to use it, or do not have the technology to use it [since limited to mobile ticketing and MyRide smart card].
 - The Airport fare is too expensive for many airport employees and discourages people from applying for jobs at the airport.
 - A lack of knowledge about how to purchase fares and/or ride the system, and many people don't know about passes and discounts available.
 - It is difficult to find the kiosk to load a MyRide Card [unable to load funds at ticket vending machines/payment kiosks at rail stations].
 - Airport workers have to pay the expensive Airport fare every day.
 - Students (K-12) do not know about passes and discounts available.

- **What are fare structure-related unmet needs for marginalized groups? What are the barriers/preventing those from historically marginalized groups from riding?**
 - No fare capping is an unmet need.
 - Pass structure is intimidating to navigate. This is particularly true on rail when transit security officers will be on the train and a customer is not sure they bought the right fare due to the fare complexity.
 - Lack of multilingual communication. Signs and messages are only in English and possibly Spanish, and many bus operators are not multi-lingual. There are a lot of immigrants that speak many other languages than English and Spanish.
 - Lack of digital skills and/or access. Technology access and knowledge are needed to sign up and/or use discounts. Some don't have the technology while some may have a smartphone but may or may not be banked, have the right data usage plan, or have a place to charge a phone. They may also have an older phone that does not keep a charge for very long.
 - The Airport fare is too expensive for people working at the airport, and there is no discount for airport employees. Airport employers can't find employees willing to make the long and expensive commute. Could airport employers pay for transit as a benefit for their employees?
 - LiVE users are not able to pay cash for fares.
 - Lack of clarity about where at the station to get your pass validated or purchase a ticket, which can be intimidating.
 - Stations in loud areas are difficult for non-visual customers, they cannot hear the train arriving.
 - Recorded audio messages in transit stations are not understandable, which discourages non-visual customers from using certain stations.
 - Not all customers know how to read and write. When those who cannot read call the customer care number, the operator refers them to using a computer/smartphone. There needs to be more sympathy from customer care.
 - Geographic accessibility to transit, some routes have been eliminated, and/or there are transit deserts.
 - The extra steps and complexity of the process to get discounts, and discounts are more apt to be used by/for marginalized groups.

- **What is one element you would change to have the fare structure better meet each Study goal – more equitable?**
 - Increase the youth age, possibly up to 26 years old. A young person is less likely to be able to afford bus fare when they are just starting to live independently. This is especially true of LGBTQ people.
 - Set eligibility for the LiVE program on Colorado living costs instead of the Federal

- Poverty Level (FPL); 185% of the FPL is not a living income in metro Denver.
 - Offer free fares for individuals with no income. Concern about individuals reselling 10-Ride Tickets they get from organizations.
 - Offer free fares for homeless with shelter access cards with QR codes to be used for validation on the bus.
 - Offer free fares for youth, low income, seniors, and people with disabilities.
 - Increase the discount level for low-income to 70 or 80%. Many low-income customers have families buying multiple fares.
 - Provide a unified, single discount level for those eligible seniors, youth, LiVe, and people with disabilities; remove a layer of complication.
 - Consider that fare changes impact the financial ability of an organization to purchase fares.
 - Reduce the Airport fare for regular airport employees, let the travelers who can afford travel therefore afford to pay, pay the full fare.
 - Offer a family fare option. [As of May 2022, up to three children ages 5 and younger can ride free with a fare-paying adult.]
 - Improve access to low income passes.
 - Remove the enrollment criteria for the LiVe program (e.g., PEAK system) as it is a barrier to entry. Trust that those who ask for a low-income discount are telling the truth; any fraud is likely less impactful than the increased use by those who honestly receive the discount.
 - Institute fare capping.
 - Broaden who qualifies for discounts to include pollution-impacted communities. Equity should account for burdens of place as well. There are tools for identifying impacted communities.
 - Provide more communication in multiple languages.
 - Partner with cultural leaders to get the word out about discounts and passes, and how to purchase and use the system to their communities.
 - Promote what Equity means to RTD on its website.
 - Do not equate disability with the ability to pay.
- **What is one element you would change to have the fare structure better meet each Study goal – more affordable?**
 - Offer a family fare option.
 - Offer a Weekly Pass.
 - Offer free fares to the airport temporarily, for a year, to increase ridership and change behavior.
 - Lower the Day Pass fare to increase its use.
 - Raise the cost of the airport line and provide a bigger discount for regular riders. Travelers, who can afford it, should pay more than regular commuters to the

airport.

- Limit transit payments to no more than 15% of a household's income.
- Consider other funding options and decreasing operational costs.
- Consider the impact on Access-a-Ride fares which are almost double the fixed-route fares. If one can't afford a regular fare, how can someone afford the Access-A-Ride fare?
- Be aware that convenience is a major factor when determining whether to use transit, not just fares. The visually impaired consider time (transit takes longer), whether transfer is required, and whether they need to navigate unfamiliar territory when deciding whether to take transit.

- **What is one element you would change to have the fare structure better meet each Study goal – simpler?**

- Make MyRide cards more accessible, for example have ticket vending machines/payment kiosks to reload them at stations. It is difficult to obtain and reload the card.
- Reduce the number of zones from three to two and expand the Local zone.
- Institute one fare type for both bus and rail based on distance.
- Put ticket vending machines/payment kiosks closer to where a customer stands and waits for the train.
- Offer a flat fare for the entire system, a customer shouldn't have to study a spreadsheet to find the correct fare.
- Offer flat fare for both bus and rail to address perception of 'elitism' of rail.
- Unify fare payment options across all fare products, discounts, and fare media. For example, LiVE customers should be able to pay with cash.
- Simplify LiVE application and payment process. The customer needs to apply and submit a photo, then wait to get LiVE photo ID, then carry two cards, and the customer can't pay cash or buy 10-Ride Tickets. RTD needs to look at the program holistically and those who have to jump through hoops.
- Improve communications and improve marketing/education on all of the different opportunities that RTD provides.
- Partner with cultural leaders to transfer knowledge. Some people just need a little extra help with someone explaining how to use transit and pay their fare.

- **Knowing there will be trade-off choices, which is your priority goal for fare structure improvements – equity, affordability, simplicity? And why?**

- Affordability and simplicity. These are the most common challenges and complexity is the biggest deterrent.
- Simplicity
 - Impacts equity.

- Reduces barriers (complexity is a deterrent to using transit).
 - A simple system would be more accessible for all, and more would use it.
 - Simplicity can be addressed through more communication and support.
 - Value. The value of the service, not just the dollar price.
 - Whether the system goes where one needs and when one needs it is as important as price.
 - If a customer receives more value, they are willing to pay more.
 - Equity
 - It is a foundational element of democracy, and transit is a part of equity.
 - Affordability
 - Affordability leads to equity.
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Appendix A: Attendees

Feedback Panel

1. Adams County, Diversity and Inclusion Administrator, Dennis Swain
2. Athletics and Beyond, Nancy Jackson
3. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Maia Whitaker
4. Colorado Cross Disability Coalition, Jamie Lewis
5. CREA Results, Fernando Pineda-Reyes
6. CWEE, Kiara Wright
7. CU Boulder Food Service Retiree, Aljoana Gilmore
8. Cultivando, Rocio Franco
9. Denver Asian American Pacific Island (DAAIPC), Riyaz (Robert) Rigonan
10. Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council (DRMAC), Coleen Samuels
11. Denver Streets Partnership, Molly McKinley
12. Focus Reentry, Molly Bowers
13. Mobility for All, Angel Bond
14. National Federation of the Blind of Colorado, Curtis Chong
15. Northeast Transportation Connections, Nick Glenn
16. One Colorado, Marv Allen
17. Pedestrian Dignity, Justin Bai
18. St. Francis Center, Greyden Charlesworth
19. Una Mano Una Esperanza, Rosa Marie Vergil Velazquez
20. RTD, Carl Green Jr. - Deputy Project Manager and Transit Equity Manager
21. RTD, Chris Quinn, Project Manager, Planning
22. RTD, Annette Hunter, Transit Equity Specialist

Others or Observers

1. Northeast Transportation Connections, Karly Andrus

Project Team

1. RTD, Debra Johnson - General Manager
2. RTD, Bill Sirois - Senior Advisor, Transit Oriented Communities
3. RTD, Monika Treipl-Harnke - Senior Manager, Revenue
4. RTD Christina Zazueta – Manager, Community Engagement
5. RTD, Dani McLean - Transit Equity Specialist
6. Four Nines Technologies, Laura Wolfgram
7. Four Nines Technologies, Christina Winberry
8. JSE Associates, Jody Erikson (Facilitator)

Appendix B: Informal Poll Results

There were 19 respondents for poll question #1, and due to technical difficulties, 10 respondents for poll questions #2-#6. Results are shown in order of support.

1. What do you like about RTD fares? Please pick your top choice:
 - 37% - I do not like the current RTD Fares
 - 21% - Discount fares for seniors, persons with disabilities, and youth
 - 16% - Low-income fare through the RTD LiVE Program
 - 11% - 3-hour pass provides flexibility
 - 5% - Easy to use day pass
 - 5% - The Regional and Airport fares are appropriate for the value of service
 - 5% - Using EcoPass/NECO Neighborhood Ecopass/College Pass to ride
 - 0% - RTD fares provide good value for money
 - 0% - RTD fares are easy to understand
 - 0% - Different passes available for my travel needs

2. What is the biggest fare-related challenge with riding RTD? Please pick your top choice:
 - 40% - There are too many different types of passes, making it difficult to pick
 - 30% - Fares are too expensive
 - 10% - Understanding how and where to pay my fare
 - 10% - There are too many discount levels
 - 10% - Upgrading from a Local fare or pass to a Regional or Airport fare is inconvenient
 - 0% - Understanding when to purchase a Local, Regional or Airport fare
 - 0% - On-board purchase and inspection processes are unclear
 - 0% - No access to locations to purchase a pass

3. If you could improve RTD fares, what change would you make? Please pick your top choice:
 - 40% - Make fares less expensive
 - 10% - Provide same discounts for seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth, and low-income adults
 - 20% - Offer the same fare for all bus and rail services
 - 20% - Expand access to the LiVE low income fare program
 - 10% - Replace zones on rail with station-to-station fares
 - 0% - More locations to purchase fares or add value (e.g., retail stores, ticket vending machines, etc.)
 - 0% - Introduce new fare passes (e.g, weekly pass, 3-day pass)
 - 0% - More ways to pay my fare (e.g., mobile app, ApplePay, credit/debit card, etc.)

4. How would you make RTD fares less expensive? Please pick your top choice:
- 40% - Eliminate all fares
 - 20% - Make fares less expensive for shorter distance fares
 - 10% - Make fares less expensive for Local buses
 - 10% - Make the monthly pass less expensive
 - 10% - Eliminate higher fare for Regional services
 - 10% - Make fares less expensive when there is lower demand, such as midday and weekends
 - 0% - Eliminate higher fare for Airport services
5. What is the top reason people have chosen not to ride RTD services?
- 20% - RTD does not go where people need to go
 - 20% - Riding RTD takes too long to get to where people need to go
 - 20% - RTD services do not come frequently enough
 - 20% - RTD services are not on time or do not show up
 - 10% - Costs of RTD fares and passes
 - 10% - People do not feel safe riding the bus or the train
 - 0% - People do not understand how much they are supposed to pay
 - 0% - It is inconvenient for me to purchase an RTD fare
 - 0% - RTD does not provide good value for my money
 - 0% - People are concerned about sanitary conditions on the bus or train
6. Which of the changes below would convince people to ride RTD? Please pick your top choice:
- 40% - More frequent buses or trains, or buses and trains running later/earlier in the day
 - 30% - Lower cost fares and passes
 - 10% - Stop/station closer to where I live, work, or study
 - 10% - Improve reliability of services
 - 10% - Improved lighting, cameras or other measures to increase security
 - 0% - Fares that are easier to understand
 - 0% - More locations to purchase fares or add value (e.g., retail stores, ticket vending machines, etc.)
 - 0% - More ways to pay my fare (e.g., mobile app, ApplePay, credit/debit card, etc.)
 - 0% - More sanitization of vehicles / stations
 - 0% - No changes would encourage me to ride RTD