



RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

Jurisdiction Feedback Panel Meeting

May 12, 2022

Meeting Summary

Meeting Objectives:

- Approve the Feedback Panel Charter
 - Build mutual understanding of the Study purpose and goals
 - Provide feedback, using public comments, 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

Bill Sirois, RTD Senior Manager, Transit Oriented Communities, provided an overview of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis purpose, goals, customer engagement, and schedule. Bill also provided an overview of the current fare structure and discount levels.

Questions and Answers

- *Question:* When testing possible fare structure changes, will RTD hold operations constant to identify fare related impacts?
Answer: Services will remain fairly constant in the analysis. The System Optimization Plan from the Reimagine RTD process will be the basis for the analysis. Changing fares will

change demand. If fares are lowered the expectation is demand will go up. RTD will not be looking to expand service beyond that in the System Optimization Plan.

- *Question:* Is RTD considering how to create a mode shift and expand the customer base?
Answer: The Fare Study process is considering how to get previous customers back and new customers who are not familiar with transit. We will want to consider how different customer bases will react to the changes.
- *Question:* Will RTD and the Study's definition of equity include geographic equity and mobility by looking at both ends of a trip (home and work) and not just the work end?
Answer: We will be looking at the demographics of the customers as part of the study. The study will be less focused on travel patterns than the Reimagine RTD process. Instead, the Study will analyze how different fare structures will impact the fares different customers pay. As part of this, we will be considering how far customers are traveling as that affects the amount that the customers pay.
- *Question:* If RTD establishes new base fares, what are the indicators or evaluation considerations that would trigger a fare adjustment? Would these be codified to help navigate fare changes beyond this first step?
Answer: The current RTD fiscal policy is to evaluate fare increases every three years to keep pace with inflation. The Fare Study could consider addressing how this Study bleeds into future fare changes and establishing a baseline moving forward.
- *Question:* How does the previous Pass Program Study relate to this Fare Study? How does this Study impact pass rates?
Answer: The Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis is a comprehensive fare study, looking at all fares. The last two studies separated the pass programs from the fare structure. This Study will be looking at the pass programs, fares, and fare products [and fare structure] together.
- *Question:* Has RTD looked at administrative cost savings (e.g., cost of fare collection) for offering free fares?
Answer: RTD is not looking at free fares [zero fares] for everyone as a part of this Fare Study. There are many complexities/challenges with free fares. RTD has looked at these as part of considering zero fares as part of the Spare the Air Day (Month) that just passed through the Colorado legislature that would make RTD fares free in the peak ozone pollution month (August) to help address air quality and ozone issues [SB22-180, passed May 11]. While RTD is not looking at a zero fare system as part of the Study, RTD may be looking at categories of zero fare or reducing fares.
- *Question:* How will the Fare Study address and/or impact the paratransit/Access-a-Ride fares?
Answer: There are relationships between fixed-route and Access-a-Ride fares. Impacts on paratransit fares and/or discounts will be considered when considering fixed-route fare structure changes. Currently, the Local Access-a-Ride fares are set by the RTD Board at \$5; this is less than federal law allows (federal law allows transit agencies to charge up to two times the comparable fixed-route fare for paratransit).

Input on the Current Fare Structure

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

Informal Poll

Members took an informal poll on their thoughts on the biggest benefits 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 poll results for all six questions.

Key results, from twenty-three respondents, for a sample of the questions asked:

- The biggest challenge with the current fare system was that fares are too expensive (43%), and the second biggest challenge was understanding when to purchase a Local, Regional or Airport fare (17%), and how and where to pay the fare (13%).
- The most supported improvement would be to make fares less expensive (57%), and the second most supported improvement was to offer the same fare for all bus and rail services (13%).
- There was a range of perspectives on how to make fares less expensive, 26% supported making fares less expensive for shorter distances, 22% supported making monthly passes less expensive, and 17% supported making fares less expensive for Local buses.
- To convince people to ride RTD, one-third supported more frequent bus or trains, or to have them run later in the day (35%). Other options with support included: improve reliability of services (22%), lower cost fares and passes (22%), and stop/station closer to where people live, work or study (13%).

Discussion Questions

- **What are the elements of the current fare structure that work well?**
 - The Airport fare for those in the highway 36 corridor is a good value.
 - The RTD Mobile Tickets app enables customers to use a smartphone to buy a fare and to use it as a ticket.
 - MyRide card and the ability to load stored value provides a good alternative to cash.
 - The EcoPass works across Local/Regional/Airport levels. EcoPass customers do not have to understand the fare structure.
 - It is good that discounts apply to multiple groups, although the varied levels (40%/50%/70%) are not working.
 - Students think that RTD works well, and they like using Student Passes.

- **What are fare structure related unmet needs for marginalized groups? What are the barriers/preventing those from historically marginalized groups from riding?**
 - Lack of multilingual communications. Non-English speakers don't know where to go and don't see RTD communications in their language. One example, FlexRide can only be booked in English and Spanish.
 - Since there is no LiVE pass option for purchases by employers, low-income customers eligible for LiVE are not able to receive the LiVE discount AND take advantage of pre-tax benefits.
 - There is no low-income fare for EcoPass or other pass programs.
 - Transit frequency and/or the schedule. Employees at industries that work 24/7 cannot use transit if they arrive/leave work late at night or very early in the morning when no transit is available.
 - There are some roundtrip barriers to using FlexRide. Some people use FlexRide to get to their appointments, but they can't get back because the rides are booked.

- **What is one element you would change to have the fare structure better meet each Study goal – more equitable?**
 - Seek alternative funding sources so transit can be free.
 - Convert to a flat-fare structure.
 - Reduce fares overall.
 - Reduce the number of fare levels to make it easier to navigate them.
 - Offer free fares. Funding would need to be at the state level because free fares would benefit the Colorado Department of Transportation from the decrease in road usage. While free fares won't save RTD money, it ultimately would benefit taxpayers.
 - Institute fare capping so those buying daily passes are not paying more than those who can buy a monthly pass upfront.
 - Base free fares or fare capping on the ability to pay.
 - Increase the low-income level to match other social service low-income levels.
 - Make it easier to enroll in the LiVE program. It is too burdensome a process.
 - Allow LiVE applicants to provide proof of eligibility for an assistance program to qualify.
 - Remove eligibility process for the LiVE program, allow customers to register for it if they believe the program applies to them. Any impacts of abuse or fraud of the system would be small and would be off-set by the increase in ridership and the decrease of the burden to low-income customers.
 - Remove service level requirements for the EcoPass program.
 - Provide a low-income EcoPass rate for low-income employees.
 - Expand what constitutes an eligible group to apply for a pass program, for example, allow community-based organizations to offer an EcoPass for participants and members of the organization.
 - Partner with low-income community groups to ensure people know the lower fare tickets are available.
 - Pressure employers near transit to offer free passes, instead of free parking.

- Partner with other local transit systems to provide transfers from one system to another. (i.e., RTD to Bustang).
- **What is one element you would change to have the fare structure better meet each Study goal – more affordable?**
 - Eliminate fare zones. It doesn't make sense to pay more for one additional mile.
 - Provide a flat fare.
 - Reduce fares for all.
 - Flatten the fare structure.
 - Set fares at dollar increments, not coin/change amounts; having no need for coins/change would ease the boarding process.
 - Make sure communities know about the LiVE low-income fare program.
 - Pass Program specific:
 - Allow organizations to include only employees at certain geographic locations for the EcoPass. For organizations that are spread across a region buying the pass for all employees is unaffordable and unreasonable. The organization will have some employees who can access transit because there is a stop/station nearby, while other employees work in locations far from transit stops/stations and will never use transit.
 - Expand eligibility for a group (e.g., community based organizations) or organization (e.g., TMAs) to engage in the EcoPass
 - Offer a regional EcoPass option to allow communities and businesses to partner to provide passes.
 - Allow sale of LiVE products to employers so employees can combine pre-tax and LiVE fare discounts for passes purchased through their employer.
 - Introduce flexibility for employers to cover employees that opt-in the EcoPass. The EcoPass utilization/"insurance model" pricing makes it too expensive for larger companies, particularly when not all employees will or can use it. For CEO level decision makers, the low use of the Eco Passes make the purchase not worth it.
 - Consider other revenue sources to off-set fares.
- **What is one element you would change to have the fare structure better meet each Study goal – simpler?**
 - Eliminate different fare types. The number of fare types is overwhelming, especially when purchasing on the RTD Mobile Tickets app.
 - Provide one discount level.
 - Institute one fare structure for both bus and rail. The variability between origin/destination fares for bus and zones for rail is confusing.
 - Provide a way for customers to enter their destination to ensure the correct fare will be identified/charged.
 - Remove the zone fare structure for rail.
 - Put JeffCo station into Zone B.

- **Knowing there will be trade-off choices, which is your priority goal for fare structure improvements – equity, affordability, simplicity? And why?**
 - Simplicity
 - If the system is simpler, there will be more riders.
 - If you make it easy to pay, you need to make it easy to use the system. Partner simplicity with improved reliability (stop dropping runs).
 - Affordability
 - This goal will gain the widest public support.
 - If fares are more affordable, there will be more riders.
 - Result of affordable fares is equity. Conversely, fares can't be equitable without lowering the price.
 - Equity
 - Benefit of transit is the ability to provide access to opportunities for those who can benefit the most.
 - Equity is the priority so that transit is available for those who need the service the most.
 - If it is equitable, it has to be affordable and simple.
 - Affordability and simplicity are tied together and lead to equity.
 - Try to address all three.

Appendix A: Attendees

Feedback Panel

State

1. Colorado Department of Transportation, Kyle French

Regional

2. Denver Regional Council of Government, Mathew Helfant

County

3. Adams County, Chris Chovan
4. Arapahoe County, Bryan Weimer
5. Boulder County, Alex Hyde-Wright
6. Broomfield City/County, Sarah Grant
7. Denver City/County, My La
8. Jefferson County, Steve Durian

City/Town

9. City of Aurora, Mac Callison
10. City of Boulder, Danny O'Connor
11. City of Brighton, Marv Falconburg
12. City of Centennial, Melanie Ward
13. Englewood, Mel Enlund
14. City of Golden, Rick Muriby
15. City of Lafayette, Denice Walker
16. City of Lakewood, Matthew Seubert
17. City of Littleton, Shane Roberts
18. City of Lone Tree, Justin Schmitz
19. Town of Parker, Jeremiah Fettig
20. Town of Superior, Alex Arinello
21. City of Thornton, Kent Moorman
22. City of Wheat Ridge, Ken Johnstone

Others or Observers

1. City of Lakewood, Jenny Gritton
2. Smart Commute Metro North, Jeanne Shreve
3. Boulder Transportation Connections / Boulder Chamber, Karen Worminghaus

Project Team

1. RTD, Debra Johnson - General Manager
2. RTD, Theresa Rinker - Market Development
3. Four Nines Technologies, Laura Wolfgram
4. Four Nines Technologies, Christina Winberry
5. JSE Associates, Jody Erikson (Facilitator)

Transportation Management Org./Assoc.

23. Commuting Solutions, Audrey DeBarros
24. Denver South, Sheryl Mcachado
25. Downtown Denver Partnership, Max Gesten
26. Northeast Transportation Connections, Angie Rivera Malpiede
27. Smart Commute Metro North, Carson Priest
28. Transportation Solutions, Stuart Anderson
29. West Corridor, Mike Hughes

Regional Transportation District

30. RTD, Bill Sirois – Sr. Advisor
31. RTD, Chris Quinn – Project Manager
32. RTD, Carl Green Jr. – Deputy Project Manager

Appendix B: Informal Poll Results

There were 28 respondents for poll question #1, and due to technical difficulties 23 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:
 - 25% - I do not like the current RTD Fares
 - 21% - Using EcoPass/NECO Neighborhood Ecopass/College Pass to ride
 - 21% - Easy to use day pass
 - 14% - Discount fares for seniors, persons with disabilities, and youth
 - 7% - Different passes available for my travel needs
 - 7% - Low-income fare through the RTD LiVE Program
 - 4% - RTD fares provide good value for money
 - 0% - The Regional and Airport fares are appropriate for the value of service
 - 0% - RTD fares are easy to understand
 - 0% - 3-hour pass provides flexibility

2. What is the biggest fare related challenges with riding RTD? Please pick your top choice:
 - 43% - Fares are too expensive
 - 17% - Understanding when to purchase a Local, Regional or Airport fare
 - 13% - Understanding how and where to pay my fare
 - 9% - No access to locations to purchase a pass
 - 4% - There are too many different types of passes, making it difficult to pick
 - 4% - Upgrading from a Local fare or pass to a Regional or Airport fare is inconvenient
 - 4% - On-board purchase and inspection processes are unclear
 - 4% - There are too many discount levels

3. If you could improve RTD fares, what change would you make? Please pick your top choice:
 - 57% - Make fares less expensive
 - 13% - Offer the same fare for all bus and rail services
 - 9% - More ways to pay my fare (e.g., mobile app, ApplePay, credit/debit card, etc.)
 - 9% - Replace zones on rail with station-to-station fares
 - 4% - Provide same discounts for seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth, and low-income adults
 - 4% - Expand access to the LiVE low income fare program
 - 4% - Introduce new fare passes (e.g, weekly pass, 3-day pass)
 - 0% - More locations to purchase fares or add value (e.g., retail stores, ticket vending machines, etc.)

4. How would you make RTD fares less expensive? Please pick your top choice:
 - 26% - Make fares less expensive for shorter distance fares
 - 22% - Make the monthly pass less expensive
 - 17% - Make fares less expensive for Local buses
 - 13% - Make fares less expensive when there is lower demand, such as midday and weekends
 - 13% - Eliminate all fares
 - 4% - Eliminate higher fare for Airport services
 - 4% - Eliminate higher fare for Regional services

5. What is the top reason people have chosen not to ride RTD services?
 - 48% - Riding RTD takes too long to get to where people need to go
 - 26% - RTD services do not come frequently enough
 - 13% - Costs of RTD fares and passes
 - 4% - RTD does not go where people need to go
 - 4% - RTD does not provide good value for my money
 - 4% - People do not feel safe riding the bus or the train
 - 0% - RTD services are not on time or do not show up
 - 0% - People do not understand how much they are supposed to pay
 - 0% - It is inconvenient for me to purchase an RTD fare
 - 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:
 - 35% - More frequent buses or trains, or buses and trains running later/earlier in the day
 - 22% - Improve reliability of services
 - 22% - Lower cost fares and passes
 - 13% - Stop/station closer to where I live, work, or study
 - 4% - Fares that are easier to understand
 - 4% - Improved lighting, cameras or other measures to increase security
 - 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