

# RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

## *Phase One Engagement Milestone Summary*

### Study Background

In response to feedback from customers and stakeholders that fares are expensive and difficult to understand, RTD launched a Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis. The study will reexamine the fare system holistically, taking into consideration the three study goals of equity, affordability and simplicity.

The study will incorporate three distinct phases of engagement to gather customer and community input and share updates on progress. The first phase, held in spring 2022, was launched to identify challenges with the current fare system and to receive input on fare structure preferences. An overview of the first phase of engagement activities, feedback received and next steps in the study is provided below.

### Engagement Activities Overview

Through the different engagement activities conducted in the first phase of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis, the study team gathered valuable feedback that will be used to shape the future fare structure. To seek input from a diverse set of perspectives, the following engagement methods were included as part of this first milestone:

- Customer and Community Meetings (in English and Spanish)
- Feedback Panels
- Community Partner Focus Groups
- Current Conditions Fare Survey (in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese)
- Website and social media

Each activity yielded significant customer, community and stakeholder feedback, which will be collected, summarized, and used to influence the fare structure conceptual options and alternatives considered by the study team. Feedback received throughout the study will be used to inform RTD's recommendations for a future fare structure.

### Customer and Community Meetings

The study team held two virtual Customer and Community Meetings – one in English (April 21) and one in Spanish (April 28), with attendance of 44 and 54 participants, respectively. The meetings were promoted by the study launch press release, website and social media posts, targeted emails to the study's distribution list, radio interviews, community partner navigators, media mentions, and word-of-mouth marketing. During the presentations, the team provided a brief overview of RTD and an explanation of the fare study, including goals, timeline, and how

equity will be a focus of the process. The presentation also provided information on RTD's current fare structure. Time was reserved for attendee questions and comments to be addressed by the study team. Throughout the English-language meeting, poll questions were deployed to gather instant feedback.

### **Feedback Panels**

Three Feedback Panels—the Equity Feedback Panel, Pass Program Feedback Panel and the Jurisdiction Feedback Panel—were convened for the study. The goal of the Feedback Panels is to consider customer and community input and how RTD may address commonalities and trade-offs among different perspectives and fulfill customer and community needs. The study team developed a charter to govern the Feedback Panels, which panel members reviewed and approved during the first set of virtual meetings held on May 11 and 12. The initial Feedback Panel meetings also included an overview of the study, a brief summary of the customer and community input heard during the preceding virtual meetings, informal polling and discussion questions. The majority of the meetings were reserved for discussion, during which participants were given the opportunity to provide input on the strengths and weaknesses of RTD's current fare structure and how RTD can achieve the goals of the study.

### **Focus Groups**

As part of the study, RTD has contracted with six community-based organizations (listed below), each serving as a community partner to help engage traditionally underrepresented populations through focus groups, participation in surveys and public meetings, and other outreach efforts. Following Train-the-Trainer sessions in English and Spanish on May 3 and 5, the community partners held focus groups virtually and in-person between May 9 and May 19 in English and Spanish to engage with their respective communities and gather feedback. Following the focus groups, the community partner representatives identified and summarized key insights and provided them to the study team for review.

A total of 101 individuals participated in the focus groups, including 70 current RTD customers, 17 previous customers, and 14 prospective customers. Participants ranged in age from high school students through senior citizens and included those who self-reported as having limited incomes, are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, have a physical or cognitive disability, and/or speak a primary language other than English.

### **List of Community Partners**

- Athletics and Beyond
- CREA Results
- Cultivando
- Denver Streets Partnership
- Focus ReEntry
- Una Mano Una Esperanza

## **Online Survey**

To gather insight from a diverse group of previous, current, and prospective customers, RTD deployed an online survey, which was open from April 4 to May 8. The survey included questions related to what customers thought of RTD fares and preference questions to obtain feedback on how RTD should consider achieving the goals of the study.

Based on self-reported data, respondents represented all counties throughout the RTD service area, as well as beyond. The survey, which was promoted through virtual meetings and feedback panels, by community partners, and through the website and social media efforts, received more than 2,400 responses.

## **Website and Social Media**

As part of the study, the study team developed a website to share information, provide updates on survey developments and engagement opportunities, and offer a method through which customers and community members could submit questions and comments to the study team. Paired with the website, the team launched a social media campaign to promote the study's engagement opportunities. Relevant statistics on website and social media engagement during the first engagement milestone are listed below:

### Website Key Statistics (April – mid-May)

- 2,772 page views; 2,142 unique views
- 1,641 entrances directly to the website

### Social Media Statistics (April – mid-May)

- 36,366 impressions; 5,567 video views
- 1,214 unique users reached
- 730 social media engagements

## **Summary of Feedback Provided**

The diversity of the participants in the study is reflected in the variety of questions and comments provided to the study team. A number of themes have emerged throughout the feedback received, which are included below.

*\*Note: Many of the comments and questions were aimed towards the fare structure and related topics; others were addressed to the services RTD provides generally. For the sake of transparency, an overview of the broadest range of feedback received by customers, community members and other stakeholders is included in the following.*

## **General Themes**

### *Fare Structure-Related*

- Fares are too expensive – with some noting that it feels less expensive to drive rather than take transit.
- Financially burdened customers should pay less than higher income customers.



- There are too many fare products, discount levels, fare levels (Local/Regional/Airport) and fare media (methods through which customers can pay for fares) – making it difficult to pick and determine how to pay.
- RTD’s complicated fare structure prevents new and existing customers from using RTD to access new destinations.
- Purchasing Monthly Passes is inconvenient – and customers cannot purchase Monthly Passes while on the bus.
- Customers like the easy-to-use Day Pass.
- Customers like the availability of discount fares available for seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth, and financially burdened customers. However, there is confusion on which discount fare program to apply for and/or which discounted fare product to purchase due to the different discount rates.
- The process of proving eligibility and signing up for discounts is too burdensome.
- Eco, Neighborhood and CollegePass are well liked and make it easy for people to ride RTD.
- While customers like the flexibility of the 3-Hour Pass instead of transfers, for some customers, the 3-Hour Pass does not provide sufficient time for them to complete their trip.
- Some customers and community members are concerned about the potential impact the study will have on paratransit fares.

#### *RTD Service and Other*

- Customers would benefit from transit operators being able and willing to explain fares (including in Spanish and other languages, if possible).
- Current transit options are time-inefficient – with some indicating a willingness to pay more for improved services.
- Convenience of using RTD is dependent on the location of where people live in the RTD service area – highlighting perceived inequities across neighborhoods and the service area.
- Some are concerned about the diminished “value” associated with RTD services, including less frequent and reliable service and lack of safety and/or cleanliness.

In addition to the themes described above, participants across engagement opportunities provided numerous suggestions for RTD to consider. The following outlines a number of grouped suggestions received from those who participated:

### ***General Suggestions***

#### *Fare Structure-Related*

- Reduce or eliminate fares without reducing service.
- Offer a single flat fare regardless of how far a customer travels or the mode of service used.
- Reward frequent travelers with a discount.



- Implement fare capping.
- Consider rolling period passes or capping such as 24-Hour Pass or 30-Day Pass.
- Lower fares for those who are financially burdened.
- Provide free fares for youth and financially burdened customers.
- Lower the Airport fare, particularly for airport employees.
- Exempt airport employees from the Airport fare.
- Identify new revenue sources (outside of fares) to offset costs.
- Simplify language to explain the fare structure.
- Consolidate to a single discount fare.
- Offer discounts (or free fares) for families, students, and/or individuals with limited incomes.
- Provide a fare discount for college students and/or create an opt-in CollegePass option.
- Provide free access to transit to individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Reduce barriers to LiVE and discount fares.
- Simplify the process for qualifying for discounts.
- Simplify Nonprofit Program to distribute discounted fare media to nonprofit organizations and social service agencies.
- Increase participation in pass programs by simplifying programs and offering discounts on bulk purchases.
- Promote technology to simplify fare payment while recognizing some customers and community members lack access to or knowledge of technology.

### *RTD Service and Other*

- Expand services across the RTD service area for greater connectivity of locations.
- Provide protection from the elements at transit stops.
- Impart customer-service mentality in bus operators to ensure respectful communications with customers.
- Consider more transit options that are fuel-efficient.
- Standardize accessibility accommodations on all RTD transit (not just Access-a-Ride).
- Provide additional educational language at transit stops on how to use the bus; fares, discounts, and routes; and bus schedules.

The above list of themes and suggestions is not exhaustive but merely represents the depth and breadth of the feedback RTD received from customers, community members and other stakeholders during this first engagement milestone.

### ***Fare Structure Preferences***

Data gathered from the first engagement milestone highlighted that not all agree on the approach RTD should take to restructure fares. The online survey, Q&A sessions and polling questions used during the English customer and community meeting as well as the feedback panel meetings asked participants their preferences on how RTD should consider achieving the goals of the study.



Respondents agreed that:

- *Financially burdened customers should pay less for transit fares than higher income customers.*
- *RTD fares should be lower for customers who use transit frequently than for customers who use transit occasionally.*

For the many respondents, service was more important than more affordable fares:

- Largest share of respondents disagreed with: *RTD fares should be more affordable, even if it results in less service.*
- Largest share of respondents agreed with: *RTD services should be maintained or improved, even if it means higher fares.*

Results for fare structure preference questions were more mixed:

- Largest share of respondents agreed with: *Customers traveling a longer distance (e.g., 10 miles) should pay more than customers traveling a shorter distance (e.g., 2 miles).*
- Largest share of respondents agreed with: *RTD fares should be based on service type levels (i.e., Local, Regional, Airport) to reflect the cost of traveling different distances.*
- Largest share of respondents agreed with: *To make fares easier to understand, RTD should have the same fare for ALL bus and rail services regardless of how far you travel.*
- Respondents were evenly mixed with a large share neither agreeing nor disagreeing with: *To reflect the difference in service amenities (e.g., comfort, speed, frequency of stops), RTD should have a different fare for bus than for rail.*

## Next Steps

Following the first set of engagement opportunities, the team will be reviewing all feedback received through each activity. As part of its customer-centric approach, the team will use this input to help guide the study.

During the second phase of the study, the team will provide an overview of the feedback received, share conceptual fare structure options, and solicit additional customer and community feedback.