



RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis Equity Feedback Panel Meeting July 13, 2022 Meeting Summary

Meeting Objectives:

- Understand customer input and feedback from Engagement #1 and #2
- Provide feedback using customer input from Engagement #2 on possible conceptual options

Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

Carl Green Jr., RTD Deputy Project Manager and Interim Civil Rights Director provided an overview of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis purpose and goals, the importance of fares to contribute to operating the transit system, overview of activities in Engagement #1 and #2, and what RTD heard from customers and the community in Engagement #2 (on conceptual options). Carl also discussed the five elements of the evaluation of alternatives, what conceptual options and suggestions were being considered and evaluated further, what is already being implemented, and what is not being considered further due to being out of the scope of the Study, addressed in other ways or is too difficult to implement at this time, and/or RTD received limited interested from survey respondents during Engagement #1.

Questions and Answers

- *Question:* To what extent will the Study address Access-a-Ride fare impacts, other than the federal maximum limit for paratransit pricing?
Answer: The Study is engaged with the Access-a-Ride advisory committee (APAC) and will consider all associated impacts of any possible changes to the fare structure.

Discussion on Conceptual Options

A subset of the conceptual options being considered was presented and discussed with the Feedback Panel. Laura Wolfram, Four Nines Technologies, provided background and information about each conceptual option before the Feedback Panel members provided input (see the slide deck for more information on what was presented).

Conceptual Options: Lowering fares, versus Flattening the Fare Structure, versus Reducing Monthly Pass

These conceptual options all targeted lowering the fares for customers through different methods.

Informal Poll

Following the presentation, members started the discussion with an informal poll on which of these three conceptual options is their highest priority:

Option A. **73% 11/15** - Lowering fares

Option B. **13% 2/15** - Flattening the fare structure (e.g., eliminate Regional fare level)

Option C. **13% 2/15** - Reducing Monthly Pass pricing

Discussion

- RTD should institute a combination of these options.
- It would be best if a customer pays one price for the day and doesn't have to pay twice a day for two transit trips. It is a financial burden to have to pay twice.
- Option A. Lowering Fares option
 - Would be more responsive to low-income customers that live pay-check to pay-check to get to work; these customers do not have the up-front capital to buy Monthly Passes.
 - Would help the most and would help those who could actually afford a Monthly pass save enough.
 - Would also result in lower Monthly Pass prices. Concerned about accessibility of fare capping since it requires access to mobile app and MyRide cards which is an extra level of complication and burden for busy low-income customers, so lower fares overall would be more responsive to low-income customers.
 - Would help nonprofit organizations to purchase and provide their clients with transit passes. Non-Profit organizations had to restructure because of the last increase in costs, and some couldn't provide as many transit passes as before. Many of the passes issued by nonprofit organizations are actual tickets which would benefit the most from Option A.
 - Would provide overall benefits and covers a lot – there are many ways to lower fares.
 - Would help older customers with set incomes who have to balance transportation with other expenses, such as medication, these customers often travel several times a day for doctor appointments and to gather medications.
 - Would benefit the most frequent riders, those front-line workers who commute every day; they often take three to four buses a day for work and to pick up their children.
 - Would attract more customers.
- Option B. Flattening the fare structure
 - Would create equity across family members. From interviews with Latinx customers at stations/stops, some were torn because not all family members get

- the same discounts, so a flat fare may be good for bigger families.
- Opposed: one member stated that the Regional fare should cost more, opposing Option B.
- Option C. Reducing Monthly Passes was a close second choice to lowering fares for many
 - Would be another way to lower fares.
 - If low-income customers could afford a reduced Monthly Pass they would get a big savings, but it would have to be low enough to be purchased up-front.
- Some of the Latinx community interviewed at transit stations/stops said they don't use transit because they do the math for their family, for their family of four driving (gas and parking) is cheaper than the cost of four transit fares.

Conceptual Option: Streamlining discount fares

Following the presentation, members started the discussion with an informal poll on which of these options for discount fares is their highest priority:

Informal Poll

- Option A. **13% 2/15** - 50% discount for LiVE and Discount customers, retaining 70% discount for Youth
- Option B. **7% 1/15** - 50% discount for all discount-eligible customers (LiVE, Disable, Youth, etc.)
- Option C. **47% 7/15** - 50% discount on 3-Hour Pass and Day Pass and 70% discount on Monthly Pass for all discount-eligible customers
- Option D. **33% 5/15** - Flat fares for discount customers, set an 50% of Local fare, while retaining current zone/distance-based fare structure for full fare customers

Discussion

- Option A (*two discount levels, combine two and leave youth alone*)
 - This is missing an extra discount for elderly customers who are on limited and fixed incomes and have lots of appointments.
- Option C (*one discount level, but different discount for different pass types*)
 - Would help lower fares and monthly pass price to improve access and not nickle-and-dime customers each time they have to pay the fare.
 - Would provide a greater discount to those who use transit frequently, for those low-income customers who are likely commuting to essential-worker jobs.
 - Would help providers help clients get a Monthly Pass, the Monthly Pass would then be almost as affordable as handing clients multiple tickets over multiple days; this would create some stability of access to transit.
 - Would support affordability and simplicity by reducing use of cash.
 - Would increase accessibility for a Monthly Pass, decreasing the need for cash-in-hand which is safer for vulnerable communities. For the disabled community, any option that means a customer needs less cash-in-hand is better. Having cash makes the community more vulnerable to theft.

- Option D (*one discount level, apply the same Local fare with discount price to Regional and Airport*)
 - Would provide relief for families who are moving around/among the fare zones to go to work and to pick up children in different locations, especially for large families.
 - Families interviewed by a Community Partner communicated that the problem was picking up/dropping off children in different locations - better for families to have a flat fare/one price for all.
- While not provided as one of the four options for polling, there was also support for zero fares for youth. This was seen as a way to help families. There was concern about youth receiving a lower discount in some of the options.
- Older customers should get the 70% discount, they are on fixed incomes and have lots of appointments.

Conceptual Option: Addressing challenges for unique subsets of customers (e.g., college student, airport employees not in Eco or College Pass programs)

- A. *Question: Airport employees not covered by EcoPass – Does the introduction of fare capping address the unique challenge for airport employees by eliminating the upfront cost of a Regional Monthly Pass?*

Discussion

- Fare capping would be a good temporary fix but pushing for an EcoPass/Master Contract for airport employees would be a better more permanent fix.
- Concerned that the airport doesn't seem to have a way to unify all employers for a master contract or that the airport doesn't want a master contract.
 - The challenges seem to be: unifying all airport employers, and the airport being able to meet set-up requirements and getting RTD all the information needed. Also, the airport has many different employer types: TSA, the City of Denver, airlines, and small and larger concessionaires.
- It would be better to push the City Council to require all airport vendors to provide an EcoPass, since the City owns and operates the airport.
- Employers in the 16th Street Mall district in Boulder got together and provided an EcoPass for its essential workers under a Master EcoPass contract. The airport could do something similar.

[Several on the call mentioned they don't work with airport employees so were unable to provide informed responses.]

- B. *Question: Semester passes for students not covered by CollegePass – Should there be a semester pass offered by colleges and technical schools that individual students can opt into? Should a similar pass be available for K-12 schools? What are the challenges and benefits?*

Discussion

- Providing an opt-in pass would be better because those who want/need the pass will get the pass, and those who don't won't.

- Yes, provide this to K-12 students as well, those students also have transportation needs - parents' work schedules may not align with school schedules. This would also encourage younger generations to get used to using transit.
- Questions raised about what the pricing would be, whether it would be utilization-based pricing, or whether it would be free.
 - RTD clarified what they had been considering is more of a multi-month pass with some sort of a discount.
- Concerned that the discount for a semester pass wouldn't make it worth it.
 - Likely the semester pass cost would be equal to five Monthly Passes with some discount.
- RTD needs to provide better marketing and education about RTD's current discount fare programs and youth fares that can help family-most friends and family asked didn't know about any of it.

Conceptual Option: Promoting bulk pass purchases

Question: If a discount is offered, how would the discount be determined? How would it be justified? How would bulk purchases also benefit non-employers, such as community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and jurisdictions?

Discussion

- A bulk discount should be provided to
 - Organizations that provide social services – both organization staff and those the organization serves.
 - Community based organizations, organizations that work with the community
 - These organizations can take the time and they know the economic and social needs, and family culture of their community to better assist community members to access transit. The organization can help community members know which fare type to purchase or discount they qualify for, as well as help people navigate the processes and technology to purchase and use passes. These organizations can also help adapt the RTD system to their community.
 - Non-profits
 - Small businesses that employ essential workers
- Nonprofit organizations lost a lot with the discontinuation of discounts as part of the program changes implemented in 2019.
- Preference is to shift the burden of proof for discounts to organizations and away from the already burdened individuals. Preference for prior program requirements where the organizations prove to RTD that they serve and qualify discount populations and equity populations, and the organizations confirm their clients are eligible.
- Given the current and likely permanent, hybrid work environment, employees are not likely to use a pass 2x a day, 5 days a week. As an employer, prefer to offer an RTD discounted Monthly Pass as EcoPass is priced on more than an employee would utilize it (and is not cost effective for employers or their employees).
- Suggestion:
 - Allow non-profit organizations to add eligible discounts to bulk purchase discounts.

- Provide a system where a third-party can add value to a customer's account/MyRide card as a way to contribute funds to individuals without issuing vouchers or new smart cards.
 - RTD clarified that this functionality is not available now and is unlikely to be available in the new Partner Portal. RTD will consider this longer term as part of next electronic fare collection procurement.

Other comments

- It would be good to shift the burden of providing proof of eligibility to use a discounted fare through the Nonprofit Program away from the individual receiving it to the organization distributing the ticket or pass.
- Because of hybrid-work schedules most of the remote staff aren't using the EcoPasses, therefore, employers need to have a more affordable option to continue to pay for the EcoPass program.
- The A-Line to the airport is undervalued (underpriced). For travelers, RTD could raise the fare, and then provide a bigger discount for airport employees. Prior to the 2016 fare change, some SkyRide fares were \$12, travelers likely would not balk at \$15 to get out to the airport. The A-Line is better environmentally, than travelers driving to the airport and parking.
- Nonprofits and community-based organizations automatically have limited budgets and I'm not sure that all the pre-LiVE discount procedures that nonprofits had to take are necessary.
- Need to keep in mind technology inclusivity and to be mindful about technology literacy and the need for one-on-one assistance.
- Hopefully, the modeling will account for additional trips low-income households will take if fares are more affordable.
- There is a belief that RTD knows the answer already; the concern is whether RTD will take action.

Due to time constraints, the Equity Feedback Panel did not discuss: Conceptual Option – Exploring pass program simplification and expansion while maintaining utilization-based pricing

Appendix A: Attendees

Feedback Panel

1. Athletics and Beyond, Nancy Jackson
2. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Maia Whitaker
3. Colorado Cross Disability Coalition, Jamie Lewis
4. CREA Results, Susana Arreola
5. CWEE, Sarah Leopold
6. CU Boulder Food Service Retiree, Aljoana Gilmore
7. Cultivando, Rocio Franco
8. Denver Asian American Pacific Island (DAAIPC), Riyaz (Robert) Rigonan
9. Denver Housing Authority (DHA), Angie Fletcher
10. Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council (DRMAC), Coleen Samuels
11. Focus Reentry, Molly Bowers
12. Mobility for All, Angel Bond
13. Northeast Transportation Connections, Nick Glenn
14. St. Francis Center, Greyden Charlesworth
15. Una Mano Una Esperanza, Rosa Marie Vergil Velazquez
16. RTD, Carl Green Jr. - Deputy Project Manager, Interim Civil Rights Director
17. RTD, Chris Quinn, Project Manager, Planning
18. RTD, Annette Hunter, Transit Equity Specialist

Others or Observers

1. Una Mano Una Esperanza, Armando

Project Team

1. RTD, Bill Sirois - Senior Advisor, Transit Oriented Communities
2. RTD, Monika Treipl-Harnke - Senior Manager, Revenue
3. RTD, Theresa Rinker – Market Development
4. RTD, Dani McLean - Transit Equity Specialist
5. Colorado Language Connection, Gerardo Avellaneda (Interpreter)
6. Four Nines Technologies, Laura Wolfgram
7. Four Nines Technologies, Christina Winberry
8. Amey Consulting, Andrew Amey
9. JSE Associates, Jody Erikson (Facilitator)