



# RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis Jurisdiction 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

Bill Sirois, RTD Senior Manager, Transit Oriented Communities, 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, what RTD heard from customers and the community in Engagement #2 (on conceptual options), 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 the of scope of the Study, addressed in other ways, too difficult to implement at this time, and/or RTD received limited interested from survey respondents during Engagement #1.

### Questions and Answers

- *Question:* Will RTD look for lessons learned from the Zero Fare to Spare the Air initiative during the month of August and consider that in this Study?  
*Answer:* Yes, RTD will consider lessons learned from the Zero Fare to Spare the Air initiative as part of this Study, but RTD is not considering eliminating fares systemwide going forward as part of this Fare Study. To ensure the information and evaluation from the Zero Fare to Spare the Air initiative is considered in this Study, RTD hired Four Nines Technologies, the consultant leading the Fare Study, to conduct the evaluation.
- *Question:* Frequent customers are already established customers, is RTD considering lowering fares or offering incentives for new customers (e.g., ride free for x trips) to attract new transit customers?  
*Answer:* RTD is looking at lower fares overall. We are looking at incentivizing frequent customers in response to customer and Feedback Panel input.
- *Comment:* If RTD is not considering setting fares in dollar increments, please consider prices that are divisible by two for discount fares (e.g., not \$0.25).

## 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 a 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. **56% 14/25** - Lowering fares
- Option B. **32% 8/25** - Flattening the fare structure (e.g., eliminate Regional fare level)
- Option C. **12% 3/25** - Reducing Monthly Pass pricing

#### Discussion

- Option A. Lowering fares
  - Would be more responsive to customer and community input that the fares are too high, and that reducing the price is a higher priority than simplifying the complexity of the fare structure.
  - Would help market RTD to increase ridership and help meet greenhouse gas emission goals.
  - Would be consistent with responding to input that RTD fares are higher than other transit agencies.
- Option B. Flattening the fare
  - Would simplify the system for employers, employees, youth and older customers, and those not familiar with transit. Customers would simply need to get a ticket and get on.
  - Would remove the complaint that riding one more stop, one more mile costs more (e.g., Adams County has two stops that are Regional while the rest are Local). People don't ride the train to Golden because the last stop is several dollars more (\$10.50 vs. \$6.00 round trip) than the second to last stop; the Regional fare feels insulting.
  - Would be easier for customers if travel on one line is the same price regardless of distance.
- Suggestions / Other Comments:
  - Flatten the fare structure for those eligible for discounts, this would help address equity concerns, while keeping the Local, Regional and Airport fares for others.

- Reduce the Monthly Pass price to a better breakeven threshold; reduce the number of days/rides needed to pay for the cost of the Monthly Pass to closer to 15 days per month.
- Lowering or flattening fares to a rounded dollar amount may reduce passenger/operator conflicts and expedite boarding/reduce dwell time.

***Conceptual Option: Exploring pass program simplification and expansion while maintaining utilization-based pricing***

*Question: How could RTD stabilize pricing over multiple years, as ridership recovers, and ensure it works with the utilization approach?*

Discussion

- It is important to provide as much price predictability as possible for organizations to budget for the Pass Program.
- The goal of simplification should be to increase ridership.
- Frustrated by the requirement to pay for all employees when only a small percentage of employees actually participate/ride transit.
- Shocked to learn airport employees don't have the EcoPass program.
- An organization needs to be able to see the EcoPass rate for today and next year to install confidence in the stability of the costs.
- Need greater transparency, public transparency of the cost of the EcoPass program year to year, and not require an organization to talk with RTD to get an idea of costs.
- Appreciative of the flexibility to remove fully remote employees.
- Other Suggestions:
  - Consider maintaining (or even possibly lowering) the 20% cap on year-over-year annual increases to provide predictability for budgeting given that new pricing is not available until later in the year.
  - Reconsider Pass Program contract minimums: the minimums discourage small businesses from taking part in the program.
  - Allow employers to take advantage of LiVE discounts in their EcoPass price.
  - Allow employers to only pay for employees that use the transit system, pay for usage only.
  - Provide an online calculator to provide a rough calculation of what the EcoPass program may cost an organization and then have them contact RTD for an exact quote.
  - Provide upfront pricing for the next 1-2-3 years.
  - Market the new tax credits associated with HB22-1026: Alternative Transportation Options Tax Credit. RTD needs to send the message that EcoPass expenses would be eligible for a state tax credit of 50% of the amount spent by the employer to provide alternative transportation options to its employees for 2023 and 2024 (up to \$2,000 credit per employee).

***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:
  - Non-profit organization serving low-income communities.
  - Community based organizations, organizations that work with the community.
  - Jurisdictions who will then distribute passes to the known local non-profit organizations doing good work in their area.
- Suggestion:
  - If the study is supposed to be equity focused, the discount should be greater based on income.
  - Develop a 501(c)3 arm of RTD to fundraise the cost of passes provided to non-profits serving low-income and vulnerable communities (e.g., SORTA in Cincinnati has done this; link: <https://www.go-metro.com/everybody-rides-metro>).
  - Shift the burden of proof of eligibility to use a discounted product purchased through the Nonprofit Program from the individual to the organizations serving vulnerable communities. This would be the most equitable and enable organizations to provide immediate assistance even if the individual doesn't have proof of eligibility.
  - Enable TMA/Os to create a master contract, leveraging TMA/Os' marketing and contacts with employers to promote the program.

### ***Conceptual Option: Streamlining discount fares***

*Question: Which streaming option is the highest priority?*

## Informal Poll

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

- Option A. 14% 2/14 - 50% discount for LiVE and Discount customers, retaining 70% discount for Youth
- Option B. 57% 8/14 - 50% discount for all discount-eligible customers (LiVE, Disable, Youth, etc.)
- Option C. 14% 2/14 - 50% discount on 3-Hour Pass and Day Pass and 70% discount on Monthly Pass for all discount-eligible customers
- Option D. 14% 2/14 - Flat fares for discount customers, set an 50% of Local fare, while retaining current zone/distance-based fare structure for full fare customers

## Discussion

- *Question:* Why do youth currently get a bigger discount than other eligible groups?  
*Answer:* The discount for youth was increased based on the recommendation from the 2018 Pass Program Working Group. It was increased to incentivize new riders, to get youth used to riding transit, and it benefited families.
- Option B (*one discount level*)
  - Would be the simplest, and easiest to understand and use.

- Would create equal access to the same discount rather than prioritize one population over another.
- Would be easier to message and less confusing for the public.
- Option C (*one discount, but different for different pass types*)
  - Would provide a deeper discount for those who use the service more.
- Option D (*one discount level, apply the same Local fare with discount price to Regional and Airport*)
  - Would be simpler. One low cost regardless of what service a discount customer is riding.
  - Would address RTD's equity goal by removing the Regional and Airport fare levels for discount-eligible customers so that those who are least able to pay, don't have to pay the higher fare.
  - Would be easier to message.
  - Would provide a more generous discount than option C for Regional and Airport customers. Significantly lower Regional Monthly Pass because only purchasing a Local Monthly Pass.
- Suggestion: Increase the age for children who ride free (currently five and under) to 12 years of age or middle school age youth. This would reduce the burden on families with young, school-aged children.
- *[Several members, after discussion, said they might shift their support to D.]*

### Other comments

- The priority for alternatives development is to ensure that fares are not a barrier for people to ride the bus/rail. It is important to recoup some operational expenses from the farebox, but not if the fare keeps people from riding.
- There is a desire to have benchmarking to compare RTD fare structure to other transit agencies. Benchmarking would provide additional data and details to the comments from customers and community that RTD fares are too expensive and the most expensive in the country. *[The study will conduct some benchmarking. The challenge is that RTD's transit system doesn't have a comparable match in size, or structure, therefore benchmarking won't be an apples-to-apples comparison.]*
- The desire of RTD's Accountability Committee, that recommended removing the requirement of the fare box minimum contribution to RTD's budget, was to make transit more affordable for everyone, valuing ridership over recouping costs.
- With enough ridership, RTD could recoup some of the loss of farebox revenue from lowering fares.

Due to time constraints, the Jurisdiction Feedback Panel did not discuss: Conceptual Option: Addressing challenges for unique subsets of customers (e.g., college student, airport employees not in Eco or College Pass programs)

- A. Airport employees not covered by EcoPass
- B. Semester passes for students not covered by CollegePass

## Appendix A: Attendees

### Feedback Panel

#### *State*

1. Colorado Department of Transportation, Kyle French

#### *Regional*

2. Denver Regional Council of Government, Matthew Helfant

#### *County*

3. Adams County, Chris Chovan
4. Arapahoe County, Jim Katzer
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 Arvada, John Firouzi
10. City of Aurora, Mac Callison
11. City of Boulder, Danny O'Connor
12. City of Brighton, Marv Falconburg
13. City of Centennial, Melanie Ward
14. City of Englewood, Mel Enlund
15. City of Greenwood Village, John Jackson
16. City of Lakewood, Matthew Seubert
17. City of Littleton, Shane Roberts
18. City of Longmont, Phil Greenwald
19. Town of Parker, Jeremiah Fettig
20. Town of Superior, Alex Arinello
21. City of Wheat Ridge, Ken Johnstone

### Others or Observers

1. City of Lakewood, Jenny Gritton
2. Downtown Denver Partnership, Max Gesten

### Project Team

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

#### *Transportation Management Org./Assoc.*

22. Boulder Transportation Connections, Amanda Mansfield
23. Commuting Solutions, Audrey DeBarros
24. Denver South, Sheryl Machado
25. Downtown Denver Partnership, Andrew Iltis
26. Smart Commute Metro North, Carson Priest
27. West Corridor, Mike Hughes

#### *Regional Transportation District*

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