

RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

Phase Two Engagement Milestone Summary

Study Background

In response to feedback from customers 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, with the objective of creating a fare structure that is more equitable, affordable and simple.

The study incorporates 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. The second phase, held in summer 2022, provided an overview of the customer and stakeholder feedback heard during the first phase, as well as what conceptual fare options are under consideration and the process of evaluation. An overview of the second phase engagement activities, feedback received and next steps in the study is provided below.

Engagement Activities Overview

The second phase of engagement activities coincided with a period of evaluation, during which RTD reviewed and assessed previous feedback and identified ways in which customer and community input could be incorporated into the final set of alternatives. As such, the second set of engagement activities were designed to allow RTD to keep the community informed of progress and upcoming milestones.

Through the different engagement activities conducted in the second phase of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis, the project team gathered feedback that will be used to shape the future fare structure. The following engagement methods were used as part of the second phase of engagement:

- Customer and Community Meetings (in English and Spanish)
- Feedback Panels
- Website and social media

The feedback received during each activity has been collected, summarized and combined with feedback from other phases. It will be used by the project team to help in the development of the fare structure alternatives.

Customer and Community Meetings

The project team held two virtual Customer and Community Meetings – one in English (June 23) and one in Spanish (June 29), with attendance of 70 and 78 participants, respectively. The meetings were promoted by the second phase launch press release, website and social media posts, targeted emails to the project’s distribution list, radio interviews, community partner navigators, media mentions and word-of-mouth marketing.

During the presentations, the study team provided a review of the purpose of the study; a thorough overview of the stakeholder feedback heard during the first phase, grouped into themes and suggestions for RTD to consider; a description of how fare alternatives are being evaluated; an overview of the conceptual fare options being considered and those not being considered; and additional information on specific conceptual fare options that are being considered. Throughout the meetings, time was reserved for attendee questions and comments to be addressed by the project team.

Feedback Panels

Three Feedback Panels (Equity, Pass Program, and Jurisdiction Feedback Panels) were reconvened during the second phase of the engagement. The Feedback Panel meetings, which were held on July 13 and 14, included an overview of the input received during the second set of Customer and Community Meetings, followed by a discussion on a subset of the conceptual options under consideration. Real-time informal polls were also deployed to gather instant feedback on Feedback Panel members’ priorities regarding fare structure changes.

Website and Social Media

Like the first phase, the second phase of engagement included updates to the website and a social media campaign to promote the study’s engagement opportunities. Relevant statistics on website and social media engagement are listed below:

Website Key Statistics (Mid-May – September)

- 2,872 page views, 2,278 unique page views
- 1,481 entrances directly to the website

Social Media Statistics (May – September)

- 59,205 impressions; 9,920 video views
- 1,082 users reached
- 1,331 social media engagements

Summary of Feedback Provided and Questions Posed

During the second phase of engagement, feedback mechanisms varied across different types of engagements. Participants in Customer and Community Meetings were given opportunities to ask questions, while Feedback Panel participants were polled and asked to provide feedback in more targeted ways. To account for the differences in structure, the following includes a general overview of the themes that emerged within the Customer and Community Meetings, as well as a separate section dedicated to input from the Feedback Panels. A more in-depth analysis of each activity is provided in the individual summaries available on the study website.

**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 and community members is included in the following.*

Customer and Community Themes

Participants asked questions and posed comments about:

- Flat fares, including the impact on RTD's budget and future project initiatives.
- Free fares for all, or at least for youth.
- Reducing fares for low-wage earners.
- Reduction of pass program costs, including EcoPass.
- Modifying EcoPass to encourage more employers to participate.
- Half fare days for larger events.
- Service reliability, including its connection to the goal of equity and the impact of missed runs (scheduled transit trip that is not delivered) on historically marginalized communities.
- Encouraging ridership throughout the RTD service area.
- Safety and rider comfort.
- Fare evasion, including rates of occurrence and potential lost revenue.
- Fare product alternatives, including 24-Hour/30-Day passes and other forms of onboard payment media as the current MyRide Card is replaced with RTD's new account-based ticketing (ABT) fare payment methods.
- Importance of fare revenue and its effect on service.
- Group fares.
- Ability to use RTD's new ABT fare payment methods on Access-a-Ride and FlexRide.
- RTD's collaboration with local governments, schools and colleges.
- Possibility of additional routes in RTD service areas using smaller vehicles.
- Immigration status and its effect on discount eligibility and ability to apply for discount fare programs and CollegePass.

Feedback Panel Themes

The format of the Feedback Panel meetings encouraged discussion on seven conceptual options being considered. Members of the Feedback Panels saw value in each conceptual option; however, for several of the options, participants had difficulty answering the discussion questions because of the complexity of the challenges that the options sought to address (e.g., price stabilization post-COVID) and trade-offs between the different approaches (e.g., streamlining the discount levels to one discount level vs. retaining a greater discount for youth customers).

Overall input from Feedback Panel participants indicated the following themes:

- A preference for lower fares, lower upfront costs and an increase or maintenance of current discount levels.

- Bulk discounts for organizations that serve financially burdened clients, taking the burden of providing proof of eligibility off the already burdened individual.
- Offering airport employees the EcoPass, while recognizing that Fare Capping will help employees without an EcoPass.
- For the CollegePass, consideration of providing an opt-in system for students, as well as for K-12 students with transportation needs.
- A stable price for pass programs over multiple years to allow organizations the ability to budget and sell the cost to their respective Boards.

Next Steps

Following the second set of engagement opportunities, the project team will review all feedback received through each activity. The project team will use this input to help guide the study.

During the third phase of the study, the project team will provide an overview of the feedback received and share the set of fare structure alternatives under consideration along with an evaluation of the alternatives for feedback. The primary objective of the engagement activities will be to gather additional input from the public to further shape the final fare structure recommendation.