RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis Jurisdiction Feedback Panel Meeting

December 5, 2022, 1:00pm-3:00pm

Meeting Summary

Meeting Objectives:

- o Provide an overview of RTD's current alternatives, policies and programs based on Engagement #3 community, customer and community based organization feedback.
- o Gather Feedback Panel input on improving a refined alternative, and input on policies and programs under consideration.

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 and timeline and activities conducted in Engagement #3.

Fare Structure Direction and Discussion

Andrew Amey, Amey Consulting, presented the alternative fare structure RTD is considering in order to seek input from the Feedback Panel members. The single alternative for refinement is the result of input from the Engagement #3 activities. Andrew provided an overview of what RTD heard from customers and the community on two draft alternatives. Engagement #3 activities included: community and customer meetings (in English, and in Spanish), an online survey (3,900 respondents in English and Spanish), Community Partner Focus Groups (65+ participants, in English and in Spanish), and a community based organization survey (45 respondents). The input from the activities showed a preference for Alternative B (depending on the activity, the preference was 59-90%). Those who expressed a preference for Alternative A, they indicated that the lower Local fare pricing was a major reason for their choice.
To see all presentation slides: www.rtd-denver.com/farestudy/feedback-panels.

Discussion - *How would you improve the alternative to benefit as many RTD customers as possible? What levers would you change and keep balance?*

- All feedback panel participants mentioned support for alternative B.
    - Simpler.
    - Provides benefits to Regional customers who tend to be essential workers.
    - Concerns:
        - This does not have benefits for Local customers; the benefits for Regional customers seems to encourage longer distance trips and urban sprawl.
        - Community and customer input was about lower Local fares, Alternative B does not lower Local fares (same as current) which are still higher than other transit agencies.
        - There is not enough data/numbers to evaluate the two fare structure alternatives – need ridership and revenue projections to know the impacts.
            - Some modeling projections were done on the two alternatives (ridership, revenue, and equity), there weren't significant differences. Ridership was slightly better in Alternative B than Alternative A, and revenue is slightly better in Alternative A than Alternative B. The largest difference was the equity impacts which may be addressed by additional policies and programs being considered.
- *Question:* Is RTD working to recoup a certain amount of revenue? Is that why we are being asked to suggest increases to balance suggested decreases?
  Answer: RTD doesn't not have a specific revenue target but is looking for how to be financially balanced. Alternatives being considered were structured to meet the overall goals of the Study and maintain current service levels (no decrease in services).
- SUGGESTIONS:
    - Lower the Local/Regional fare while maintaining the simplicity of Alternative B. For balance, raise the airport single fare which is paid mostly by tourists/travelers (those outside the RTD district) and ensure airport workers are not paying the higher fare.
    - Increase the 3-Hour Pass to 4-hours – allow more time for longer distance trips to be completed in the Hour-Pass fare.
        - *[NOTE: RTD is not considering changing the Hour-Pass timeframe. The 3-Hour Pass was established during the 2018 Pass Program Working Group as an alternative to transfers for one-way trips.]*
    - Lower the 3-Hour Pass to $2.50 and Day Pass to $5. For balance, round up the Monthly Pass to $100.
        - This would lower Local/Regional fares and use round numbers for easier payment.
        - More customers would be apt to buy the cheaper Day Pass, even if they didn't use it more than once.

        ○   Combined Alt A and B, develop an alternative that is more affordable for locals and simpler.

Policies and Programs Direction and Discussion

Andrew Amey presented the policy or program for Feedback Panel input.

Discount Fares: Free Fares for Youth **–** How could RTD define eligibility – three options (age, k-12, limited to participating schools)? Where should RTD look for external funding?

- All commenters supported the Age-based definition of youth (verbally or in the chat)
    - Easier for bus operators to check eligibility and easier to administer.
    - Inclusive of any youth – RTD district residents, Colorado residents, and visitors.
    - Most mentioned 18/19-years old as the maximum to support youth becoming independent and include older high school students.
- SUGGESTION:
    - Only require proof of eligibility for older youth (teens?), allow younger riders to ride more easily (no proof of age required).
- _Question:_ How much of Free Fare for Youth could RTD cover without additional external funding? Is RTD considering phasing in Free Fares for Youth, starting with a population that RTD can fund themselves?
  Answer: RTD is gathering feedback now and will discuss all the options before developing a preliminary recommended alternative for RTD Board approval and further customer input.
- _Question:_ Is RTD considering gating stations?
  Answer: RTD is only considering gating one station, Union Station, for ongoing improvements. RTD has not discussed gating any other stations.
- External Funding SUGGESTIONS:
    - State Legislature.
    - Consider phasing Free Fare for youth based on what RTD can fund themselves, then look for external sources to fund older age youth.
    - Not school districts – they have already been cutting back on their own transportation budgets and RTD is already providing some school transportation.
    - Not jurisdictions or MPOs – too difficult to administer if some jurisdictions contributed and others didn't.

Discount Fares: LiVE Expansion

How to remove barriers?
- There was support for the direction presented, RTD is on the right track.
- The biggest obstacle to taking advantage of any low-income discounts (for public works, transit, etc.) is the process of enrollment and proving eligibility.
- SUGGESTIONS:
    - Decrease materials needed to certify eligibility.

- o Move to a trust system – do we know how many would abuse the system compared to the administrative costs to verify eligibility? Other transit agencies reduced reporting quantity and their participants numbers were about the same.
  - ▪ RTD is not considering removing income verification but does want to make the process simpler.
- o Pilot a self-reporting option and see if the advantages out-weigh the volume of abuse.
- o Rely more on partners to certify income eligibility – allow other organizations to verify income for RTD's LiVE program. This could also help spread word about the program.
- o Partner more for outreach and training – leverage those in the community to identify the best marketing opportunities (events, locations) to ensure connecting with different populations with nuanced strategies.
- o Use plain language, use culturally responsive language.

How to improve access to LiVE?
- ● There was support for the direction presented.
- ● Support the simplicity of a single discount level for all eligible categories; it is easier to explain and understand which is the best discount for a customer.
- ● SUGGESTIONS:
  - o Allow for cash purchases, like other discount eligible groups (e.g., senior and youth).
  - o Create one process for any/all discount categories – application, card, etc.
  - o Increase the income threshold over 200% of the federal poverty level – it is expensive to live in this region.

Pass Programs: Affordable Housing Pass – Which of the two approaches is best and why? And any other suggestions?
- ● This will depend on how RTD defines "affordable" – the definition should be in alignment with Housing Authorities, most of whom use an AMI threshold and not FPL.
- ● Approach1
  - o Removes the psychological barrier to enrollment – removes the stigma of having to show a LiVE card; customers will not have to have a LiVE card and a RTD fare card/ticket.
- ● Approach2
  - o This will apply to more people – there are less 100% affordable housing developments in the district than mixed income developments, and most jurisdictions are pushing for more inclusive housing, for more mixed income developments.
- ● SUGGESTIONS:
  - o Provide both approaches – not all developments are 100% and all should be able to access the program for their affordable housing residents.

- o Work with housing authorities to define "affordable" (e.g., conduct a focus group).
- o Lower the 100% threshold in Approach 1.
  - ▪ This might be counter to the RTD goal of simplicity – if less than 100% units are affordable, RTD has to establish how to verify the distribution, pricing, etc.
- o Provide a jurisdiction with Affordable Housing EcoPass option – a city or counties housing authorities could provide transit for all affordable housing participants
  - ▪ This is already available. Example: Boulder County has a master contract for all affordable housing units, priced at Full Fare rates.

Pass Programs: _Overall, Eco and NECO, College pass programs and Bulk Purchase Program_

Changes to Other EcoPass (Business, College, NECO)
- There was support for simplifying the Service Level Areas (SLA-based on physical geographic areas) from four to three (A/B, C, and D-airport) and lowering the minimum employee threshold to five.
- NECO – the new fare collection system has a limited ability to delineate a senior or youth therefore there is uncertainty about applying the discounts.
  - o RTD seeks to keep all pass programs consistent, and no other pass program applies eligible discounts.
  - o RTD will reexamine this depending on the functionality available in the new fare collection system.
  - o This will make the NECO less attractive.

Bulk Purchase Program
- This would be an opt-in option for any business/employer who doesn't have EcoPass; they would purchase what they want at/over $2000 to get a discount.

New Programs: Transit Assistance Grant Program _(Presented, but not discussed)_
- SUGGESTION (in chat only): consider a spin off as a foundation to solicit corporate and private donations, expanding funding availability and program reach.

Appendix A: Attendees

Feedback Panel

State
1. Colorado Department of Transportation, Bruan Pokorny

Regional
2. Denver Regional Council of Government, Matthew 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

City/Town
8. City of Arvada, John Firouzi
9. City of Aurora, Tom Worker-Braddock
10. City of Boulder, Danny O'Connor
11. City of Centennial, Melanie Ward
12. City of Lakewood, Matthew Seubert
13. City of Littleton, Keith Reester
14. City of Longmont, Phil Greenwald
15. City of Northglenn, Sara Dusenberry
16. Town of Parker, Jeremiah Fettig
17. Town of Superior, Alex Arinello
18. City of Thornton, Kent Moorman

Transportation Management Org./Assoc.
19. Boulder Transportation Connections, Amanda Mansfield
20. Denver South, Sheryl Machado
21. Smart Commute Metro North, Carson Priest
22. Transportation Solutions, Stuart Anderson
23. West Corridor, Mike Hughes

Regional Transportation District
24. RTD, Bill Sirois – Sr. Advisor
25. RTD, Chris Quinn – Project Manager
26. RTD, Carl Green Jr. – Deputy Project Manager

Others or Observers
1. Broomfield City/County, Allison Baxter
2. City of Lakewood, Jenny Gritton

Project Team
1. RTD, Theresa Rinker – Senior Manager, Market Development
2. RTD, Brandon Figliolino – Community Engagement
3. Four Nines Technologies, Christina Winberry
4. Amey Consulting, Andrew Amey
5. JSE Associates, Jody Erikson (Facilitator)

Appendix B: Agenda
RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis
Feedback Panel Meeting
PASS PROGRAM - November 30, 2022, 1:00-3:00pm
EQUITY - December 5, 2022, 10:00am -12:00pm
JURISDICTION- December 5, 2022, 1:00pm-3:00pm

Agenda – DRAFT

Meeting Objectives:
- o Provide an overview of where RTD is at on alternatives, policies and programs based on Engagement #3 community, customer and community based organization feedback.
- o Gather Feedback Panel input on improving a refined alternative, and input on policies and programs under consideration.

1:00   Welcome and Agenda review
1:07   Safety Moment
1:10   Presentation:
- Overview of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis project
  - o Purpose, Goals, Timeline
  - o Engagement #3 Activities
- Fare Structure Alternatives Presented during Engagement #3
  - o Overview of Alternatives A and B
  - o What did RTD hear during Engagement #3?
  - o Where is RTD thinking about going?

1:30   Discussion: Feedback on Fare Structure Direction: How would you improve the alternative to benefit as many RTD customers as possible? What levers would you change to make it work?
- Presentation on levers
- Discussion

1:45   Presentation and Discussion: Policies and Programs
1. *Discount Fares: Free Fares for Youth* - How could RTD define eligibility?
2. *Discount Fares: LiVE Expansion* - Feedback on methods to remove barriers? and How could RTD further improve access to LiVE?
3. *Pass Programs: Affordable Housing Pass*
4. *Pass Programs:*
    a. Overall Pass Program Policies
    b. Changes to Other EcoPass (Business, College, NECO)
    c. Bulk Purchase Program
    d. Semester Pass
5. *New Programs: Transit Assistance Grant Program*

1:55   Next Steps
2:00   Adjourn