

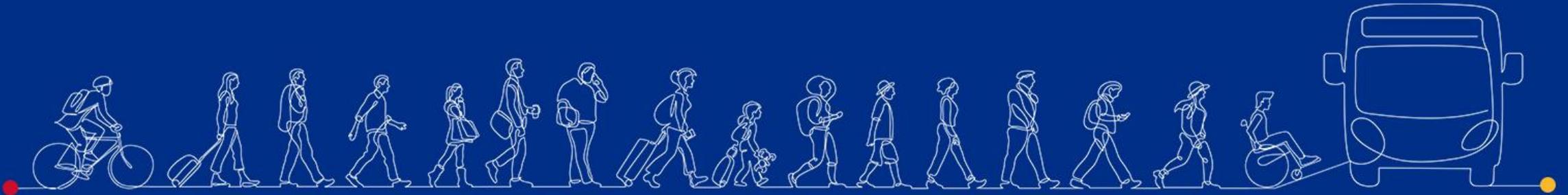
RTD

FARE

STUDY



RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis



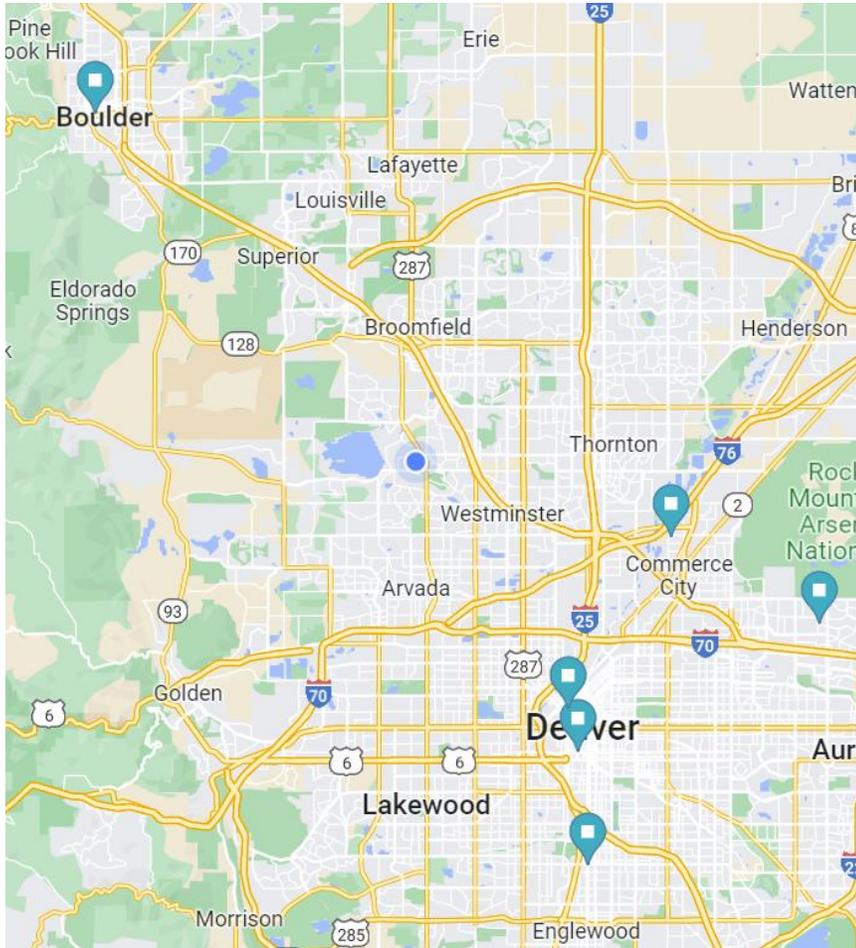


**We Make Lives Better
Through Connections.**

Focus Group Feedback

Themes and insights from October and November 2022

Focus Group Overview



- 6 focus groups were conducted by community-based organizations that have relationships and trust with community members.
 - Focus groups were held in English and in Spanish, in person and virtually, from October 20 to November 18.
 - 84 community members participated.
- Community partners included:
 - Focus ReEntry
 - Cultivando
 - Athletics and Beyond
 - Denver Streets Partnership
 - CREA Results
 - Una Mano Una Esperanza

Focus Group Participants

- To understand the demographics represented in the focus groups, participants were asked about their:



Household size



Annual household income



Racial/ethnic background

- Participants were also asked about their use of RTD services, including whether they:



Currently use RTD services



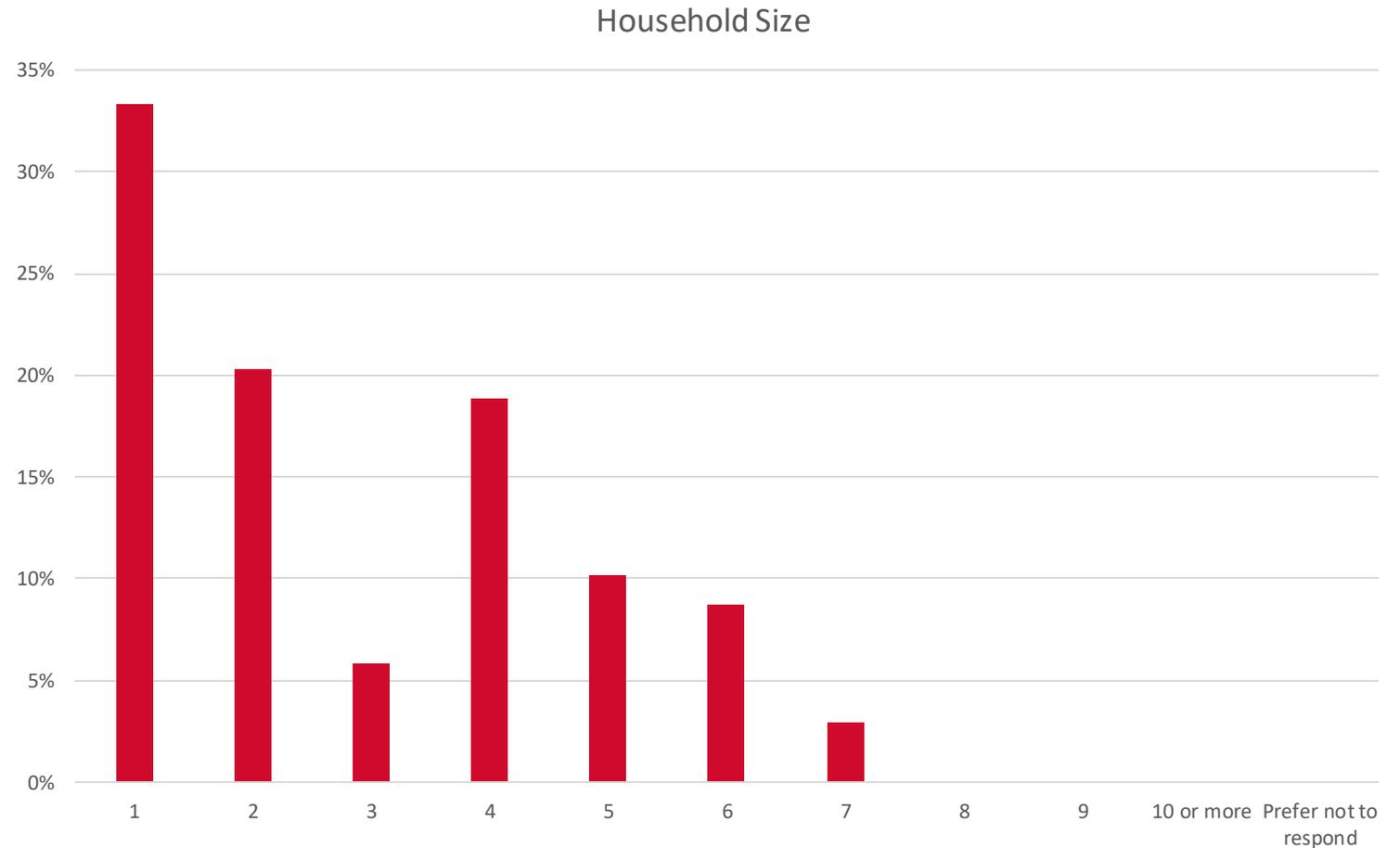
Use Local, Regional or Airport fares



Participate in one of RTD's discount programs

Focus Group Participants: Demographics

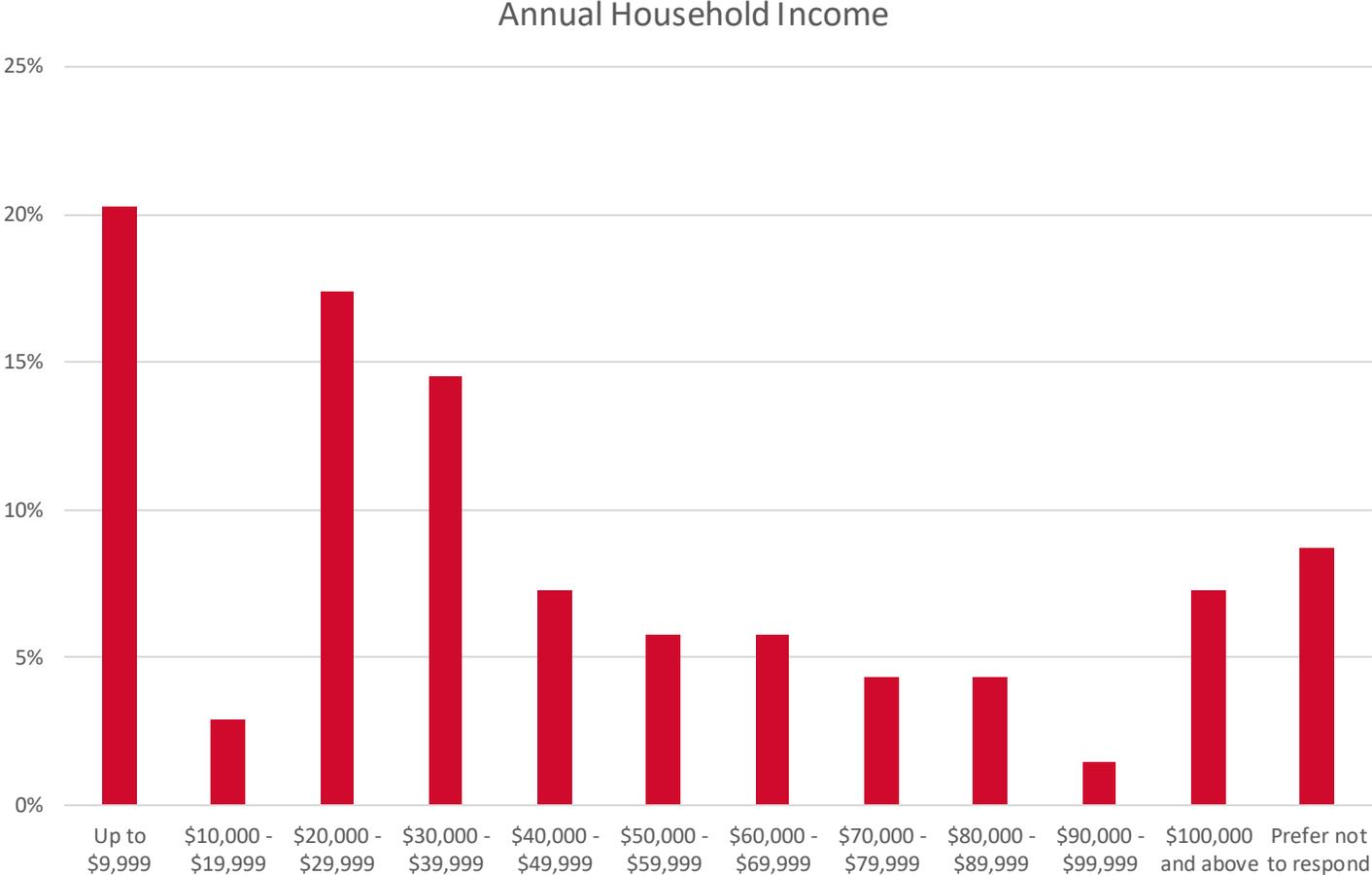
- The majority of participants lived in households with one or two occupants.
- 46% lived in households with three or more individuals.



*Note: demographics reflect participant data from 5 of the 6 Community Partner Focus Groups.

Focus Group Participants: Demographics

- Nearly 80% of participants who chose to disclose their household income make less than \$80,000 annually.
- Nearly 70% make less than \$50,000 per year.
- 55% make \$40,000 or less annually.

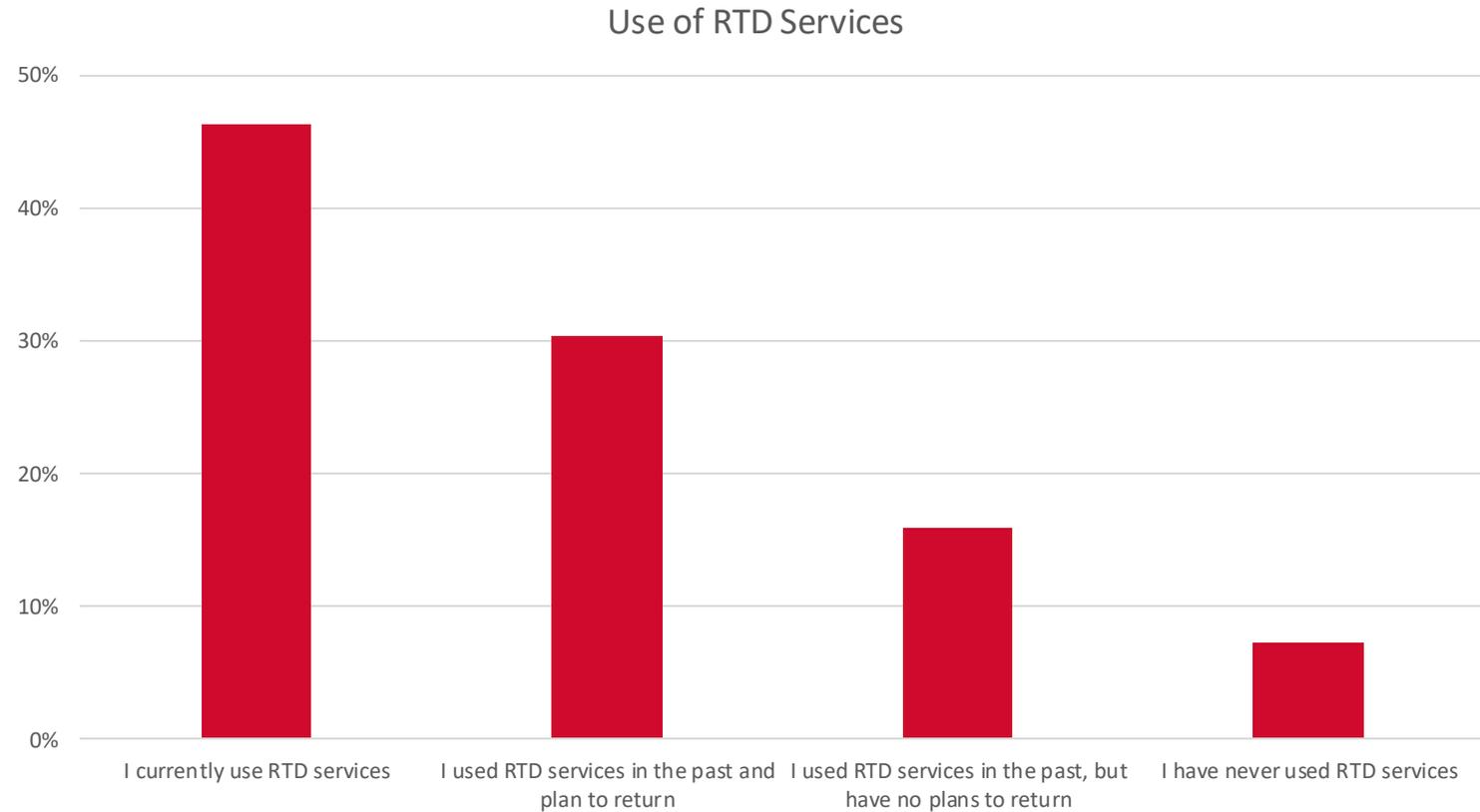


*Note: demographics reflect participant data from 5 of the 6 Community Partner Focus Groups.

Focus Group Participants: Use of RTD Services

■ Of all participants:

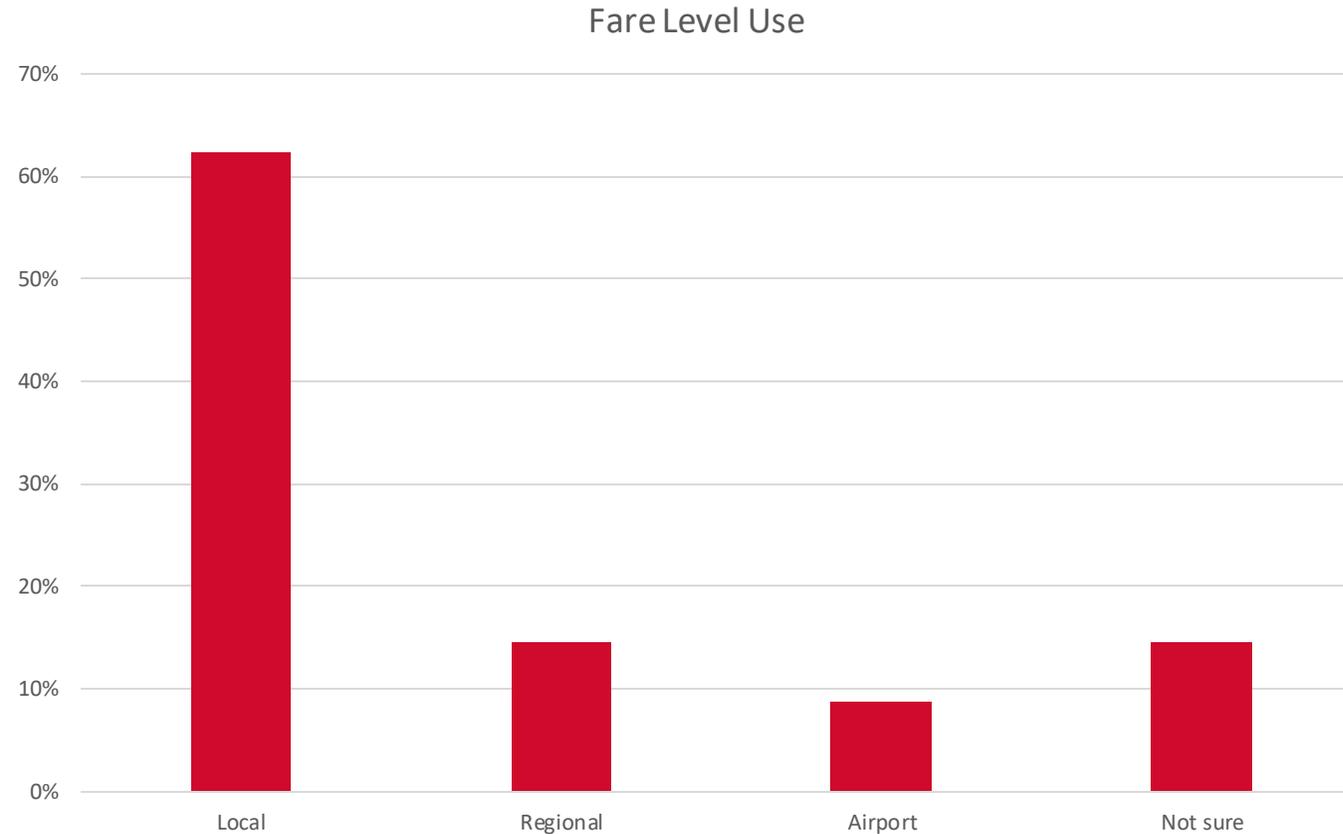
- 46% currently use RTD services
- 46% used RTD services previously
- 7% have never used RTD services



*Note: demographics reflect participant data from 5 of the 6 Community Partner Focus Groups.

Focus Group Participants: Use of RTD Services

- More than 60% of participants used Local RTD services most often.
- Nearly a quarter use Regional or Airport fare levels.
- Nearly 15% were unsure of the fare level they used most often.



*Note: demographics reflect participant data from 5 of the 6 Community Partner Focus Groups.

Focus Group Participants: Use of RTD Services

- Nearly 20% of participants use the income-based LiVE discount.
- 20% participate in another discount program (youth, senior, individuals with disabilities or free ride).



*Note: demographics reflect participant data from 5 of the 6 Community Partner Focus Groups.

Focus Group Discussion Topics: Fare Structure Alternatives

- Participants learned about two proposed [fare structure alternatives](#):
 - **Alternative A**, which lowers fares for customers overall while retaining the Local, Regional and Airport fare levels of the current fare structure
 - **Alternative B**, which simplifies the fare structure by combining Local and Regional fares while maintaining an Airport fare
- Participants shared their preferences between Alternative A and B and how each of the fare structures would impact where and how often they use RTD services.

Focus Group Discussion Topics: Policies and Programs

- Participants also learned about [policies and programs](#) under consideration including:
 - Options to make it easier to sign up for discount programs
 - Making discount fares less expensive for seniors, youth, individuals with disabilities and individuals with limited incomes
- Participants shared their experiences with discount programs, opportunities to improve the process to sign up for fare discounts and which changes to RTD policies and programs they would prioritize.

Fare Study Insights

Feedback on proposed Fare Alternatives, Policies and Programs

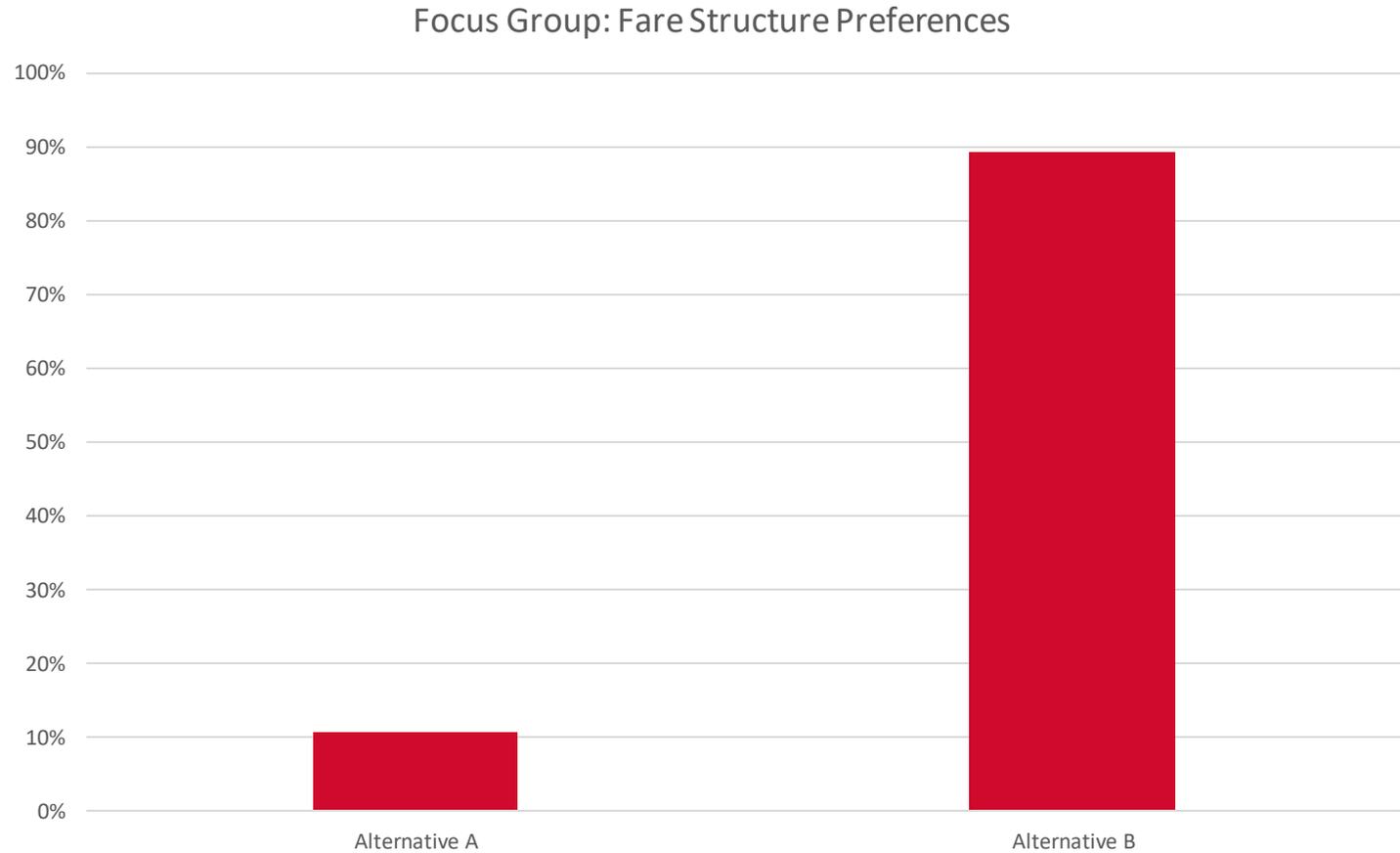


Fare Structure

Feedback on Alternative A and B

Fare Structure Alternative Preferences

- Nearly 90% of respondents who identified a preferred option selected Alternative B.



Fare Structure Alternatives Feedback

Support for Alternative A

- Participants liked that Alternative A:
 - Features lower prices, particularly a large reduction in the Monthly Pass price which rewards frequent customers
 - Decreases the price for the customers who use RTD most often, which are Local customers
- Participants liked that Alternative A's Local prices were cheaper than the current fare and the fares in Alternative B.
- Participants indicated that they would save on some transportation costs. One participant indicated that **"every cent matters"** so he would choose the option where he pays less.

Fare Structure Alternatives Feedback

Support for Alternative B

- Focus group participants emphasized the simplicity of Alternative B, indicating that fewer options to choose from makes it easier to understand and use.
- Participants indicated that there would be less confusion and more predictability, including fewer “gotcha” fares when customers mistakenly transfer to a Regional service.
 - Participants said they would feel more comfortable and less worried when traveling.
 - Some participants thought that the simplicity would reduce conflicts between customers and bus operators.
- Participants also used the words “flexible” and “functional” to describe Alternative B because they could use RTD services to travel to more locations. They appreciated the ability to travel further distances (such as to Boulder) for the Local price.

Fare Structure Alternatives Feedback

Support for Alternative B

- Many participants expressed support for the Monthly Pass, particularly that it included travel to the airport and provided large savings for regular customers. One said, **“Use it as many times as you want, far or near.”**
 - Some participants indicated that Alternative B’s Monthly Pass gave them a better picture of the total cost of travel.
 - Participants also said the pass made travel on RTD more attractive as gas prices, car insurance, parking and other costs increase.
- Participants saw potential benefits of Alternative B for many types of customers including:
 - Ease of use for new customers or visitors
 - Savings for airport workers
 - Encouraging more transit use, particularly for commuters from the suburbs

Fare Structure Alternatives Feedback

Concerns about Alternative A

- Because the overall fare structure stays the same, participants indicated that the structure is still confusing to understand and would remain a barrier to use.
- Having fares that aren't full dollar amounts was described as "annoying."
 - There were significant concerns about the fairness and burden for customers who prefer to pay cash, as they will need to carry change or will pay more for their fare if they do not have the exact fare amount.
- Some participants believed the fares were still not low enough, saying, "We only pay a little less than we do now."

Fare Structure Alternatives Feedback

Concerns about Alternative B

- Participants expressed concern that prices remain the same for Local customers.
- Some participants expressed confusion about how the Airport fare would work, worrying that they would have to pay one fare to get to Denver and then an additional fare to travel to the airport.

General Fare Structure Feedback

- Regardless of the alternative, some participants were concerned about how the fare structure change would impact payment to RTD workers and the services offered (both frequency of services as well as expansion and addition of new routes and equipment).
- Some suggested the bus should be free and that funding for transit should be provided through public funds they contribute to by paying taxes.
- Some indicated they did not like the 3-Hour pass because it does not give them enough time to travel to their destination before expiration, particularly if they are traveling long distances.
- Others expressed that it is still expensive under both alternatives to travel to the airport.

Impact of Fare Structures on RTD Use

Impact of Alternative A

- Lower fares would encourage some participants to use RTD services more. Participants said:
 - “The lower the cost, the more interest in using RTD”
 - “With lower rates, it would be more convenient to use public transportation”
- Others indicated that their use of RTD services would remain the same either because:
 - They are currently using EcoPass or CollegePass
 - Cost is not the main barrier to using RTD services
 - ▶ Use is more dependent on the convenience, frequency and reliability of transit services

Impact of Fare Structures on RTD Use

Impact of Alternative B

- Participants indicated that lower fares to travel further distances would encourage them to use transit.
 - Some indicated that they would travel to other cities, such as Boulder, Golden, Parker, Thornton or other Regional locations.
 - Others indicated that they would use transit more to go to work, to school, for leisure activities or to access the mountains.

Impact of Fare Structures on RTD Use

Impact of Alternative A or B

- Participants indicated that lower fares in either Alternative would encourage them to use RTD services more.
 - One noted, **“I currently use public transportation when I have no other choice; if the price were more affordable, it would be my first choice.”**
 - Others said that the cheaper prices would encourage them to use RTD services to save money on gas.
 - Some expressed that the new, lower price made tradeoffs (of whether to drive or take public transportation) easier.



Discount Programs

Feedback on improving access to RTD discount programs

Discount Programs: LiVE Sign-Up Experiences

- Participants described their experiences in signing up for the income-based LiVE discount, explaining that:
 - “It was difficult to do all of the requirements” and was “especially challenging if unhoused”
 - “Working with the PEAK system was tedious and challenging”
 - There are too many barriers and too much paperwork, making it “impossible for people who work multiple jobs”
 - The process is humiliating
- Participants indicated that a more straightforward process, particularly one that is streamlined and/or connected to other benefits or services, would support them in signing up for the program.

Discount Programs: Disability Sign-Up Experiences

- Participants described their experiences signing up for the Special Discount Card for Individuals with Disabilities, explaining:
 - “It was a headache”
 - Mailing the forms and providing the documentation were significant barriers
- Some participants indicated that while they were not currently signed up for the discount, they thought they might be eligible. They expressed a lack of awareness about what qualified for the discount.
- Others indicated that the threshold requirement currently used to qualify through the Veterans Administration is too high. Currently the benefit letter must state the disability is over 50% service connected; the focus group participant noted that “20% is more reasonable and often used by other systems.”

Discount Program: Youth Sign Up

- Only one youth focus group participant had used the RTD youth discount. They indicated that it was easy to sign up, saying “I just needed to show my student card at King Soopers.”
- Other youth participants indicated that they were not aware that there was a program for youth.
 - One indicated that while they had heard about the program, they typically do not use RTD enough to sign up for the program.

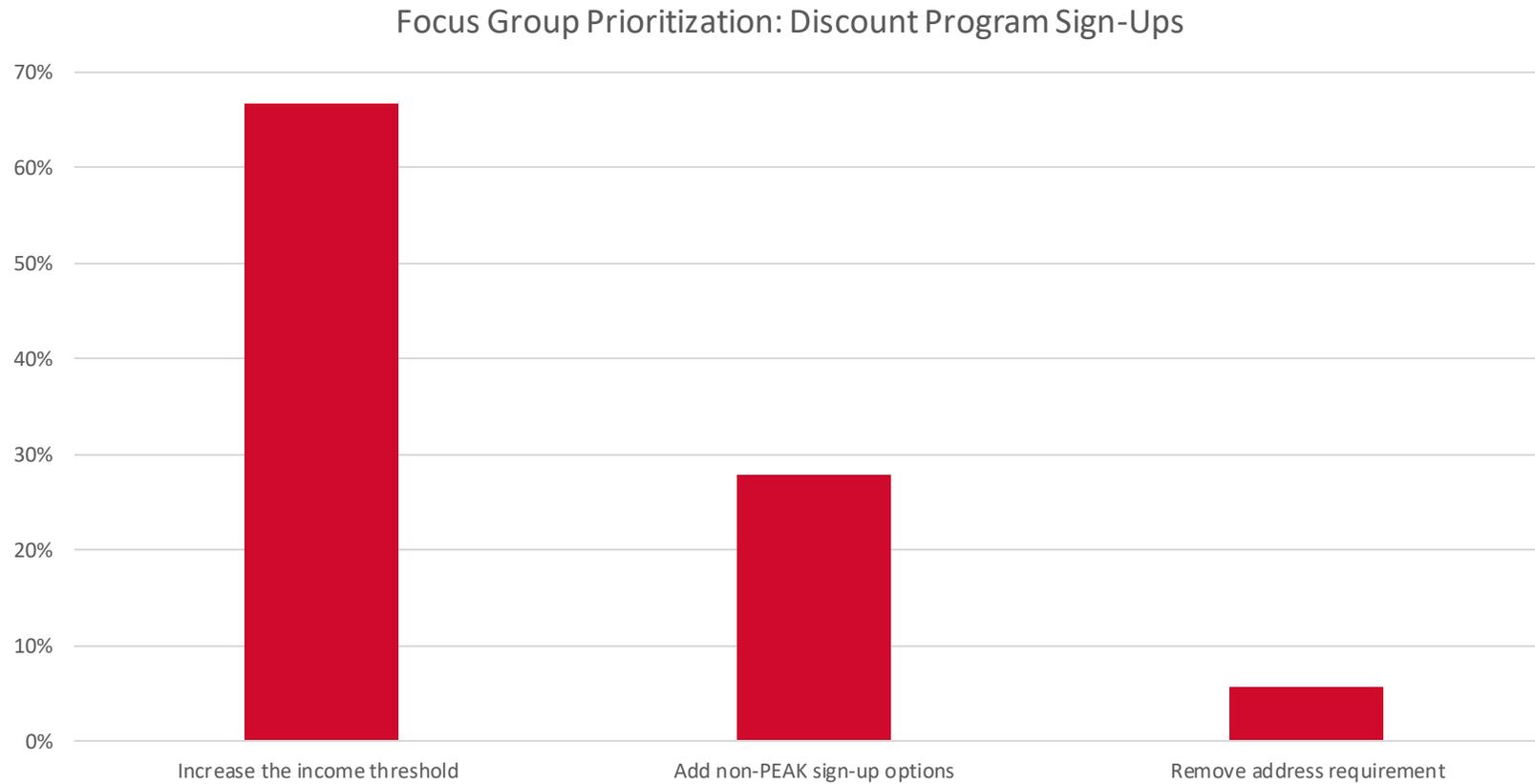
Discount Programs: Awareness

- Many participants expressed a lack of awareness of the availability of the fare discount programs.
 - Participants said there should be intentional efforts to make information more accessible and visible about what programs are available and what is required to qualify for them.
 - They indicated that customers are only aware if they go to the RTD website, which can be difficult to access or navigate.
 - Participants offered ideas of where to publicize the information, including:
 - ▶ Information posted on RTD buses and trains, in stations and other public locations
 - ▶ Posts on social networks
 - ▶ Advertising or stories in the media, particularly Hispanic media
 - Participants indicated that awareness campaigns should be in multiple languages, including Spanish.

Discount Programs: Improving Access

- Participants were presented with several ways that RTD could make it easier to sign up for the income-based LiVE discount and asked which *one* improvement they would prioritize.
 - The majority of participants indicated that they would **increase the income that a household can make and still qualify for the LiVE discount.**
 - There was also wide support for having **options to sign up for LiVE outside of the PEAK benefits system.**
- Participants noted that *all* improvements should be a priority to increase access to LiVE.

Discount Programs: Improving Access



Improving Access: Income Threshold

- Participants explained why increasing the income threshold was most important to them:
 - With an increase to the income threshold, more people would qualify for the discount.
 - ▶ **“Many people in need are currently left out.”**
 - There are challenges with slight increases in income that make you no longer eligible for support.
 - ▶ **“The transition from receiving aid and discounts to not can be difficult and create household instability.”**

Improving Access: Non-PEAK sign-ups

- Participants indicated that PEAK is a deterrent to signing up for the LiVE discount.
 - One of the major challenges to accessing PEAK is **having access to a computer**.
 - Not having access to a computer both impairs signing up but also logging onto the system to address any changes. Some participants explained that their access to LiVE was recently removed due to changes in the program but they could not log on to PEAK to address it.
- Some indicated that the PEAK system itself could be improved or streamlined.
 - One participant noted, “The tech exists for people to automatically connect to the IRS for tax info; the PEAK system should use that kind of functionality.”

Improving Access: Non-PEAK sign-ups

- Participants indicated that it would be helpful to have support, particularly from someone they trust, to get signed up.
 - One explained, “**Working with a real person close to home or where I go often would get more people help quickly.**”
- Others asked for a place or way to sign up for discounts **confidentially**.

Improving Access: In-District Address Requirement

- While it was not the most important improvement, participants indicated that removing the in-district address requirement should be implemented.
 - One indicated that it “seems really simple from a technological perspective” and that “it should be done immediately.”

Improving Access: Community Sign Ups

- Participants were introduced to the idea of RTD partnering with local organizations or nonprofits to help community members sign up for LiVE. When asked what kinds of organizations are convenient to them and that they trust to go to for support, they said:
 - Libraries
 - Recreation centers
 - Post Office
 - Grocery stores
 - Cafes
 - Community health centers
 - Employers
 - Apartment complexes/housing providers
 - Refugee agencies or organizations
 - Childcare providers
 - Community-serving nonprofits and other local organizations “where we know the people who are a part of them”

Improving Access: Community Sign Ups

- Participants were introduced to the idea of RTD partnering with local organizations or nonprofits to help community members sign up for LiVE. When asked what kinds of organizations are convenient to them and that they trust to go to for support, some specific organizations were identified, including:
 - Athletics and Beyond
 - CREA Results
 - Cultivando
 - Focus Reentry
 - Lupita's Camino a la Esperanza
 - Mental Health Partners
 - The Boulder Shelter
 - The Denver Foundation
 - The Department of Labor

Discount Programs: Increasing Discounts

- Participants were presented with several ways that RTD could consider increasing discounts for customers. When asked which *one* improvement they would prioritize:
 - The majority of participants indicated that they would **increase the discount to 70% for the Monthly Pass for customers using discounted fares**
 - Nearly one in four participants chose **free fares for youth**
 - There was some support for increasing the LiVE discount to 50% and having a single discounted fare to travel anywhere within the RTD district

Discount Programs: Increasing Discounts



Increasing Discounts: Monthly Pass at 70% Discount

- When asked if a larger discount on the Monthly Pass would encourage LiVE customers to purchase one, many indicated that it would. (Some noted that they support the discount but would not purchase the pass upfront because of fare capping.)
 - Many participants noted that this discount would make the Monthly Pass more accessible and “save us a lot of money,” particularly for families.
 - Some indicated that this was their top pick because it would **provide the most benefit for the most people** – youth, seniors, individuals with disabilities and individuals with limited incomes. “For those of us who are handicapped or others who qualify, it is very good.”
 - Because the Monthly Pass “lets people ride all day as many times as they want,” participants indicated they would ride public transportation more.

Ensuring Equity: MyRide Monthly Fare Capping

- Participants were informed about how to use the MyRide card or mobile app to take advantage of fare capping.
 - Many participants indicated that they **already used the MyRide card**, noting that the card **“makes it easy to load funds and use.”** Others said that the card **“saves time,”** indicating that it was faster to pay by using the cash on the card.
 - Few participants indicated that they used the mobile app. Many said they found the app confusing or didn’t have a phone that could run the app. **One who did use the mobile app said that it was “phenomenal** because [the fare] is immediately discounted.”
 - Those who did not use a MyRide card or the mobile app said that they *would* use it to benefit from fare capping or to load cash onto cards.
 - ▶ Participants liked that they did not have to provide personal information, such as a Social Security number, to get the card.

Ensuring Equity: MyRide Monthly Fare Capping

- When asked about what kinds of businesses are convenient to load cash onto their MyRide card, participants indicated that the following would be good locations:
 - Grocery stores including King Soopers and Safeway
 - Convenience stores such as 7-Eleven
 - Gas stations
 - Bus stations

Increasing Discounts: Free Fares for Youth

- Adult participants indicated that free fares for youth would encourage them and the young people in their family to use RTD services more. They said it would:
 - Help youth get to school or to college classes, especially in inclement weather
 - Ensure young people can get where they need to go, overcoming barriers such as not having an income, not driving, not having a car or having schedules that do not align with their parents' work schedules
 - Provide more freedom and independence for youth
 - Help youth feel comfortable with RTD, which would encourage future ridership
 - Save families money, create financial stability in households and allow funding currently used for youth transportation to be used for other family needs such as food
 - Save parents time if youth have their own transportation
- There was support for free fares for youth even among participants who do not have children.

Increasing Discounts: Free Fares for Youth and Semester Pass

- Youth participants expressed support for free fares for youth, explaining that it would:
 - Have a very large economic impact for them and their families
 - Make it easier on families (both financially and logistically)
 - Reduce their dependency on getting rides from friends
 - Enable them to get to school or to college
 - Promote more bus use which would lead to fewer emissions and be better for the environment
- Youth expressed that *any* cost is a barrier to using public transportation as they are reliant on their parents for money or even if they work, they have limited funds.
- Youth participants also described free or discounted transportation through a Semester Pass as “very important,” making college more affordable and enabling them to better balance school and work. One said, “It would be less of a burden.”

Increasing Discounts: LiVE Increase to 50% and Single Fare

- Participants indicated that increasing the LiVE discount to 50% would support Local customers, particularly “casual riders” who use the services less frequently.
- While it was not identified as one of the most important discounts, participants indicated that a single discounted fare would encourage them to travel more often and to travel farther.
 - Participants said, “If there is a greater discount, we will travel more often.”
 - Some indicated that they would travel more with their family or for leisure around the region.

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