

# **RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis**

**Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey Results – Executive Summary**

March 15, 2023

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Introduction

The Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey is the second survey conducted as part of the RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis. The first survey conducted was the Current Conditions Survey, which asked customers and non-customers for their opinions and preferences regarding current RTD fares and how RTD could improve them. The feedback and results of the first survey were used to develop the proposed alternatives discussed in this Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey. For this second survey, RTD conducted outreach to get input and preferences on proposed alternative fare structures. This survey asked customers and non-customers for their opinions and preferences regarding two proposed alternative fare structures. Respondents provided very important feedback on the overall fare alternatives as presented, as well as feedback on specific aspects of each alternative. The feedback provided by survey respondents helped inform further refinement of the proposed fare structure developed as part of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis.

RTD conducted the Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey in October and November 2022. The survey was offered in English and Spanish languages. Customers could access the survey in English from the RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis website <https://www.rtd-denver.com/faresstudy> and the survey in Spanish from the website Estudio Tarifario y Análisis de Equidad de Todo el Sistema de RTD <https://www.rtd-denver.com/estudio-de-tarifas>.

The survey received 3,910 responses in total from RTD customers and non-customers throughout the counties of the RTD service area. The English survey received 3,596 responses and the Spanish survey received 314 responses. The survey was open to everyone to participate, there was no sampling involved and no weighting of customer responses.

Customers were asked about their current and potential future usage of RTD services, the types of fares, types of discounts and types of passes they use. Current customers were asked to provide their opinion on what they like and do not like about RTD fares. Customers and non-customers were then asked to provide their preference between the two proposed alternative fare structures – Alternative A and Alternative B. Additionally, respondents were asked to rank which features of the alternatives were most important to them. The survey also asked respondents if RTD should consider a single fare price for customers paying discounted fares for travel anywhere in the RTD service area.

At the end of the survey, respondents provided demographic information about their ethnicity / racial background, household size, and income levels. This document provides the summary results of the survey and the opinions of respondents.

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Equity Populations

Given the focus of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis on promoting equity, for several of the survey questions cross tabulations were done to understand how equity populations, in particular low-income and minority survey respondents, may have responded differently from overall survey respondents. These equity populations are as defined by RTD's Title VI Program.

**Low-Income Status:** Survey respondents were asked to provide their household income level and number of individuals in their household. Combining the household size with the income level determines a household's low-income status. In this survey, respondents are considered low income if their household income is at or below 150% of the Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines.<sup>1</sup> The number of survey respondents that were categorized as low income in the Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey (Survey #2) was 480, which is 15% of survey respondents. This is an increase in responses from low-income individuals as compared to the Current Conditions Survey (Survey #1), which had 149 responses, or 9% of respondents (see Table 1). However, the percentage of low-income respondents in the 2022 Current Conditions and Proposed Alternatives Fare Surveys is lower than in previous RTD surveys. In the 2017 Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSAT), 27% of survey respondents were categorized as low income based on household income and size, and in the 2019 CSAT, 25% of survey respondents were categorized as low income. Both the 2017 and 2019 CSAT surveys had a much larger number of respondents with 9,936 and 3,811, respectively. These surveys were also conducted onboard RTD vehicles in accordance with established sampling plans and were statistically valid.

**Minority Status:** Additionally, survey respondents were asked to self-identify their racial / ethnic background. Minority being defined as anyone who indicated a race / ethnicity other than "Caucasian/White – not of Hispanic origin". Of those who responded to the question in the Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey (Survey #2), 820 people or 25% identified as a minority ethnicity / racial background. This is a slight increase from the Current Conditions Survey where 446 people or 24% identified themselves as a minority ethnicity / racial background. In the 2017 and 2019 CSAT surveys, 31% of survey respondents identified as minority. The Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey percentage of minority respondents is generally in line with previous surveys.

*Table 1: Survey Low-Income and Minority Response Rates*

	<b>Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey (Survey #2) October – November 2022</b>	<b>Current Conditions Survey (Survey #1) April – May 2022</b>	<b>2019 CSAT</b>	<b>2017 CSAT</b>
<b>Overall Responses</b>	3,910	2,425	--	--
<b>Low Income</b>	480 (15%)	149 (9%)	25%	27%
<b>Minority</b>	820 (25%)	446 (24%)	31%	31%

<sup>1</sup> "U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility," HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2022 <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Definitions

**Airport** – Customers who most frequently pay the Airport fare when using RTD services

**Bus** – Customers who use RTD bus services (i.e., local bus, regional bus, Skyride, Flatiron Flyer, 16th Street Mall Shuttle, or FlexRide). Note: respondents were able to select multiple service types

**Equity Populations** - Low-income or minority customers as defined based on RTD's Title VI Disparate Impact (minority) and Disproportionate Burden (low-income) Policies and as defined below

**Fare Level** – Different fare levels paid by customers based on the distance-traveled or destination – Local, Regional, or Airport. This was also referred to as 'Fare Category' and 'Service Level'

**Local** – Customers who most frequently pay the Local fare when using RTD services

**Low-income** – Respondents whose household income is at or below 150% of the Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines for their household size

**Mode** – Different service types – Bus or Rail. Note: respondents were able to select multiple service types

**Minority** – Respondents who indicated their race / ethnicity as African-American/Black, Asian/Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Native American/American Indian, Bi-racial/Multi-racial or Other

**Rail** – Customers who use, or used, RTD rail services (i.e., Light Rail [C-Line, D-Line, E-Line, F-line, H-Line, L-Line, R-Line and W-Line] or Commuter Rail [i.e., A-Line, B-Line, G-Line and N-Line]). Note: respondents were able to select multiple service types

**Regional** – Customers who most frequently pay the Regional fare when using RTD services

**Spanish Language** – survey respondents that completed the Spanish language survey, N=314

**Access-a-Ride** – Customers that use the Access-a-Ride transportation services that are provided for people with disabilities, who cannot access the RTD fixed-route bus and train system.

## Definitions of the Three Study Goals

**Equity** – Support transit reliant/financially burdened customers; Provide equitable and fair access to fares, products and discounts, regardless of race, color, national origin, income status and for other marginalized communities

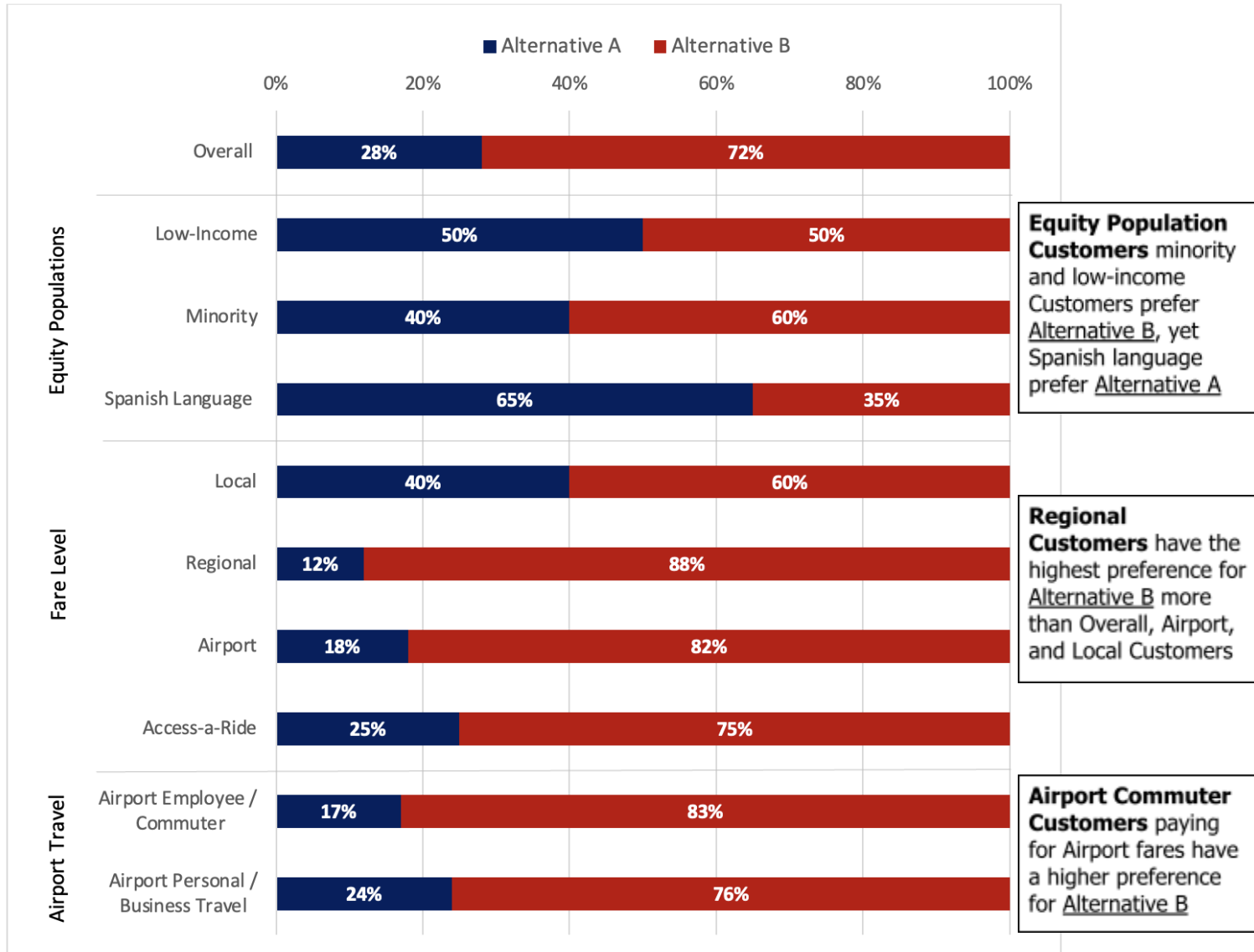
**Affordability** – Align fares with the value of the service received

**Simplicity** – Make fares easy to understand, with standardized discounts and streamlined fare payment options

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Customer Alternative Preferences

Q9 Considering the two fare structure alternatives presented, which do you prefer:



### Customer Alternative Preferences Highlights

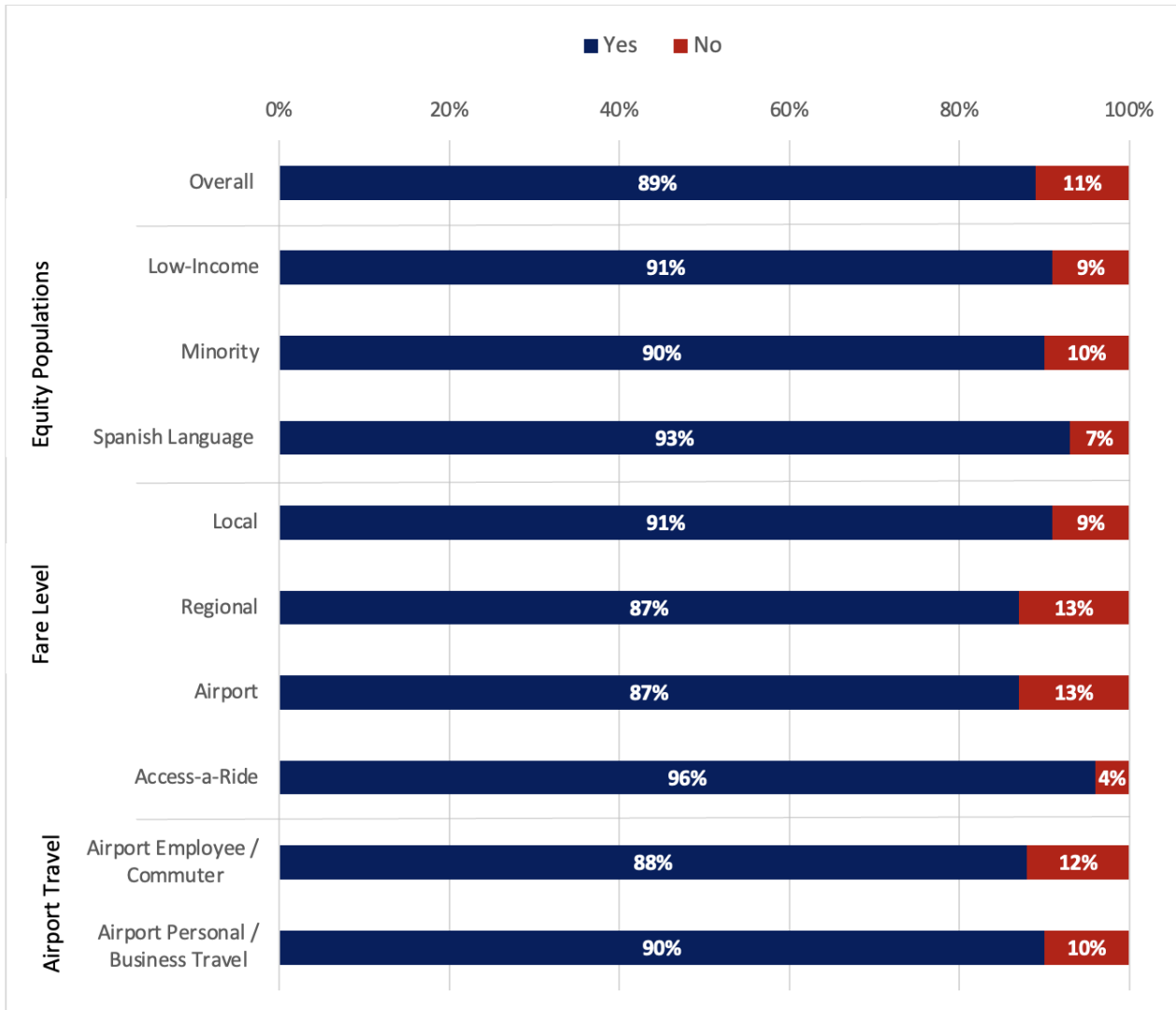
- Overall, approximately three-quarters of survey respondents prefer Alternative B over Alternative A.
- Survey respondents prefer Alternative B across most of the equity populations, fare levels, and airport travel.
- Spanish Language survey respondents are the only group that prefer Alternative A.
- Equity populations have a lower preference for Alternative B compared to the overall population.
  - Low-Income customers are evenly divided in their preference for Alternative A and Alternative B.
  - Of the customers surveyed 60% of the Minority customers prefer Alternative B.

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

- 65% of Spanish language customers prefer Alternative A.
- Regional customers (88%) and Airport Employee/Commuters (83%) have the highest preference for Alternative B.

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

Q10 For customers paying discounted fares (e.g., LiVE low-income customers, seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth), should RTD consider a single fare for travel anywhere in the RTD service area, including the airport?



## Customer Discount Fares Preferences Highlights

- Overall, the majority (89%) of the survey respondents agree that customers paying discounts should have a single fare for all travel in the RTD service area.
- The majority of survey respondents across all equity populations, fare levels, and airport travel agree that customers paying discounts should have a single fare for all travel in the RTD service area.

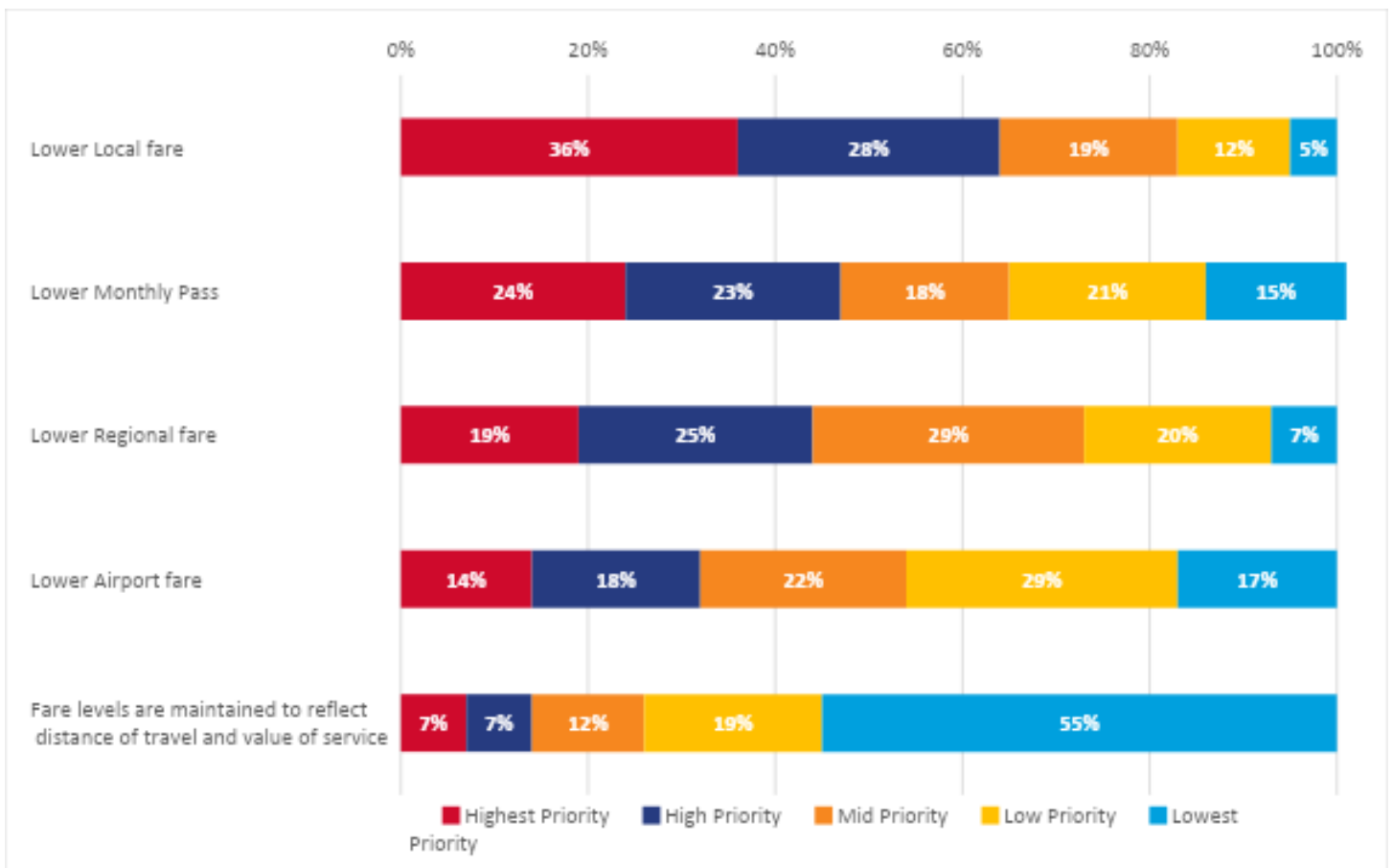
# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Alternative A Features

Q7 Below is a list of the different features of Alternative A. Please rank the features that are most important to you. Rank 1 as your top priority through 5 as your lowest priority.

*Survey respondents were asked to rank their choices. The graphs below display the five features of Alternative A presented and the percentages in which survey respondents Overall ranked their prioritization from highest priority (1st choice) to lowest priority (5th choice).*

### Overall



### Ranking of Alternative A features Highlights

- Survey respondents ranked Lower local fares as the most important feature of Alternative A, with 36% ranking it the highest priority.
- Survey respondents' next highest priority was Lower Monthly Pass.
- The lowest priority (5th choice) of survey respondents was that Local, Regional and Airport fare levels are maintained to reflect distance of travel and value of service.



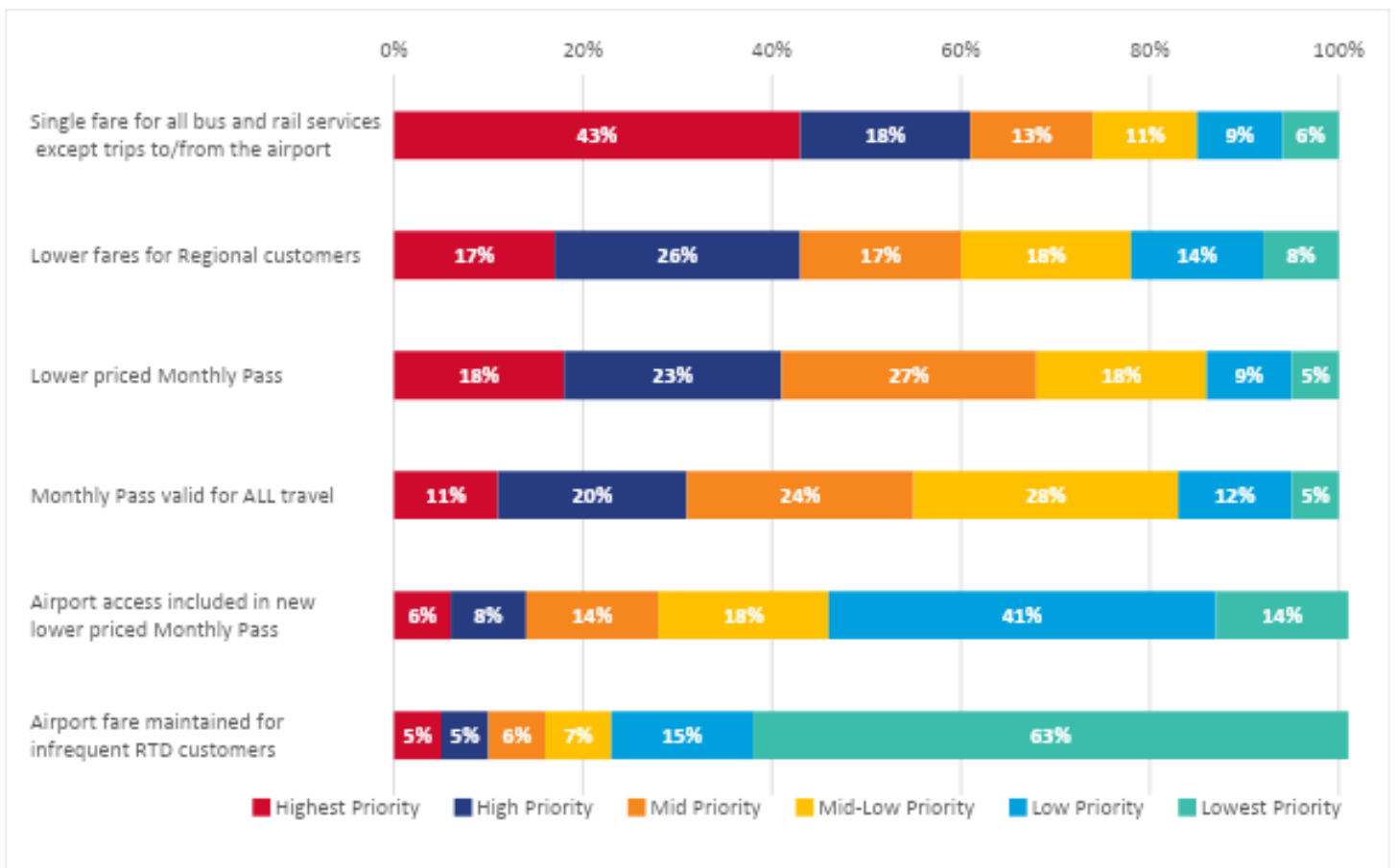
# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Alternative B Features

Q8 Below is a list of the different features of Alternative B. Please rank the features that are most important to you. Rank 1 as your top priority through 6 as your lowest priority.

*Survey respondents were asked to rank their choices. The graphs below display the six features of Alternative B presented and the percentages in which survey respondents Overall ranked their prioritization from highest priority (1st choice) to lowest priority (6th choice).*

### Overall



### Ranking of Alternative B features Highlights

- Survey respondents ranked Single fare for all bus and rail services except trips to/from the airport as the most important feature of Alternative B, with 43% ranking it the highest priority.
- Survey respondents ranked lower fares for Monthly Pass and lower fares for Regional customers similarly as the next highest priorities (18% and 17% respectively).

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

Q14 Please provide any additional comments you would like to share about the RTD fare alternatives presented:

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional feedback and comments in the form of write-in responses. An overview of the key themes from responses to the open comment box on Question 14 include:

- Simplify fare system overall / reduce confusion
- Simplify fares associated with the W-Line
- Simplify regional fares
- Consider improving student discounts
- Consider making all youth fares less expensive or free
- Consider making fares for low-income customers, seniors, and people with disabilities free
- Consider lowering the fares to the airport to increase usage
- Lower the Monthly Pass price
- Consider continuing with Free Fare August
- Work with airport employers for RTD discounts for airport employees
- Concern over the alternatives and fare changes impact to Access-a-Ride fares
- Interest in improving and expanding EcoPass
- Increase outreach education on discount passes and reduce barriers to apply

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

## Key Findings

When presented with the two fare structures, Alternative A and Alternative B, approximately three quarters of customers surveyed preferred Alternative B. Customers that usually pay the Regional or Airport fares were the highest supporters of Alternative B. Local fare customers, Low-Income, and Minority groups were more split between the two alternatives, though Alternative B was still preferred by a smaller margin.

When asked what they thought about the specific features of **Alternative A**:

- Customers overall as well as Low-income, Minority and Local fare customers ranked:
  - Lower Local fares as the most important feature
  - A lower priced Monthly Pass as the second most important feature
- Customers who usually pay the Regional fare chose lower regional fares as the most important feature of Alternative A
- Customers who usually pay the Airport fare chose lower airport fares as the most important feature of Alternative A

When asked what they think about the specific features of **Alternative B**:

- Customers overall as well as Low-income and Minority customers ranked
  - A single fare for all bus and rail services except trips to/from the airport as the most important feature
  - A lower priced Monthly Pass as their second most important feature
- Customers who usually pay the Local fare chose single fare for all bus and rail services except trips to/from the airport as the most important feature of Alternative B
- Customers who usually pay the Regional fare were evenly split between the following as the first and second most important features of Alternative B:
  - Single fare for all bus and rail services except trips to/from the airport and
  - Lower fares for Regional customers
- Customers who usually pay the Airport fare ranked
  - Single fare for all bus and rail services except trips to/from the airport as the most important feature
  - Airport access included in new lower priced Monthly Pass as the second most important feature

When customers were asked if RTD should consider offering a single fare for customers paying discounted fares (e.g., LiVE low-income customers, seniors, individuals with disabilities, youth) to travel anywhere in the RTD service area, the majority of customers said yes. The majority of survey respondents across all equity populations, fare levels, and airport travel agree that customers paying discounts should have a single fare for all travel in the RTD service area.

Survey respondents that provided additional comments focused on:

- *Simplify fare system overall / reduce confusion*
- *Consider improving student discounts*

# Proposed Alternatives Fare Survey

- *Consider making all youth fares less expensive or free*
- *Consider making fares for low-income customers, seniors, and people with disabilities free*
- *Lower the Monthly Pass price*