

# RTD Accountability Committee

## Draft Recommendations

Last summer, the RTD Board in collaboration with Governor Polis and the transportation committee chairs of the Colorado General Assembly formed the RTD Accountability Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to provide an independent and objective analysis of RTD's operations and develop a set of recommendations for improvement to the operations and statutes related to RTD. The Committee is independent of RTD and hosted by the Denver Regional Council of Governments.

Over the last year, the Committee has undertaken an analysis of the agency and has drafted recommendations for improvement. The recommendations will be delivered to the board and staff of RTD, the governor, the Colorado General Assembly, and the public.

Prior to finalizing their recommendations, the Committee wants to hear your opinions on the draft recommendations. This report organizes the recommendations into six topics:

- Governance
  - Subregional Service Councils
  - Board of Directors
- Operations
  - Fares and Pass Programs
  - Operator Retention
- Service
- Northwest Rail/Unfinished FasTracks
- Using Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds
- Partnerships
- Transparency and Reporting
  - System Performance
  - Financial

You may review summaries of the recommendations and provide input on [this short survey](#). Please provide your feedback by **June 14**. A public hearing will also be held before the RTD Accountability Committee at their [June 14 meeting](#).

The Committee will consider the input received through the survey and at the public hearing, and adoption of final recommendations is anticipated at the June 28 RTD Accountability Committee meeting.

# GOVERNANCE

## Subregional Service Councils

*The RTD Accountability Committee believes that RTD should have a more collaborative decision-making structure to increase input from local communities.*

Revise RTD's transit service planning process by establishing subregional service councils. Service councils will have responsibility for developing and recommending "local" transit service plans for the RTD Board's consideration. The RTD Accountability Committee believes the introduction of this concept will:

- improve collaboration between RTD and the communities it serves. increase opportunities for public input through locally-accessible forums.
- advance social equity goals by developing community-based transit plans that identify transportation and service gaps, especially in low income and minority neighborhoods.
- promote innovative mobility solutions at a local level consistent with the RTD Board's overall service goals and objectives.
- provide an opportunity to address geographic equity and rebuild trust and transparency with constituents.

**Membership:** The RTD Accountability Committee recommends service councils be representative of the community-at-large. Service council membership shall include:

- Elected representatives from each city/town/county within each council district.
- A broad spectrum of interests and geography to ensure social, economic, financial, and environmental equity considerations are represented.
- Transit Users: residents who live, work, or attend university within the council district.

**Districts:** The RTD Accountability Committee recommends RTD establish a workgroup of regional stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate the following two service council boundary concepts to ascertain the best fit for the Denver region. The workgroup shall consider the role and purpose of the service councils, community cohesion and RTD staff resources in its analysis.

- **County Boundaries:** The RTD service area encompasses wholly or partially Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties. The establishment of service councils based on this pre-determined geo-political boundary would appear logical since local governments residing in the same county already have a familiarity with each other. Additionally, county-based service councils would be consistent with the already established DRCOG subregional forums which are utilize for transportation planning and funding decisions.
- **Travel Shed:** A valuable tool for visualizing and analyzing mobility patterns. In the Denver region, known travel behavior makes this concept a viable option particularly if fewer service districts is the objective.

**RTD Resource Allocation:** RTD Accountability Committee acknowledges the critical role RTD plays in fulfilling the mobility needs of Denver area residents. Understandably, taxpayers are interested in having more information of how their tax dollars are being used to create an equitable transit system. As a result, the RTD Accountability Committee recommends RTD develop and submit to the subregional service councils an annual report illustrating how the revenues generated in each subregion are used to provide transportation “value” to the residents of the subregion.

## RTD Board of Directors

*The structure of the Board of Directors differs from some peer agencies. The RTD Accountability Committee believes a deeper exploration should be pursued after Subregional Councils are implemented.*

The RTD Accountability Committee acknowledges there is not consensus on the effectiveness the RTD Board, nor is there clarity on the existence of a problem or what that problem may be. In addition, the RTD Accountability Committee is making a series of recommendations (e.g., Subregional Service Councils) which, if implemented, may impact Board operations. Finally, the RTD Board is proactively making changes to the structure of subcommittees while the organization has appointed a new General Manager.

When coupled with these changes, these high-level findings are not sufficient for developing recommendations, as they simply note areas of differences and commonalities, as opposed to effectiveness. Therefore, it would be premature to develop recommendations for future Board structures and the RTD Accountability Committee suggests further study and analysis be completed by an independent body with input from regional stakeholders. Specifically, the committee recommends the following course of action:

- Following a reasonable period of time for the RTD Accountability Committee recommendations to be implemented (e.g. two years), investigate the effectiveness of RTD’s Board structure. In partnership with regional stakeholders, evaluate the historical context of RTD’s Board structure, define Board effectiveness, success and efficiency, and evaluate past Boards for meeting these criteria. Determine if a problem exists, and if so, develop a problem statement. If a problem does not exist or inefficiencies are not found, the RTD Board structure should remain intact.
- If a problem does exist, or it is determined the Board could be operating more efficiently, conduct a deep and thorough study of RTD’s Board structure in comparison with peer transit agency and agencies within the region. Further examine the findings in this assessment, and develop an understanding of the impacts the implementation of any RTD Accountability Committee recommendations.
- Based on the findings of the study, determine if a new Board structure would better serve both RTD and the region’s constituents. If so, outline a new Board structure, including roles and responsibilities, and revise the by-laws if necessary.

# OPERATIONS

## Fares and Pass Programs

*RTD's fare structure and pass programs are complex and can be difficult to navigate. The RTD Accountability Committee recommends simplifying fares and pass programs to improve the customer experience and increase ridership.*

1. Consolidate all discounts into a free fare that would cover for equity populations (youth, senior, disabled, and low-income).
  - Eliminate exact change requirements for discounted fares.
  - Recognizing the potential barriers to free fares, the committee recommends consolidating fares as single 50% discount.
2. Identify strategies to simplify pass structures.
  - Implement a “family plan” benefit for all RTD pass-holders, where an adult can purchase fare media using one smart card for their multiple individuals.
  - Standardize existing deep discount group pass programs (EcoPass, NEcoPass, College Pass) into one brand, EcoPass, focused on incentivizing use.
    - Explore a “pay as you go” pass with fare capping/accumulators
    - Make Ecopass available to every employee in the district (~1.5 million) through a monthly, per employee transportation fee assessed on employers
    - Explore the implementation of a recurrent “membership” model
  - Incentivize individuals & organizations to purchase passes in bulk by:
    - Extending discounts for bulk purchases.
    - Enabling contributions to mobile wallets from multiple entities: both the employee/resident, and from employers/governments/non-profits, allowing employers to match contributions directly on the pass media of the employees.
  - Explore a “connect card” that allows riders to use transit fare across various entities (for example: CDOT’s Bustang, and microtransit/mobility options).
  - Replicate pass types on the mobile platform with fare capping/accumulators (ex: if you purchase fare amounts that add up to a day/monthly pass, your fare is automatically converted as opposed to over-paying).
3. Convene community, business and anchor institutions (hospitals, universities, school districts) utilizing passes on a regular basis to determine updates to the agreements.
4. Implement equity in fare evasion
  - The fine for fare evasion on RTD services is \$75 and is set by state statute. Given that fare evasion and illegal parking are similar offenses, this raises some equity concerns that transit riders pay higher fines than car drivers.

# Operator Retention

*The RTD Accountability Committee operations subcommittee assessed and discussed the State Auditor Report's findings on operator retention and human resources. The report described a series of recommendations to address and improve operator retention. The committee agrees with the findings of the report and encourages RTD to utilize federal relief funding to support the implementation of the proposed recommendations.*

Summary of report recommendations:

- RTD management should take additional steps to improve supervisory practices around performance feedback to address operator turnover.
- RTD management should improve its processes to help ensure that bus operators receive adequate rest breaks during their work shifts, in accordance with requirements in the Union Collective Bargaining Agreement.
- RTD management should improve its processes for assigning schedules to operators.

# SERVICE

*The RTD Accountability Committee recommends the following strategies to improve RTD's service delivery:*

## 1. Accessibility + Infrastructure

- Improve accessibility at light rail and fixed route stops. Proposed solutions include:
  - Zero-stair entrance at transit stations.
  - Standardize wayfinding signage and directional grooved pavement, ensuring some level of consistency across similarly designed stations to ensure blind communities are able to navigate transit stations.
  - Improve audio announcement system to assist those in the blind community.
- Identify a pipeline of accessibility improvements alongside disability and mobility advocates to allocate federal infrastructure dollars as they become available.
- Using existing survey data, work in partnership with municipalities to standardize and improve bus stop placement to ensure greater accessibility.

## 2. Multimodal Transportation

- Work with micro-mobility partners and municipalities to ensure transit stations have diverse mobility options (e-bikes, scooters and other multi-modal devices including 3- and 4-wheel for people with mobility issues) to provide riders the last mile connection.

## 3. Service Delivery

- As Reimagine RTD continues its work, focus redesign efforts prioritizing travel needs on frequent transit users, including bus rapid transit.
- Work in coordination with municipalities and anchor institutions to coordinate land use and transportation planning to ensure a comprehensive network of transit-only lanes on major routes and equitable transit-oriented developments.
- Designate easily accessible space at RTD bus and rail stations for individuals with disabilities to access services such as taxis, Uber/Lyft, and other transportation providers. Designated areas at the station would help provide a seamless connection for transit riders.

# NORTHWEST RAIL/UNFINISHED FASTTRACKS

*The five unfinished FasTracks corridors, and Northwest Rail in particular, are a significant financial and operating challenge for RTD. These recommendations provide opportunities to explore achievable options while continuing to keep commitments to voters.*

1. The RTD Accountability Committee supports the Northwest Rail alignment for the Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) corridor and recommends RTD pursue all reasonable partnership opportunities with the FRPR project. This route not only appears to provide significant benefits for the FRPR project but also offers an opportunity to leverage investments and services to support NW Rail.
2. RTD should work with local jurisdictions and DRCOG to explore opportunities for transit-oriented development and other strategies to increase projected ridership on the unfinished corridors.
3. RTD should investigate opportunities to increase non-RTD resources for transit stations including local cost sharing, grants, tax increment financing, or public-private partnerships.
4. RTD should perform a complete and comprehensive analysis of the Northwest Rail project to establish a common set of assumptions and engage in a regional discussion about opportunities and alternatives, both near-term and long-term, for the corridor.
5. RTD should work with CDOT and DRCOG to implement Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects in the northwest region, beginning with SH 119, as identified in the Northwest Area Mobility Study (NAMS) and the DRCOG 2050 Regional Transportation Plan.
6. Due to a heavy debt burden, RTD cannot afford to begin construction on the promised northwest rail line from Denver through Boulder to Longmont at this time. The RTD Accountability Committee recommends that until adequate funding can be found for this project, RTD should focus on significantly expanding Bus Rapid Transit services like the existing Flatiron Flyer, including direct service to Longmont and other Northwest Corridor communities by 2026 while continuing to pursue longer-term plans for the completion of Northwest Rail:
  - RTD should evaluate the validity of the suggested benefits of a Northwest Corridor BRT transit system that it will 1) deliver services a decade or more sooner than rail, 2) better accommodate future growth than rail, 3) be far less expensive to implement than rail, 4) be far less expensive to operate than rail, 5) be far less expensive to maintain than rail, and 6) be far less of a threat to RTD's future financial stability than rail; respond to the RTD Accountability Committee on these six points; and take action if deemed appropriate.
  - RTD should consider potential compromises with the Northwest region, such as the proposed compromise plan to deliver expanded BRT services to the Northwest Corridor by 2026 while continuing to pursue the longer-term plans for the completion of NW Rail and take appropriate action.
  - RTD should restore all six Flatiron Flyer routes within 12 months.
  - Within five years, RTD should increase BRT capacity within the NW Corridor from 3.37 million to 5 million rides per year.
  - RTD should provide the final \$175 million needed to complete SH 119 BRT between Boulder and Longmont. If financed at 2% interest over 30 years, this would cost RTD \$9.3 million per year.

# USING FEDERAL COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS

*These recommendations are aimed at stabilizing RTD operations, restoring services, rebuilding trust, attracting new and returning riders, and helping the agency recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.*

1. Provide a transparent process and make priorities clear.
  - RTD should provide full transparency during its process to consider and implement its use of these federal funds so that stakeholders and members of the public can follow the tradeoffs and pros and cons of their decisions. RTD should clearly define its priorities for this funding, what issues are being addressed by additional funds, and the amount of funding allocated to each priority. This transparency should continue as funds are spent so that the public can track expenditures.
2. Strategically recall previously laid off front line employees.
  - The Committee acknowledges and supports RTD's decision to recall approximately 200 direct-service employees. However, in keeping with the above recommendation, RTD should explain the amount of federal funding needed to recall these workers and what amount of funding is available for additional priorities. The focus of these recalls should be to ensure that RTD has capacity to restore quality transit service, particularly to transit-dependent communities as quickly as possible.
3. Share federal funding with other transit service providers in the metro area.
  - There are several non-profit and community-based transit service providers in the RTD district. They supplement RTD's fixed-route and para transit services, often at lower cost than RTD could provide comparable service. As with RTD, these providers have been impacted by reduced ridership and revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will benefit from this funding.
4. Conduct a six-month pilot to rebuild ridership and attract new riders via a reduced flat fare for local and regional routes and free fares for all or some of the discount groups (youth up to 19 years old, seniors 65+, disabled and low income LiVE).
  - Market it as a simple, affordable, and easy to understand way to ride RTD and an incentive to attract returning and new riders. This will reduce costs for financially struggling essential workers who are still riding RTD. During the pilot program, use this time to explore other ways to improve affordability of existing and/or new pass programs, including LiVE, that can be put in place as a longer-term solution.
5. Help rebuild and increase ridership by improving uptake and ease of use of passes.
  - Allow flexibility in the EcoPass programs and contracts so that more neighborhoods and businesses can participate. For example, allow master EcoPass contracts to support county-wide affordable housing programs and create more options for businesses to obtain employee EcoPasses for a subset of their workers. Consider discounts for bulk pass purchases.
6. Help fund PEAK eligibility technicians/caseworkers at county HHS departments to help people through LiVE enrollment, and allow LiVE applicants to prove eligibility through verification documents from other assistance programs (SNAP, WIC, etc.). Continuing to get the LiVE ID cards in qualified participant's hands is essential and counties can provide this customer assistance, but need funding to help support this function.



# PARTNERSHIPS

*Partnerships with local governments, non-profits, business, and institutions offer opportunities to leverage and expand RTD resources and services.*

1. Leverage existing and new partnerships to improve service efficiency and grow ridership. RTD should emphasize partnerships with local governments, anchor institutions, transportation management organizations (TMOs) and employers or employment centers who have a unique understanding of local mobility needs.
2. Incentivize communities to enter cost-sharing arrangements with RTD to provide new or existing local transit solutions in an effort to minimize service gaps and increase ridership.
3. Explore opportunities to provide cost-effective local transportation services through collaboration with existing mobility service providers (e.g., Via, Uber, Lyft) in areas where traditional fixed route may not be the most appropriate mobility solution. Also, explore opportunities to contract with other third party providers that may specialize in a particular service (e.g., paratransit) at a reduced cost.
4. As more federal relief funds become available, expand these partnership opportunities to improve service efficiency.
5. Develop a competitive Innovation Grant program to drive bold ideas to increasing ridership.
6. Encourage RTD's public-facing dashboard to include a component that highlights existing private and public partnerships.
7. Regularly evaluate the success of existing partnerships by predetermined metrics and "re-scope" relationships to ensure maximum benefit.
8. Pilot first/last mile projects to build ridership, especially in disadvantaged communities. These pilot programs could serve communities more than a mile from rail stations and be available only to RTD pass holders. The service could be operated in partnership with TNCs (e.g. Uber/Lyft or nonprofits such as Via Mobility Services and pick up passengers at designated stops along a designated loop route.

# TRANSPARENCY AND REPORTING

*The RTD Accountability Committee recommends that RTD to provide prominent, accessible and easy-to-understand financial and performance information on its website for the public, stakeholders, partners, and elected officials.*

## System Performance

### 1. Operational Effectiveness

- Increase ridership
  - Percent boarding change by mode
- Provide dependable service
  - Percent of on-time performance by mode
  - Percent of employee vacancies
- Ensure fleet reliability
  - Percent of vehicles over their useful life

### 2. Operational Efficiency

- Efficiently manage finances
  - Operating cost recovery ratio
  - Percent increase in fare revenue
  - Percentage of cost per mile as compared to peer agencies
- Achieve outstanding financial performance
  - Bond Rating

### 3. Customer Experience

- Provide an excellent rider experience
  - Percent of time passengers are in crowded conditions
  - Average facility and vehicle cleanliness complaints per month
  - Overall customer satisfaction and/or net promoter score
- Engage with customers
  - Call answer rate efficiency (in seconds)
  - Average time to resolve customer issues

### 4. Community Engagement

- At this time, metrics capturing the success of community engagement are not proposed. While the RTD Accountability Committee prioritized this metric area, there are insufficient peer examples from which to draw. Below is a list of stretch metrics that may be considered at a later time when there is a better understanding of what success would look like and/or data becomes available:
  - Positive contribution to the region
  - Percent increase in positive public impressions (multi-media)
  - Number of successful partnerships

### 5. Equity & Accessibility

- Serve all populations
  - FTA Title VI Triennial review compliance
  - Percent of customers indicating service frequency meets their needs

- Serve all customers
  - Adherence to ADA zero denials request mandate Average ADA complaints per boarding
- **Stretch Metrics:** The RTD Accountability Committee noted that the metrics outlined above, while measurable and applicable, do not capture the full spirit and importance of measuring equity and accessibility. As such, stretch metrics have been identified for further consideration. These stretch metrics will require a clear definition of terminology and success. In some cases, these metrics may require access to data that is not currently available.
  - Percent of minority/low-income people with access to the system
  - Percent of households within a 10-minute walk or roll of high-quality mobility options (consider how affordable may also be incorporated)
  - Average wait time by service mode
  - Ratio of average fare to national average
  - Average number of transfers per trip
  - Calls answered for paratransit

## 6. Environmental Impact

- Protect the environment
- Percent increase of low emission vehicles in fleet
- **Stretch Metrics:** The Subcommittee noted that the metric outlined above, while measurable and applicable, does not capture the extent to which RTD is impacting the regional environment. As such, stretch metrics have been identified for further consideration. These stretch metrics will require a clear definition of terminology and success. In some cases, these metrics may require access to data that is not currently available.
  - Pound of seasonal air pollutant prevented (NOX in summer and PM 2.5 in winter) Pounds of CO2 per passenger miles traveled
  - Total facility energy use

## 7. Safety

- Operate a safe system
  - Number of preventable accidents per 100,000 miles
  - Number of signal violations
- Keep employees safe
  - Number of reported employee equipment accidents
- Keep the system secure
  - Offenses per 100,000 riders
  - Average response time to emergency dispatch calls

Further detail on the project approach and proposed metrics can be found in the RTD Accountability Committee Performance Metric Assessment Recommendations report.

# Financial Performance

1. Provide a simplified version of financial budget information that includes a simple one-sheet budget document that is more accessible to the general public and easy to follow. Consider use of public focus groups to help craft content and format.

Currently, RTD's website provides a great deal of financial information which is challenging to sift through and understand. While this amount of detailed financial information may be useful in some situations and should remain available for the public, RTD should create (and update quarterly) the following:

- A basic budget document (ideally in a one-sheet format). This should be a high-level summary document that contains revenues and expenses by category in relation to the current adopted budget. (provide link defining key terms)
- Capital project schedule and expenditure information, updated at least quarterly.

2. Provide explanatory information on RTD's budget and the process it uses to form and finalize this budget.

Even in a basic format, financial information can be difficult to interpret. RTD should supplement the above recommendation focused on a high-level summary with a plain-language "translation" of the budget. The Department also should consider alternative formats, such as videos.

- A layperson's overview of the budget itself, including available revenue streams, primary expense categories, and defining terminology such as "Base System" and "Farebox Revenue." This is also an opportunity to explain that fares do not cover the full cost of a ride, which is a common misperception.
- A description of the budget adoption process and the role of the Board of Directors.
- A description of how the budget aligns with RTD's mission and performance objectives.

3. Include financial information on FasTracks that is easy to follow.

Given the public interest and scrutiny on this program, RTD should build on its well-developed FasTracks website by providing up-to-date financial information to create a more comprehensive representation of the program. This information should describe the FasTracks Internal Savings Account (FISA), how it is used, and any additional resources that help stakeholders and the public understand the status of FasTracks projects. In developing this content, RTD should consider public awareness of terms like "FasTracks," "Base System," etcetera.

4. Provide a long-term vision for the use of federal stimulus funds as they continue to flow.

To date, federal stimulus money received by RTD from the CARES Act and CRRSAA has totaled over \$430 million. The agency is expected to receive a third allotment from the most recent stimulus package. RTD should provide a quarterly report with a full accounting on the use of these funds as well as share its priorities for the third allotment, especially as these funds exceed what is needed to cover base operations (including personnel costs). Materials should explain restrictions on stimulus dollars (what it can and can't be used for) and should provide, where relevant, a connection to the Accountability Committee's recommendations regarding the use of additional federal relief funds.