

RTD Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis

Phase Four 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 is reexamining the fare system holistically, with the objective of creating a fare structure that is more equitable, affordable and simple.

The study incorporates multiple 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 were under consideration and how those options would be evaluated. The third phase, held in fall 2022, introduced two proposed fare structure alternatives as well as additional fare policies and programs and gathered public feedback to refine the designs.

The fourth and final phase of community engagement, held in spring 2023, presented the refined fare structure proposal and provided an opportunity for public comment. An overview of the fourth phase engagement activities and results is provided below.

Engagement Activities Overview

In the fourth phase of the Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis, the study team gathered public comment on the final recommendation for approval by the RTD Board of Directors. The following outreach methods were included as part of this milestone to educate the public about the recommendation and seek official public comment from a diverse set of perspectives:

- Website Updates and Social Media Posts
- Targeted Stakeholder Emails
- Virtual Public Hearings
- In-Person Open Houses
- Community Events
- Community Partner Outreach/Community-Based Organization Communications Toolkits

All communications, hearings and open houses were conducted in English and in Spanish, and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation was available on site at the open houses. In addition, educational materials for this phase were developed in more than 20 languages spoken by customers within the RTD service area and made accessible to customers as well as community partners who could support the distribution of information within the community. Language assistance and effective communications support was available upon request.

Website and Social Media

In April 2023, the study team updated the dedicated project microsite, farefeedback.rtd-denver.com in English and comentariosobrelatarifa.rtd-denver.com in Spanish, to educate the public on the recommended fare structure, policies and programs under consideration by RTD. Opportunities to engage in the fare study's fourth phase were promoted on the Fare Feedback website and the Fare Study page, rtd-denver.com/farestudy. The public comment form was also provided on each page of the Fare Feedback website, allowing for website visitors to conveniently comment on the topics relevant to them.

In addition to organic social media posts to promote engagement opportunities, RTD deployed a paid social media campaign to reach targeted audiences. Relevant statistics on website and social media engagement are listed below:

Fare Feedback Website Key Statistics (April – May)

- 4,392 page views; 3,345 unique visitors

Fare Study Website Key Statistics (April – May)

- 266 page views; 148 unique views

Social Media Statistics (April – May)

- 106,375 impressions

Virtual Public Hearings

The study team held four virtual public hearings – two in English (May 3 and 16, with attendance of 16 and 19 participants, respectively) and two in Spanish (May 2 and 16, with attendance of 16 and 12 participants, respectively). The virtual hearings were promoted by the fourth phase launch press release and associated print, television and radio media coverage, the updated websites, social media posts, targeted emails, community partner navigators and promotoras and word-of-mouth marketing. Five community organizations (Athletics and Beyond, CREA Results, Denver Streets Partnership, Focus Reentry and Una Mano, Una Esperanza) partnered with RTD to promote the fare study events and public comment period. Hundreds of additional nonprofits, schools and governmental entities were provided with messaging and tools to share opportunities to engage with the community members they serve.

The study team presented the study's background, engagement to date and the proposed fare structure, policies and programs, allowing for clarifying questions. During the hearings, attendees were given time to voice an official public comment in a two-minute time window or provided the option to submit a written comment online. Attendees were also encouraged to provide feedback on the study's outreach plan for the LiVE Income-Based Discount Program via the chat and online polls.

In-Person Open Houses

The study team hosted two in-person open houses – on May 11 (at the LoDo Towers Amenity Center) and on May 16 (at Carla Madison Rec Center). The locations, both of which are in the City and County of Denver and near major transit lines, were selected to allow for convenient transit access across RTD’s service area.

RTD subject matter experts and consultant staff were present at the open houses, where attendees were able to visit stations on different topics and learn about the proposal under consideration. Participants were also given the opportunity to leave an official public comment prior to departing via a paper or online public comment form. They could also provide feedback on the LIVE Discount outreach plan via interactive presentation boards. A total of 41 community members participated in the open houses.

Community Events

In April and May, RTD staff members participated in nine events led by community organizations throughout RTD’s service area, which included:

- Adams 12 Five Star Wellness Festival – April 29, 2023
- Cinco de Mayo Festival – May 6 and 7, 2023
- Jefferson County Older Adult Wellness Fair – May 12, 2023
- Viva Streets Denver – May 14, 2023
- Storytime and FlexRides at the Broomfield Library – May 16, 2023
- Northglenn Food Truck Carnival – May 19, 2023
- Adams County Connect Summer Kick-Off – May 20, 2023
- Sun Valley Rising Viaduct Night Market – May 20, 2023
- Boulder County Farmers Market – May 24, 2023

The study team also hosted pop-up events on RTD properties as well, which included:

- April 25 at Lincoln Station
- April 26 at Arapahoe at Village Station
- May 2 at Central Park Station
- May 3 at US36/Sheridan Station
- May 4 at Union Station
- May 9 at Littleton Downtown Station
- May 11 at Wagon Road Park-n-Ride
- May 23 at Olde Town Arvada Station
- May 24 at Federal Center

Educational materials and public comment forms were available at each event. RTD staff engaged with more than 2,600 community members during the community and pop-up events.

Public Comment

One of the main purposes of the fourth phase of engagement was to gather public comment from customers and community members on the recommended fare structure, policies and programs. As referenced above, community members were given the opportunity and encouraged to provide comments directly on the website; during virtual public hearings; during in-person open houses; through community partner outreach; and at community events.

The public comment period was open from April 13 to May 24; a total of 731 comments were received.

Summary of Customer and Community Feedback through Public Comments

During the fourth phase of engagement, customers, community members and other stakeholders provided feedback through official public comment on the recommended fare structure. Feedback showed broad support for the fare structure, policies and programs under consideration. Participants also provided feedback on RTD's proposed communications plan for the LiVE Income-Based Discount Program expansion, including potential community partners and communication channels through which RTD should share information with the public.

A full summary and analysis of the public comments relevant to the fare study is available on the Fare Study page. Comments that were not directly relevant to the fare study but were concerned with other aspects of RTD's operations will be compiled and shared with the appropriate departments within the organization.

Next Steps

Following this phase of the study, the study team presented the findings to the Board of Directors on July 25. The proposed fare structure, policies and programs were approved.

As a result, the Zero Fare for Youth Pilot program will go into effect in September 2023, while the new fare structure and other policies and programs will go into effect in 2024.