

October 3, 2025

Colorado General Assembly  
State Capitol  
Denver, CO 80203

Senator Faith Winter and Members of the General Assembly:

Thank you for your advocacy on behalf of RTD's many Access-on-Demand users. I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors to update you on our vote earlier this week on modifications to the agency's popular supplemental, premium paratransit service—Access-on-Demand—the reasons behind our vote, and the thorough in-depth process we took to arrive at this challenging decision.

The Board decided on Tuesday, September 30 to implement a fare structure for Access-on-Demand of \$2.25 for low-income riders who qualify for our LiVE program and \$4.50 for standard fare—a ***position supported by both the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition (CCDC) and National Federation of the Blind (NFB)***.

Access-on-Demand is RTD's supplemental, premium paratransit service, which was created in 2020 to add transit options for paratransit eligible customers beyond our federally mandated Access-a-Ride program. RTD is the only transit agency in the state offering a service along the lines of Access-on-Demand, and the structure of RTD's program, even after the Board's modifications, remains one of the most expansive of its type in the nation. Access-on-Demand allows customers to book a ride on-demand through a third-party transportation network company and/or taxicab company (i.e. Uber, Lyft, zTrip, and Metro Taxi). Customers can then take that trip to any destination within the RTD and RTD will subsidize the trip up to a specific dollar amount. The program has proven to be highly popular with ridership increasing over 300% since its inception. RTD, through formal Board action, has committed nearly \$50 million in direct funding to the program since its creation.

On Tuesday, September 30, 2025, a two-thirds majority of the Board approved the aforementioned CCDC and NFB supported fare change as well as the following additional modifications:

- Reinstatement of the highly popular multi-stop functionality, which will allow customers to make up to two stops on one trip (i.e. take a child to school and then continue to work for one fare payment)
- Inclusion of the entire district of 2,345 square miles as allowable service area, which represents a nearly 195% increase over the historic paratransit service area of 795 square miles
- A cap of 60 trips per month
- A service reduction of two hours—the service will not be available from 1:30 a.m. to 3:30 a.m.
- A decrease in the per-trip subsidy to \$20 from \$25, meaning the customer will pay their fare and then RTD will cover the next \$20 of their trip
- An effective date of January 1, 2026, to allow customers to become familiar with these modifications

The Board grappled with this decision for nearly two years, and we sought in-depth input from staff, external experts and the disability community along the way. Since its inception in 2020, the Access-on-Demand program has operated as the only RTD service that does not require customers to pay an upfront fare other than Zero Fare for Youth. While fare revenue represents only ~5% of RTD's total revenues, the rapid expansion of the program, which has grown over 300% since its inception as a pilot program, required the Board to make difficult decisions. Further, despite these modifications, we expect the program to continue to grow and the funding we

provide to the program to continue to increase. The Board is continuously grappling with the appropriate fare level for all services and will monitor the Access-on-Demand fare structure moving forward.

The Board's actions were significantly informed by feedback we received from the community over the last 20 months. As I mentioned above, the Board voted to reinstate the highly popular multi-stop functionality in large part due to the feedback received from customers of the program. Further, the Board voted to preserve the service area for Access-on-Demand to be the entire RTD region; this was done to ensure Access-on-Demand customers residing in locations that are not currently served by local bus service, including many communities Broomfield, retained access to this vital service. While the fare increase was not an easy decision it was a necessary one to contain the program's costs. Additionally, the Board met all the other requests of CCDC and NFB, except for one—the Board authorized a **significantly greater** service area than what was requested by those organizations. All paratransit eligible customers, including all who utilize Access-on-Demand, will continue to have access to our fixed route bus, light rail, and commuter rail services at no fare.

Nearly five years ago, RTD staff came to the Board with an innovative solution to improve paratransit services for our region's disabled community. Since 1992, RTD has primarily provided paratransit services through a program known as Access-a-Ride. Access-a-Ride, which is a federally mandated complimentary program to our traditional fixed route bus and light rail services, requires eligible customers to call at least one day ahead to book a trip at a designated time. Further, the service is limited to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from bus or light rail services. This means that a customer cannot be picked up or dropped off outside of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of a local fixed route service. On average, RTD pays roughly \$106 per Access-a-Ride trip.

The table below shows the relative differences between the two programs after the Board's actions this week to modify the Access-on-Demand program.

#### **Federally Mandated Access-a-Ride Program**

Service area = 795 square miles  
Booking process = schedule 24+ hours in advance  
Service availability = dependent on local bus service  
Number of stops per customer = 1  
RTD's per trip cost = \$106  
RTD's per trip cost for WAV\* = \$106

#### **RTD's Supplemental Access-on-Demand Program**

Service area = 2,345 square miles  
Booking process = on-demand  
Service availability = 22 hours a day  
Number of stops per customer = up to 2  
RTD's per trip cost = \$20  
RTD's per trip cost for WAV\* = \$270

\*WAV = Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle

As you can see from the above chart, the premise behind the creation of Access-on-Demand was simple and straightforward. If RTD could replace Access-a-Ride trips, which cost ~\$106 per trip, with trips provided by transportation network companies and/or cab companies (such as Uber, Lyft, zTrip, and Metro Taxi) capped at a per-trip subsidy of no more than \$20 or \$25 then everyone would win. RTD could decrease trip costs, while customers would gain more utility through on-demand booking and greater travel time flexibility.

The result has been nothing short of amazing. Utilization has boomed, customer satisfaction has skyrocketed, and the Board applauds the foresight of RTD staff for launching a program that has added immense value to the lives of thousands of disabled individuals across the region. Despite the well-intentioned aims of saving the agency money through operating efficiencies, the program has proven to be more popular than even the most aggressive initial estimates and continues to experience compound growth in both the number of trips provided and customers using the program. As such, we expect to continue to grow our financial commitment to the program.

At our meeting this week, the Board approved an additional \$9.4 million in spending for the program. As it currently stands, the program, which was originally expected to cost \$9.7 million, has spending authorization of \$47.8 million. And we anticipate authorizing more spending during the current contract terms which run through June 2026. This represents nearly \$50 million in additional spending for paratransit customers from 2020 – 2026. An additional \$15-plus million will be spent on the program annually moving forward. And that number is expected to grow as the modifications will only slow the rate of growth in the program.

Regardless of the Board's actions to lessen the impact of the modifications, we understand that these changes will have serious implications for many of RTD's most vulnerable customers. As elected officials we acutely appreciate the challenges you all faced this year when making decisions to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in spending for crucial State programs. In that regard we empathize with your duties as fellow elected officials and wish you the best as you tackle similar decisions in the year ahead.

I am immensely proud of the agency's innovations to provide paratransit options that are of greater value to our customers. The Board has been following closely the work of the legislature's RTD Accountability Committee, which is examining our paratransit offerings, and of which I am a non-voting member. Should the RTD Accountability Committee have further recommendations on how to improve our paratransit programs, we will give those recommendations the highest consideration. Now that the Board has made modifications to the Access-on-Demand program, our Operations, Safety, and Security Committee will be returning its attention to making improvements in our Access-a-Ride program in furtherance of our commitment to serving our region's disabled community. We would be happy to keep you updated on our progress to improve Access-a-Ride.

Attached to this letter is a presentation provided to the Accountability Committee from Nelson Nygaard, a highly respected transit consultancy hired by the Colorado Energy Office to educate members of the committee on RTD's paratransit programs. I found this presentation, commissioned outside of RTD, to be a fair, balanced, and realistic overview of our paratransit programs and the potential paths forward. The Board is eager to engage with whatever recommendations come from the committee's analysis. Below are several key takeaways:

- "RTD Board and staff understand the gravity of the issue in front of them and are committed to finding a solution that works for the current and future riders of RTD's paratransit programs that also works for the balance of the RTD system and its financial underpinnings" (slide 15)
- "Engagement with the community at the Board and staff levels has been extensive, and the decision process has been careful and deliberate" (slide 15)
- "There will be criticism of whatever decision is reached as there is no perfect answer" (slide 15)

We remain steadfastly committed to serving the most vulnerable individuals in our region and look forward to our continued partnership.

Sincerely,



Julien Bouquet, RTD Board Chair, Director, District G

**Cc:** Board of Directors; Debra A. Johnson, RTD General Manager and CEO; Jack Kroll, Executive Manager, RTD Board Office; Michael Davies, RTD Government Relations Officer

**Enclosures:** RTD *Paratransit Accountability*, Tim Payne and Bethany Goad of Nelson Nygaard, Sept. 2025  
Letter from Colorado Cross Disability Commission and National Federation of the Blind, Sept. 2025