

Zero Fare for Youth: Key Messages

August 2023

About Zero Fare for Youth

What is Zero Fare for Youth?

Zero Fare for Youth is a one-year pilot program that aims to enhance the lives of RTD customers and communities by reducing transportation costs for families. By inviting ages 19 and under to use RTD services at no cost, we also remove barriers to education and employment, while creating access to destinations across the metro Denver region.

Beginning September 1, RTD is excited to welcome a future generation of transit users to experience the benefits of public transit without a fare. Zero Fare for Youth encourages lifelong transit use through early exposure to, and use of, public transportation among a new generation of customers.

One of several proposals to come from the RTD Fare Study and Equity Analysis, RTD desires to promote equity and affordability by reducing costs and increasing the cost competitiveness of public transit for families.

When does Zero Fare for Youth begin?

Zero Fare for Youth will begin on September 1, 2023 and run through August 31, 2024.

Are all RTD services available during Zero Fare for Youth?

Yes, youth can ride all RTD services at no cost during Zero Fare for Youth.

What about special services like Access-a-Ride?

For Access-a-Ride, Youth must be medically certified to use this service. Access-a-Ride customers can book in advance as they normally do. For more about Access-a-Ride certification, please see <https://www.rtd-denver.com/services/accessaride>

How are youth defined for this program?

Youth are defined as anyone 19 years of age or younger.

What type of proof do youth need to show to be eligible?

Eligible customers 19 and younger only need to show proof of eligibility to the bus operator and fare inspectors to ride RTD buses and trains. The proof includes the following:

- Middle or high school student identification card
- Passport
- Valid government-issued identification card or driver's license
- Alien registration/permanent resident card
- Military identification/dependent card with date of birth
- RTD-issued Youth Special Discount Card



What happens at the end of the pilot year?

For long-term sustainability of Zero Fare for Youth, RTD will seek funding partners to support the continuation of the program after the pilot.

Who else can use RTD services at zero fare?

- Up to three children ages 5 and younger can use RTD services at no cost with a fare-paying adult.
- All active duty military personnel who are wearing the appropriate Class A or Class B uniforms or who present an active duty military ID card can use RTD services at no cost at any time.

Promotion of the program

How will RTD promote Zero Fare for Youth?

RTD will promote this initiative through a comprehensive communications effort, which will include:

- Internal channels (to RTD employees)
- RTD digital communications (webpage, social media, service alerts)
- RTD assets (transfluges, vehicle exteriors)
- Public relations (news releases, media pitches, newsletters, emails, News Stop)
- Community engagement (collaborations with fantastic community partners and agencies)
- And more!

Benefits of using RTD's services

What are the benefits of Zero Fare for Youth for RTD customers?

In addition to riding RTD at zero fare from September 1, 2023 through August 31, 2024, youth can experience all the financial, lifestyle, environmental, and community benefits of transit.

Financial and lifestyle benefits

- **Save money** – Taking the bus and train saves on car expenses including maintenance, parking, and tolls, which add up quickly. Cost of living increases have also made everything more expensive, including groceries, clothing and back-to-school shopping. A household can save nearly \$10,000 annually by taking public transportation and living with one less car.
- **Save time** – While taking public transit you can use your phone, catch up on reading, emails, podcasts, or just sit back and relax!
- **Save gas** – Taking public transit frees up additional funds in customers' everyday budgets. In addition, public transportation saves the United States an estimated 6 billion gallons of gas each year.
- **Reduce stress** – Taking public transit eliminates the stress and anxiety of battling everyday traffic. Leave the driving to RTD!
- **Gain independence** – Public transportation allows you to travel where and when you want to go, just like anyone else. Reduce your dependence on others for transportation, which can be highly inconvenient to them, you, or both. Public transportation levels the playing field and allows you to continue your studies, visit family and friends, and connect to destinations in other communities in conjunction with other forms of transportation.

- **Increase flexibility** – Parents caring for children will get hours back in their day and money back in their pocket using public transportation. Many parents have trouble getting to work or picking up their kids from school, and zero fare public transportation increases options while providing much needed support.
- **Create equity** – Transit creates an opportunity to ride at no cost to eliminate barriers to education, employment, and other activities.

Environmental benefits

Taking public transit removes vehicles from roadways, limiting traffic congestion, air pollution, and ground-level ozone.

- **Less pollution and clearer skies** – Every vehicle on the road releases an average of one pound of CO₂ per mile driven. Compared with driving alone, taking public transportation reduces CO₂ emissions by 45%, decreasing pollutants in the atmosphere and improving air quality. It's estimated that public transportation in the U.S. saves 37 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually, and even moderate increases in bicycle use each year could save an estimated 6 to 14 million tons.
- **Healthier communities** – Improved air quality in a community means greater health benefits for the people who live there. That can mean fewer cases of respiratory ailments such as asthma and even cancer. People are also more prone to get out and exercise when the air quality is better.
- **Reduce harmful chemicals** – We usually think of gas as the only pollutant when it comes to cars, but they also use antifreeze and other fluids that are bad for the environment. Taking sustainable transportation instead of driving cuts down on all of them.
- **Reduce traffic** – More cars mean more roads need to be built, which causes water run-off that contributes to ground and water pollution. Fewer cars in favor of active transportation such as bikes mean more bike paths and lanes, which are more sustainable.
- **Reduce noise** – We rarely think of noise pollution when it comes to cars, unless you live by a busy street. Less driving will make your neighborhood quieter to everyone's benefit.

RTD service notes

- RTD buses and trains will operate on regular schedules during the pilot.
- RTD will not be adding service in support of this effort.
- Service Changes will be enacted over the course of the pilot as part of RTD's regular practice of adapting services at periodic intervals per analysis of traffic patterns, ridership, economic factors, community feedback, and implementation of the System Optimization Plan.

Digital tools to help along the way

RTD provides the tools to make riding easy.

- Use RTD's Next Ride web app to view schedules, plan trips, see vehicle locations in real time, and view Service Alerts.
- Download the Transit Watch app for iOS or Android, in English or Spanish, to speak with Transit Police in real time.

Safety and security measures

- The safety and security of RTD's customers, employees, and all who use the agency's services and facilities are of the utmost importance to RTD.
- RTD Transit Police will conduct regular patrols, keep a close watch on services, and will deploy officers as needed.
- RTD takes every precaution with Security to create a welcoming transit environment. If customers see something suspicious, or witness a crime in progress, advise them to call RTD Transit Police at 303.299.2911 or download the Transit Watch app for iOS or Android to speak with Transit Police in real time through text messages. In an emergency, please dial 911.
- Please Respect the Ride and be courteous to fellow customers and RTD employees.

Learn more about Zero Fare for Youth

Visit www.rtd-denver.com/youth