

RTD PASS PROGRAM WORKING GROUP - MEETING #2
June 6, 2017 - Meeting Summary - DRAFT

Meeting Objectives:

- Examine RTD's existing pass program data
 - Examine Boulder's experience with pass programs
 - Discuss the two presentations and look for opportunities for improvement/revision/replacement
 - Hear from members of the public and from stakeholders not on the working group
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I. Public Input

The meeting opened with input from the members of the public, observers and stakeholders who are not on the working group. The input included the following:

- Passes are important to Boulder County
- Reducing green-house gas emissions, providing mobility for everyone are important
- Pass holders are far more likely to ride
- Affordable housing and transit go together - both are necessary to keeping our communities affordable
- We recognize that we must partner with RTD including providing funding if we want to improve transit service
- It's important to think about the aggregate rather than the individual
- Passes create new riders - those who get a pass may not have been a rider at all
- You can bring in more revenue by having more people on the bus, even if the revenue/rider is lower than the full fare
- Routes with excess capacity can add riders very cheaply
- Create a virtuous cycle - passes create ridership which grew the system
- Passes create a transit constituency
- In dot-com recession, we had the first conflict around the pass programs: Are we paying enough; does net revenue cover net costs?
- Uneasy truce with no real partnership to have EcoPass live up to its potential
- Going forward: embrace EcoPass, make changes necessary to get on the right side of equity, and create community-wide programs
- Transit is important to the elderly who don't drive
- We struggle to get everyone to pay for neighborhood passes
- We would love to have a city-wide pass
- We need a low-income pass
- Lafayette - \$40/household
- Lafayette is losing its diversity as housing costs are going up; people pay more than we'd hope on transportation and we would like to lower the costs
- Traffic and air quality continue to be important reasons for our encouraging riders
- We hope that we can find a way to use the My Denver Card for transit service; it will help establish independence and build habits for the future
- Boulder Housing Partners are grateful for the ability to participate in the pass program
- Transit brings access to services
- A city-wide or county-wide pass would be beneficial
- Streamline the administrative processes
- We would be happy to pilot a new approach
- With two decades of data collection, we believe that EcoPass is the most effective in changing behavior

- We want access to passes for low-income neighborhoods
- Boulder's downtown program provides transit to low-wage workers
- The working group should expand access
- Longmont wants to transition to a community-wide pass
- Local, free bus ride is vital for low-income people
- Non-profits have been advocating for free transit
- Equity is essential
- High school students need an opportunity to use transit, particularly in school districts where a significant majority qualify for free and reduced lunch; the need is great
- We work to give bus passes to rich people in south Boulder; hard work from the city staff and volunteers who go door to door and work to get more enrolled is essential
- In the early days of neighborhood EcoPass, everyone wanted one but now there are more and more who get passes through college or employers, so we have fewer takers
- We worked to get smart cards rolling - have not seen data
- We think we're being overcharged
- The smart card database program was written in 1978
- The neighborhood EcoPass program requires too much work for volunteers
- Expanding our program has been tough
- Fairness is a concern - an adjacent neighborhood got a price 3-times higher than the price we pay; the system doesn't work
- Improvements in bus service has been diminished in parts of Boulder

II. RTD Welcome - Dave Genova, General Manager and CEO

- We want to remind you of the guiding principles that we established at the start of this effort, particularly of the need to find a fiscally sustainable solution
- In addition, we need to be able to do for all stakeholders what we do for any one stakeholder

Q: What do you see as the guarantee that our recommendation will be implemented?

A: After the board adopted the new fares, they made a commitment to look at the pass programs. We get many requests for all kinds of pass programs and many fall outside of existing policy, so we need a consensus-driven, fiscally sustainable solution. My commitment: if you do those things, we will act on your recommendation

III. RTD - Presentation - Pass Program Data - See Slide Deck

Comments/Questions During the Presentation:

Q: What % of cost is covered by fares?

A: Fares cover 20% of costs

Comment: We need to get an estimate of the real discount associated with each pass program

Q: Can we get any estimates from customer surveys?

Comment: Revenue-per-pass varies widely from one college to another

Q: Tap data - are those trips?

A: Yes, they are trips not individual boardings

IV. Boulder Presentation - See Slide Deck

V. Discussion

- The data gap created by riders not tapping is a major concern; in the system we create, we need to find an easy way to get riders to comply
- Any future programs have to come with data collection processes to ensure accuracy going forward
- We should keep what works - passes can be found revenue - from riders who otherwise would not have made the choice to ride RTD; we need to think about the realities of cost and revenue
- Equity is a real problem we must solve --- getting low-income neighborhoods into the Neighborhood EcoPass Program - that's one way to think about that
- The equity problem stems from the fact that passes come from affiliation with an organization - a business, a college, a neighborhood - we have to solve for unaffiliated people
- There are ways to create affiliations/groups for low-income riders - in Boulder, Section 8 housing is a way we aggregate
- Q: Should affiliation matter; should that be the basis for giving a discount?
- Q: Is age a better way to establish groups, better than who's in school?
- Transparency has to be a part of this - we should know who gets what and who pays what
- Struck by how antiquated the current approach is; this is not the future of transit; we have to start thinking about how people live and why people travel; for example, someone who is a student isn't just going to school, they are traveling for all sorts of other reasons
- The insurance model has been the premise - the idea of drawing in large groups and creating value for the agency in unused passes
- There is value to getting the money up front
- Some programs are all-in, and others aren't
- We can't look at this in silos; we have to look through the equity lens; can we get EcoPass beyond the affluent neighborhoods?
- This should be the test: Is it simple, and is it affordable?
- It's too hard to use the system the way it is now
- Many companies don't charge the individual employees, they calculate who will use a pass and if it's over 30%, then joining EcoPass makes sense, otherwise, use Flex and only buy the ones you need
- There is too much reliance on affiliation - many don't know they can affiliate or how to --- I'd rather see a low-income pass for individuals, including students, not continuing to require that someone join a group to get a pass
- The program is oriented toward affluence - people with jobs and good jobs - how about those working in service or those looking for jobs
- We need to be clear about what we are trying to accomplish, what are we aiming at
- It should be a simplified structure, maybe not as simple as one kind of pass, but we must simplify
- Q: For RTD - are you interested in a certain scale and level of ridership?
- A: As we grow service, we must find the 80% that fares don't generate; yes, we want increased ridership and service in a sustainable way; this effort is key to the strategic goals for RTD
- 'Deliver increased market share' - that's part of the RTD strategic goal - we could benefit from seeing ridership projections and from exploring how pass programs contribute to RTD's financial needs
- Low-income access to service must be a focus
- It's important to keep in mind that pass users at CU are those who are the lowest paid; these staff members are not earning six-figure salaries
- It's necessary to find fare levels that increase revenue without sacrificing ridership
- We will want to respond to changing demographics in the region

- We need to think about the people who cannot afford the EcoPass
- We should be thinking about the ability of students to use the transit system and become the riders of the future
- Equity includes transit's ability to provide services that people need
- We should articulate a set of shared values and guiding principles rather than measurable criteria
- Given the benefit of increasing ridership when buses have capacity, maybe we need to return to peak and off-peak pricing
- We need to think through what works and what doesn't for each pass program
- We need to deal both with fare media and fares - how one pays and how much - but we need to do that separately

VI. Next Meeting

June 20 - 1:00-4:00 - Shorter AME Church - 3100 Richard Allen Ct, Denver, CO 80205 (near southwest corner of Colorado Blvd and Martin Luther King Blvd)