



2024 RTD Director Candidate Questionnaire

Name Chris Nicholson

RTD District A

Why are you interested in serving on the RTD board of directors?

I'm a full-time RTD rider, the only one running for the board this year. After seven years of relying on RTD to get around, I saw more and more ways that our transit agency fails to deliver high quality service for reasons unrelated to the size of its budget.

Together with six other candidates, I've released a detailed plan, A Commitment to Riders, that explains how we'll correct that failure. Read the plan at fixRTD.com

I know RTD can run a system where people feel safe. I know they can run a schedule riders can trust. I want to serve to fix these basic problems so that more people will join me on the buses and trains. So that at least some of the time, RTD can be useful for everyone.

While many other transit agencies have restored service levels close to what they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, RTD has only restored service to 70% of pre-pandemic levels. Please share your thoughts about how the agency has approached restoring service post-pandemic and tell us about your vision for RTD's ridership, including how would you work to advance that if elected to the board.

RTD has focused too little on restoring useful service and has not prioritized removing the barriers to new ridership that currently exist. Useful service does not have to be frequent, but it must be trustworthy. RTD's local bus on time percentage hovers around 80%, and that number understates how late buses can often be.

RTD should be prioritizing excellent on time percentages and ensuring routes are effectively timed so connections are rarely missed. New riders should be able to tap their credit cards rather than paying in cash.

For service expansion, they should look at where demand currently outperforms frequency as an indication of where to expand. I've run these numbers. They should offer the last mile facilities: secure bike parking, well stocked scooters, walkable stations with wayfinding for visitors.

And they absolutely must create a sense of safety at all RTD stations and on their buses and trains. No matter how much service you restore, most people won't ride it if they don't feel safe.

RTD's service intersects with a number of other jurisdictions and agencies. Tell us about what role, if any, you think RTD board members should play in building partnerships and collaborating with other elected leaders, local governments, and agencies, like DRCOG and CDOT?

Building strong relationships should be fundamental to how the RTD board operates. Unfortunately, most board members have not made those sorts of personal connections a high priority. This makes forming effective partnerships unnecessarily difficult. It results in missing the opportunities that grow from casual

conversations.

I'm proud to be endorsed by Denver Mayor Mike Johnston, as well as mayors, city council members and state legislators from across the metro area. They've endorsed me because I've put in the time to get to know them and their communities. I've showed up to their events and listened to what they care about.

RTD needs to show the surrounding communities that it wants to be an active partner in solving the key challenges that require collaboration. Building trust is the first step.

RTD recently conducted an organizational assessment which sheds light on a number of areas for improvement within the agency and recommendations for addressing those. What recommendations do you think should be prioritized, if any, and how would you work to address the key findings if elected to the board? What experience do you have with organizational management?

Re-orienting RTD's organizational structure has to be near the top of the board's priorities. RTD is fundamentally a very well subsidized transportation business, but it rarely approaches its operations through that lens. Increasing institutional cadence, aligning around KPIs (key performance indicators), driving decisions with extremely high quality data are all the hallmark of businesses at RTD's scale.

Changing that involves critical new hires: a Chief Technology Officer, Chief Customer Experience Officer, a Chief Strategy Officer and others who can lead systemwide changes in how RTD operates. It involves far more rigorous and open data collection, so that decision-makers across the agency can easily understand how the business is operating at every level, whether that's for on-time percentage, workforce readiness, cash flow, software uptime, staff should not have to dig for relevant data.

Please share what equity means to you as a prospective RTD Board Director and what responsibility, if any, you think RTD has in advancing transportation equity in the Denver region.

Equity is about the kids I rode the 83D with in the morning a few years ago. Their mom couldn't afford a car and her two twin boys needed to get to pre-school before she went to work. Equity is a transit service reliable and frequent enough that she doesn't need that car.

Equity is the otherwise housebound paraplegic who can go visit his friends for a football game thanks to RTD's paratransit services that are at least as reliable as him getting a ride from a friend (were that possible).

Equity is ensuring that RTD's disproportionately minority and low income ridership has service commiserate with their demand for transit. Equity is providing a safe experience for riders that does not make some feel unwelcome because of their race or income.

Yes, RTD has a major role in providing transit service to people who want to use transit. Equity is just doing that job well.

Do you ride RTD today? If so, tell us how often, what routes you frequent, and what your experience is like as a rider and how it informs your perspective as a prospective board member. If not, tell us why.

I'm the only full-time RTD rider running for the board this year. I've taken 201 trips in the last six months according to my MyRide data. My most common routes are the 15, 0, 15L, 6, FF1, 38, 43, 44, 10, D, H, and the MallRide (which isn't included above because it's free).

I think RTD is great...when it works. When it goes where you want, when it comes on time, when it's clean and there's nothing illegal happening at your station.

I think my experience relying on the system gives me a unique appreciation for RTD, a unique understanding of what needs to change, and a unique resolve to get it done. If I don't, I'll have to live with my own failure every day on the bus for the next couple decades.