



## 2024 RTD Director Candidate Questionnaire

**Name** Karen Benker

**RTD District** District I

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

I served on the RTD Board in the 1990s and we were able to build the SW rail line to Littleton. I have had a decades long interest in transit and am very dedicated to finishing Fastracks and bringing rail to Longmont through Boulder and Broomfield counties. The rail line must be built-- and now that the Governor and state legislature are interested in completing this line, it will help to have their support.

### **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.**

Bus and rail service was drastically cut due to COVID several years ago. It's time to restore service and build ridership back up (like what other transit agencies had been doing for the past 2 years). RTD is sitting on an enormous reserve. Now is the time to be strategic and thoughtful and fulfill our mission to provide comprehensive service.

Growing ridership is not rocket science. Past practices can be brought forward as well as talking with other transit agencies across the country for creative ideas.

However, first the public must feel safe when riding RTD. New measures must be taken to make trips safe and this needs to be widely published/advertised so that the public knows that their concerns have been heard and addressed.

Service must be reliable. I have heard from transit riders that often times, the bus does not show up. Train service must be restored. Running trains at 10 mph kills ridership increases. Accurate real time information must be reliable.

Once RTD is safe and reliable, RTD needs to begin a comprehensive PR campaign to bring people back. Services also needs to be increased. Commuters/workers have always been the key ridership group and they now need to be lured back (especially since government and businesses want more of their employees to come back to the office). I would also like to see BroncoRide, RockiesRide reinstated. SkyRide needs expansion. Requests were made to offer rides to Red Rocks for concerts. This should happen.

Local governments are our partners. They know what services they want restored. We need to work with them as partners.

**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?**

The Governor and State Legislature have passed recent laws requiring RTD to work constructively with Front Range Passenger Rail and CDOT to build the NW rail line and rail along the entire Front Range of Colorado. This will require all 3 agencies to work together on technology, construction contracts, resource sharing, data sharing, and project oversight. We need to make these partnerships successful.

**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?**

The report highlights many personnel issues facing RTD and their management staff. Before making judgments on how their staff operates, I would like to talk with staff members and other sitting board directors to get their opinions.

It does seem that staff is demoralized and changes need to be made.

As past director of several programs, I am familiar with HR issues and building an esprit de corps.

**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 treating others fairly and with respect and listening to their concerns. When we start to expand bus and rail service, we need to ensure that all areas of the RTD district are served (since they all pay sales taxes to RTD) and that lower income communities-- that rely on transit for work or other needs-- are provided the necessary service. When RTD raised fares several years ago, I did send my concerns to my RTD director. I knew they were too high. I am pleased that the current RTD board fares to more reasonable levels.

**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.**

When I was working in Denver, I rode RTD almost every workday. I am now retired. I use commuter rail to the airport when I take trips out of state.

I took the LX from Longmont to Denver, but RTD slashed this route several years ago and made bus riders transfer in Broomfield. This route must be restored.