



2024 RTD Director Candidate Questionnaire

Name Kiel Brunner

RTD District A

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

I am a data scientist, researcher, partner and dad, focused on ensuring Denver Metro's Regional Transportation District (RTD) is a meaningful part of our climate future. I grew up with transit, environmentalism, and social equity as core values. My great grandparents and grandparents were surgeons for the railroad, nurses, Democratic politicians, and wildlife conservationists. My father ran an environmental manufacturing company and my mother has a background in social work.

Currently, I'm a data scientist, building federal budgeting software using AI/ML to save taxpayers money and previously ensured equity in vaccine distribution in Colorado. Before getting a masters in data science, I was a public opinion researcher recording hundreds of thousands of voices and improving lives by changing policy at every level of government and electing progressive candidates at the federal, state and local officials. In this work I was passionate about transit, conservation and housing. I took action by passing ballot measures, electing leaders and guiding the legislative process all the way up to the Federal level. I have also been in the bureaucratic trenches; working, contracting, interning and volunteering in all three branches of government. I know the processes and relationship building required to move activism to action.

After electing climate action leaders, progressive champions and working with social equity, environmental, health, labor and transportation organizations to solve seemingly impossible problems, one of the hardest things I've done was help my toddler use an inhaler and try to explain why they were having problems breathing. Our air quality in Denver is 6th worst in the nation according to the American Lung Association and inhalers help but it's not a long term solution for our climate future. By improving transit services in the Denver metro area and making it a consistent and comfortable choice, we can save people time, money and improve our health.

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.

To achieve our climate goals, RTD must prioritize: 1) improving ridership experience, 2) strategic planning and 3) collaborating to build transit, oriented for our future. It's time for RTD to take a leadership position as the largest transportation agency in the state, commit to collaboration in bold strategic growth and accept the challenges we need to undertake.

First, we need to enhance transit services by providing rapid, frequent, and reliable service with a comfortable experience, making it the best choice for the Denver metro area. To achieve this goal the Board needs to set policies keeping RTD accountable through data and metric tracking of ridership, safety and the efficiency of service. Rather than attempting micro-management, the governance board should

focus on thorough oversight and auditing, improving communication, setting clear expectations, building better relationships with staff and the community and creating an environment for success.

Second, while regaining community trust and boosting ridership, RTD should develop a strategic regional plan focused on social equity, economic growth, and climate sustainability. RTD has not tracked with the growth of our region and instead of strategically planning for growth, it has retracted and ridership is dropping. Our climate future requires smart planning and green growth to ensure our home is habitable, now and for future generations.

Third, by collaborating with advocates, governments, and businesses, we can expand services, complete existing projects, and build transit-oriented communities, securing a better future for Colorado. It is clear the State of Colorado is ready and willing to be a partner in a transit system to help clean our air, land and water, as are many organizations and local governments.

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?

A strategic vision for RTD requires meaningful collaboration with all levels of government, labor unions, social justice, environmental and transit advocacy groups and members of the business and development community. The most successful transportation agencies and TOCs I have worked with had strong partners in the community, helping deliver better services through clear communication of goals and strategy, taking a holistic approach to transit, housing and smart growth to raise standards of living and protect the environment and create sustainable financing models without overburdening riders, taxpayers and business. These transit agencies increased their trust with the public and were able to grow with their communities.

Through a lens of bettering our climate, a strategic vision for RTD first needs to improve current service and repair its brand to improve ridership. RTD has to get back to basics and make reliable transit a priority to balance budgets and improve service for riders and taxpayers. Improving service should include increasing safety, frequency and reliability with the Board setting policies using data driven metrics to guide RTD, rather than attempt to micromanage decisions. When it comes to RTD's brand, the Board should coordinate with RTD, its staff and community partners to better communicate about changes, maintenance and planning.

In addition to building back the community's trust and improving ridership, we need to focus on creating a strategic regional transit and development plan with a focus on ensuring social equity, economic growth and a better climate future through connected communities. There are many areas of suggested improvement recommended internally and externally and I believe, as a Board, we need to lean on staff and community partners to fully assess deficiencies, look to technical experts for solutions and weave together a long term strategy to execute.

One area where working with local governments is unavoidable is with the very necessary improvements needed at the nearly 10,000 bus stops. Given ownership of the stops is unclear at best, it will take coordination with many municipalities and a clear policy from the Board to ensure safety, comfort, accessibility and better rider information at the stops. Coordinating with advocates, federal, state and local governments and the business community, a plan could include technology modernization, moving to cleaner energy for RTD fleet and operations, finishing existing projects, expanding service and building the transit system and transit oriented communities to sustain the growth of our region for decades to come.

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?

I am trained and certified in the federal Planning, Procurement, Budgeting and Execution (PPBE) accounting process and helped create an enterprise level machine learning application to improve the budgeting processes for all Federal agencies. I wrote machine learning algorithms to predict risk, velocity of spending, identify and connect lost transactions to their ledger location and identify and predict amounts of funding likely to be wasted in a budget cycle. Through this process, I became intimately familiar with the good and bad processes in budgeting and how to identify risk in an agency.

Having worked with transit agencies and coalitions building TOCs, I helped write ballot measures and guided the legislative process to coordinate and fund projects. I have also worked with PPPs to build public works and understand that collaboration and building coalitions with the blessing of the public is the best way to accomplish goals. Prior to this work I worked in a small business, learning their accounting, budgeting and marketing processes and contract approval, and managed budgets for nonprofits (mostly political campaigns).

The Board's responsibility of budgetary oversight is a charge I take very seriously. Given my experience with transaction level accounting, I am comfortable digging into ledgers when appropriate and necessary. A recent audit by the State of Colorado indicated two major issues, making RTD and the Board outside of compliance for the relevant budgeting statutes. In both cases, adequate information was not received by the Board and this illustrates an unfortunate disconnect between RTD and the Board. It is clear the Board needs to improve its relationship with its staff and RTD leadership to be trusted with this level of information. Staff and the GM need to know they have a healthy working relationship with the Board and partners dedicated to financial stability, sustainability and growth. Given improved synergy, RTD can provide better service, improve ridership and be a meaningful part of the climate solution.

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 in transit means improving access and increasing independence. Transportation policy has long been used to segregate and repress protected classes, especially communities of color. Infrastructure planning has cut communities of color apart, and the Denver metro area is guilty as any other community of this practice, especially the interstate highway system. I have worked extensively with the ACLU and SPLC on social equity issues but working in the South to help tear down Confederate monuments impacted me in a way that I will never forget. I learned first-hand how ingrained racism still is in our public spaces and institutions, implicitly and explicitly and how it affects BIPOC communities economically, socially and emotionally. Transit has a large part to play in making our public spaces and service more inviting to all and helping people connect with their community.

In the context of RTD, first, we have to ensure we do no further harm to BIPOC communities and other protected classes. This takes listening to the community and making decisions based on social equity. Next, RTD needs to ensure service is accessible, reliable, safe and frequent. Better service will improve people's educational and economic situations by expanding the range of schools and jobs to choose from and by reducing the need to own a vehicle, we can put \$10-15k back in people's pockets. Looking forward, RTD should work with communities to build a transit system giving people the freedom to choose where they live, work and play.

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.

Our family takes transit occasionally. We live between the 10 and the 15 on Cap Hill and love taking our toddler around downtown on the trains (it's one of his favorite activities and was his birthday wish this year!). Before moving back to Colorado, we were daily transit riders. Unfortunately, RTD is rarely the best choice for us. When it comes to getting to work, dropping our kid off at childcare or getting around Denver to do the fun things it has to offer, it is unreliable, too infrequent and takes more time than walking or biking in many cases.

Currently, my commute is 10 steps to my home office, our childcare is a 6 minute bike ride and my wife has a 7 min walk to her office. We made our housing choices based on the inability to rely on transit. When we first moved to Denver, it took my wife longer to ride the bus than to walk to work and it was an hour walk! She experienced many missed connections and in the end, she decided after years of being a daily transit rider, it was not a viable option. So she drove and eventually, we moved to be closer to her work but not everyone has the option to move, so their work, school, health care and social options are limited.

I am running for RTD to make it the best choice for getting around Denver so we can improve ridership and meet our climate goals. RTD needs to ensure service is accessible, reliable, safe and frequent. Better service will improve people's educational and economic situations by expanding the range of schools and

jobs to choose from and by reducing the need to own a vehicle, we can put \$10-15k back in people's pockets. Improving transit services in the Denver metro area by making it a consistent and comfortable choice, we can save people time, money and improve our health.