



2024 RTD Director Candidate Questionnaire

Name Matthew Larsen

RTD District E

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

I want to serve because I am frustrated by RTD's poor performance as a transit provider in recent years, and I want to make it better. Currently RTD's services lack comfort, safety, perceived safety, cleanliness, and order on buses and particularly on trains and at train stations. Service is unreliable; trains and buses too often do not arrive on schedule, or at all, and it is far too difficult to get reliable information on what the status of the train or bus is and more generally what is going on with it. Finally, the frequency of scheduled service is too low across much of the area to be a practical method of transportation for the majority of residents.

If elected, I will aggressively push for RTD to address safety and order, take necessary steps to greatly improve reliability, and improve frequency so that it can compete with driving in terms of point-to-point time to destination.

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 not had the right goals or approach in terms of restoring service to pre-COVID levels. RTD has not set restoring ridership to pre-COVID levels as a goal, and even increasing ridership in general was not set as a performance goal for the CEO. Increasing ridership - while at the same time increasing farebox recovery - should be the number one, overriding goal for RTD. As a board member, I would do everything possible to ensure that the entire organization is oriented around increasing ridership. The key to doing this is improving safety, reliability, and frequency until the value of service is so consistently high that it is a better choice than driving for 20-30% of trips in the metro area.

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?

As much as possible, RTD should partner with agencies and governments like these when doing so can improve the frequency, safety, and reliability of the service that RTD offers. Board members can and should play an important role in reaching out to these entities to see how they can work with RTD to make transit better in the Denver metro, and across the front range.

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 have been an executive in medical device companies for most of my career, and I am experienced with managing teams and with working with a leadership team to improve the organizations I have worked for.

Concerning the Segal report's findings, I would discuss the findings with the CEO, and find out her plan to prioritize and address the needed improvements. I think the most important issue to address is organizational structure - I would want to understand why the organizational structure is set up like it is, and what the CEO's plans are, if any, to improve it.

The Board needs to consider if the current CEO is RTD's best option to meet its future goals, and whether or not it is time to make a change in leadership to someone more capable of driving ridership growth.

I think the Board must be responsible for defining the future vision of RTD, and ensuring that this vision is supported by the CEO, and effectively communicated to all employees, and the public.

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.

RTD has an important role in providing transportation options to the disabled community, and it should continue to fulfill this role and seek to improve the quality, reliability, and frequency of service to this community.

Aside from that, "advancing transportation equity" should not be a major first order goal of the service. The main goal must be increasing ridership, and shifting driving trips to transit trips. When RTD delivers a great service that maximizes increased ridership, everyone in the District will realize benefits far beyond the current offering. In terms of absolute numbers, maximizing ridership will greatly increase the number of riders across every category of people. The exact relative composition of ridership by racial or other categories should not be a major focus of the agency, provided that ridership growth is happening with every group or category. Title 6 regulations should be interpreted, to the maximum degree possible, to ensure that ridership growth is occurring across all groups, but should not fixate on the relative percentages of riders in different groups as long as each group is growing.

This is because in general, increasing ridership will have to mean getting people who are currently driving to take transit. On average, drivers will be a higher income, less diverse group than non drivers, as drivers will tend to have higher incomes. Higher incomes often correlate with being white in the US. So any strategy to increase ridership may disproportionately increase white ridership vs. the current baseline. This should not be considered a problem, as successful strategy that increases white ridership will also increase non-white ridership, and will improve the quality of service for all riders.

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.

Given that I work from home, I was nonetheless an at least weekly rider of the E and H lines into downtown up until this summer. I often go downtown around 5 or 6pm, and I lived near the Yale Station and now near the Southmoor station, and the train - when running frequently and reliably - was a more pleasant trip with less hassle than driving during the evening rush hours. This summer, the coping panel project and the unplanned maintenance issues related to rail burn on the E and H lines made them unusable and I have not ridden since the coping panel project started. In my last attempt to ride the E or H line from Southmoor station, the train once again failed to arrive at the scheduled time with no notice, explanation, or logic. I rode my bike back home and just drove. On the way, I decided I would try to run for Board to try to fix this situation.