Regional Transportation District (RTD)
Accountability Committee

Report of the 2025-2026 RTD Accountability Committee

Submitted to Colorado General Assembly

Report prepared by Confluence Policy & Strategy Group in partnership with Colorado Energy Office.

Submitted to the General Assembly by Colorado Energy Office, Confluence Policy & Strategy Group, and Hudson Skykomish LLC on behalf of the RTD Accountability Committee.

While the RTD Accountability Committee is administered by the Colorado Energy Office (CEO), this report is strictly representative of the Committee's work and deliberations. Nothing in this report should be construed as the recommendations of CEO or the Office of the Governor. Furthermore, the recommendations have not been subject to legal or fiscal analysis.

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In concluding its work and delivering this report, the Committee honors the legacy of Senator Faith Winter, who was a prime sponsor of the legislation creating the Committee, and who was a tireless champion for building a Colorado that was more connected, more equitable, and more sustainable for future generations. The Committee's work overlapped with Senator Winter's tragic passing, which motivated members to fulfill their legislative charge in producing robust recommendations designed to deliver high-quality transit service for the entire region, and for all Coloradans.

As Chair of the Senate Transportation and Energy Committee, Senator Winter was a transformative force in Colorado's approach to transportation and public transit. She was a lead co-sponsor of SB21-260, a landmark modernization of the state's transportation funding that prioritized strategic investment and a more sustainable future. She also championed policies to expand transit access, provide free transit service for youth, advance transit-oriented development, expand electric vehicle adoption, and support multimodal transportation investments. Through these measures and many more, her leadership set Colorado on a path toward meeting its climate goals while ensuring that the benefits of cleaner air and a healthier environment would be shared by all.

Her legacy will continue to shape Colorado's climate policy, transportation systems, and community fabric for years to come. As the General Assembly receives this report and it is read by future advocates for transit, the Committee hopes that the actions taken to advance this work will continue Senator Winter's efforts and legacy towards a robust public transit system that delivers cleaner air and access to opportunity for Coloradans.

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Background and Charge

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) plays a central role in the economic vitality, environmental sustainability, and quality of life of the Denver metropolitan region. Initially created as a political subdivision of the State by the General Assembly in 1969, RTD has overseen the expansion of bus, light rail, commuter rail, and paratransit services across one of the largest and most geographically and demographically diverse service areas of any transit agency in the country. Over time however, regional growth patterns, fiscal constraints, workforce challenges, changing travel patterns following the pandemic, and unresolved legacy commitments, most notably related to the FasTracks program, have placed increasing strain on RTD's governance and operating model.

In response to these challenges, the Colorado General Assembly in 2025 created the RTD Accountability Committee (the Committee) within the Colorado Energy Office (CEO) and charged it with examining RTD's governance, workforce retention, paratransit services, and collaboration with local governments and state agencies, and with developing recommendations to improve outcomes for riders, taxpayers, employees, and state and local partners by January 30th, 2026. The Committee brought together appointees from the legislature, Governor, and RTD representing local government leaders, labor representatives, the RTD Board, key rider constituencies, and subject-matter experts, and was supported by independent research, staff analysis, and extensive facilitated discussion. Over the course of its work, the Committee reviewed data, heard from RTD leadership, experts, and external stakeholders, and deliberated publicly to identify recommendations they believe will strengthen RTD's ability to deliver reliable, equitable, and fiscally responsible transit service and grow ridership.

Committee Process

The RTD Accountability Committee's work was grounded in a deliberate, transparent, and iterative process designed to build shared understanding before advancing recommendations.

As detailed in Section II of this report, the Committee's work unfolded over multiple phases, beginning with orientation and baseline briefings on RTD's history, statutory framework, finances, governance, workforce recruitment and retention, paratransit services, and interactions with local governments. Members received extensive background materials, heard from a broad set of stakeholders, RTD leadership and staff, and reviewed independent analyses to establish a common factual foundation for discussion.

The Committee met publicly 12 times spanning more than 43 hours between August and January, primarily virtually, with three longer in-person meetings. Committee meetings also incorporated public comment, and written public comment was accepted throughout. All meeting agendas, minutes, slides, public comments, and other associated materials can be found in the Appendices.

As the process progressed, the Committee moved intentionally along an arc of learning—from information gathering, to issue identification, to idea generation, to evaluation of options and tradeoffs. Meetings were structured to encourage rigorous questioning, candid dialogue, and the airing of divergent perspectives, while remaining focused on the Committee's legislative charge. Expert facilitation by Confluence Policy & Strategy Group (Confluence PSG) supported this progression by helping members surface underlying assumptions, clarify points of disagreement, and test potential reforms against the Committee's charge. This approach allowed members to revisit and refine their views over time, rather than being locked into early positions. CEO also contracted with national experts in transit agency governance, paratransit, and workforce, who delivered independent assessments and materials to the Committee to inform their deliberations.

By the time the Committee turned to formal deliberation and voting, members had engaged deeply with the issues across governance, paratransit, workforce, and intergovernmental collaboration. While not all members agreed on every recommendation, the process ensured that decisions were informed by a shared body of information, sustained discussion, and an understanding of the implications of action - or inaction - for RTD and the region.

Key Findings and Opportunities for Reform

The RTD Accountability Committee concluded that governance reform is the most urgent and consequential issue within their charge, finding that without meaningful structural and non-structural changes, RTD risks continued erosion of service quality, public trust, and regional credibility amid mounting fiscal, operational, and workforce pressures. Members expressed a strong and shared belief that incremental changes to governance would be insufficient, and intended their recommendations as a clear call for decisive action by the General Assembly, the RTD Board, and RTD leadership to realign governance with the demands of the present and the needs of the region's future. Increasing ridership was a key motivating factor for many Committee

members that shaped the recommendations; connecting to governance, a majority of members ultimately concluded a smaller, more nimble board, with stronger expertise would more likely be able to provide the strategic leadership necessary to guide the agency to achieve the goal of increased ridership.

The Committee's work identified a set of interrelated challenges and opportunities that cut across RTD's governance, operations, and external relationships and informed their recommendations. While the Committee's recommendations span several distinct areas, members consistently concluded that governance reform is foundational: clearer authority, accountability, and capacity at the Board level can enable and reinforce improvements across the system. At the same time, the Committee emphasized that reforms related to workforce stability, paratransit services, and collaboration with local governments and state agencies are essential in their own right and should proceed in parallel.

Governance and Accountability. The Committee concluded that RTD faces systemic governance challenges that hinder reliable service, resource management, and stakeholder responsiveness. The current Board's size, lack of competition for elected seats, lack of expertise, and limited visibility impede effective leadership, accountability, and oversight. While many directors are deeply committed, the structure itself makes it difficult to hold any single entity accountable for systemwide performance.

The Committee also concluded that modernizing the Board's composition, clarifying statutory roles, strengthening fiscal oversight, and professionalizing Board leadership are necessary to restore public confidence and equip RTD to address long-term challenges. These changes are intended not to diminish democratic representation, but to strengthen it and improve outcomes by ensuring that governance structures match the scale, complexity, and importance of the District. While structural reforms are important, improvements to authorities, training, substructures, clearer communication, and executive oversight are also critical, and timely action is needed to prevent these challenges from worsening.

Workforce Retention. The Committee found that workforce capacity, especially among operators and frontline maintenance staff, remains a key constraint on RTD's post-COVID service restoration and expansion (and that RTD is not alone amongst transit agencies nationwide struggling with this same issue). While progress has been made in recruitment, retention, and compensation, ongoing risks to that progress include early-career attrition, organizational culture, scheduling practices, and mentorship and support. Continued improvement will require sustained focus on this issue, and many solutions will require labor collaboration as well as improved data and performance measurement. Ultimately, the Committee concluded that effective workforce recruitment and retention is fundamental to RTD's long-term success.

Paratransit Services. The Committee found that paratransit services are complex, resource-intensive, and highly individualized, with diverse rider needs that vary by mobility, trip purpose,

location, technology access, and income. While RTD's two paratransit services generally serve the same ADA-eligible population, their different models, costs, and federal ADA requirements create challenges when considered or planned for in isolation. Rising demand for the newer Access-on-Demand service has added operational and financial pressures, and although existing analyses offer insight, a comprehensive vision and assessment is needed to guide future decision-making. Overall, effective paratransit decisions require a holistic understanding of rider needs, service tradeoffs, and system-wide impacts.

Local Government and State Agency Collaboration. The Committee found that while staff-level collaboration between RTD and local governments is often strong, political and strategic alignment has been uneven and at times, the level of staff involved has not always aligned with the task or challenge. Frustration among local elected officials is frequently tied to unresolved expectations from past commitments and the absence of shared, transparent criteria for service and investment decisions. The Committee concluded that improving collaboration requires clearer standards, better data sharing, more effective engagement structures, and a deliberate effort to move beyond legacy debates about FasTracks toward a shared vision for the future of transit in the region. In this context, the Committee highlighted the importance of initiating a forward-looking regional conversation about RTD's role, priorities, and aspirations in a changing region.

About the Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this report reflect both the Committee's process and its voting outcomes. Although Committee rules required only a simple majority for adoption, a review of the recorded vote tallies shows that most recommendations received substantial support, with many garnering well over two-thirds and, in several cases, broad supermajorities of the Committee's votes. This level of support underscores that, despite differing viewpoints, there was meaningful alignment around the need for change and the general direction of reform.

A small number of members dissented from particular recommendations and subsequently submitted minority opinions, which are included in full in the appendices along with a summary in Section IV. The perspectives raised in those opinions, including concerns about democratic representation and the risks of structural change, were discussed at length during Committee deliberations and were not ultimately persuasive to a majority of members, who concluded that the recommendations as adopted best respond to the challenges identified and the Committee's charge from the General Assembly.

RTD Accountability Committee – Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations are summarized in the sections below, and printed verbatim as voted on by the Committee in Section IV of the report.

GOVERNANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee's recommendations summarized below were driven by the top values they identified that a reformed governance structure should support, including effectiveness, system health, fiscal stewardship, long-term vision, and expertise. They were also motivated by the top problems Committee members identified both at the system level (low ridership, public trust and confidence, and limited strategic vision) as well as at the governance level (a need for expertise, lack of oversight, the large size of the board, and low competition and visibility amongst the elected seats).

Number & Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
G1: Board Structure & Composition	Reduce the Board size to 9 members with 5 elected and 4 members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.	General Assembly
G2 and G3: Appointee Criteria	Appointees must collectively have key areas of expertise (financial, land use, transportation planning, disproportionately impacted communities) as well as a labor seat.	General Assembly
G4: District-Based Elected Positions	All five elected seats should be district-based.	General Assembly
G5: Board Chair Authority	The Board shall select a full-time Chair (any appointed or elected member) to a two-year term.	RTD / General Assembly
G6: Timing of Implementation	Implement the new structure at the soonest appropriate time, at the latest in time for the 2028 election.	General Assembly
G7, G8, and G9: Terms, Limits & Staggering	Members should serve four-year terms with two full four-year term limits; terms should be staggered for continuity.	General Assembly
G10: Ballot Threshold	Review and increase the ballot signature threshold for elected members to better align with other elected positions.	General Assembly
G11: Statutory Implementation	Adopt all structural reforms through statute rather than ballot referral.	General Assembly

Number & Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
G12: Board Substructures	Add ex-officio seats for labor and CDOT on certain RTD standing committees	RTD
G13: Review of External Committees	Review, revisit, and strengthen the role of all RTD committees of external stakeholders to improve effectiveness	RTD
G14: Authorities and responsibilities	Clarify Board authority over fiscal oversight, CEO evaluation, and General Counsel. Require and update performance metrics and regular public reporting.	General Assembly
G15: Fiscal Oversight	Strengthen multi-year budgeting, audits, Board financial training, reporting, and review of District's current financial condition. Additionally, study the potential benefits and challenges of shared responsibility and/or ownership of the District's rail assets.	RTD / General Assembly
G16: Candidate Supports and Staffing	The Committee recommends reinstating a Transit Academy-style program, led by an outside entity, to train and inform prospective RTD Board candidates.	General Assembly
G17: Board Compensation	Increase and benchmark Board compensation to inflation, and make the Chair a full-time position	General Assembly / RTD
G18: Executive Leadership	Strengthen GM/CEO evaluation goals and metrics in alignment with the next strategic plan and tie executive compensation annually to performance.	RTD
G19: Board Staffing and Supports	Improve process for Board access to agency staff, ensuring support while respecting the GM/CEO's day-to-day management authority.	RTD

Paratransit Recommendations

The Committee approved a single recommendation on paratransit, that RTD undertake a comprehensive analysis and planning effort to inform a holistic vision and plan for providing service to riders with disabilities in the District, that would include multiple components outlined in the table below.

Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
Needs Assessment	Study the population, needs, and service gaps of riders with disabilities.	RTD
Service Integration	Assess ways to improve integration of Access-a-Ride and Access-on-Demand.	RTD
Collaboration	Assess opportunities to collaborate with local and regional partners to address service gaps.	RTD
Engagement	Engage with paratransit users, riders with disabilities, service providers, etc.	RTD
System Vision	Establish an overarching framework and goals to guide paratransit decision-making.	RTD
Fiscal Sustainability	Assess long-term costs and tradeoffs using peer comparisons.	RTD
Innovation	Pursue innovative and technology-enabled service models.	RTD

Workforce Recommendations

Number & Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
W1: Recruitment	Expand hiring, training, and test preparation efforts and partnerships to reach additional communities, and work with ATU to explore more flexible and part-time positions.	RTD
W2: Retention	Together with ATU and partners, expand opportunities for newer operators, strengthen employee voice and workplace culture, and explore childcare subsidies to improve recruitment and retention.	RTD / ATU

Number & Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
W3: Training and Mentorship	Expand or add apprenticeship and mentorship programs and incentivize senior operators to mentor new hires to improve training and retention.	RTD / ATU
W4: Data and Measurement	Strengthen employee and community data collection by improving participation methods, expanding recruitment and retention metrics, reducing reliance on surveys, and enhancing data quality where surveys are used.	RTD / ATU

Local Government & State Agency Collaboration Recommendations

Number & Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
LG1: Improve Subregional Service Councils	Reevaluate and improve the Subregional Service Councils, with local and community input, to clarify their role, broaden representation, strengthen facilitation, and enhance strategic focus.	RTD
LG2: Service Allocation Criteria	Recognizing growing ridership as a top priority, use the upcoming Comprehensive Operations Analysis to establish transparent, data-driven service allocation criteria that balance ridership growth with equitable geographic coverage.	RTD
LG3: Service Buy-up Policy	Reinstate a service buy-up policy to enable expanded local service.	RTD
LG4: Shared Information	Adapt and improve existing dashboards together with local government and partners to provide transparent reports on service data, project updates, and performance.	RTD
LG5: Standardize Protocols for Bus Stops	Set clear bus stop safety and maintenance standards, defining responsibilities while accounting for local jurisdiction differences.	RTD

Number & Topic	Recommendation Summary	Directed To
LG6: Collaboration on Large Capital Projects	Build on recent experience with past and current inter-jurisdictional cooperation on large capital projects that increase ridership opportunities.	RTD
LG7: Planning for the Future	Undergo a process with state, regional, and local partners to plan for a path forward that identifies opportunities including and beyond FasTracks, establishes a vision for a sustainable, efficient, and future-focused transit system, and increases investment in transit.	RTD / General Assembly / DRCOG / Local Governments

Path Forward

Taken together, the Committee's recommendations present a clear opportunity for the General Assembly and RTD to act decisively while remaining collaborative to ensure the success of transit in the Denver metro region. The Committee does not suggest that governance reform alone will solve RTD's challenges, nor that operational improvements should wait for statutory change. Rather, it offers a coordinated set of actions—some requiring legislative action, others within RTD's authority—that can be pursued concurrently to strengthen accountability, stabilize the workforce, improve service for riders with disabilities, and rebuild trust with local and regional partners.

The Committee believes that with thoughtful implementation, these reforms can position RTD to move beyond historic and current challenges, adapt to future demands, and deliver a high quality, effective transit system that better serves the region's residents, economy, and climate goals.

From the RTD Accountability Committee Chair and Vice Chair.

To the Governor and members of the General Assembly, the RTD Board of Directors and leadership team, our local government partners, and the public:

On behalf of the Regional Transportation District Accountability Committee (the Committee), we are pleased to deliver this report and its recommendations. The Committee approached this work with seriousness, discipline, and a shared commitment to strengthen public trust in RTD and improve the rider experience, particularly for those who rely on RTD every day to access jobs, health care, education, and community.

From the outset, members recognized that RTD's challenges are complex and interconnected. They include service reliability and safety, fiscal sustainability, workforce recruitment and retention, governance and oversight, and the unique operational demands of paratransit. The Committee also worked within an environment shaped by post-pandemic ridership shifts, inflationary cost pressures, heightened safety concerns, major capital obligations, and evolving expectations from riders, employees, and the region's local governments. In that context, the Committee focused on practical reforms that are grounded in facts, informed by lived experience, and designed to be implementable.

The recommendations in this report are the result of thoughtful inquiry and candid, respectful debate. Members brought differing perspectives across geographical areas, political viewpoints, professional backgrounds, and lived experiences with transit. Those differences strengthened the work. The Committee agreed early to focus on outcomes, to listen carefully, and to "disagree without being disagreeable." That shared commitment created room for productive tension, creative problem-solving, and ultimately, broad consensus around priority actions.

At a high level, the report advances recommendations intended to:

1. **Strengthen governance, accountability, and transparency** so decision-making is clearer, performance expectations are measurable, and oversight better supports public confidence.

2. **Modernize and stabilize paratransit** by conducting a comprehensive assessment that addresses riders' needs and establishes a holistic vision for transit services for riders with disabilities.

3. **Support workforce recruitment, retention, and readiness** through strategies that improve job quality, training and career pathways, and organizational capacity to deliver excellent service.

4. **Align resources and planning with regional needs** by improving coordination with local governments and partners, clarifying roles, and strengthening mechanisms for collaboration.

5. **Advance implementation with clear sequencing and responsibility** so recommendations move from report language to real-world change, supported by timelines, ownership, and ongoing monitoring.

The Committee's work required significant time and sustained engagement. Members met for more than **40 hours** in formal sessions and contributed **hundreds of additional hours** reviewing materials, analyzing information, consulting stakeholders, and preparing for deliberations between meetings. We are deeply grateful for that level of commitment and for the professionalism members demonstrated throughout.

We also want to acknowledge the **project leadership team** including the administrator at CEO, the facilitators and research partners who provided a strategic approach, a neutral forum that welcomed all perspectives, and a fact-based foundation for discussion. Their work helped ensure meetings were productive, that members had access to relevant information, and that deliberations remained focused on actionable solutions rather than rhetoric. Just as importantly, the leadership team fostered an environment where members could test assumptions, ask hard questions, and make progress across areas where viewpoints initially diverged.

This report is not an endpoint. It is a roadmap for strengthening RTD at a moment when the region needs a resilient, responsive transit system more than ever. Implementing these recommendations will require sustained leadership, collaboration across institutions, and follow-through that matches the urgency of the public's expectations. If acted upon, the recommendations can help position RTD to deliver safer, more reliable service; rebuild trust through transparency and performance; better support its workforce; and strengthen partnerships that reflect the region RTD serves.

We extend our appreciation to the RTD AC members, the many stakeholders who shared their experiences and ideas, and all who supported this work. We respectfully submit this report in the spirit in which it was developed: candid about challenges, grounded in evidence, and optimistic about what improved governance and sustained implementation can achieve for the future of transit in the Denver metro region.

Sincerely,

Maria Garcia-Berry
Chair, RTD Accountability Committee

Jaime Lewis
Vice Chair, RTD Accountability Committee

Introduction & Legislative Charge

01

Purpose of the RTD Accountability Committee

Established by [SB25-161 Transit Reform](), the Regional Transportation District Accountability Committee (The Committee or The 2025 Accountability Committee) was created within the Colorado Energy Office (CEO) to provide an independent, structured assessment of RTD's governance structures and systems, paratransit services, workforce retention and labor-related issues, and the District's collaboration with local governments and state agencies. State leaders formed the Committee in recognition of RTD's essential role in supporting mobility, economic development, environmental goals, affordability, access to opportunity, and quality of life across the Denver metropolitan region.

The Committee's purpose is to evaluate current conditions, identify opportunities for improvement, and complete a report that includes a summary of the Committee's work, the findings of its evaluation, and any recommendations on the topics detailed in statute by January 30, 2026. The Committee's report is intended for the General Assembly, the Governor's Office, and RTD, but may also be informative for local governments, partner agencies, and the public as RTD evolves to meet the region's changing transportation needs.

Legislative Charge

SB25-161 provides the statutory authority for the Committee and outlines specific areas for analysis and recommendations. The statutory topics were grouped into four main thematic areas for the purposes of organizing the Committee's learning, discussions, and recommendations:

GOVERNANCE-RELATED TOPICS

With respect to governance, SB25-161 directs the Committee to review:

- "The governance structure of the Board of Directors and executive leadership of the District;"
- "Compensation for the Board of Directors and executive leadership of the District;"

As part of this charge, the Committee evaluated and discussed multiple aspects of governance, including but not limited to:

- Governance-related challenges facing RTD
- Board structure, size, composition, and election/appointment mechanisms
- Board substructures (e.g. committees)
- Board authorities and responsibilities
- Fiscal oversight
- Board staffing, supports, and compensation
- Executive leadership and compensation

Inclusion of these topics reflects the importance of RTD's governance to support strategic decision-making, effective leadership and oversight, service quality, responsiveness to riders, and regional representation to achieve the important mission of the District for the region.

WORKFORCE RETENTION AND LABOR-RELATED TOPICS

With respect to workforce retention and labor-related topics, SB25-161 directs the Committee to review:

- "The District's workforce retention."
- "How transit services within the District can be expanded while ensuring good-paying jobs with benefits for transit service and maintenance providers, given state investments

to expand transit in the state;"

- "How transit services within the District may be served by implementing employer harmony agreements that protect against labor disputes and other disruptions that can lead to workforce retention challenges and service reliability and safety concerns;"

As part of this topic, the Committee evaluated and discussed multiple issues related to workforce retention and labor-management relations, including but not limited to:

- Recruitment and retention challenges and strategies to address
- Wage competitiveness and benefit structures
- Hiring processes
- Mentorship and training
- Safety, health, and working conditions
- Organizational capacity within operations, planning, finance, and capital programs

The inclusion of workforce retention in the statute highlights the critical role that front-line employees play in the transit industry and challenges that RTD and transit agencies nationwide have been facing with respect to transit operator shortages, which have presented challenges for maintaining and expanding transit service levels which provide consistent, reliable customer experience to transit riders.

PARATRANSIT SERVICES

SB25-161 also requires the Committee to consider *"The paratransit services provided within the District's geographic service area",* which are defined in statute as, *"complementary parallel transit services for individuals with disabilities who are unable to utilize regular or fixed-route transit services for some or all of their transit needs."*

While SB25-161 did not specify what aspects of paratransit services the Committee should review and make recommendations on, the Committee evaluated and discussed multiple issues related to paratransit, including but not limited to:

- Requirements for and challenges of RTD's two paratransit services, Access-a-Ride and Access-on-Demand
- Recent evaluation, engagement, and decision-making by the RTD Board related to the newer of the two services, Access-on-Demand
- Needs for additional assessment and planning to holistically plan for services for people with disabilities in the District

The inclusion of this charge reflects the importance of equitable access and ADA-compliant mobility services within RTD's overall mission.

REPRESENTATION AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS & STATE AGENCIES

SB25-161 also requires the Committee to consider *"The representation of local governments and state agencies within the District"*. As part of this topic, the Committee evaluated and discussed multiple issues related to local government and state agency collaboration, including but not limited to:

- Existing mechanisms for local government coordination and collaboration with RTD, such as the Subregional Service Councils and Partnership Program, and possible improvements
- Decision-making criteria for establishing service levels and options for enabling increased service in different parts of the District
- Opportunities to strengthen alignment and collaboration on key priorities like bus rapid transit, transit-oriented development, bus stops, and corridor planning.

The inclusion of this topic highlights the importance of local government and state agency representation and collaboration with RTD, given the importance of transit to those stakeholders as well as the need for close coordination and planning with respect to service and operations, infrastructure to access transit services, adjacent land uses, and more.

BUILDING ON 2020-2021 ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE WORK

SB25-161 also established an intention for the Committee's work to *"build on the work of the previous RTD Accountability Committee created in 2020"*, including specifically assessing the Subregional Service Councils created at the recommendation of the 2020-2021 Accountability Committee and making any recommendations to improve their effectiveness ([2020-2021 Accountability Committee](#)). The 2020-2021 Accountability Committee was administered by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), and had a different and more expansive scope than the 2025 Committee; nevertheless, the 2025 Committee was provided information about the status of the previous recommendations, and discussed implementation of relevant recommendations.

Committee Composition & Representation

SB25-161 establishes a 15-member Committee representing diverse appointing authorities and subject-matter perspectives. Members include appointees of:

- The Senate President
- The Speaker of the House
- The Senate Minority Leader
- The House Minority Leader
- The Governor
- A non-voting representative designated by the RTD Board of Directors

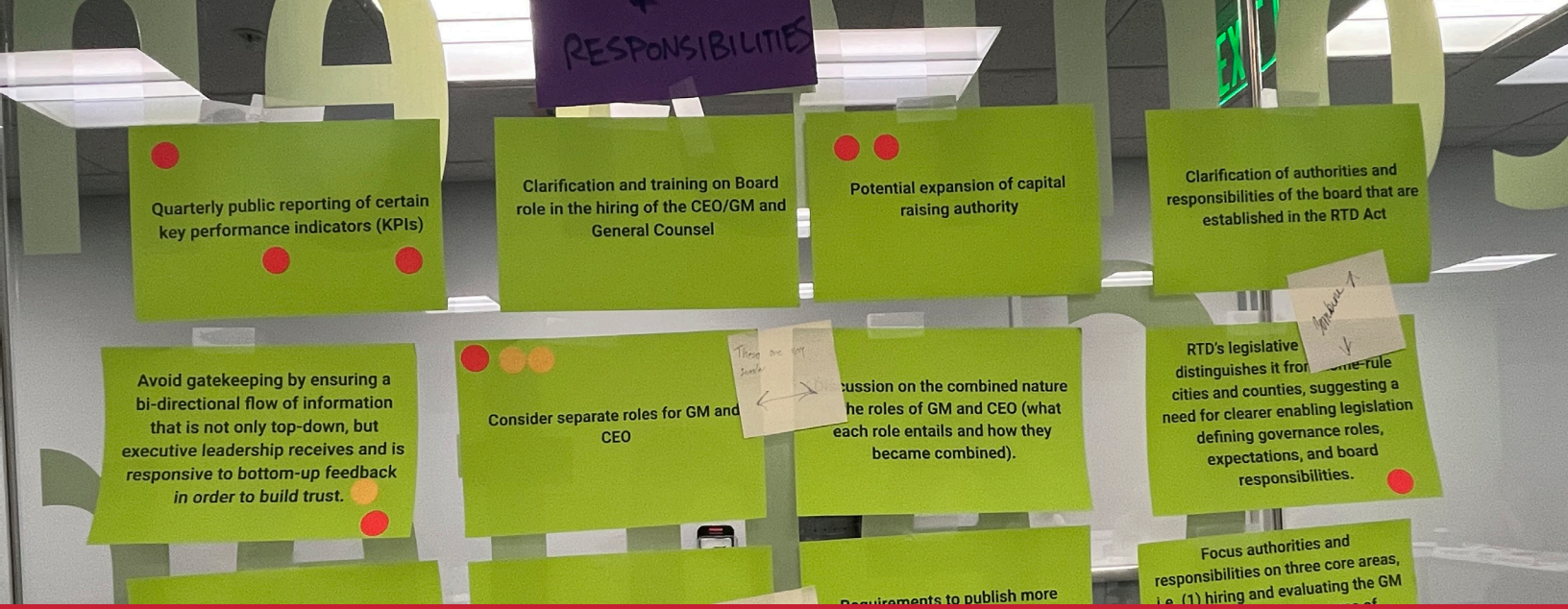The statute requires representation and expertise across a variety of domains, including:

- Workforce development
- Transportation equity
- Youth riders
- Transit riders with disabilities
- Labor
- Local government within the RTD district
- Economic development
- Multimodal transportation and urban planning
- Environmental sustainability

- Rider and worker safety
- Financial planning and management
- RTD Board members, current and former

Members (detailed in Table 1) were selected based on their expertise, organizational roles, and ability to represent constituencies affected by RTD's current and future performance. Their perspectives have been critical in ensuring that Committee deliberations reflect the diverse needs of the Denver metro region served by RTD.

TABLE 1: COMMITTEE MEMBERS

NAME	APPOINTING AUTHORITY	ROLE FILLED
Maria Garcia Berry	Governor	Former member of the District's Board of Directors
Matt Larsen	Governor	Current member of the District's Board of Directors
Harold Dominguez	Governor	Expertise in local government within the district's service area
Alexis Senger	Governor	Expertise in financial planning and management
Jackie Millet	Governor	Expertise in multimodal transportation
James Flattum	Governor	Expertise in environmental organizations
Tobin Snook	Senate President	District service user who is 22 years or younger
Renée M. Chacon	Senate President	Expertise in transportation equity
Miller Hudson	Senate President	Expertise in workforce development
Andrew Iltis	Senate Minority Leader	Expertise in economic development
Jaime Lewis	Speaker of the House	Representative of transit riders with disabilities
Lance Longenbohn	Speaker of the House	Representative from the District's transit workers labor organization
Kiplund Kolkmeier	Speaker of the House	Expertise in urban planning
Matthew Groves	Minority Leader of the House	Expertise in public and transit worker safety
Julien Bouquet	RTD Board of Directors	Ex-officio nonvoting member who is a current member of the District's Board of Directors

Approach to Tasks & Recommendations Development

02

The RTD Accountability Committee undertook its work through a sequenced, transparent, and deliberative process designed to ensure that final recommendations are grounded in shared understanding, evidence and analysis, and stakeholder input. The committee facilitation team structured the Committee's work across several phases spanning August 2025 through January 2026. The process included learning, idea generation, iterative refinement, and convergence toward recommendations that were ultimately voted on.

Overview of the Committee's Approach

Senate Bill 25-161 established the Committee and directed members to develop recommendations across four interconnected domains: governance, workforce and labor retention, paratransit, and representation of local governments and state agencies. To support that charge, SB25-161 directed CEO to support the Committee in carrying out its duties, and develop an approach to ensure that the Committee's work is conducted to enable meeting its statutory goals. CEO was selected due to the agency's mission to support Colorado's transition to a more equitable, low-carbon,

and clean energy economy and promote resources that reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, including pollution and emissions from transportation as well as promote an equitable transition to transportation systems, such as mass transit, that reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. CEO hired facilitation and research support to create the committee facilitation team consisting of Confluence PSG (facilitation), led by Berrick Abramson with support from Carrie Steele and Hudson Skykomish LLC (research support), led by David Bragdon with support from subcontractors. The Committee's work was coordinated by Kelly Blynn, Senior Policy Advisor, Land Use and Transportation at CEO who completed the procurement process for each consultant and developed the overall work plan to meet the directives of SB25-161.

The committee facilitation team designed a process that balanced expert briefings, structured discussion, and carefully moderated ideation. Each meeting was organized to build on prior knowledge, enabling the Committee to navigate a complex set of topics in a coherent and cumulative manner.

The committee facilitation team served as the process stewards, developing agendas, sourcing and developing pre-readings and presentations, surveying members between meetings, consolidating and clarifying Ideas for Consideration, and ensuring discussions remained aligned with the Committee's statutory scope. All member-generated ideas were preserved and synthesized in neutral language for later deliberation.

Committee meetings incorporated public comment, briefings from research experts as well as local and state partners, and structured opportunities for Committee dialogue and discussion, ensuring that recommendations reflect a broad set of perspectives and responsibilities. The Committee met publicly 12 times spanning more than 43 hours between August and January, primarily virtually, with three longer in-person meetings. All meeting agendas, minutes, slides, public comments, and other associated materials can be found in the Appendices.

This approach enabled members to engage deeply with the material, consider diverse viewpoints, and build toward coherent, evidence-based recommendations.

Guiding Principles, Operating Norms, and Bylaws

To support effective deliberation, the Committee agreed to a set of guiding principles and operating norms that shaped all meetings, discussions, and decision-making processes. These included:

Good Faith: Members approached deliberations with a shared commitment to problem solving, transparency, and clarity of intent.

Openness: Presentations, discussions, and materials were designed to support open, accessible dialogue, including public participation and the sharing of differing perspectives.

Focus: Meetings followed structured agendas, with facilitation designed to ensure efficient use of member time and sustained attention on statutory responsibilities.

Participation: All members were expected to actively engage in discussions, review materials, and represent their respective constituencies and appointing authorities.

Respect: Members maintained a respectful environment grounded in listening, acknowledging differences, and navigating disagreements constructively.

These norms have guided the Committee's work since its inaugural meeting and have supported a transparent, balanced, and collaborative process.

Additionally, the Committee adopted a set of bylaws at its second meeting, which established key aspects of the Committee's operations, including selecting a chair and vice chair, establishing a quorum (at least 10 members are needed), and taking any official votes (at least 8 members, a simple majority, are needed). Please see Appendix C for a copy of the Committee's bylaws.

Strategic & Values-Driven Approach

The Committee paired its structured work arc with a strategic and values-driven approach designed to surface problems, clarify priorities, and guide members toward coherent, actionable recommendations supported by a majority of the Committee. Early in the process, members engaged in facilitated discussions to define the core problems the Committee sought to solve both at the system level and within each substantive area of the charge: governance, paratransit, workforce retention, and the role of local and state partners. These discussions helped ground the Committee in a shared understanding of the challenges shaping RTD's performance. Members identified, for example, persistent concerns about low ridership, a lack of public trust, Board role clarity and a need for diversity and expertise on the Board; the tension between growing Access-on-Demand utilization and long-term fiscal sustainability; and the workforce pressures contributing to service instability and operator shortages. Brainstorming sessions generated a broad landscape of "problems to solve," which were then organized, refined, and synthesized to ensure they meaningfully informed downstream deliberations.

In parallel, the Committee articulated a set of values intended to guide its work and serve as a touchstone throughout ideation and recommendation development. Members rated and discussed values such as system health and effectiveness, equity, transparency, fiscal responsibility, accountability, and long-term vision and goals recognizing that RTD's future direction must be shaped not only by statutory obligations but by a coherent set of principles that reflect the needs and aspirations of the region. This values-driven orientation helped the Committee elevate considerations such as equitable access for riders with disabilities, responsible stewardship of public resources, and the importance of creating workforce stability through fair treatment and supportive organizational culture. Through facilitated conversation, the Committee established alignment on the values most essential to its work and used them to filter, test, and shape emerging ideas.

To deepen this alignment, members completed survey assessments rating both the relative importance of identified values and the severity or urgency of each problem. These structured inputs enabled the committee facilitation team to identify areas of convergence, clarify where additional discussion was needed, and highlight the issues most likely to drive consensus. By integrating qualitative discussion with quantitative feedback, the Committee built a shared framework that supported balanced deliberation across its diverse membership.

This combined strategic and values-based approach ensured that the Committee's ultimate recommendations would be grounded in shared priorities rather than individual preferences or isolated perspectives. It enabled members to navigate complex and interrelated topics with discipline and clarity, linking the Committee's statutory responsibilities to a coherent set of values and problem statements. As a result, the Committee entered its recommendation-development phase with a clear understanding of the issues at stake, the principles guiding its work, and the outcomes it sought to advance on behalf of the region.

FACILITATION AND PROCESS DESIGN

The Colorado Energy Office (CEO), as the administering agency for the RTD Accountability Committee, established the scope, statutory charge, and overarching goals for the Committee's work. In collaboration with CEO leadership and staff, Confluence PSG was engaged to design, facilitate, and manage the Committee's process to ensure the work was conducted in a strategic, neutral, and transparent manner capable of supporting informed deliberation among members with diverse perspectives.

Confluence PSG President Berrick Abramson served as the Committee's Executive Facilitator and led all full Committee meetings and work sessions. Abramson brings extensive experience facilitating high-stakes, complex, and at times contentious public sector initiatives, including leadership of the Governor's Transportation Funding Group, the Working Group on the Future of Transit and Rail, discussions and negotiations related to joint service passenger rail, bipartisan statewide engagement on the use of federal relief funds, and multiple initiatives addressing transit accessibility, regional government collaboration, transit-oriented development, and land-

use policy. Drawing on this experience, Abramson worked closely with CEO to design the overall arc and sequencing of conversations, ensuring meetings progressed intentionally from information-sharing and learning, to issue identification, exploration of options and tradeoffs, and ultimately to deliberation and voting.

This facilitation approach was designed to prevent premature conclusions, surface and test underlying assumptions, and allow members to refine their views as they engaged with data, expert perspectives, and one another. Meetings emphasized disciplined agenda design and structured dialogue capable of supporting candid discussion while maintaining focus on the Committee's statutory responsibilities. Throughout the process, facilitation maintained a strict commitment to neutrality in both practice and perception, creating space for respectful sharing of multiple perspectives and for finding consensus through dialog where possible.

Carrie Steele, Confluence PSG's Policy Director and Senior Project Manager, served as the primary day-to-day manager of the Committee's operations. Steele coordinated all meeting logistics, managed member communications and participation, and oversaw the preparation and organization of agendas, materials, and records. She worked closely with CEO staff to ensure timely distribution of information, consistent communication with Committee members, and accurate documentation of discussions, deliberations, and votes, supporting continuity across meetings and sustained member engagement.

Together, Confluence PSG, CEO and the contracted research experts operated as close partners throughout the Committee's work.

Research Overview

The Committee's work was grounded in an extensive research base that spanned governance models, workforce trends, paratransit operations, and intergovernmental collaboration in Colorado and across the United States. This section summarizes the structure of that research and the analytic framework through which the Committee interpreted its charge.

The facilitation team curated a set of pre-meeting readings, briefings, technical analyses, and stakeholder inputs to ensure the Committee had access to balanced, high-quality information from the research team, independent analyses, RTD, and other key experts and stakeholders from around the U.S. and Canada.

RESEARCH TEAM

CEO contracted with David Bragdon of Hudson Skykomish LLC, an independent consultancy with extensive background in transit agency governance and policy. He retained two subcontractors

with significant national expertise in the Committee's other topic areas, the Eno Center for Transportation (Eno Center) who focused on workforce and labor-management relations, and Nelson \ Nygaard, who focused on paratransit. While their scopes and timelines were limited due to the deadline and budget for the Committee, their expertise and independent assessment was valuable for helping the Committee start from a shared high-level understanding of RTD's approach to each topic, its performance, and how it compares with other peer agencies. The following summarizes the scope and deliverables of each member of the research team:

David Bragdon (Governance and Local Government Collaboration)

Bragdon summarized the national literature on transit agency governance to provide the Committee pre-reading and briefing slides highlighting governance values and governance structure typologies and their strengths and weaknesses, interviewed transit agency leaders in other comparable regions to develop case studies and convened a panel discussion, and interviewed key RTD stakeholders to inform learning presentations, memos, and Committee discussions. Bragdon produced several memos including case studies from other regions and local government collaboration (see Appendix F).

Nelson \ Nygaard (Paratransit)

Nelson \ Nygaard, a national consulting firm focused on multimodal transportation and public transit services, provided a presentation to the Committee on federal ADA paratransit requirements, interviewed RTD paratransit staff and key stakeholders, and collected and analyzed paratransit data from RTD. They produced a slide deck briefing, as well as a white paper summarizing RTD's two paratransit programs, federal requirements, case studies from peer agencies, and considerations for the Committee's recommendations (see Appendix F).

Eno Center (Workforce)

The Eno Center, a national transportation research institution with several programs and past studies related to workforce issues in the transportation field, conducted interviews with RTD and ATU staff, collected and analyzed workforce recruitment and retention data from RTD, and summarized the national literature on transit agency workforce retention. They provided a literature review, white paper, and two presentations to the Committee summarizing national trends, benchmarking RTD and their efforts relative to their peers, assessing RTD's recruitment and retention practices and outcomes, and identifying potential additional best practices to continue improvement in this area. Eno's work focused primarily on transit operators and mechanics, which make up a major portion of the transit workforce, and are critical for providing the agency's core services as well as (in the role of operator) being an important element of the customer's direct daily experience with the agency. Due to the limited scope and timeline, Eno Center focused only on fixed-route bus and rail services provided by RTD employees, not those contracted out to private firms.

ADDITIONAL INPUTS

In addition to the research team's deliverables, they helped assemble other national research papers as pre-readings. The facilitation team also worked with RTD staff to identify key background materials to inform the Committee. This included, for example:

- Legislative Council Staff's statutory overview of RTD powers and Board structure, as well as RTD's enabling statute
- National transit agency analyses and case studies on governance, paratransit, and workforce
- Relevant RTD policy documents, Board packets, research and plans, and slide decks

All pre-reads, slides, memos, and white papers provided to the Committee on each topic are listed below and can be found in Appendix F. This diverse set of materials enabled members to work with a shared factual foundation while also incorporating multiple perspectives.

Integration of Public, Stakeholder, and Expert Perspectives

Throughout the process, the Committee also considered inputs from a variety of public, stakeholder, and expert perspectives, including:

- Public comments, both written and live during meetings
- Stakeholder interviews conducted by Bragdon and others of local governments, regional entities, state agencies, national transit leaders, advocacy organizations, and more
- Presentations and feedback sessions at stakeholder meetings such as the Downtown Denver Partnership, Colorado Counties Inc., Commuting Solutions, the Denver Metro Chamber, Move Colorado, transportation advocates, and DRCOG.

These perspectives informed both the learning materials and the Committee's deliberations, ensuring recommendations reflect the full constellation of voices, evidence, and lived experience. All materials considered, including written public comments, can be found in the Appendices.

Iterative Learning–Ideation Sequencing

The Committee's work generally followed a two-meeting loop that allowed ideas to remain grounded in current research and shared understanding. This was done through a sequencing that featured topic-specific learning at a meeting followed by continued exploration between meetings and the development of ideas for that topic at the following meeting. This iterative process ensured continuous refinement, created opportunities for cross-topic integration, and allowed members time to reflect between meetings.

LEARNING PHASE (AUGUST – OCTOBER)

The Committee began its work with a comprehensive learning phase, ensuring that all members shared a common baseline of information. All slides, white papers, and lists of links to pre-reading materials can be found in Appendix F. Each recommendation section also features a brief summary of the key learnings and discussion points under each topic.

IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION PHASE (SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER)

After each learning session, Committee members engaged in structured, judgment-free brainstorming to develop Ideas for Consideration. This phase was intentionally exploratory: members were encouraged to propose a wide range of concepts, recognizing that not all ideas would become recommendations. The committee facilitation team consolidated these ideas without pre-judging, elevating or omitting any in preparation for later prioritization, refinement, and deliberation.

CONVERGENCE TOWARD RECOMMENDATIONS (NOVEMBER – JANUARY)

Beginning in early November and into December, the Committee shifted from learning and idea generation to prioritization, refinement, and development of recommendations. Members began identifying areas of alignment and exploring the feasibility, desirability, and implications of various ideas. The committee facilitation team supported this phase by designing surveys and in-person activities to prioritize ideas, identifying answers to Committee member questions, and facilitating discussions to identify areas of alignment and hone recommendations.

RTD Background, Previous Examinations, & Context of 2025 Committee Work

03

Overview of RTD

RTD is the largest transit agency in Colorado and one of the most expansive in terms of service area in the western United States. Created by the Colorado General Assembly in 1969 as a political subdivision of the state similar to a special district, RTD serves as the Denver metropolitan region's regional transit provider, responsible for delivering mass transportation services that promote the public health, safety, convenience, economy, and welfare of residents throughout its 2,345-square-mile service area (RTD, Legislative Council Staff). More than 3 million people live within RTD boundaries, spanning eight counties and 40 municipalities.

RTD's statutory mission directs the agency to "develop, maintain, and operate a mass transportation system" that provides fast, frequent, reliable, and safe service and prioritizes reductions in household transportation burdens, air pollution, congestion, and traffic fatalities (C.R.S. 32-9-102, 32-9-107). This mission underscores RTD's regional significance: the District plays a critical role in supporting economic mobility, access to opportunity, climate goals, and regional growth to the Denver metropolitan area, where over half the state's population lives.

Background of the Committee's statutory topics

GOVERNANCE

RTD is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors elected from population-based districts, each representing approximately 200,000 residents (Legislative Council Staff). This structure was established by voter approval in 1980, replacing an earlier model in which Board members were appointed by county commissioners. RTD remains one of only a small number of transit agencies nationwide governed by an elected board.

In statute, the Board is responsible for setting policy, approving budgets and strategic plans, overseeing the General Manager/Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO), and ensuring the overall performance and stewardship of the District. Board compensation has been set in statute at $12,000 per year for each Director, and GM/CEO compensation is guided by internal policies set by the Board (C.R.S. 32-9-117; GM/CEO Performance Assessment Framework). In addition to its statutory authorities, the Board has adopted several policies and substructures to guide its work, such as Board training and norms, bylaws, strategic plans, standing committees on specific topics, and external advisory committees (Legislative Council Staff; RTD Governance Materials).

Over time, however, concerns have emerged regarding role clarity, Board-management boundaries, fiscal oversight, and the Board's capacity to consistently exercise strategic governance oversight rather than operational involvement. Governance reform has been the subject of sustained attention in recent years. The 2020–2021 RTD Accountability Committee identified that RTD's existing board structure is an outlier among peer transit agencies that could be impacting their governing effectiveness (2021 RTD Accountability Committee Governance Evaluation). While the committee did not reach consensus on structural changes, it did recommend that an independent body revisit the issue after a few years (2021 RTD Accountability Committee Report). Subsequent legislative efforts, including a proposed restructuring bill in 2024 that did not pass, further elevated governance as a central issue (HB24-1447). More recently, the 2024 Fiscal Governance Audit by the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) and RTD's Organizational Design and Workplace Assessment both highlighted governance-related weaknesses, including gaps in Board training, strategic oversight, performance monitoring, and clarity of authority (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024; Organizational Assessment, 2024). The interviews conducted for the organizational assessment also identified some concerns or uncertainties about the advantages or impacts of a significant restructuring of the Board amongst some employees.

SB25-161 reinforced the importance of governance by directing the 2025 Accountability Committee to examine "the governance structure of the Board of Directors and executive leadership of the District," as well as compensation for both (SB25-161). In parallel, the legislation imposed new requirements related to reporting, transparency, strategic planning, and performance dashboards implicitly acknowledging that governance reform is foundational to improving accountability and outcomes.

For more detail on this topic, see the sections on governance in the Committee Findings and Recommendations section and Appendix F.

PARATRANSIT SERVICES

Paratransit services are a federally mandated and essential component of RTD's mission to provide equitable mobility across the District. For many riders with disabilities, paratransit is not a supplement to fixed-route transit but a primary means of accessing employment, healthcare, education, and community life. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), RTD is required to provide complementary paratransit service for individuals whose disabilities prevent them from using fixed-route transit for some or all trips, within defined service area and service hour requirements (Paratransit White Paper).

RTD currently provides paratransit through two programs serving the same ADA-eligible population: Access-a-Ride (AaR) and Access-on-Demand (AoD). AaR is RTD's ADA-mandated service, offering pre-scheduled, door-to-door transportation using contracted providers and dedicated wheelchair-accessible vehicles. AoD, which was introduced in 2020, is a premium, same-day service that exceeds ADA minimum requirements and provides on-demand curb-to-curb trips through taxi and transportation network company providers that has effectively been zero fare for many riders to date. While the programs serve the same general population, they differ substantially in service model, cost structure, regulatory role, and which paratransit riders they best serve.

AoD was expanded in 2022 and has since grown rapidly due to its flexibility and convenience, contributing to significant cost increases and new operational considerations. In response, the RTD Board adopted program modifications in September 2025 intended to balance improved mobility for some riders with fiscal sustainability and continued compliance with ADA obligations. Despite over a year of public input and analysis, the RTD Board has faced significant opposition to the changes from AoD riders and disability advocates, highlighting the complexity of paratransit service delivery.

For more detail on this topic, see the sections on paratransit in the Committee Findings and Recommendations section and Appendix F.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND RETENTION

Workforce capacity and retention have emerged as one of the most significant constraints on RTD's ability to provide reliable, frequent, and safe transit service. Like transit agencies across the United States, RTD has faced persistent challenges recruiting and retaining bus and rail operators and frontline maintenance staff over the past decade (Workforce White Paper). These challenges have directly affected RTD's ability to restore service levels post-COVID, maintain infrastructure, and

meet rider expectations, making workforce stability a central issue for both operational performance and public confidence.

National research and industry benchmarking indicate that workforce shortages are widespread and driven by a combination of factors, including intense competition for workers, highly regulated operating environments, safety and fatigue concerns, seniority-based scheduling practices, and the time and cost required to obtain commercial driver licenses and complete training. Transit work, while mission-driven and unionized with good wages and benefits, can be less attractive to newer workers seeking flexibility, predictability, and work-life balance. These dynamics have contributed to high attrition rates during the first year of employment at many agencies, including RTD.

RTD has experienced these pressures acutely, with operator and maintenance vacancies limiting service restoration and contributing to trip cancellations and reduced frequency in recent years. At the same time, RTD has made measurable progress. Recruitment pipelines have expanded, compensation has become more competitive relative to peer agencies, first-year retention rates have improved, and investments have been made in apprenticeships, supervisor training, and employee development. Independent analysis indicates that RTD's strategies and outcomes are broadly consistent with those of peer agencies and that recent trends show meaningful improvement, even as challenges persist (Workforce White Paper).

In addition to frontline staffing, broader organizational capacity and culture influence workforce stability. A recent organizational assessment identified a workforce deeply committed to RTD's mission, alongside structural and cultural challenges related to communication, decision-making clarity, and leadership alignment (Organizational Assessment, 2024). RTD has initiated a multi-year effort to strengthen organizational effectiveness and become a more desirable employer. Together, these conditions framed the Accountability Committee's examination of workforce issues and informed its recommendations, which focus on strengthening recruitment, retention, mentorship, labor collaboration, and data-driven workforce management as essential components of RTD's long-term sustainability.

For more detail on this topic, see the sections on workforce in the Committee Findings and Recommendations section and Appendix F.

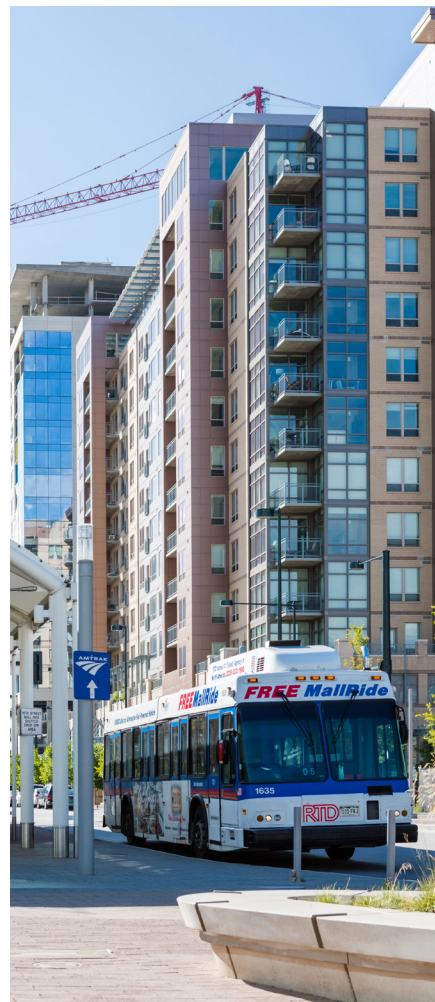## REPRESENTATION AND COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS & STATE AGENCIES

RTD coordinates with counties, municipalities, DRCOG, and state agencies through a mix of formal and informal mechanisms focused on service planning, operations, infrastructure, land use, housing, and public safety. Key avenues include subregional service councils that advise on local service issues; a partnership program that provides matching grants for projects such as first/last mile connections; and extensive collaboration with DRCOG through non-voting Board participation, technical committees, and joint work on regional transportation plans and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects. Additional coordination occurs through working groups, project-level collaboration with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and other state agencies, and partnerships with local police departments. Beyond these formal channels, advocacy organizations and Transit Demand Management partners also provide a valuable pathway for communications, public relations and stakeholder engagement.

Interview research by David Bragdon found a clear divide between political and staff-level relationships (Local Government Collaboration Memo). While relationships with local elected officials are often strained, staff-level coordination is generally effective and productive, resulting in tangible improvements such as bus lanes, transit signal priority, service planning, and transit-oriented development planning. Political dissatisfaction largely stems from the incomplete delivery of the 2004 FasTracks program and perceptions of unequal distribution of investment and service, despite the absence of agreed-upon standards for what constitutes a "fair share" in different parts of the region.

The research also identified opportunities to strengthen collaboration aside from changing governance structures, such as addressing unresolved FasTracks commitments, setting clearer standards for service and investment allocation, restoring options for local governments to fund higher service levels, and expanding cooperative efforts on issues like bus priority and public safety.

For more detail on this topic, see the sections on local government collaboration in the Committee Findings and Recommendations section and Appendix F.

PREVIOUS ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE WORK & STATUS

The 2020-2021 RTD Accountability Committee, designed to be fully independent from RTD, was formed through a collaboration of the Governor, Transportation Chairs of the General Assembly, and the RTD Board. The 2020-2021 Accountability Committee's scope was generally much broader than the 2025 Accountability Committee's, with a charge of "providing feedback and a set of recommendations for improvement to RTD's operations and statutes".

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION THEMES

The 2020–2021 RTD Accountability Committee was staffed by DRCOG and ultimately produced 43 recommendations across governance, operations, finance, transparency, and equity (2020-2021 Accountability Committee). The 2020–2021 Committee's recommendations fell under nine broad categories:

1. Use of federal COVID-19 relief funds

2. Operator retention and workforce practices

3. Subregional service councils

4. Board structure

5. FasTracks options and decision transparency

6. Reporting metrics and performance dashboards

7. Fixed-route and paratransit improvements

8. Partnerships for service enhancement

9. Fare simplification and pass program reform

Of the more expansive scope of the previous Committee, some topic areas were most germane to the current Committee's work including for example:

- **Operator retention and workforce practices:** The 2020-2021 Accountability Committee made some high level recommendations designed to address job quality and workforce retention such improving supervisory practices, ensuring adequate work breaks, and improving scheduling practices

- **Subregional service councils:** The subregional service councils were a concept developed by the previous Committee to create a more collaborative decision-making model with local communities, which have since been implemented by RTD, and were a significant topic of discussion for the current Committee.

- **Board structure:** Ultimately, the previous Committee did not make specific recommendations about Board structure, acknowledging a lack of consensus on the topic, and recommended a future effort (such as the current Committee) explore the topic in greater depth.

RTD'S 2021 AGENCY RESPONSES

RTD's Board approved a full response document to the recommendations (Agency Responses to the RTD Accountability Committee Final Report). RTD:

- **Agreed** with 26 recommendations, including the three areas mentioned above that overlap with the current Committee's charge
- **Partially agreed** with 16 recommendations, including some where federal requirements or limitations on funding posed some concerns
- **Disagreed** with one item regarding a fare change recommendation because RTD was conducting a broader fare study, though the Office of the State Auditor did later note RTD ultimately implemented elements of this recommendation.

AUDIT FINDINGS ON IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

The 2024 Fiscal Governance Audit found that RTD had implemented 21 of the 43 recommendations, but had not fully implemented 22 which remained a work in progress (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024). The State Auditor concluded that:

- Several recommendations lacked clear responsible parties
- Implementation timelines were undefined
- Reporting to the Board was inconsistent
- Progress tracking tools were incomplete

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS AS OF DECEMBER 2024

In December 2024, RTD provided a formal status update showing progress on some items (such as updated management training and early work on subregional engagement structures), while acknowledging that several recommendations will require continued implementation through 2025 (Accountability Committee Recommendations Implementation Update, 2024). The update also noted a commitment to creating a working group internally to monitor implementation and report to the Board on progress. RTD committed to completing outstanding recommendations no later than December 2025, contingent on ongoing studies. A December 2025 report from the Office of the State Auditor found that RTD had taken action to comply with 15 of the 15 recommendations (OSA Report, 2025).

The 2025 Accountability Committee reviewed the above documents as they began their work, informing their discussions where the Committees' charges overlapped.

Overview of other key aspects of RTD

While the Committee's scope and timeline was limited, other key aspects of RTD offer important context for the issues facing the agency with respect to the Committee's core charges of governance, paratransit, workforce, and local government collaboration.

SERVICES AND SYSTEM OVERVIEW

RTD provides a comprehensive portfolio of services, including fixed-route bus, light rail, commuter rail, paratransit, FlexRide, vanpool, and specialized services. Operational performance is one of the most visible aspects of RTD as an agency. Ridership levels, service quality, and reliability have been central concerns for customers, elected officials, and state policymakers.

Service Levels

RTD's 2022 System Optimization Plan (SOP) sought to realign services with post-pandemic travel behavior, workforce availability, and fiscal constraints, and included route-specific plans designed to "better meet the mobility needs of equity population groups, increase overall ridership, and can be implemented within RTD financial resources" (System Optimization Plan). While the SOP provided a framework for stabilization, service restoration and ridership recovery has lagged behind peers. As of 2024, RTD still had the greatest reduction in service relative to post-pandemic vehicle revenue service miles amongst the largest U.S. urban areas (about 30%), according to National Transit Database Data compiled by the Urban Institute (Urban Institute, 2025).

Reliability and Maintenance Challenges

Light rail service has experienced significant disruptions in the past few years due to long-deferred state-of-good-repair projects, such as the Downtown Rail Reconstruction, Southeast Corridor coping panel remediation, and systemwide rail burn maintenance. These projects have resulted in multi-week shutdowns, prolonged single-tracking, and slow zones, which have contributed to ridership losses (Denver Post).

Ridership Trends

RTD's ridership recovery following the pandemic has lagged significantly behind peers, likely due to factors such as reduced service frequency since the pandemic, changes in travel behavior, reliability challenges, deferred maintenance projects, perceptions of safety, and network design. As of 2023, RTD had recovered just 57% of pre-COVID ridership, amongst the lowest of agencies included in an analysis of National Transit Database data by the Brookings Institute (Brookings). In 2024, ridership remained 39% lower than pre-COVID levels, and declined in early 2025 relative to the same period the previous year (Axios).

FasTracks

FasTracks is the transit expansion program approved by voters in 2004 to build more than 120 miles of new commuter rail and light rail, nearly 20 miles of bus rapid transit, significant increases in bus service hours and dozens of new transit hubs and park-and-rides. Over the last 20 years, FasTracks has delivered several new rail lines, but has also faced funding shortfalls, cost increases, and has several corridors still incomplete. SB25-161 also required RTD to submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly by the end of 2025 demonstrating how RTD will complete the Plan's unfinished corridors by 2034. The new report estimates the cost of the 4 unfinished corridors at $1.6 billion, and notes RTD does not currently have the funds to complete any of the corridors (Finishing FasTracks, RTD).

FINANCIAL CONTEXT

RTD's fiscal environment is shaped by a combination of long-term structural factors, most notably its large geographic service area, dependence on sales tax revenue, historic debt obligations from FasTracks, unpredictability of the current federal administration, and significant fluctuations in ridership and fare revenue. While RTD remains fiscally solvent and generally healthy on traditional indicators, recent audits and budget cycles highlight substantial governance, reporting, and planning challenges that may hinder long-term financial resilience.

In 2024, the Office of the State Auditor concluded that while RTD is generally in stable fiscal condition based on statutory indicators, significant risks are emerging (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024):

- Federal COVID-19 relief funds were fully exhausted by 2023.
- Capital needs including major rail state-of-good-repair projects exceed current funding levels.
- RTD has needed to utilize significant portions of its reserves in recent years to cover budget gaps

These constraints, combined with ongoing commitments related to the voter-approved FasTracks expansion program and a desire amongst stakeholders to restore service and recover ridership, pose substantial long-term fiscal challenges.

Findings From the State Auditor's Fiscal Governance Audit (2024)

Overall, the 2024 Fiscal Governance Audit conducted by the OSA found RTD was in good fiscal health as of Calendar Year 2022, though it also identified significant gaps in RTD's budgeting, reporting, and long-term financial planning practices (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024). Key findings include:

1. RTD did not report all statutorily required cost-efficiency metrics from 2021 to 2024.

2. Inaccurate capital renewal projections, missing $153.2 million in approved 2024 projects.

3. Insufficient budget detail provided to the Board for statutory compliance, and RTD did not fully adhere to statutory budget filing requirements.

4. Inconsistent quarterly tracking of strategic plan performance and unauthorized changes to financial metrics.

5. Lack of policies to ensure timeline onboarding training for new Board members, as well as ongoing training.

6. Over-expenditures on the Ozone Season Transit Grant Programs in 2022 and 2023.

Revenue Structure and Fiscal Capacity

RTD's revenue base is built primarily on a voter-approved 1 percent sales and use tax, composed of a 0.6 percent base system tax and a 0.4 percent FasTracks tax. Sales tax receipts represent roughly 67 percent of total revenue as of 2023, an increase from 55 percent in 2014 as fare revenues declined (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024). This makes RTD structurally sensitive to economic cycles, consumer behavior, and shifting retail activity.

Passenger fare revenue, once a significant component of the operating budget, has declined sharply. Fare revenue in 2023 was just one-third of 2019 levels, accounting for only 5 percent of total revenue (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024).

Federal operating and capital grants remain essential, especially during and after the pandemic. Between 2020 and 2023, RTD received approximately $790 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds, which offset severe ridership losses due to the pandemic but created an ongoing structural gap once the funds were exhausted (Fiscal Governance Audit, 2024). This anticipated spend down of COVID funds has been further complicated since January 2025 by the unpredictability of federal government funding decisions and disbursements.

In December 2025, the RTD Board approved its largest budget ever of $1.9 billion (Denver Post; RTD budgets). The budget included utilizing reserve funds to cover a significant deficit estimated between $100-400 million this year, driven by a combination of higher than expected maintenance costs and falling sales tax revenues. While RTD has more significant reserves currently than other entities in the state, they could quickly be drawn down. As of the December 2, 2025 RTD Board meeting, the 2026 deficit is forecast to be $228 million, leading RTD directors to contemplate the need for service cuts in 2027 (RTD board packet).

Collectively, these financial issues have driven concerns amongst political leaders and regional stakeholders about systemic challenges in fiscal oversight, Board-staff coordination, and strategic direction.

Summary of Key Challenges Facing RTD

Multiple recent initiatives have focused on addressing accountability, low levels of public trust, and concerns about performance, including the 2020-2021 Accountability Committee, legislative efforts to reform governance in 2024, and new requirements for reporting, transparency, and strategic planning included in SB25-161. These concerns and resulting initiatives stem from several interconnected structural, operational, financial, and governance challenges facing RTD that frame the 2025 Accountability Committee's work.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- **Large service area:** RTD has the largest geographic service area among its peers, as well as one of the most heterogeneous in terms of land use patterns (North Highland report)
- **FasTracks obligations** remain incomplete, creating uncertainty and undermining public trust.
- **Diverse regional growth patterns** create challenges balancing urban and suburban service needs (i.e. tensions between providing broad service coverage vs. focusing service on high ridership areas)

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

- **Service reliability,** weakened by infrastructure deficiencies, deferred maintenance, and workforce challenges
- **Post-pandemic service levels** remain below 2019 levels (at 86% as of fall 2025).
- **Changes to rider's mobility preferences** and rates of working from home since the pandemic have contributed to lower ridership.
- **Operator shortages** that have limited restoration of service levels and caused unreliability for riders
- **Bus and rail network misalignment** with changed commuter patterns

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

- **High costs per rider,** per service hour, and per passenger mile
- **Declining fare revenue** and stagnant ridership
- **Increasing costs of purchased transportation contracts** from the private vendors who operate some services on behalf of RTD
- **Need for sustained capital reinvestment** to address deferred maintenance and other needs
- **Upcoming structural financial challenges** as costs grow faster than revenues, and the agency utilizes reserves to cover the difference

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND SAFETY CHALLENGES

- **Perceptions of personal safety** remain critical drivers of transit choice
- **Reliability, on-time performance, and service quality/frequency** influence ridership growth

Committee Findings and Recommendations

04

Governance Findings & Recommendations

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

RTD is overseen by a 15-member publicly elected Board of Directors, each representing a population-based district of approximately 200,000 residents, who are elected to four-year terms. Previously overseen by a board appointed by county commissioners within the District, a citizen ballot measure in 1980 was successful in changing the composition of RTD's Board to its current structure. RTD remains one of just three elected transit agency boards nationwide.

As detailed in state statute, the Board is responsible for setting policy, approving the budget and strategic plan, hiring and supervising the General Manager/CEO, and overseeing district performance, amongst other authorities and duties, though it also may delegate duties to management and staff. Board member compensation has been fixed by state statute at $12,000 annually per Director since 2008, while compensation for the GM/CEO is determined through Board-approved internal policies and evaluation frameworks. Beyond its statutory responsibilities, the Board has established a range of policies and structures to support its work, including bylaws, strategic plans, Board training and operating norms, standing committees focused on key oversight functions, and external advisory committees.

Governance reform has emerged as a key issue in recent years as interest has risen in improving RTD's overall performance amongst the region's political leaders and stakeholders. Board structure was part of the scope of the 2020-2021 RTD Accountability Committee (which ultimately did not make specific recommendations), a bill in 2024 that ultimately was not adopted (HB24-1447) attempted to shrink and restructure the Board, and governance issues have been highlighted in various recent reports, including for example:

- The 2024 Fiscal Governance Audit conducted by the OSA identified gaps in Board training, strategic plan oversight, and performance monitoring (while generally finding stable fiscal health at the time).

- The 2024 Organizational Assessment found that excessive Board involvement in operational matters has contributed to role confusion, staff uncertainty, and diminished organizational effectiveness.

- In addition to the creation of the 2025 Accountability Committee, SB25-161 addressed several other governance-related issues, including clarifying the powers and duties of the Board, placing new requirements related to reporting to the legislature, public dashboards, establishing certain goals, strategic planning, capital planning, and service planning.

Part of the focus on governance reform has arisen due to a lack of electoral competition at times during the history of the elected board: according to the Secretary of State, out of 172 RTD electoral contests since 1980, 68 of them were uncontested (~40%). 50 had 2 candidates (29%), and 54 had 3 or more candidates (31%) (CO Secretary of State). SB25-161 also prohibited write-in candidates which previously were allowed.

SB25-161 underscored the central role of governance by requiring the 2025 Accountability Committee to review the District's governance and executive leadership structure, along with compensation for both. At the same time, the bill introduced new mandates for reporting, transparency, strategic planning, and performance dashboards, reflecting a legislative recognition that strong governance is a prerequisite for greater accountability and improved results.

WHAT THE COMMITTEE LEARNED

Structural Governance

The Committee reviewed extensive national research on transit governance models, including elected boards, appointed boards, hybrid structures, and state or city/county controlled authorities. As part of this work, the Committee received briefings and memos from transit expert David Bragdon, including (see Appendix F for all presentations and memos):

- Comparative analysis of governance typologies and their strengths and weaknesses;
- Confidential interviews with current and former board members from peer regions, including Utah, the Twin Cities of Minnesota and the San Francisco Bay Area;

- Case studies examining recent governance reforms in Utah and the Twin Cities of Minnesota.

These materials illustrated recurring themes across regions: challenges recruiting qualified candidates for low-visibility elected boards; risks of excessive board involvement in operations; the importance of training, norms, and committee structures; and the tradeoffs inherent in appointed versus elected models. To help focus the conversations, Bragdon suggested a working definition of governance as the "institutional structures and processes by which policy and decisions are made", and advised clearly distinguishing governance responsibilities from day-to-day management issues. These materials also emphasized that no single governance model guarantees success; rather, effectiveness depends on alignment between structure, authority, accountability, political culture, and organizational capacity. The committee also explored themes of what "values" are sought to be achieved in governance, and how various characteristics can be in tension: for example, the desire that a board be "representative" of the general public vs. the desire that the board possess technical "expertise" needed to oversee a complex organization. Some of the governance typologies studied and considerations identified included:

- **Direct control by state governments,** such as in Boston, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Rhode Island. This typology suits geographically compact states where much of the state's population is served by the agency and political leaders recognize the importance of transit to the region/state, but can fail if the transit agency's success is not relevant to state leaders' political success.

- **Direct city or county control,** such as Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, El Paso, where city boundaries encompass most of the region, but would be difficult in regions where there are a significant number of suburban jurisdictions.

- **Boards composed of officials from local jurisdictions,** such as LA Metro, Sound Transit, and Phoenix Valley Transit, which can result in a lack of a unified, cohesive attention from local elected officials (who are in many cases already part time and receive low pay), disproportionate representation relative to population, and parochialism.

- **Multiple agencies serving a single region,** such as Los Angeles County and the Bay Area, where agencies may be able to better focus on a particular subregion or transit mode, but may also result in fragmented governance and service delivery.

- **Governance structures driven by expertise and outcomes,** such as Transport for London (or outside the transit industry, the Federal Reserve Board), where governance qualifications are focused on specific areas of expertise and accountability is to particular policy objectives rather than specific constituencies. The foundational legislation creating these entities implicitly prioritizes appointees' expertise in particular professional disciplines, rather than an expectation that they be representational of specific constituencies.

- **Governance structures of different sizes,** ranging from 3 in Utah to 18 for Sound Transit in Washington State, with RTD generally being on the larger end of peer transit agency board sizes.

The Utah Transit Authority case study was particularly instructive. There, a shift from a large, locally based board to a smaller, state-appointed trustee model produced unintended consequences, including blurred lines between oversight and management, duplicative staffing and increased administrative overhead, and diffused accountability. This example reinforced the Committee's conclusion that structural reform must be carefully designed and paired with strong non-structural governance practices.

The Twin Cities briefing also encouraged the Committee towards finding alignment in recommendations; there, several reform efforts and a similar committee process have failed to identify a consensus path forward, resulting in maintenance of the status quo, despite widespread impressions that the status quo is dissatisfactory.

The Committee also received a briefing from the Colorado Boards and Commissions office, which helped illustrate themes across other governance structures in statute, and provided additional context for how appointees are recruited, vetted, nominated, and confirmed in alignment with statutory requirements and guidelines. The briefing highlighted that Boards and Commissions with more policy-making authority and responsibility (such as the Energy and Carbon Management Commission) are generally smaller and more highly compensated.

Non-structural Governance

The Committee received and reviewed RTD's statute and materials from RTD related to current Board training, Board operating procedures, compensation, GM/CEO evaluation, substructures, and other policies and procedures (all of which are included or linked to in Appendix F):

- **Board authorities:** The Committee reviewed the Board's authorities and responsibilities in state statute (RTD Act, §§ 32-9-101 — 32-9-168), as well as those articulated in the Board's bylaws, which reflect governance duties common to other boards such as setting the budget and monitoring financial performance; hiring, supervising, evaluating, and potentially terminating the GM/CEO and General Counsel; and considering and voting on major policy decisions. The Committee also reviewed RTD's current strategic plan, budget, and new performance dashboards measuring key performance indicators. Per SB25-161, RTD must publish quarterly dashboards showing ridership by route, on-time performance, workforce statistics, and other key metrics.

- **Board training, staffing, and supports:** The Committee reviewed information about the Board's compensation and comparisons with other transit agencies, as well as comparisons with other elected and appointed positions in Colorado where compensation is generally benchmarked to inflation. The Committee also reviewed information provided by the Board's office, including orientation and training materials, operating guidelines, and its governance manual, which collectively outline aspects like accessing staff resources, and appropriate divisions between the Board and day-to-day management.

- **Substructures:** The Committee reviewed information about the Board's standing committees, including an Executive Committee; Finance and Planning; Operations, Safety, and Security Committee; Performance Committee; and Audit Committee. RTD undergoes several required and internally driven audits, including performance audits, annual financial audits, and audits by federal agencies. RTD also has several committees of external stakeholders designed to be advisory to the Board, including the Citizens Advisory Committee, Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities, and Paratransit Advisory Committee.

- **Executive compensation and oversight:** The Committee also reviewed RTD's executive compensation philosophy and GM/CEO performance assessment framework, situating executive leadership within broader considerations of performance accountability, fiscal stewardship, and alignment with strategic goals.

Ultimately the RTD and its Board have many key internal governance policies and procedures in place and its roles and responsibilities are fairly clear in statute, though interviews by Bragdon highlighted these can be inconsistently adhered to in practice, contributing to the governance challenges identified.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

During its ideation phase, the Committee generated a wide range of ideas related to governance, including:

- Alternative board sizes and compositions, including elected, appointed, and hybrid models, generally ranging in size from 7 to 11 members;
- Use of nominating or screening processes for appointed members;
- Enhanced standing committee structures and use of ex-officio participation;
- Expanded training, onboarding, and support for board members;
- Clarification of Board versus management roles and authorities, as well as staffing and support models;

- Revisions to Board and chair compensation to reflect workload and responsibility;
- Strengthened fiscal oversight, audit functions, and long-term financial planning;
- Clearer alignment between executive evaluation, compensation, and performance outcomes.
- Possible addition of an independent Office of Inspector General, similar to New York's MTA or San Francisco's BART.

Not all ideas advanced to recommendations. In particular, the Committee was cautious about adopting governance models that concentrated authority without sufficient checks, or that added procedural complexity without clear benefit. The recommendations that follow reflect areas where the Committee found sufficient alignment, feasibility, and urgency to warrant action.

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

Based on its review and deliberations, the Committee reached several overarching findings that informed its recommendations:

- **Governance challenges at RTD are systemic**, not episodic, and materially affect the District's ability to deliver reliable service, manage resources, and respond to customer ad stakeholder needs.
- **The current governance structure does not adequately support the level of expertise, accountability, and strategic leadership required** given RTD's scale, fiscal complexity, and regional importance. Capacity and expertise to serve as a governing board that can provide policy leadership and fiscal oversight is needed to guide the agency through current challenges.

- **The large size of the current Board as well as the lack of visibility and competition for elected Board seats** contribute to difficulties in exercising effective leadership and ensuring needed expertise to perform the Board's oversight functions. The size of the board can pose challenges to briefing members, developing productive working relationships among Board members, reaching common understandings, and navigating difficult decisions.

- **While increasing expertise and capacity is critical, maintaining regional representation is also essential.** Members felt retaining a majority of the Board seats as elected members will be important for ensuring representation and continuity going forward.

- **Structural reform alone is insufficient;** improvements to authorities, substructures, training, compensation, executive oversight, and coordination with local governments and regional entities are also critical. Even as structural and non-structural governance reforms are essential, ultimately additional evaluations will be needed to address other systemic issues and ensure RTD's success for the region.

- **Clear accountability pathways and communication** between the Board, executive leadership, the General Assembly, local government stakeholders, and riders are essential to sustained improvement.

- **Delay increases risk:** absent timely action, governance shortcomings will continue to compound operational, financial, and reputational challenges.

GOVERNANCE AT A CRITICAL CROSSROADS: THE CASE FOR URGENT REFORM

The RTD Accountability Committee concluded that **governance reform represents the most consequential and time-sensitive issue** within the Committee's statutory charge. While RTD has served the region for decades under its current governance model, the Committee determined that the structures, practices, and expectations that may have been adequate in the past are no longer sufficient to meet the scale, complexity, and urgency of the District's current and future challenges.

Across its deliberations, the Committee repeatedly returned to a core finding: **RTD is at a critical crossroads,** facing intersecting pressures related to fiscal sustainability, service reliability, workforce stability, public trust, and regional credibility. In this context, governance is not a peripheral concern. It is a central determinant of whether RTD can respond effectively to these challenges. Members expressed that significant action is necessary to interrupt the trend of transit decline in the region, and several public commenters also voiced a similar sentiment, while underscoring the importance of transit to economic and community development in the region (see Appendix D for all public comments received). Increasing ridership was a key motivating factor for many Committee members that shaped the recommendations. A majority of members

ultimately concluded a smaller, more nimble board, with stronger expertise would more likely be able to provide the strategic leadership necessary to guide the agency to achieve the goal of increased ridership.

Members expressed a strong and shared belief that **incremental or cosmetic changes to governance would be insufficient**. The Committee's discussions reflected deep concern that, absent meaningful structural and non-structural governance reforms, RTD risks continued erosion of its ability to deliver quality transit service for the region, which would continue to undermine perceptions of trust and confidence among riders, local governments, state leaders, and the public. These concerns were heightened by recent audits, assessments, and legislative actions that collectively point to systemic issues rather than isolated operational failures.

While the Committee ultimately coalesced around a set of significant recommendations for structural change and decided against more extensive actions, the intensity of its deliberations underscores the seriousness of its conclusions. The recommendations that follow are therefore intended not as modest adjustments, but as a **clear call for decisive action** by the General Assembly, the RTD Board, and RTD leadership to realign governance with the demands of the present and the needs of the region's future.

These recommendations were informed by the Committee's alignment around key values, as well as both systemic and governance-specific problems they identified, as described in the sections that follow.

Key Systemic Problems to Address

To ground the Committee in clear language and alignment on the underlying reason for recommending changes, the Committee utilized a multi-step approach for identifying the "problem to solve" at the system and specific topic levels. This included in-person brainstorming and discussions, interactive voting activities, surveys between meetings, and interviews conducted by David Bragdon with summaries shared with the Committee. Through this, the Committee identified several system-level challenges motivating their recommendations. While recognizing these extend beyond governance, they nevertheless highlighted that effective governance is necessary to lead the agency in addressing these larger challenges. The top system-level problems to solve, as supported by a majority of the Committee, included:

- Low ridership and factors contributing to it
- Public trust and confidence
- Appearance of limited coordinated, strategic vision & plan

The Committee additionally highlighted issues such as workforce retention, fiscal challenges, and a need for leadership as motivating challenges informing their governance recommendations.

Key Governance Problems to Address

More specifically, the Committee discussed problems they felt were directly related to governance. The top system-level problems to solve identified through discussion and surveying included:

01	Need for diversity of expertise and experience on the Board
02	Challenges with fulfilling oversight role due to dynamic between Board and leadership and part-time nature of the Board
03	Challenges working with, making decisions, and finding consensus with a larger board

The lack of competition and attention on Board elections was also a significant focus, with members highlighting the large share of uncontested elections and low compensation contributing ultimately to challenges with the Board providing effective leadership and oversight. Other issues identified included parochialism, lack of transparency and clear communications, and turnover presenting issues to long-term planning.

Values Informing Governance Recommendations

The Committee recognized there is no one optimal governance structure, but that different structures can support different values. The Committee's recommendations were informed by an alignment around shared values uncovered through discussions and surveying. The top five values members identified related to governance included:

- Effectiveness
- System health
- Fiscal stewardship and responsibility
- Long-term vision, goals, and clear performance indicators
- Expertise

The Committee's top identified values reflect its significant focus on ultimately ensuring improved performance and success of the District in providing high quality transit service to the region.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its examination, deliberations, and votes, the RTD Accountability Committee adopted the following governance recommendations. These recommendations are presented **verbatim, as approved by the Committee,** and reflect the Committee's conclusion that both **structural and non-structural reforms** are necessary to strengthen accountability, effectiveness, and public trust in the governance of the District. The recommendations reflect the votes of the 14 voting members of the RTD Accountability Committee as established by SB25-161. While the ex-officio non-voting member could not register a vote, the member had the opportunity to participate in discussions of all recommendations.

Structural Governance Recommendations

The Committee believes there is an urgent need for reform and that time is of the essence. The Committee concluded that RTD is at a critical crossroads, that the current governance structure does not serve the future as well as it served the past, and that significant change is needed. The Committee therefore strongly recommends a different governance structure for the District.

01

Governance Recommendation 1:
Board Structure and Composition

Vote 11 In Favor, 2 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee recommends a nine-member Board of Directors, with five elected and four appointed positions. The appointments would be made by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. If the Senate is not in session, appointees shall serve in their position until confirmed (or rejected) by the Senate.

Note: *This service until a hearing is possible is standard practice for most Boards and Commissions that require Senate confirmation of gubernatorial or legislative appointments.*

02

Governance Recommendation 2:
Appointee Criteria

Vote: 13 In Favor, 1 Opposed

The Committee recommends that appointees must be residents of the District and must collectively have key areas of expertise necessary to provide effective oversight and ensure success of the District, including but not limited to:

- Financial expertise
- Land use and multi-modal transportation planning
- Transit operations
- Disproportionately impacted communities

03

Governance Recommendation 3:
Labor and Workforce Appointee

Vote: 8 In Favor, 5 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee recommends that one appointed seat must be held by a member of labor who is not currently an employee of RTD's largest collective bargaining agency, or an officer of the same.

04

Governance Recommendation 4:
District-Based Elected Positions

Vote: 13 In Favor, 1 Opposed

The Committee recommends that all five elected seats be district-based seats, with districts to be drawn in accordance with applicable laws.

05

Governance Recommendation 5:
Board Chair

Vote: 14 In Favor, 0 Opposed

The Committee recommends that the Chair be elected to a two-year term and that the Board select a Chair. Any duly elected or appointed member shall be eligible to serve as Chair.

06

Governance Recommendation 6:
Timing of Implementation

Vote: 10 In Favor, 4 Opposed

The Committee recommends the new structure be implemented at the soonest appropriate time, and at the latest in time for the 2028 election to be implemented no later than January 2029.

07

Governance Recommendation 7:
Terms

Vote: 14 In Favor, 0 Opposed

The Committee recommends both elected and appointed seats serve four-year terms.

08

Governance Recommendation 8:
Term Limits

Vote: 14 In Favor, 0 Opposed

The Committee recommends that elected and appointed positions may serve two full four-year terms and be subject to statute regarding term limits. For clarity, completion of partial terms does not count toward the two-term limit.

09

Governance Recommendation 9:
Staggered Terms

Vote: 11 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 2 Not Present

The Committee recommends that when implementing the new Board structure, the terms be staggered such that the entire Board does not turn over all at the same time, to support continuity.

10

Governance Recommendation 10:
Ballot Threshold

Vote: 11 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 2 Not Present

The signature threshold established in statute for getting onto the ballot for the RTD Board elected seats should be reviewed and revisited, likely increasing the current threshold in statute of 250 signatures to align more closely with other elected positions.

11

Governance Recommendation 11:
Statutory Change

Vote: 11 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Abstain, 1 Not Present

The Committee recommends that the structural governance changes be made exclusively through statute and not by referral to the ballot.

Non-Structural Governance Recommendations

12

Governance Recommendation 12:
Board Substructures

Vote: 10 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 3 Not Present

The Committee recommends that RTD include at least ex-officio seats (if not full voting membership) on its standing committees to strengthen coordination with key stakeholders and partners, including:

1. A union seat on the Operations and Safety Committee or its successor; and

2. A seat for the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) (or Colorado Transportation Investment Office (CTIO) or Clean Transit Enterprise (CTE)) on the Finance and Planning Committee or its successor.

13

Governance Recommendation 13:
Review of External Committees

Vote: 10 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 4 Not Present

G-13a: The Committee recommends RTD review and revisit the composition and role of the Citizens Advisory Committee in order to strengthen its effectiveness and ensure its input into key policy and oversight decisions made by the RTD Board.

G-13b: The Committee recommends RTD review, on a regular basis, all standing committees of external stakeholders, including the Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities (APAC) and the Advisory Council for People with Disabilities, to identify gaps or duplications and opportunities to consolidate if appropriate, in order to clarify and formalize their roles and engagement with the RTD Board and improve their effectiveness.

14

Governance Recommendation 14:
Authorities and Responsibilities

Vote: 10 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 4 Not Present

G-14a: The RTD Accountability Committee recommends the General Assembly strengthen the authorities and responsibilities of the RTD Board in C.R.S. § 32-9-109.5 to clarify and focus the Board's efforts on being a governing board that provides effective oversight of the District. These authorities and responsibilities should focus principally on:

- Passing a fiscally responsible annual budget;
- Setting policy direction designed to grow ridership;
- Hiring and evaluating the GM/CEO on appropriate measures of performance aligned with the strategic plan; and
- Ensuring the General Counsel is hired or retained by, evaluated by, and reports to the Board of Directors.

G-14b: The Committee further recommends that reporting requirements in statute ensure that RTD establish quantifiable performance metrics in its strategic plan related to fiscal performance, workforce retention, ridership (including paratransit numbers), and customer service metrics such as on-time performance, and that RTD publish performance data for these metrics at least quarterly to strengthen transparency, oversight, and effectiveness. Any changes to reporting requirements should be reviewed in light of requirements from SB24-230 and SB25-161.

15

Governance Recommendation 15:
Fiscal Oversight

Vote: 10 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 3 Not Present

G-15a: The Committee recommends RTD take key steps to improve transparency and oversight of the District's finances, including:

- Establishment of a regular three- to five-year capital improvement and asset management / state-of-good-repair budgeting process;
- Conducting more in-depth financial training for Board members;
- Conducting a thorough review of the District's current financial condition and budget shortfall;
  Strengthening the Board's audit function; and
- A regular SMART Act or similar hearing presentation on the District's budget.

G-15b: The Committee recommends the General Assembly direct RTD to establish a clear, transparent, multi-month process that results in development of a budget aligned with the Board's goals, including quarterly reports forecasting deficits and revenues.

G-15c: The Committee further recommends that the State, in collaboration with RTD, study the potential benefits and challenges of shared responsibility and/or ownership of the District's rail assets.

16

Governance Recommendation 16:
Candidate Supports and Staffing

Vote: 11 In Favor, O Opposed, 3 Not Present

The Committee recommends that something akin to the former "Transit Academy" be reinstated to provide training and informational sessions to potential RTD Board candidates, both appointed and elected. This initiative should be led by an outside party, potentially DRCOG in partnership with other agencies or organizations, with a reasonable level of participation by RTD as requested.

17

Governance Recommendation 17:
Board Compensation

Vote: 12 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee believes that Directors and the Chair should be paid more. The expectation is that the Chair is a full-time position. Salaries for all Directors should be reviewed and benchmarked by a third party with expertise in public-sector compensation to an appropriate comparative position given the workload and responsibilities. Such reviews should be conducted on a cycle consistent with the terms of Directors and aligned to a standard rate of increase such as CPI or another index. This compensation structure should be implemented to coincide with other recommended structural changes to the Board.

18

Governance Recommendation 18:
Executive Leadership

Vote: 12 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee recognizes that the current Board has taken steps to establish goals and metrics in the annual GM/CEO evaluation and believes that these efforts should be strengthened in alignment with the agency's strategic plan whenever it is updated. Compensation of executive leadership should be directly connected to performance and achievement of objectives. This should be an annual process that can begin immediately and is not dependent on implementation of the new Board structure.

19

Governance Recommendation 19:
Board Staffing and Supports

Vote: 10 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Abstain, 2 Not Present

Board members and the GM/CEO should establish a more clear mutual understanding of the amount and types of access to agency staff that board members can reasonably request in the course of their duties on behalf of the agency. Procedures for this interface exist, but seem to be inconsistently understood. The protocol, in practice as well as writing, should recognize that board members are entitled to some agreed-upon level of support from agency staff, and that while in effect the staff of RTD works under the overall direction of the board, individual employees do so functionally through a chain of command headed by the GM/CEO and that individual board members do not directly manage staff.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

While the Committee did not seek to prescribe detailed implementation steps, its discussions highlighted several considerations relevant to moving these recommendations forward.

Many of the structural governance recommendations will require **legislative action**, including statutory changes to Board composition, appointment authority, terms, and compensation. The Committee views timely legislative engagement as essential to maintaining momentum and signaling seriousness of intent. The Committee's recommendations also clarify their belief that these changes should be made legislatively rather than through the ballot, which would necessitate a statewide vote on a matter only affecting the Denver region, which they did not think would be appropriate or beneficial.

Other recommendations fall within the purview of the **RTD Board and management**, particularly those related to committee structures, executive oversight, financial oversight, training expectations, and governance norms. The Committee believes these actions can and should begin immediately, rather than waiting for structural changes to take effect. In some cases, these changes may already be underway or contemplated and may just need to be reviewed for potential improvements; for example, the Citizens Advisory Committee charter includes an obligation to revisit its charter and role every three years, and RTD already includes capital planning as part of its annual budgeting process.

Implementation will also require sustained collaboration between the **General Assembly, RTD Board, and RTD management**, particularly where reforms intersect with budgeting processes, reporting requirements, and long-term financial planning. While not required by statute, RTD already regularly participates in the SMART Act process as a way of fulfilling required reporting to the legislature, for example.

Finally, the Committee emphasized that governance reform should be understood as an ongoing process rather than a one-time reset. Continued monitoring, evaluation, and willingness to adjust will be necessary to ensure that reforms deliver the intended improvements in accountability, performance, and public trust.

SUMMARY OF MINORITY OPINIONS

Following final deliberations and voting by the RTD Accountability Committee, members were invited to submit minority opinions to ensure that dissenting perspectives developed during committee discussions were fully documented for the Legislature and the public record. Two minority opinions were submitted, each representing the views of two committee members (one non-voting member and three voting members). While differing in scope and proposed remedies,

both minority opinions raise concerns about the majority's governance recommendations and reflect a shared advocacy for preserving a board of only members elected by the general public.

Across both minority opinions, several common themes emerge. Most prominently, both express strong opposition to replacing or substantially diluting the voter-established, elected RTD Board with a partially appointed structure. The authors argue that such changes risk distancing governance from riders and taxpayers, and creating a board that is less accountable to the population most affected by RTD's decisions. Each minority opinion further cautions that altering board structure will not resolve underlying fiscal, ridership, or land-use challenges facing the region's transit system. A key disagreement between the two opinions lies in whether limited structural adjustments can be responsibly made without jeopardizing democratic representation.

The perspectives raised in those opinions, including concerns about representation and risks of structural change, were discussed at length during Committee deliberations and were not ultimately persuasive to a majority of members who concluded that the changes voted forward as recommendations are all necessary to address the identified challenges and to realize a bold vision for the future of RTD.

Note: The complete submitted minority opinions are available in the appendix.

Paratransit Findings & Recommendations

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Paratransit services are a federally mandated and essential component of RTD's mission to provide equitable mobility across the District. For many riders with disabilities, paratransit is not a supplement to fixed-route transit but a primary means of accessing employment, healthcare, education, civic participation, and daily activities. As such, the design, performance, and sustainability of these services are central to RTD's obligations under federal law and its broader public mission.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), RTD is required to provide complementary paratransit service for individuals whose disabilities prevent them from using fixed-route transit for some or all trips (Paratransit White Paper). ADA paratransit must be comparable to fixed-route service in terms of service area, hours, and days of operation, but is inherently more individualized and operationally complex. Nationally, ADA paratransit is among the most costly transit services to deliver on a per-trip basis, reflecting its labor-intensive nature, individualized routing, and regulatory requirements.

RTD currently provides paratransit through two distinct programs serving the same ADA-eligible population: **Access-a-Ride (AaR)** and **Access-on-Demand (AoD).**

Access-a-Ride (AaR)

Access-a-Ride fulfills RTD's obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and provides pre-scheduled, door-to-door transportation through contracted providers using

dedicated, wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Key elements of AaR, which are designed to meet federal requirements, include:

- Door-to-door service
- Reservations required at least one day in advance
- Service area within ¾ of a mile of RTD's fixed-route network, and service days and hours that match RTD local bus service
- Service provided through a contracted provider responsible for hiring, training, and overseeing drivers
- Wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) owned by RTD and operated by contractors
- Drivers must meet background checks, drug testing, and undergo training to work with people with disabilities
- Per ADA requirements, AAR fare may be less than base fare but not to exceed twice the amount of base fare.
- Per ADA requirements, RTD cannot limit the availability of AaR by imposing capacity constraints on service

AaR remains one of the most costly services RTD provides on a per-trip basis, which aligns with national trends. AaR on-time performance from 2015 to 2024 shows improvement in some years and declines in others, though overall on-time performance has improved significantly to over 90% in 2024 (Nelson \ Nygaard Paratransit White Paper).
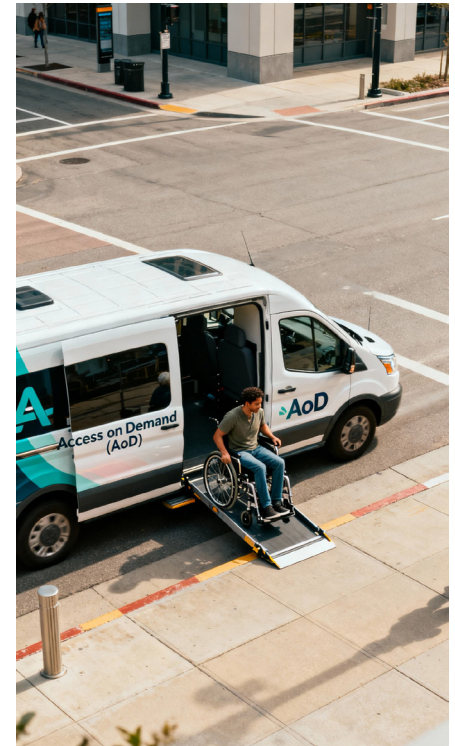
Access-on-Demand (AoD)

AoD is a premium, same-day service that exceeds ADA minimum requirements. It provides curb-to-curb transportation through partnerships with taxi and transportation network company (TNC) providers. First piloted in 2020 and expanded systemwide in 2022, AoD operates across the full RTD service area and has been valued by riders who benefit from flexible scheduling, direct routing, expanded geographic service, and same-day booking options. For riders who do not require door-to-door service or specialized driver assistance, AoD has expanded mobility opportunities beyond those available through AaR. Additionally, RTD has offered the service with no base fare for trips under $25 for the first 60 trips per month, which has meant the service has been effectively zero fare for many riders.

Since its expansion, AoD demand has grown rapidly (Paratransit White Paper). Between 2022 and 2023, AoD trips increased from approximately 20 percent to 44 percent of total paratransit trips, contributing to significant cost growth. Program costs rose from under $1 million annually at inception to an estimated $24 million in 2024. While these trends reflect strong rider utilization, they have also raised concerns regarding fiscal sustainability, service oversight because TNC drivers are not required to meet the same training standards as AaR drivers, and interaction with ADA-mandated services, including impacts on the availability of wheelchair-accessible vehicles needed to meet AaR demand.

Following over a year of public input and deliberation, in September 2025, RTD adopted modifications intended to balance the improvements in mobility for some paratransit users with what RTD has forecast as an unsustainable fiscal outlook. RTD commissioned a peer review of its paratransit services by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in 2024, and one of their core recommendations was to update the AoD program to enable "a financially sustainable option that serves customer needs" (Paratransit Peer Review). These changes included implementing a minimum fare consistent with AaR, capping RTD's per-trip subsidy, and adjusting service hours. The modifications were intended to preserve the benefits of AoD while ensuring RTD's ability to meet its ongoing ADA obligations through Access-a-Ride and address financial concerns. Multiple peer transit agencies across the U.S. have experienced similar issues with premium on-demand paratransit services, and have needed to implement similar policy changes to address financial sustainability (Paratransit White Paper).

The process and ultimate decision generated substantial concern and feedback from AoD riders and disability advocates, underscoring the importance of paratransit services to the community and the complexity of balancing mobility, equity, and fiscal stewardship. Disability advocates from Atlantis and Adapt filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in December 2025 seeking a preliminary injunction to stop RTD from implementing its Board-adopted changes to AoD (Denver Post). In late December, a federal judge declined to grant the injunction, allowing the changes to take effect on January 1, 2026 (Denverite).

WHAT THE COMMITTEE LEARNED

Members were briefed on federal requirements for ADA paratransit, the history of and distinctions between RTD's Access-a-Ride (AaR) and Access-on-Demand (AoD) paratransit services, the rapid growth in AoD demand, and the financial and legal implications of various policy choices. The Nelson

\ Nygaard presentation and associated white paper provided a clear, independent understanding of fiscal sustainability, federal constraints, and parallels in other U.S. regions (see Appendix F). The committee also considered the recent peer review commissioned by RTD of its paratransit services by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and associated recommendations, as well as RTD staff analysis of AoD and various options for program modifications.

Stakeholder perspectives from the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, National Federation of the Blind, and other paratransit advocates were integrated through written submissions, and the RTD Board Chair's formal communication to the legislature and Committee provided additional insight regarding recent Board decisions. Together, these inputs provided insight into regulatory requirements, operational performance, rider experience, fiscal considerations, and lessons from peer agencies. Informed by the above and recent actions of RTD and its Board, the 2025 RTD Accountability Committee considered:

- Requirements and constraints of the ADA for paratransit services

- Sustainability of AoD in a constrained budget environment, and tradeoffs with other services relied on by riders with disabilities

- Equity implications of premium service access

- Service quality and oversight of TNCs vs. specialized providers

- Integration with other local and regional transportation services, such as those for seniors

- The need for a holistic understanding of the transportation needs of riders with disabilities, and an integrated vision and approach to address them

- The need for an improved data and evidence to support future planning policy decisions

- Considerations regarding paratransit services statewide, as well as state level policy issues such as TNC driver training and availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles, etc.

Throughout its deliberations, the Committee sought to understand paratransit not as a single programmatic issue or discrete policy decision, but as part of a broader system of services including for people with disabilities. Members discussed the diversity of rider needs, differences between ambulatory and non-ambulatory trips, geographic variation across the District, and the ways in which service design choices can have differing impacts across populations.

Recognizing that the RTD Board was concluding key deliberations on this topic simultaneously with the RTD Accountability Committee commencing its deliberation, the Accountability Committee chose to consider recommendations regarding paratransit services primarily looking forward and at a systemic level, rather than wading into the concurrent decision-making and implementation.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Members generated ideas related to needs analysis, planning and visioning, equity evaluations, AoD/AaR integration, wheelchair accessible vehicle availability, improvements in RTD's engagement practices, and potential policy changes affecting transportation network companies (TNCs).

While recent Board actions related to paratransit provided important context, the Committee ultimately chose to keep their focus forward-looking, and to identify what additional analysis, engagement, and planning would be necessary to support a holistic, data-informed, and rider-centered approach to paratransit services over time.

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The Committee's examination highlighted several overarching themes:

- Paratransit services are complex, highly individualized, and resource-intensive, requiring careful alignment between federal requirements, rider needs, operational capacity, and fiscal stewardship.
- AaR and AoD serve the same ADA-eligible population but differ significantly in service model, customer experience, and cost structure, creating challenges when the programs are planned or evaluated in isolation.
- Demand for premium, same-day AoD service has grown rapidly, reflecting clear rider value but also introducing new operational and financial pressures.
- Riders with disabilities are not a monolithic group; needs vary widely based on mobility type, trip purpose, geography, access to technology, and income.
- Existing analyses and peer reviews provide valuable insight, but do not substitute for a comprehensive, RTD-led effort to define a long-term vision and plans for paratransit and related services.

Collectively, these findings reinforced the Committee's view that paratransit decisions benefit from being grounded in a holistic understanding of rider needs, service tradeoffs, and system-wide impacts.

Committee Recommendations

Based on its examination and deliberations, the RTD Accountability Committee adopted the following recommendation related to paratransit. **This recommendation is presented verbatim, as approved by the Committee.**

<div>

01

Paratransit Recommendation 1:
Analysis and Planning

Vote: 10 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Abstain, 3 Not Present

The Committee recommends RTD undertake a comprehensive analysis and planning effort to inform a holistic vision and plan for providing service to riders with disabilities in the District. This analysis and planning effort should include:

1. A needs assessment to better understand the population of people with disabilities using transit, their needs, and gaps.

2. An assessment of ways to better integrate Access-on-Demand and Access-a-Ride services.

3. An assessment of opportunities to collaborate with local and regional organizations to address gaps in paratransit services.

4. Engagement with paratransit users, transit riders with disabilities, local governments, local and regional service providers, and other key stakeholders.

5. Establishing an overarching framework, vision, and/or set of goals to guide decision-making about RTD's paratransit services and other services that support people with disabilities in the District.

6. An assessment of fiscal sustainability, including RTD's overall spending on paratransit as a portion of the budget compared to other regions, tradeoffs between services relied on by riders with disabilities, and related considerations.

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The Committee further recommends that RTD aggressively adopt innovative approaches to providing additional paratransit services, leveraging available and emerging technologies, including autonomous vehicles and other technology-enabled service models.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

As RTD and the Board advance these recommendations, additional refinement and implementation work will be necessary. While the Committee did not seek to prescribe specific solutions, its discussions highlighted several considerations that may inform next steps:

- **Need for a vision and framework:** Both APTA's peer review and Nelson \ Nygaard's white paper emphasized the need for a more comprehensive vision for RTD's services for riders with disabilities informed by data and community input. Without the holistic planning exercise recommended by the Committee designed to establish such a framework, difficult decisions such as the recent one made by the Board on AoD will continue to be one-off decisions that lack guiding principles or priorities.

- **Data and information:** Further work will be needed to define what data are most useful for understanding rider needs, service performance, and unmet demand, and to ensure data collection methods are consistent and reliable across programs.

- **Rider engagement:** Ongoing, structured engagement with riders with disabilities and representative organizations will be critical to translating analysis into service designs that reflect lived experience, including through RTD's formal committees, the Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities and the Paratransit Advisory Committee.

- **Service integration:** Evaluating how different paratransit and mobility options function together may require new analytical frameworks that move beyond program-by-program evaluation.

- **Equity considerations:** Advancing a holistic vision will require attention to how service changes affect riders differently based on disability type, income, geography, and access to technology.

- **Governance and coordination:** Implementation may benefit from clear roles, expectations, and communication pathways among RTD staff, advisory committees, external partners providing similar transportation services, and the Board as decisions progress.

The Committee views these considerations as part of an iterative process. Together with the recommendations above, they underscore the need for continued, thoughtful work to ensure paratransit services remain responsive to riders while aligned with RTD's broader mission and long-term responsibilities.

Workforce Findings & Recommendations

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

A stable, skilled, and motivated workforce is foundational to RTD's ability to deliver safe, reliable, and frequent transit service. For most riders, a bus driver is the only RTD employee they regularly encounter, which shapes customer experience. Across the Denver metropolitan region, service restoration, ridership recovery, and long-term system sustainability are inseparable from RTD's capacity to recruit, train, and retain frontline employees, particularly bus and rail operators and maintenance staff. Workforce challenges are not unique to RTD, and the District's ability to address them effectively will play a decisive role in determining whether recent investments in governance reform, service planning, and capital programs can translate into improved outcomes for riders and communities.

Senate Bill 25-161 explicitly directed the Accountability Committee to examine workforce retention and labor-related topics, including how transit services can be expanded while ensuring good-paying jobs with benefits, and how labor-management practices can support service reliability and workforce stability. This statutory emphasis reflects a broader recognition by state leaders that workforce capacity has become one of the most binding constraints on transit performance nationwide and that meaningful progress requires sustained attention, partnership, and structural alignment rather than isolated interventions.

Within this context, the Committee approached workforce issues not as a narrow human resources challenge, but as a system-level determinant of RTD's operational resilience, fiscal stewardship, and public credibility.

WHAT THE COMMITTEE LEARNED

National and Industry Context

The Committee's learning was grounded in national research and benchmarking conducted by the Eno Center for Transportation, which confirmed that RTD's workforce challenges mirror those faced by transit agencies across the country (see Appendix F for Eno Center's complete white paper and slides provided to the Committee). National surveys by the American Public Transportation Association indicate that nearly all transit agencies report workforce shortages, with operator and maintenance vacancies directly limiting service levels. Highly regulated environments, safety responsibilities, drug and CDL requirements, shift-based schedules governed by seniority, and competition from other industries have made recruitment and retention increasingly difficult particularly among younger workers seeking flexibility and predictability.

Scheduling practices emerged as a consistent pain point nationwide. Seniority-based systems, while grounded in collective bargaining and long-standing industry norms, often leave newer operators with less desirable shifts, weekends, and split schedules contributing to early attrition. Safety concerns, stress, and fatigue further compound retention risks, particularly during the first year of employment. Disconnects between operations planning, management, and labor can also hinder workforce retention, for example when outdated technology or scheduling undermine workplace efficiency and job quality.

National literature and Eno Center also emphasized the importance of considering the human dimension of operators' jobs in particular. Operators are critical: they are the face of the agency that the public sees whenever they interact with transit, and especially in recent years, they have also had to undertake sometimes extreme additional responsibilities, essentially becoming front line responders to mental health crises, homelessness, drug abuse, and more in addition to their already challenging everyday duties.

RTD-Specific Workforce Conditions

RTD has experienced these pressures acutely. In recent years, operator and maintenance vacancies have been a primary factor constraining service restoration following the COVID-19 pandemic. As recently as 2023, vacancy rates reached approximately 19 percent for bus and light rail operators and 30 percent for maintenance workers, contributing to trip cancellations, reduced frequency, and delayed capital and state-of-good-repair work (Denver Post). While a particular pain point in restoring service post-pandemic, RTD's workforce challenges pre-date COVID, with news articles as early as 2019 highlighting RTD needing to cancel some trips due to a lack of operators (Bloomberg News).

Despite this longstanding challenge, the Committee learned that RTD has made measurable progress in recent years. Between 2023 and 2025, the number of monthly job applicants more than doubled. The number of bus and rail operators increased, retention rates for represented employees during the first year of employment rose substantially, and employee perceptions of safety improved. Compensation levels for operators and mechanics have increased and are now more competitive relative to peer agencies. RTD has also invested in expanded recruitment efforts, apprenticeship programs, supervisor and manager training, and tuition reimbursement.

Importantly, the Eno Center concluded that RTD is not an outlier in either the challenges it faces or the strategies it has deployed. Rather, RTD has implemented many of the same tools used

successfully elsewhere and has begun to see results. However, Eno's analysis also highlighted additional best practices employed by peer agencies that RTD has not yet fully adopted, many of which would require close coordination with labor partners and a willingness to revisit long-standing assumptions about scheduling, training pathways, and employee support, such as:

- Financial incentives for senior operators to work less desirable routes and shifts to open those up to newer operators
- Expand part time positions
- Offer pre-employment training opportunities, such as for obtaining a CDL
- Developing additional partnerships with, for example, ESL programs, workforce development agencies, social service agencies, ATU, etc. on recruitment
- Report additional data such as the number of candidates finishing training and completing their first year to focus on quality of employees and job satisfaction, not just quantity
- Offer incentives for employees opting out of healthcare programs and for childcare
- Continue to improve retention through better and more coordinated training, expanded mentorship opportunities, apprenticeships, and structured professional advancement opportunities
- Improve survey response rates and collect data from contracted-out services
- Collaborate more with other transit agencies to identify best practices and benchmark data

Organizational Capacity and Culture

Beyond frontline staffing, the Committee examined RTD's broader workplace culture and organizational capacity through review of the 2024 Organizational Design and Workplace Assessment commissioned by RTD. That assessment, conducted through 339 interviews, document reviews, and national benchmarking, identified a workforce deeply committed to RTD's mission, but operating within a hierarchical and siloed structure that limits collaboration, blurs decision-making authority, contributes to a lack of shared vision and focus, and creates uneven employee experience across departments.

While leadership stability has improved and several cultural strengths were identified including pride in service, strong intra-team relationships, and career mobility opportunities, the assessment underscored that workforce retention is influenced not only by wages and benefits, but by clarity of purpose, quality of supervision, communication, and employees' sense of ownership in the organization's future.

RTD has begun implementing a multi-year organizational transformation effort based on this assessment focused on becoming a more desirable employer, improving information flow,

strengthening leadership capacity, and articulating a clearer strategic vision. The Committee viewed this work as a critical complement to more targeted recruitment and retention strategies.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

During its ideation phase, Committee members proposed a wide range of workforce-related concepts, including but not limited to:

- Expanded partnerships with community colleges, workforce agencies, veterans' organizations, and ESL programs;
- Pre-employment and CDL training support to reduce barriers to entry;
- Greater use of part-time and flexible operator positions;
- Incentives for senior operators to mentor new hires or cover less desirable shifts;
- Childcare resources to improve recruitment and retention;
- Expanded apprenticeships and structured career pathways;
- Improvements in employee engagement practices and data collection;
- Stronger labor-management collaboration to align workforce practices with service goals;
- Supporting employees with housing via transit-oriented development

These ideas were refined through discussion, feasibility assessment, and alignment with the Committee's statutory charge, ultimately informing the recommendations adopted by the Committee.

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

Based on its review and deliberations, the Committee reached several overarching findings:

- Workforce capacity particularly among operators and frontline maintenance staff remains a primary constraint on RTD's ability to restore and expand service.
- RTD has made meaningful progress in recruitment, retention, and compensation, but continued improvement will require sustained effort and adoption of additional best practices.
- Early-career attrition remains a key risk, driven by scheduling practices, job expectations, and support during the first year of employment.
- Many promising strategies depend on collaboration with labor partners and cannot be implemented unilaterally.

- Workforce stability is shaped not only by pay and benefits, but by organizational culture, mentorship, employee ownership, and quality of supervision.
- Improved data, engagement practices, and performance measurement are essential to understanding workforce dynamics and targeting interventions effectively.

Collectively, these findings reinforced the Committee's conclusion that workforce reform is not ancillary to RTD's challenges, but central to its long-term success.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its examination, deliberations, and votes, the RTD Accountability Committee adopted the following workforce recommendations. **These recommendations are presented verbatim, as approved by the Committee.**

01

Workforce Recommendation 1:
Recruitment

Vote: 12 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Abstain, 1 Not Present

W-1a: The Committee recommends RTD pursue partnerships with other key stakeholders, including community college districts, CDOT, ATU, regional entities, workforce agencies, community organizations, and ESL programs on hiring outreach including disproportionately impacted communities and the veteran community, training (particularly on obtaining CDLs), and test prep support.

W-1b. The Committee recommends RTD together with ATU explore enabling more flexible and part-time positions for operators.

02

Workforce Recommendation 2:
Retention

Vote: 13 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Not Present

W-2a: The Committee recommends RTD together with ATU explore ways to open work for newer operators to vote on.

W-2b: The Committee recommends RTD examine and implement strategies to improve internal culture, ownership, and job satisfaction, including structural changes to enable employees to have a stronger voice in decision-making.

W-2c: The Committee recommends RTD in collaboration with ATU or other partners as appropriate explore and implement childcare subsidies to support employee recruitment and retention.

03

Workforce Recommendation 3:
Training and Mentorship

Vote: 11 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Abstain, 2 Not Present

W-3a: The Committee believes mentorship is a valuable tool that increases retention of new hires and that training and mentorship is a critical issue. Therefore:

W-3b: The Committee recommends RTD and ATU expand their joint apprenticeship program, and establish expanded mentorship options.

W-3c: The Committee recommends RTD incentivize senior operators to mentor new hires, including possibly providing stipends tied to mentor evaluation.

04

Workforce Recommendation 4:
Data and Measurement

Vote: 11 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 2 Not Present

The Committee recommends RTD improve their employee and community engagement and impacts to improve participation and enable better assessment of RTD's organizational health and performance, including but not limited to:

- Establishing additional metrics including recruitment and retention;
- Identify and utilize means of input other than surveys;
- Greatly reduce use of surveys and where they are used, explore strategies to:
  - Increase sample sizes;
  - Boost participation rates, including consideration of a third party survey administrator;
  - Include open ended questions focused on concrete issues such as safety, convenience, on-time performance, etc., in addition to qualitative measures around operator engagement, culture, and job satisfaction.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

While the Committee did not seek to prescribe detailed implementation steps, its discussions highlighted several considerations relevant to advancing these recommendations:

- Many workforce strategies require RTD to collaborate with labor partners and may need to be addressed through collective bargaining or joint labor-management processes.

- Recruitment and retention efforts are most effective when paired with strong onboarding, mentorship, and early-career support.

- Data improvements should prioritize actionable insights over volume, enabling leadership to identify where interventions are most needed.

- Workforce initiatives should be aligned with RTD's broader organizational transformation efforts to reinforce culture, clarity, and shared ownership.

The Committee emphasized that workforce reform is an ongoing endeavor requiring persistence, partnership, and continuous learning rather than a one-time set of actions. Ultimately, the recommendations the Committee voted on are all for RTD (and its partners) to implement, rather than the legislature.

Local Government and State Agency Collaboration Findings & Recommendations

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

RTD coordinates with counties, municipalities, DRCOG, and state agencies in a variety of formal and informal ways around service planning and operations, infrastructure upgrades, land use and housing investment, public safety, and more. Avenues for this coordination include, for example:

- **Subregional service councils,** which were recommended by the 2020-2021 Accountability Committee, and are advisory bodies to work with local jurisdiction partners, advocacy groups, and others on service and other issues at the subregional level.

- **Partnership program,** which provides a budget set-aside to provide grants to local entities, often for first/last mile services, and requires local matching funds.

- **Many avenues for coordination with DRCOG,** including RTD is a non-voting member of the DRCOG Board, RTD staff participate on the DRCOG Technical Advisory Committee, and extensive coordination on regional transportation plans and bus rapid transit (BRT) projects.

- **Other formal and informal collaboration,** such as Transit Signal Priority Working Group, BRT project coordination with CDOT and state agencies, and coordination with local police departments.

WHAT THE COMMITTEE LEARNED

David Bragdon conducted a round of off-the-record interviews with local government staff and officials regarding relationships between local general purpose governments (cities and counties) with the transit district. The perspectives informed a memo from Bragdon to the Committee about RTD-local relations which is included in Appendix F. RTD staff provided a presentation (also available in Appendix F) describing a range of coordination structures including Subregional Service Councils, the Partnership Program, DRCOG committees, and regular coordination with local governments, TMAs, and other stakeholder groups. The presentation highlighted coordination on such issues as BRT planning, corridor planning, transit signal priority, bus stops, public safety, and service changes.

Bragdon's research revealed that while political relationships with local elected leadership are highly fraught, staff-level coordination is often highly functional and effective. Additional insights from this research include:

- How "general purpose" local governments are represented within "special districts" like RTD varies widely; sometimes special districts have representation from their local government entities, but usually not. Regardless of governance, local governments collaborate with their special districts and transit agencies on several practical matters like pedestrian infrastructure, bus stops, transit priority measures, etc.
- Political leaders' dissatisfaction with RTD seems mostly related to the under-delivery of the 2004 FasTracks program, as well as a general sense of their jurisdiction not receiving

a "fair share" of both capital investment and operating service, even though there is no objective definition of what that ought to be.

- Staff-level collaborators mostly cite specific examples of current and recent projects producing positive outcomes, such as installation of bus lanes, first/last mile connections, and collaborative planning around transit-oriented development.

Bragdon's research uncovered several possible opportunities to improve RTD collaboration with local governments outside of governance reform, such as:

- Undertake a process to resolve ongoing frustration about incomplete FasTracks projects (including the bus service expansion which had been promised in that ballot measure) and identify a path forward suitable to the needs and resources of today

- Set clearer standards for service allocation and investment

- Revive provisions for local governments to "buy up" additional service levels, which have been major element of success in other cities

- Build on existing cooperative work on important issues like bus lanes, shelters, public safety

- Pursue opportunities to work with DRCOG who can serve as a technical resource, convenor, and "honest broker" due to their relationships with local governments and staff with transit expertise.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

During its ideation phase, Committee members proposed a wide range of local and state government coordination concepts, including but not limited to:

- A range of ideas to help strengthen the effectiveness of the Subregional Service Councils and Partnership Program

- Strengthening coordination with DRCOG, CDOT, and local governments on BRT project delivery, corridor planning, bus stops, and transit-oriented development

- Re-establishing a Transit Academy to educate and prepare Board candidates

- Establishing agreed-upon, data-driven criteria for service allocation to balance goals of maximizing ridership and ensuring equitable coverage

- Enabling service buy-up by local governments to enable expanded local service

- Addressing FasTracks legacy issues

- Creating systematic engagement practices with local governments.

These ideas were refined and prioritized through discussion, additional research, and stakeholder input, ultimately informing the recommendations adopted by the Committee.

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The Committee's examination of RTD's collaboration with local governments and state agencies found that while there are numerous formal coordination structures in place and many examples of effective staff-level collaboration, persistent challenges remain at the political and strategic levels. These challenges have contributed to frustration among local elected officials, misalignment around service expectations, and ongoing tensions related to legacy commitments and investment decisions. The Committee concluded that improving collaboration does not require wholesale governance restructuring, but rather clearer engagement pathways, shared data, and renewed regional alignment around priorities for transit investment and service delivery.

Based on its review and deliberations, the Committee reached the following findings:

- **Staff-level collaboration between RTD and local governments is generally effective,** particularly on project delivery, service planning, bus priority treatments, transit-oriented development, and first/last-mile improvements. These working relationships have produced tangible outcomes and demonstrate the value of sustained technical coordination.

- **Political dissatisfaction among local elected officials is widespread but uneven,** and is driven largely by unresolved expectations related to the 2004 FasTracks program and perceptions of inequitable distribution of service and investment.

- **Existing engagement structures, including Subregional Service Councils and the Partnership Program, provide a foundation for collaboration but vary in effectiveness.** Their impact is often limited by inconsistent participation, unclear purpose, overly operational focus, and insufficient linkage to decision-making processes that elected officials care most about.

- **RTD lacks transparent, regionally shared criteria for service allocation and investment decisions,** which has contributed to mistrust and made it difficult for local governments and state partners to understand or support tradeoffs between ridership growth, equity, fiscal constraints, and geographic coverage.

- **Opportunities for enhanced collaboration exist outside of governance reform,** including clearer resolution of FasTracks legacy issues, reinstating mechanisms for local service buy-up, improving shared performance dashboards, standardizing roles related to bus stop safety and maintenance, and deepening coordination with regional entities such as DRCOG.

- **Sustained progress will require shifting from episodic engagement to more systematic, forward-looking regional collaboration,** focused not only on current operations but on a shared vision for the future of transit beyond FasTracks, aligned with ridership growth, land use patterns, climate goals, and fiscal realities. Even seemingly smaller issues like maintaining bus stops are key to ridership and need improved coordination.

Overall, Committee discussions emphasized the importance of reliable engagement pathways, shared data, transparent rationale for service allocation, and clarity around FasTracks legacy issues.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its examination and deliberations, the RTD Accountability Committee adopted the following recommendations related to local government and state agency collaboration. **These recommendations are presented verbatim, as approved by the Committee.**

01

Local Government Recommendation 1:
Evaluate & Restructure As Appropriate Subregional Service Councils To Improve Effectiveness
Vote: 13 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee recommends RTD revisit the design and implementation of the Subregional Service Councils, with input from local government and other key partners, explore and consider the following improvements discussed by the committee in order to improve effectiveness:

1. The evaluation should examine the existing Councils and define the role, purpose and general operating principles of the Councils
2. Work with local governments to ensure senior staff participation to enable coordination and communication flows with elected leaders
3. Implement independent or rotating facilitation to encourage more open discussions and shared ownership
4. Include additional representation from advocacy groups, community members, chambers of commerce, and economic development groups
5. Increase focus on strategic and future-oriented planning in addition to operational updates

02

Local Government Recommendation 2:
Service Allocation Criteria

Vote: 13 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Not Present

With a belief that growing ridership is the top priority, the Committee recommends RTD include in their upcoming Comprehensive Operations Analysis, a process to establish a transparent, data-driven criteria to guide service allocation, balancing goals of maximizing ridership with ensuring equitable broad geographic coverage.

03

Local Government Recommendation 3:
Service Buy-up Policy

Vote: 13 In Favor, 0 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee recommends RTD reinstate a service buy-up policy and program to enable expanded local service, which may include partnerships between local governments and RTD to enable expanded service.

Note: *A service buy-up policy or program refers to a framework whereby RTD would allow local governments to purchase additional transit service in order to improve frequency or hours of operation on a particular route or in a particular area.*

04

Local Government Recommendation 4:
Shared Information

Vote: 13 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Not Present

The Committee recommends RTD adapt and improve existing dashboards including collaborative development with local governments and DRCOG to ensure public, fully accessible, transparent dashboards or reports that summarize regional service data, project updates, and performance indicators.

05

Local Government Recommendation 5:
Standardize Protocols for Bus Stop Improvements and Maintenance

Vote: 11 In Favor, 3 Opposed

The Committee believes bus stop safety and maintenance are key to ridership and recommends that RTD develop clear standards for bus stop safety and maintenance, clarifying the responsibility of RTD and local jurisdictions. The Committee recognizes the unique context and factors of each local jurisdiction and brings this to the attention of the General Assembly.

06

Local Government Recommendation 6:
Build on Recent Experience With Past and Current Inter-Jurisdictional Cooperation on Large Capital Projects that Increase Ridership Opportunities

Vote: 13 In Favor, 1 Opposed

The Committee believes RTD should pursue additional partnerships for interagency cost-sharing and project management that leverages local, state, federal, and private sector funds. The Committee recommends that RTD report on grants applied for, not pursued, and received, and provide an explanation for each.

07

Local Government Recommendation 7:
Strategic Focus and Actions to Support Future of RTD

LG 7a. Increasing Investment in Public Transit

Vote: 11 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Abstain, 1 Not Present

With a commitment to the importance of ridership, the Committee recommends RTD must work together with state leaders, local governments, and regional stakeholders to increase investment in public transit, resolve lingering frustrations around the portions of the 2004 FasTracks plan which have not yet been accomplished, and identify a path forward.

LG 7b: A Regional Conversation about the Future of Transit and Regional Opportunities Beyond FasTracks

Vote: 12 In Favor, 1 Opposed, 1 Not Present

Working together, these stakeholders, led by RTD, must engage in a new regional conversation and planning effort to identify a path forward. This effort should explore how best to enable the region to plan for the future, and identify a financially sustainable path for transit service responsive to the current era that evaluates technology and focuses on an effective, efficient system.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The Committee discussion highlighted several considerations that may strengthen implementation of the recommendations in this section. Many actions can be initiated by RTD within existing authority, but durable progress will depend on consistent collaboration with local governments, DRCOG, CDOT, and other state partners—particularly to align technical work with the priorities and decision points of elected leaders.

Clarify collaboration mechanics and decision pathways. Recommendations related to Subregional Service Councils and broader regional coordination will be most effective if engagement forums have a clear purpose, consistent participation, and explicit feedback loops to RTD leadership and the Board. Where appropriate, the Committee noted that neutral facilitation, disciplined agendas, and defined roles can help these forums move beyond information sharing to collaborative problem-solving.

Use the Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) as a shared foundation for service allocation and tradeoffs. The Committee emphasized that transparent, data-informed service allocation criteria should be developed with partner visibility into the inputs, goals, and constraints—and paired with a clear approach for communicating how the criteria will be applied when difficult tradeoffs occur. This could occur as part of RTD's upcoming Comprehensive Operations Analysis.

Treat shared reporting as a joint product. Improvements to dashboards and information sharing will be most useful if RTD and partners align on a small set of measures that matter most (e.g., reliability, ridership, and major project/commitment status) and commit to regular, plain-language updates that reduce duplicative requests and support joint accountability.

Pair flexibility tools with clear standards and practical templates. Reinstating a service buy-up policy and establishing bus stop protocols can improve local flexibility as well as safety and maintenance outcomes, but implementation will benefit from clear program design, equity guardrails, and readily usable tools (e.g., standard agreement templates and checklists) so jurisdictions can collaborate with RTD with more consistency and predictability. *Note: RTD published a third party assessment of their bus stops after the Committee's last meeting, which can provide baseline information for future coordination efforts (*RTD Jan. 13, 2026 Finance and Planning Committee meeting packet*).*

Collaboration improvements can complement a "future of transit" conversation. The Committee noted that progress on near-term collaboration mechanics (e.g., service councils, shared data, transparent decision-making) can help build trust to support a broader regional conversation on the path forward beyond FasTracks—an effort that will likely require active partnership among RTD, DRCOG, local governments, state agencies, and, where needed, legislative attention to policy and funding constraints.

Implementation Considerations

Legislative Actions Required

A number of the Accountability Committee's recommendations will require action by the Colorado General Assembly to be implemented. Most prominently, the recommended structural governance reforms — including changes to Board size and composition, appointment authority, terms, compensation, and transition timing can only be effectuated through legislative amendments because RTD is a special district created in state statute. The Committee viewed legislative action as essential not only to authorize these changes, but to establish clear accountability, continuity, and legitimacy for reforms that will shape RTD's governance for decades. At the same time, the Committee was clear that the legislature has the authority to make several of the recommended changes, and recommended not referring the structural governance changes to the ballot, which would need to be subject to a statewide vote.

Beyond governance structure, some of the Committee's recommendations intersect with existing and recently enacted statutory requirements related to reporting, transparency, strategic planning, and fiscal oversight. Legislators may wish to consider how new governance provisions align with and reinforce requirements established under SB24-230 and SB25-161, including quarterly performance dashboards, strategic plan reporting, and budget transparency. Coordinating these provisions will be important to avoid duplicative or conflicting mandates and to ensure that enhanced oversight translates into clearer expectations rather than increased administrative burden.

Legislative engagement may also be required to enable or support implementation in other areas, depending on policy choices made during refinement of recommendations. These could include, for example, clarifying authority related to Board compensation benchmarking, supporting workforce partnerships with state agencies or educational institutions, or addressing statewide policy issues affecting paratransit service delivery (e.g., transportation network company regulations or accessibility requirements).

RTD BOARD & MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Many of the Committee's recommendations fall squarely within the authority of the existing RTD Board and management and can be initiated without awaiting legislative action. These include improvements to Board committee structures, governance norms, executive oversight practices, training and onboarding, performance measurement, and internal management processes related to workforce and paratransit planning. The Committee emphasized that visible early action by the Board and management would help maintain momentum and signal commitment to reform.

In particular, the Committee believes that non-structural governance reforms — such as clarifying Board versus management roles, strengthening committee effectiveness, enhancing financial oversight practices, and aligning executive evaluation with strategic goals should begin immediately. These actions can improve decision-making, accountability, and organizational clarity in the near term, even as larger structural changes are phased in over time. In the case of the recommendations regarding aligning the GM/CEO evaluation framework with the strategic plan, while this generally already occurs, the Committee emphasized this should be updated when the next strategic plan is adopted.

Implementation will require close coordination between the Board and management to ensure reforms are operationally feasible and appropriately sequenced. Management will play a central role in developing detailed work plans, aligning internal

resources, and integrating new expectations into existing processes. At the same time, the Board will need to exercise consistent oversight, weigh in on key policy decisions, resist re-entering operational decision-making, and hold itself accountable to the governance standards it establishes.

PHASING, DEPENDENCIES & SEQUENCING

The Committee's recommendations vary in complexity, timing, and interdependence, underscoring the importance of thoughtful phasing and sequencing. Structural governance reforms, if adopted, will require transition planning related to elections, appointments, compensation changes, and continuity of leadership. These changes may need to be implemented on a defined timeline to align with election cycles and statutory deadlines, as reflected in the Committee's recommendation regarding implementation no later than the 2028 election.

Other recommendations are less dependent on structural change and can proceed in parallel. For example, improvements to workforce recruitment partnerships, mentorship programs, data collection practices, and paratransit planning frameworks can begin (or in many cases are already underway) while governance reforms are under consideration. Similarly, enhanced reporting, performance dashboards, and Board training efforts can be phased in incrementally, building capacity over time.

Dependencies across topic areas should also be considered. Workforce stability affects service reliability, which in turn influences customer experience, ridership recovery, financial performance, and public trust. Paratransit planning decisions intersect with fiscal sustainability and equity goals. Governance reforms shape the Board's ability to oversee all of these areas effectively. The Committee views sequencing not as a rigid checklist, but as an adaptive process that balances urgency with organizational capacity and risk.

MONITORING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Sustained improvement will depend on the ability of RTD, the Board, and the General Assembly to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes over time. The Committee's recommendations are designed to align with emerging statutory reporting requirements, including quarterly performance dashboards and enhanced strategic plan reporting. These tools provide a foundation for tracking implementation and assessing whether reforms are delivering intended results.

Effective monitoring will require clear identification of responsible parties, measurable indicators, and regular review cycles. For governance reforms, this may include tracking completion of committee reviews, reforms, and ultimately their effectiveness, executive performance goals and outcomes, and adherence to clarified roles and responsibilities, for example. For workforce initiatives, metrics related to recruitment, retention, early-career attrition, safety, and employee

engagement will be important. For paratransit, monitoring should encompass completion of the comprehensive planning efforts recommended, and how they relate to future service quality, rider experience, fiscal sustainability, and equity impacts.

The Committee emphasized that evaluation should support learning and course correction, not simply compliance. Transparent reporting, coupled with structured opportunities for review and adjustment, can help ensure reforms remain responsive to changing conditions and emerging challenges.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

While the Committee's charge was focused on near-term evaluation and recommendations, members consistently emphasized the importance of viewing implementation as part of a longer-term strategic trajectory for RTD. Governance reform, workforce stabilization, paratransit planning, and strengthened local collaboration collectively create an opportunity to reset expectations, rebuild trust, and position RTD for sustained success in a rapidly changing regional context.

Over the long term, effective implementation could enable RTD to pursue more ambitious goals, including expanded service, stronger integration with regional land use and climate strategies, expanded partnerships to address first- and last-mile connectivity, and innovative service models that leverage new technologies. A more stable workforce, clearer governance framework, and improved local and state collaboration may also improve RTD's ability to deliver major capital projects, address deferred maintenance, and respond proactively to fiscal and ridership challenges.

The Committee views these opportunities as contingent on disciplined execution of the foundational reforms outlined in this report. Implementation is not an end in itself, but a means of enabling RTD to better fulfill its public mission and adapt to future demands. A successful RTD is essential for the Denver metropolitan region and the State of Colorado to provide access to opportunity, ensure affordable transportation options, meet climate and air quality goals, and much more. Continued collaboration among the General Assembly, state agencies, RTD Board, management, local governments, labor partners, and riders will be essential to realizing these long-term benefits.

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Appendix Overview

Additional information can be found in the following Appendices, which are available as a separate document on the CEO website

- Appendix A: Legislative Text (SB 25-161 Excerpts)

- Appendix B: Member Comments & Minority Opinions

- Appendix C: Meeting Agendas, Minutes, and Bylaws

- Appendix D: Summary of Public Input

  - All written public comment

  - Summary of presentations given, live public comment

- Appendix E: Full Ideas for Consideration (optional)

- Appendix F: Research Materials and Sources

  - Overarching

  - Governance

  - Paratransit

  - Workforce

  - Local government