

2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of Final Report

RTD ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE



CONFLUENCE
POLICY & STRATEGY
GROUP



COLORADO
Energy Office

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.



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