



**COLORADO
CROSS-DISABILITY
COALITION**

CCDC Position on HB 24-1447 - RTD Bill

The Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition is the largest disability led organization in Colorado. Our mission is to advocate for social justice for people with all types of disabilities. We have over 5000 members. Many of our members are transit reliant, meaning that we are unable to drive due to our disabilities, and sometimes due to affordability. Those in the front range rely on RTD and the ability of RTD to function is directly tied to our ability to live independently, obtain, or maintain employment, engage in civic or faith-based activities, use medical care, and go about our daily lives. Those of us who use power wheelchairs have no other option even if we have money because we do not have the ability to access Uber, Lyft, or cab companies. Many with other types of disabilities cannot afford those other options.

Our position is that RTD and all forms of public transit is an essential public utility that is necessary for a functioning community, particularly urban communities where there is a population to support transit. RTD has struggled for years to maintain drivers due to chronic underfunding and having archaic rules and laws imposed on them. There are many parts of the bill that we support. The biggest controversy in the bill is proposed changes to composition of the RTD board, which is currently 15 elected members.

While CCDC shares the concerns of other groups, we are not completely opposed to SOME change in the RTD board composition. We would be open to a proposal that has SOME reduction in size and included SOME appointed positions with the following caveats:

- 1) The appointed positions include a representative of riders that can represent disproportionately affected or historically marginalized communities. This means people with disabilities, and Black and brown communities and people from

low-income parts of the district. The position (preferably 2 people) would have to be someone that was able to engage with more than their own group.

- 2) The appointed positions include a representative from drivers. We will let the drivers' unions opine about how this should occur.
- 3) Other changes the sponsors already made in the bill including anti-ableism and ADA training remain.
- 4) Government appointees are ex-officio (which is in the current bill).

While we are not adamant about a specific size, we believe 11 is a more appropriate number to ensure the many interests of the district are represented.

While we have an excellent relationship with the current General Manager, Debra Johnson, this has not always been the case. For most of the RTD history the ONLY way we could address issues with management other than litigation was through our elected representatives. As is true with any elected position, if someone is not doing a good job voters can make the change at the ballot box. We do not get rid of representative democracy because voters are sometimes lazy or uninformed. We work harder to make democracy work. However, we agree that some appointed positions for specific perspectives make sense. It does not have to be an either/or.

We believe there is a lot of good in the bill and suggest a compromise. Pass the bill without the specifics of Board composition with a specific process and deadline for a stakeholder process to work this out. We do not think that details of board composition can be negotiated in the few weeks remaining in the session. We suggest that the bill be amended to:

- 1) Identify a number that the board will shrink to over a specified period but that will NOT affect the 2024 election cycle as that is already underway.
- 2) Require stakeholder to meet and negotiate the following and report to the TLRC no later than 10/1/2024. Require the TLRC to draft a bill for composition changes for early introduction in the 2025 session.
 - a. Appointed vs elected as long as 66% remains elected.
 - i. Specific appointments and appointment process.
 - b. District boundaries.
 - c. Funding for increasing director budgets for constituent work since they will have different districts.
 - d. Transition plan.
- 3) Allow the one appointment of the CDOT rep to occur now.
- 4) Allow increased pay to begin so current directors have the time and resources to engage effectively with a transition and figure out constituent services for a larger district.

Our recommendations are not based on any concern with current or past board members. It is based on what we believe is needed to increase support for RTD, which is an important public resource. If adding appointed members to the governing board will increase the “buy-in” or support, we think it is worth a try. We do not think that the RTD struggles are due to the board or management. We think they are symptoms of larger societal issues that RTD alone cannot fix. For RTD to function properly there needs to be a dramatic increase in ridership and service. To make this happen, RTD needs to be able to recruit more workers and riders. RTD needs the cooperation of cities and the state to attract both the workforce and choice riders.