



COLORADO

Governor Jared Polis

November 17, 2020

Angie Rivera-Malpiede
Chair, RTD Board of Director
1660 Blake Street
Denver, CO 80202

Debra Johnson
Chief Executive Officer, General Manager
1660 Blake Street
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Chair Rivera-Malpiede and General Manager Johnson:

Thank you for the Regional Transportation District's (RTD) continued correspondence and updates to my administration on your response to the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) crisis. Like you, we are committed to protecting the public's health and safety during this unprecedented time, and we are acutely aware of the financial impact this event is having on Colorado families, businesses, and the economy overall.

As we wrote in our April letter to you and the board, we appreciate your efforts to implement the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's guidance for public transportation. We hope you will note that we have recently updated that [guidance](#) to reflect the latest data, epidemiological trends, and stakeholder input. It is essential that RTD implement all aspects of this mandatory guidance fully to keep both operators and passengers safe, including clear postings for social distancing, and ensure that these same protective measures in our guidelines are also afforded to contractors. Given your size, RTD also plays a role in providing an example to smaller transit authorities, adding to the imperative of full compliance.

This is especially important right now, as we are seeing an increase of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations across the Denver Metro Area. If we want to keep our economy open through the holidays and into next year, we need your assistance to ensure social distancing requirements and hygienic conditions on your buses, trains, offices, garages, and other common spaces for employees and passengers. This is vital both for passengers and, critically, for the operators and other RTD employees who join front-line workers across critical industries in keeping our state moving during this crisis. Guidelines are specified in the newly updated guidance. Please let us know if you have any questions upon review of the document.

The transit system in the Metro area has always been part of the solution to many issues, including traffic congestion, providing travel options to residents including those who rely on transit, air pollution, and economic prosperity. If health safety protocols are not being followed and people get sick while using your services, this will, unfortunately, undermine the public's faith in the safety of transit throughout this pandemic and in times to come. We can't let that happen.

In addition, in our April letter, we addressed the necessity of transparency and accountability to our constituents for funding, especially the new disposition of CARES Act funding. We appreciate your continued support and participation in the RTD Accountability Committee. This will further our ability to have a safe, efficient, and accountable transportation network. As we noted, RTD will be an important player in the coming months as we continue to recover from the impacts of this economic disruption. Again, we urge you to ensure there is oversight of the RTD budget after being the recipient of at least \$232 million in CARES Act funding.

Specifically, the state is deeply concerned by recent reports of hundreds of RTD's critical workers potentially being laid off. We believe that this decision requires significantly more public transparency prior to being finalized and that it raises some big questions about the district's prioritization of resources during this challenging time – specifically the significant influx of CARES Act funding that was intended to alleviate or at least delay the need for this kind of decision.

I request that you immediately brief the accountability committee on this issue specifically, including identifying whether there are other cuts that the RTD Board and management have considered and which could be made to avoid, or even delay, the layoffs. Among other issues, it would help to understand what the agency is doing to cut overhead, whether the agency's executive salaries are being reduced through salary cuts or furloughs to avoid layoffs to bus and light rail operators, how you are prioritizing route operations based on current utilization, underserved communities, and service to the most vulnerable and transit dependent, and how RTD's use of CARES Act funds comply with treasury guidance to address the specific challenges associated with COVID-19.

Notably, it is particularly important that these front line layoffs be delayed until it is clear whether Congress will be providing more relief to struggling transit agencies and local governments across the country. I understand the challenges associated with all state and local functions during this hard time, but as RTD was one of the only government agencies in Colorado to receive a specific federally appropriated tranche of relief in the CARES Act it is essential that the public see exactly where that money is going, and have confidence that it is putting the safety of dependent riders and critical workers first.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. We appreciate your continued service to Colorado and thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Polis
Governor