



Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

Memorandum

September 3, 2026

TO: Interested Persons

FROM: [Katie Ruedebusch](#), Policy Research Section Manager, 303-866-3001

SUBJECT: Regional Transportation District (RTD) Overview

Summary

This memorandum provides information on the Regional Transportation District (RTD). Information related to RTD's statutory history, authority, board, budget, and service area is included below.

Regional Transportation District Overview

The General Assembly created RTD in 1969 to create, operate, and maintain a transportation system in the RTD service area.¹

Service Area

[RTD](#) currently serves nearly 3.1 million people in 2,345 square miles of service area, including all or part of the following eight counties: Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson, and Weld. Annually, RTD operates more than 126 bus routes, 10 rail lines, and other specialty services, as shown in the current [RTD service map](#).

Board of Directors

The size of the [RTD Board of Directors](#) (board) has been modified over the years. The original board consisted of 21 taxpaying electors. In 1980, a citizen-initiated ballot measure changed the composition of the board to a 15-member elected board of directors, elected for four-year terms. Pursuant to [Senate Bill 26-150](#), the board will be reduced to nine elected and appointed members beginning in 2029.

¹ Section 32-9-101, *et seq.*, C.R.S.



Transition to New Board Composition

By September 15, 2027, the bill requires the legislature's [Office of Legislative Legal Services](#) and the [Legislative Council Staff](#) to apportion the composition of the RTD board for elections beginning in 2028 so that five board members will represent a district on the basis of population and ridership numbers. The [Independent Legislative Redistricting Commission](#) will perform redistricting after the 2030 federal census and thereafter.

In addition, beginning January 1, 2029, the current RTD board members' terms expire and the terms of the nine new board members begin, with five elected members and four appointed by the Governor. The bill also establishes requirements for the background and expertise of the appointees, requires the Denver Regional Council of Governments to provide a list of nominees for the board, and allows the Governor to remove an appointed member under certain circumstances.

Board Authority

As required by the original statute, within five years of RTD's creation, elections were held in all district counties to authorize RTD's authority to issue debt for mass transportation purposes. State law gives RTD's board the power to enter into contracts, borrow and invest money, purchase and maintain property, and levy taxes. The board is also charged with setting RTD policy, adopting the annual budget, and establishing RTD's short- and long-term transit goals.

Budget

For 2026, RTD's total projected revenues were about \$1.3 billion. Of this revenue, approximately 69 percent is from the 1.0 percent sales and use tax within RTD's service area, with the remaining 31 percent came from grants, passenger fares, and other revenue. RTD employed around 3,457 individuals throughout the Denver metropolitan area in 2025. In addition, RTD works with approximately 1,600 private contractor employees. Detailed budget information is available in [RTD's Budget Book FY 2026](#).



RTD Annexation

Colorado law currently defines RTD's service area as the area that existed within the district as of July 1, 2007, along with additional area annexed to or included in the district after July 1, 2007.² The state allows additional RTD service area to be added through petition or election.

Incorporated or unincorporated areas may join RTD either through petition or election. Certain landowners may petition to join RTD's service area if they live in a contiguous area along RTD's service areas and 100 percent of parcel landowners agree. For local governments or unincorporated counties, 8 percent of eligible electors or the board of county commissioners may request an election to include an area in RTD. Petitions for elections must be submitted at least 120 days before an election, and the RTD board must approve the election by a majority vote.

If any unincorporated area is entirely contained within RTD's service area, the district may pass a resolution to annex the territory into the district, subject to certain notice requirements, a public hearing, and vote of the RTD board.³ RTD must send the resolution to any local governments, special districts, and school districts in the unincorporated annexed territory, along with the executive director of the Colorado Department of Revenue.

The annexation or inclusion of any area into RTD's service area is not effective until the RTD board updates the service area map and the Department of Revenue communicates with retailers in the new area.⁴

RTD Fare Structure

Table 1 below shows RTD's full price fares for various routes since 2006. Rates for discounted fares are not included. In 2024, RTD updated its fare structure after conducting a [Systemwide Fare Study and Equity Analysis Study](#).

² Section 32-9-106.1 (1)(a)(I), C.R.S.

³ Section 32-9-106.8 (1), C.R.S.

⁴ Section 32-9-106.1 (2)(e), C.R.S.



Table 1
RTD Fares Since 2016

Year	Local Fare	Regional Fare	Airport Fare
2016	\$2.60	\$4.50	\$9.00
2017	\$2.60	\$4.50	\$9.00
2018	\$2.60	\$4.50	\$9.00
2019	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2020	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2017	\$2.60	\$4.50	\$9.00
2018	\$2.60	\$4.50	\$9.00
2019	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2020	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2021	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2022	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2023	\$3.00	\$5.25	\$10.50
2024	\$2.75	-	\$10.00
2025	\$2.75	-	\$10.00
2026	\$2.75	-	\$10.00

Source: Legislative Council Staff.

RTD fares depend on several factors, including zone of travel, discounts, and type of ticket package purchased. In addition, rides are free for youth under 19 and active-duty members of the U.S. military. Fares and fare payment options are discussed in detail on the RTD website's [Fares page](#).

RTD Legislative Oversight

RTD is a statutorily created entity, similar to a special district. However, RTD is not a regional transportation authority, as it was created as a separate statutory political subdivision. Current law gives RTD's elected board wide authority to operate and maintain the transportation system within its district boundaries. The legislature plays a limited role in the administration of RTD. However, RTD is required to provide copies of its annual budget to the [Transportation Legislation Review Committee](#), and other information, data, testimony, or audits as requested by the committee.

Legislative History

The General Assembly has introduced a number of bills to change the taxes and fees that RTD may collect, RTD's boundaries, and the level of RTD services that must be provided by private companies. Table 2 outlines bills passed by the General Assembly that directly modified RTD's statutory authority.



Table 2
Bills Substantially Changing RTD Statutory Authority Since 2002

Bill Number	Category	Bill Description
SB 25-161	Privatization of Services	Authorized to enter into service partnerships with local governments, institutions of higher education, business or housing entity, or special district to expand transit services within or beyond the boundaries of RTD
SB 25-051	Taxes and Fees	Amends RTD's statutory definition of "operating costs" to mean all operating expenditures, excluding depreciation
SB 09-108	Taxes and Fees	Removed the 1.0 percent cap on the sales tax that RTD can collect
SB 07-251	Privatization of Services	Eliminated the minimum requirement for RTD to contract with private businesses, and authorized RTD to contract with private companies for up to 58 percent of services
SB 07-088	Taxes and Fees	Expanded RTD's authority to charge a fee at park-n-rides
SB 06-093	Taxes and Fees	Allowed RTD the authority to charge a parking fee at park-n-rides
SB 05-182	District Boundaries	Allowed special benefits to be awarded in eminent domain proceedings for RTD projects
SB 02-179	Taxes and Fees	Increased the amount of sales tax that RTD can collect from 0.6 percent to 1.0 percent to fund FasTracks
HB 21-1186	Taxes and Fees	Removed the requirement that 30 percent of RTD's operating costs be covered by fare revenue and restrictions on RTD's ability to charge parking fees
HB 07-1295	District Boundaries	Specified the geographic area of RTD, and required it to consist of all land within the district as of July 1, 2007
HB 07-1186	District Boundaries	Authorized RTD to include incorporated areas of a county under certain requirements
HB 06-1338	District Boundaries	Authorized the inclusion of counties, or portions of counties, if they request annexation
HB 03-1103	Privatization of Services	Increased the percentage of RTD service that must be provided by private businesses from 35 percent to 50 percent
HB 03-1070	District Boundaries	Allowed RTD to annex an area if a majority of registered voters approve of the annexation
HB 01-1132	District Boundaries	Allowed RTD to unilaterally annex unincorporated territory completely surrounded by the district

Source: Legislative Council Staff.

Additionally, the General Assembly has considered a number of other changes under RTD's statutory authority that did not become law. These proposals have included various changes to the boundaries of RTD; various increases and decreases to the percentage of RTD services that must be provided by private businesses; and changes to the board's composition, elections, and campaign finance requirements.