

Grant Application Staff Report

Date: January 13, 2026

To: Douglas County Board of County Commissioners

Through: Douglas J. DeBord, County Manager

From: Jennifer L. Eby, AICP, Director of Community Services

CC: Ryan J. Arthur, Community Programs Coordinator
Allison E. Cutting, Community Services Supervisor
Rand M. Clark, CCAP, NCRT, Assistant Director of Community Services

Subject: **2026 Regional Transportation District Partnership Program application in the amount of \$3,520,000 with a local contribution of \$880,000 for a project total of \$4,400,000**

Board of County Commissioners' Business Meeting

January 27, 2026 @ 1:30 p.m.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The request is for authorization to submit the 2026 Regional Transportation District (RTD) Partnership Program application in the amount of \$3,520,000 to expand transit services in northern Douglas County. A local contribution of \$880,000 is required for a project total of \$4,400,000.

II. REQUEST

Staff requests authorization to submit the 2026 RTD Partnership Program application in the amount of \$3,520,000 with a local contribution of \$880,000 for a project total of \$4,400,000.

III. BACKGROUND

Douglas County's Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study (Study) completed in July 2025 and provided recommendations for enhancements to the transit and multimodal transportation network throughout the county. Expanding local transit options were viewed positively as a way to improve quality of life and allow people within Douglas County access to critical services, commute to work, and better connect them to where they need to go. The Study's implementation plan identified regional funding available through RTD's Partnership Program to facilitate proposed enhancements to transit.

RTD established the Partnership Program to help communities meet local mobility needs through transportation projects of their own design. RTD administers the Partnership Program through Subregional Service Councils (SSCs) to represent local interests and account for connections between communities. In a meeting with the BCC on September 30, 2025, RTD Directors recommended that Douglas County submit requests for Partnership Program funding to support the expansion and ongoing operation of the Link on Demand transit service. Staff drafted two partnership submissions for RTD's Southwest and Southeast SSCs, which together, cover northern Douglas County.

IV. DISCUSSION

The request to the RTD Partnership Program will provide funding to support expansion and continued operation of Link on Demand in both the southwest and southeast subregions within RTD's boundary including Highlands Ranch, Stonegate, and Parker. The \$4,400,000 is proposed to be allocated in the following manner:

	RTD Funds	Local Match	Project Total
Southwest Subregion	\$ 400,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 500,000
Southeast Subregion	\$ 3,120,000	\$ 780,000	\$ 3,900,000
Total:	\$ 3,520,000	\$ 880,000	\$ 4,400,000

Local match will come from Douglas County's Road and Bridge Sales and Use Tax revenue allocated for innovative transit programs.

V. RECOMMENDED ACTION

Staff recommends authorization to submit the 2026 RTD Partnership Program application in the amount of \$3,520,000 with a required local contribution of \$880,000 for a project total of \$4,400,000 as it complies with all federal, state, and county approval standards and policies.

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Partnership Program Application

A) Applicant Information

Project Sponsor Name	Douglas County
Project Sponsor Type	Local Government
Additional Partners	City of Lone Tree Denver Regional Council of Governments
Subregional Service Council	Southwest
Contact Person	Ryan Arthur
Email	rarthur@douglas.co.us
Phone Number	(303) 814-4326

B) Project Information

Project Title
Link On Demand – Zero Fare Microtransit Program
<i>Briefly describe the project location. Please include a map and GIS layer (as a .zip file) as an attachment with your submission. If you need assistance creating a GIS shapefile for your service area, please reach out to Cory Schmitt (cory.schmitt@rtd-denver.com) no later than April 30.</i>
Project location will occur in the Highlands Ranch Metro District contained within RTD Southwest Subregional Service Council's defined boundary. Please see attachments 3 and 4 for the project map and GIS layer.
Project Type (select one)
On-demand transit service – demand-responsive service operating in a specific area

Project Description (a few paragraphs describing your project in more detail)
The purpose of this project is to secure funding for Douglas County's microtransit pilot project in Highlands Ranch, ensuring continued mobility and reliable connections to key destinations, including RTD light rail and bus services. This funding will support ongoing service within the RTD Southwest Subregion Service area while enabling strategic coverage and strengthening regional transit integration.
Douglas County completed the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study in 2025, which proposed implementing microtransit in northern Douglas County. The study used previous planning efforts and resident surveys, which identified transit as a key need, to suggest pilot projects and develop a framework for the sustained expansion of local transit options. Douglas County's Board of County Commissioners expanded the successful Link On Demand microtransit service from the City of Lone Tree into Highlands Ranch as a first step. The County replicated the existing model by continuing Link's zero-fare policy, accessibility for mobility challenged riders, operational support

center, rider safety measures, and system reliability. Sustaining this service ensures residents continue to have convenient, safe, and flexible transit access.

Link On Demand meets diverse community mobility needs, including medical appointments, school, work, errands, and connections to RTD light rail stations. RTD light rail stations consistently rank as top destinations each month, reinforcing Link On Demand's role in first and last mile connectivity. In the first 6 months of operation, 43% of trips were for connections to public transit, equating to more than 26,400 trips, demonstrating the critical link between local microtransit and regional RTD infrastructure. Sustaining this service ensures residents continue to have access to safe, convenient, and affordable transportation, supporting quality of life and mobility across northern Douglas County and the greater Denver region.

Partnering with RTD will ensure the long-term sustainability of this proven microtransit service, allow for expanded service, strengthen connectivity, and advance RTD's strategic objectives as a trusted leader in regional mobility.

For funding requests for mobility services, please answer the following four questions:

1. What are the proposed days and hours of operation?

Days and hours of operation will continue to be Monday – Thursday: 7AM – 7PM, Friday: 7AM – 10PM, Saturday: 10AM-10PM.

2. Have you had any conversations with service providers? Note that the service provider will need to be selected competitively.

Douglas County has an existing agreement with Via Transportation, Inc. to deliver Transit as a Service in Highlands Ranch. Via was selected through a competitive process by the City of Lone Tree to operate Link On Demand. Based on Lone Tree's process and success, Douglas County designated Via as a Preferred Vendor to ensure seamless integration with existing service and rider base, as to not conflict or compete with Lone Tree's chosen service provider. Douglas County has experience conducting competitive procurements for transit projects. The County intends to conduct a thorough and competitive procurement process prior to further expansion to ensure future vendor selection meets applicable federal and state criteria.

Douglas County will seek providers that can offer a competitive vehicle hour cost and commitments to that cost for a minimum of three years. The County reserves the right to reject all bids/proposals, to waive formalities, informalities, or irregularities contained in a said bid/proposal and furthermore, to award a contract for items in whole or in part, if it is deemed to be in the best interests of the County. All federal and state policies that govern the procurement process will be met to ensure compliance.

3. Will you charge the customer for the service?

No. The service will be zero fare.

4. What is the area of the proposed service area (in square miles)?

<p>Approximately 29 square miles.</p>
<p>Please provide a project implementation timeline, either below or attached to your application, including launch date and important milestones. Assume a minimum of four months to complete agreements and procure a service provider (if applicable). RTD will announce awardees in August.</p>
<p>This project is focused on securing funding to sustain microtransit in Highlands Ranch and allow County funding to be invested in future expansion. Upon award notification, funding will be applied to maintain current operations, including continued connectivity with RTD infrastructure.</p>
<p>RTD hopes to fund projects that are “shovel-ready.” Please describe other funding sources, amounts, your experience in managing these types of projects, and note potential risks to project implementation. If your project includes funding from outside sources, include a letter of support or documentation of the funding source.</p>
<p>Douglas County launched the Highlands Ranch Link On Demand pilot project in May of 2025. The services have operated successfully for seven months.</p>
<p>Funding includes the County’s Capital Improvement Project funds, which resources the current pilot operation of Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch.</p>
<p>Douglas County understands that all innovative projects come with risks. Douglas County is confident in their ability to effectively administer this project and manage through challenges as they arise.</p>
<p>Douglas County plans to continue using the following proven practices for efficient and effective collaboration:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing meetings. Douglas County, Lone Tree, and our current vendor meet consistently to discuss the project scope and proposal specifics. During the project implementation period, all entities meet bi-weekly to establish a routine of set practices for ongoing project management, identify areas of improvement, and agree upon next steps for resolving issues and meeting milestones. • Streamlined communications. Each organization has designated a single point of contact for owning deliverables and serving as the liaison between external partners and internal organization stakeholders. With these designated points of contact, partners will minimize the risk of delays due to unclear lines of communication or confusion. • Existing collaboration. The expansion of Link On Demand into Highlands Ranch has strengthened the partnership between each organization. This history and familiarity will be valuable and relevant, providing a successful blueprint upon which further expansions in Douglas County can be based.
<p>The project team has developed a refined marketing plan that continues to build rider growth over time, reach service goals, and engage target markets. However, if ridership is low, the team has prepared a list of proposed solutions to support rider growth.</p>

- Real-Time Adaptation. A key factor that influenced why our current vendor was chosen to operate the service was due to their operating system's ability to adapt to changing demands. The number of active vehicles adapts to variations in ridership demand to continue to hit cost of service and performance goals.
- Engaging Out of Zone Riders. The Rider App will capture information from riders who open the app to book a ride but are outside of the service zone as well as new user signups who live outside the zone. This data can be analyzed to understand the locations that riders want to travel to/from and the times of day that they are looking to book those trips. This will help to understand demand, demographics, and use patterns to improve service to serve interested riders more effectively.
- Decreased Funding. Douglas County acknowledges that available funding today does not guarantee the availability of funding in the future. If external funding sources are exhausted, the County will be able to maintain the service with its current funding for a few years. The hours of operation and the size of the service zones can be altered to reduce costs, by analyzing ridership data and making decisions to make cuts where ridership impact would be lessened.

Does your organization have a procurement policy and/or standards? If yes, please provide additional information, such as a link to the procurement policy, attach the policy to your submission, or describe your organization's procurement policy. RTD will provide procurement support for organizations that do not have a procurement policy and/or standards in place.

Yes, procurement policy and standards are attached. For the purposes of this application, Douglas County will continue to operate as the main point of contact with the selected vendor for all administrative, contracting, and procurement purposes.

C) Project Data

Using DRCOG's Data Tool, please provide the following information about populations served. For fixed-route proposals, include populations within a ¼ mile buffer. For on-demand proposals, include populations within the service area boundaries.

Total population	52,738 (2023)
Total households	20,927 (2023)
People of color	9,899 (2023)
People with low-income	3,048 (2023)
People with limited English proficiency	983 (2023)
People 60 and over	12,156 (2023)
Youth Under 18	11,795 (2023)
People with a disability	4,705 (2023)
Households without a vehicle	664 (2023)
Housing cost-burdened households	5,046 (2023)

D) Project Budget

Calendar Year	RTD Funding	Local Funding	Total
2026	\$400,000	\$100,000	\$500,000
2027	\$400,000	\$100,000	\$500,000
2028	\$400,000	\$100,000	\$500,000
Total Project Cost			\$1,500,000

Describe sources of funding, including any contingencies (necessary budget approvals, etc). Local match must be a cash match; in-kind is not eligible as match. If approved, projects will be reimbursed up to 80% of project costs by RTD. Reimbursements will be made either monthly or quarterly.

Douglas County allocated Capital Improvement Project funding through 2030 as a local source of funding for Link On Demand. This allocation is sufficient to meet all match requirements.

Operating cost assumptions (e.g. cost per hour)

The current contracted cost per hour to run the Link On Demand microtransit service is \$70.19. The targeted trips per vehicle hour is 3, resulting in an expected cost of \$23.40 per trip. The annual budget reflects approximately 7,100 vehicle hours per year, consistent with the current cost-per-hour operating model. This represents a cost-effective strategy compared to traditional fixed-route service in suburban areas.

Is your project/funding request scalable? If so, please indicate the least amount of funding you could accept, and how the project scope would be reduced. If not, please explain justification for non-scalable projects.

Scaling down this proposal would have a negative impact on the expansion of locally provided transit services to other areas within northern Douglas County. The County would not be able to expand the Link On Demand microtransit service to other communities as quickly as recommended in the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study prescribed.

Are you proposing to purchase vehicles and how will you procure?

No.

Proposed vehicle cost assumptions, if applicable:

Not applicable.

Where will vehicles be serviced and maintained? Note that RTD is unable to service and maintain other organization's vehicles.

The current vendor is responsible for the servicing and maintenance of all vehicles. Their selected leasing partner ensures that the fleet is in good repair and that riders enjoy consistently clean and comfortable rides. Through their extensive footprints and large vehicle fleets, the vendor provides Douglas County with significant operating flexibility to adjust the service as necessary and ensures that the vehicles are always available.

Please attach a line-item project budget. Note that funding for the construction of infrastructure is ineligible.

Please see Attachment 2 for a line-item budget of the proposed service over the next three years.

E) Demonstration of Benefits and Needs

Why is this project needed?

Douglas County is a suburban county in the southern Denver Metropolitan Area with an estimated 2023 population of 383,910, 26% (101,437) of whom, live in in Highlands Ranch. While Highlands Ranch is served by three RTD bus routes and connected to nearby RTD light rail, many residents lack reliable access to transit. This gap limits regional mobility, reduces access to employment and services, and increases car dependency. Link On Demand addresses these needs by functioning as an extension of RTD's system and connecting residents to key destinations and regional transit services.

The need for flexible transit is underscored by the County's demographic trends. Douglas County's population is aging rapidly, with residents over the age of 55 projected to increase from 27% to 39% by 2050. Residents ages 65 to 74 years old are expected to grow by 31%, and those aged 75 to 84 by 69%, increasing demand for accessible, flexible transit options that traditional transit cannot cover fully meet. A 2025 survey found that 25% of Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch riders were 65 years and older, highlighting the importance of sustaining accessible transportation for older adults.

Link On Demand also serves a wide range of users, including students, low-income households, individuals without vehicles, people with mobility challenges, commuters, service workers, and remote workers. Survey results show riders use Link On Demand for errands (69%), medical appointments (52%), work (47%), school (17%), and to connect to other public transit (43%). In all, 75% of riders are visiting stores, restaurants, and other businesses more frequently.

Additionally, 88% of users mentioned that Link On Demand offers safe, convenient, and affordable transportation, and 95% said that access to Link made their community a more desirable place to live. These statistics not only highlight the program's success but also underscore its potential to significantly enhance the quality of life and economic vitality across the region, making it a driver for community value creation that impacts people from all walks of life.

Douglas County's Transportation Master Plan 2050 has identified that 80% of Douglas County residents travel alone to work, while only 2% use public transit (17% when focused on northern Douglas County). With 75.3% of all trips originating and ending in Douglas County, Link On Demand provides an attractive, shared-ride alternative to the single occupancy vehicle, while complementing RTD services and helping to reduce transportation barriers for the residents of Douglas County.

Who benefits from the project?
People living and working within the Link On Demand service zone, or passing through Highlands Ranch, are benefitting from this transportation opportunity. Residents and employees located within Highlands Ranch now have access to free transit services that help connect to regional rail, statewide Bustang services, substantial retail and commercial properties and businesses, as well as medical providers.
In addition to Link On Demand being used for first and last-mile connections into existing RTD transit stations, residents are able to utilize the service to travel within the entire service boundary, to include neighboring Lone Tree and Meridian. Given these observations, project partners believe that Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree, and Meridian businesses will continue to benefit from increased foot traffic and experience economic growth.
Does the project serve equity populations? Please describe.
Equity considerations have been integrated into the planning and development of this proposal and will continue to be incorporated. The project will continue to serve equity populations throughout the service zone. According to DRCOG's Data Tool, this includes 3,048 low-income households, 9,899 individuals of color, 983 people with limited English proficiency, 12,156 older adults, 664 households without a vehicle, 4,705 individuals with a disability, and 5,046 cost-burdened households. Many of these individuals face economic, housing, and transportation burdens. This microtransit project helps residents within the service area access fixed route transportation networks, enabling greater access to affordable, safe, multimodal options while providing greater equity and quality of life. Individuals living in affordable housing developments in Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree, and Meridian will continue to benefit from improved transportation.
Currently, one-third of the fleet of vehicles used to operate Link are equipped to serve those who need wheelchair access. Drivers are certified to utilize this equipment, and all drivers undergo background checks consistent with State Unit on Aging requirements. Additionally, riders who are disabled or require additional accessibility are afforded curb to curb service to improve their access to the Link.
Community engagement efforts will continue to prioritize transit-dependent and equity populations. All project partners have extensive experience conducting outreach and soliciting feedback from community members. Post-contracting activities have included a customer survey and tabling at various community events to incorporate community voices and the human aspects of service into Link On Demand.
Does the project fill a gap in existing transit service? Please describe.
Link On Demand fills two critical gaps in existing transit services:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing access to first and last-mile connections to RTD hubs. Multimodal regional hubs throughout the Denver region are important, but they may become unsustainable if individuals cannot access them easily. Since the implementation of Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch, RTD light rail stations

<p>continue to remain as riders' top destinations. This is verification that riders use Link On Demand to access the broader transportation network provided by RTD.</p> <p>2. Enhancing sub-regional connectivity. An integral objective of this project is to support access to new transit opportunities for people who live and work in northern Douglas County. Since the expansion of Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch, residents can access critical job centers and commercial districts throughout the entire service zone.</p>
<p>Efforts to improve interregional and subregional connectivity are also informed by community input. Douglas County's Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study concluded in July 2025, and the implementation of transit connectivity for northern Douglas County has been identified as a top priority.</p>
<p>How does the project align with RTD's Strategic Plan? Specifically, how will it impact two of RTD's strategic priorities - Community Value and Customer Excellence?</p>
<p>The project is aligned with RTD's Strategic Plan and directly advances its strategic priorities, with particular emphasis on Community Value and Customer Excellence. By sustaining Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch, RTD is investing in a proven program that improves access to existing services, expands first and last mile connectivity, enhances regional coordination, and delivers high-quality customer service.</p>
<p>A. Community Value: Link On Demand provides a safe and valuable transportation option for the community and utilizes multiple tactics, as outlined by RTD, to ensure success. For example, the project utilizes cross-jurisdictional partnerships between Highlands Ranch, Douglas County, Lone Tree, and Meridian to promote equitable and accessible transportation throughout the region.</p> <p>B. Customer Excellence: The project prioritizes the rider to always deliver a high-quality service for all individuals. For instance, the rider app has been designed with input from disability advocacy groups and been thoroughly tested in focus groups of riders with disabilities. The service has been designed to be safe, convenient, and reliable for all riders. To build the service zone, project partners considered popular nearby destinations, job centers, natural boundaries, and existing transit services to ensure that the service will be utilized and efficient. Riders report an average 4.9 out of 5 star customer satisfaction rating indicating a positive impression of safety and performance.</p>
<p>How has the project (or similar project) performed in the past? Has it been successful and/or met performance metrics? If new, n/a.</p>
<p>Link On Demand pilot project continues to exceed expectations and performance metrics, particularly over the first six months of expanded service into Highlands Ranch. In the first full month of service, rides surpassed 4,900. The number of rides have increased month over month, with December 2025 finishing with 10,470 rides. Alongside this increase in demand, rider satisfaction has remained high – Link On Demand's average rider rating is 4.9 out of 5. Additionally, service utilization has continued to improve over time, starting at 2.6 passengers per hour in its first full month of service and improving to 3.4 by December 2025.</p>

Please use the space below to provide any additional information about your project.

Douglas County residents desire transit within the region. A public survey conducted for the County's 2050 Master Transportation Plan found that 37% of respondents identified providing a variety of transportation choices as a top priority, and results from the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study indicated residents would use transit at least monthly if it served their destinations. Link On Demand responds to these needs by addressing local mobility challenges and improving access to regional transit.

Future expansion of Link On Demand follows the phased approach the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study prescribes, with service zones that cover northern Douglas County population centers along the southern east-west C-470 corridor from Highlands Ranch to Parker and north-south along I-25 from Lone Tree to Castle Rock. The successful partnership with the City of Lone Tree and Via Transportation has established a strong foundation for continued service delivery. Douglas County values the opportunity to extend its partnership with RTD to meet the transit needs of northern Douglas County, building on a proven microtransit model that serves as a successful blueprint for the broader Denver Region.

Application Submission Checklist

Please submit all application material to RTD via the application portal by May 14, 2025, at 5pm MT. When submitting, please begin all file names with your organization name (e.g. RTD_application.pdf).

- Application form (required)
- Line-item project budget (required)
- Map of project location (required)
- GIS layer of project location (required, submit in a .zip file)
- Project schedule (required, either in the application on page 3 or as an attachment)
- Procurement policy (required, either in the application on page 3 or as an attachment)

Partnership Program Application

A) Applicant Information

Project Sponsor Name	Douglas County
Project Sponsor Type	Local Government
Additional Partners	Town of Parker City of Lone Tree Denver Regional Council of Governments
Subregional Service Council	Southeast
Contact Person	Ryan Arthur – Community Programs Coordinator
Email	rarthur@douglas.co.us
Phone Number	(303) 814-4326

B) Project Information

Project Title
Link On Demand – Zero Fare Microtransit Program
<i>Briefly describe the project location. Please include a map and GIS layer (as a .zip file) as an attachment with your submission. If you need assistance creating a GIS shapefile for your service area, please reach out to Cory Schmitt (cory.schmitt@rtd-denver.com) no later than April 30.</i>
Project location will occur in an area consisting of the neighborhoods of Grand View Estates, Meridian Village, Sierra Ridge, Stepping Stone, and Stonegate to the east of the City of Lone Tree, and the Town of Parker. Please see attachments 3 and 4 for the project map and GIS layer.
Project Type (select one)
On-demand transit service – demand-responsive service operating in a specific area

Project Description (a few paragraphs describing your project in more detail)
The purpose of this project is to expand Douglas County's microtransit pilot project in Highlands Ranch east through Stonegate into the Town of Parker to increase mobility and connect residents to key destinations, including connections to established regional transit services.
Douglas County completed the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study in 2025 which proposed implementing microtransit in northern Douglas County. The study used previous planning efforts and resident surveys, which identified transit as a need, to suggest pilot projects and develop a framework for the sustained expansion of local transportation options. Douglas County's Board of County Commissioners took action to expand the successful Link On Demand microtransit service in the City of Lone Tree into Highlands Ranch as a first step. The County replicated the existing model by continuing

Link's zero-fare policy, accessibility for mobility challenged riders, operation center, rider safety measures, and system reliability. Douglas County has prioritized rider experience, so that those who use and rely upon the service know that they will have a convenient, reliable, and safe ride wherever they are going. Expanding this service into the Town of Parker is the next step in providing additional transit services to northern Douglas County.

Northern Douglas County's road networks and neighborhood designs favor flexible transit options. Current trip patterns show diverse origins and destinations, benefiting from adaptable services like Link On Demand. RTD light rail stations remain top destinations for Link riders, proving effective in connecting commuters to the broader Denver metro. Expanding service into Parker and securing partnership funds will enable greater mobility across northern Douglas County.

Link On Demand's 2025 expansion into Highlands Ranch demonstrated that the community values transit options which adapt to their needs. Riders use Link for medical appointments, school, work, daily errands, and connections with pre-existing RTD infrastructure like the light rail stations. RTD light rail stations consistently rank as top destinations each month, reinforcing Link On Demand's success in first mile, last mile connectivity. People in Stonegate and the Town of Parker would be afforded these same opportunities with continued expansion of Link On Demand. Expansion of Link would maintain an integrated service area and allow Parker residents to travel throughout northern Douglas County including the RTD transit network.

Partnering with RTD will ensure the sustainable expansion of this successful microtransit service into Stonegate and the Town of Parker while achieving RTD's goal of being a trusted leader in mobility through investing in this project.

For funding requests for mobility services, please answer the following four questions:

1. What are the proposed days and hours of operation?

Days and hours of operation will continue to be Monday – Thursday: 7AM – 7PM, Friday: 7AM – 10PM, Saturday: 10AM-10PM.

2. Have you had any conversations with service providers? Note that the service provider will need to be selected competitively.

Douglas County has an existing agreement with Via Transportation, Inc. to deliver Transit as a Service in Highlands Ranch. Via was selected through a competitive process by the City of Lone Tree to operate Link On Demand. Based on Lone Tree's process and success, Douglas County designated Via as a Preferred Vendor to ensure seamless integration with existing service and rider base, as to not conflict or compete with Lone Tree's chosen service provider. Douglas County has experience conducting competitive procurements for transit projects. The County intends to conduct a thorough and

competitive procurement process prior to further expansion to ensure future vendor selection meets applicable federal and state criteria.

Douglas County will seek providers that can offer a competitive vehicle hour cost and commitments to that cost for a minimum of three years. The County reserves the right to reject all proposals, to waive formalities, informalities, or irregularities contained in said proposal and furthermore, to award a contract for items in whole or in part, if it is deemed to be in the best interests of the County. All federal and state policies that govern the procurement process will be met to ensure compliance.

3. Will you charge the customer for the service?

No, the service will be zero-fare.

4. What is the area of the proposed service area (in square miles)?

Approximately 55 square miles. This is split between the portion of Highlands Ranch that resides in the Southeast Subregional Service Council zone, 13.9 square miles, and the planned area for Parker, 41.1 square miles.

Please provide a project implementation timeline, either below or attached to your application, including launch date and important milestones. Assume a minimum of four months to complete agreements and procure a service provider (if applicable). RTD will announce awardees in August.

Douglas County is prepared to follow all procurement requirements. RTD Partnership Program funds will be utilized for the expansion of microtransit service into the Town of Parker, and Douglas County anticipates 12 to 16 weeks until launch of expanded services from execution of a contract with RTD.

- Service Agreement Amendment: 3 weeks
- Project planning, driver onboarding, and operator procurement: 7 weeks
- Testing and Finalization: 1 week
- Launch: Phase 1, Beginning of 2026 Q2. Phase 2, Q4
- 2026

RTD hopes to fund projects that are “shovel-ready.” Please describe other funding sources, amounts, your experience in managing these types of projects, and note potential risks to project implementation. If your project includes funding from outside sources, include a letter of support or documentation of the funding source.

Douglas County’s experience with the launch of the Highlands Ranch expansion of Link On Demand microtransit proves that this project is “shovel ready”. Vendor selection will include the requirement to provide turnkey transit as a service solution including application for riders, drivers, and dispatchers; full program staffing and management; vehicle procurement and maintenance; around-the-clock customer service and technical support; and expertise in service design, safety and compliance, marketing, community engagement, and grants.

Funding includes the County's Capital Improvement Project funds, a commitment of funding from the Town of Parker, Transportation Improvement Program funding through DRCOG, which include federal Carbon Reduction Program funding and CDOT Multimodal Transportation and Mitigation Options Fund, and CDOT's Clean Transit Energy SB230 Formula Grant funding.

Douglas County understands that all innovative projects come with risks. With Lone Tree's extensive experience, Douglas County is confident in their ability to effectively administer this project and manage through challenges as they arise.

Douglas County plans to continue using the following proven practices to reduce risks and provide efficient and effective collaboration:

- Standing meetings. Douglas County, Lone Tree, and our current vendor met consistently to discuss the project scope and proposal specifics, this process will be repeated with Parker staff to support expansion. During the project implementation period, all entities meet bi-weekly to establish a routine of set practices for ongoing project management, identify areas of improvement, and agree upon next steps for resolving issues and meeting milestones.
- Streamlined communications. Each organization has designated a single point of contact for owning deliverables and serving as the liaison between external partners and internal organization stakeholders. With these designated points of contact, partners will minimize the risk of delays due to unclear lines of communication or confusion.
- Existing collaboration. The expansion of Link On Demand into Highlands Ranch has strengthened the partnership between each organization. This history and familiarity will be valuable and relevant, providing a successful blueprint upon which Link On Demand's expansions into Parker will be based on.

The project team has developed a refined marketing plan that continues to build rider growth over time, reach service goals, and engage targeted markets. However, if ridership is low, the team has prepared a list of proposed solutions to support rider growth.

- Real-Time Adaptation. A key factor that influenced why our current vendor was chosen to operate the service was due to their operating system's ability to adapt to changing demand. The number of active vehicles adapts to variations in ridership demand so as to continue to hit cost of service and performance goals.
- Engaging Out of Zone Riders. The Rider App will capture information from riders who open the app to book a ride but are outside of the service zone as well as new user signups who live outside the zone. This data can be analyzed to understand the locations that riders want to travel to/from and the times of day that they are looking to book those trips. This will help to understand demand, demographics, and use patterns to improve service to serve interested riders more effectively.

- Decreased Funding. Douglas County acknowledges that available funding today does not guarantee the availability of funding in the future. If external funding sources are exhausted, the County will be able to maintain the service with its current funding for a few years. The hours of operation and the size of the service zones can be altered to reduce costs, by analyzing ridership data and making decisions to make cuts where ridership impact would be lessened.

Does your organization have a procurement policy and/or standards? If yes, please provide additional information, such as a link to the procurement policy, attach the policy to your submission, or describe your organization's procurement policy. RTD will provide procurement support for organizations that do not have a procurement policy and/or standards in place.

Yes, procurement policy and standards are attached. For the purposes of this application, Douglas County will continue to operate as the main point of contact with selected vendor for all administrative, contracting, and procurement purposes.

C) Project Data

Using DRCOG's Data Tool, please provide the following information about populations served. For fixed-route proposals, include populations within a ¼ mile buffer. For on-demand proposals, include populations within the service area boundaries.

Total population	144,956 (2023) [Parker]; 110,977 (2023) [HR]
Total households	53,103 (2023); 41,529 (2023)
People of color	35,988 (2023); 22,667 (2023)
People with low-income	11,742 (2023); 7,089 (2023)
People with limited English proficiency	3,152 (2023); 2,283 (2023)
People 60 and over	25,703 (2023); 22,991 (2023)
Youth Under 18	35,282 (2023); 27,087 (2023)
People with a disability	11,443 (2023); 8,056 (2023)
Households without a vehicle	1,146 (2023); 644 (2023)
Housing cost-burdened households	15,186 (2023); 9,742 (2023)

D) Project Budget

Calendar Year	RTD Funding	Local Funding	Total
2026	\$3,120,000	\$780,000	\$3,900,000
2027	\$3,120,000	\$780,000	\$3,900,000
2028	\$3,120,000	\$780,000	\$3,900,000
Total Project Cost			\$11,700,000

Describe sources of funding, including any contingencies (necessary budget approvals, etc). Local match must be a cash match; in-kind is not eligible as match. If approved,

projects will be reimbursed up to 80% of project costs by RTD. Reimbursements will be made either monthly or quarterly.

Douglas County allocated Capital Improvement Project funding through 2030 as a local source of funding for Link On Demand. The Town of Parker has committed to providing its own public funding in 2026 as a portion of the local match. Additionally, approved DRCOG Transportation Improvement Project funds will provide additional resources for operating Link On Demand for 2026 and 2027.

Operating cost assumptions (e.g. cost per hour)

The current contracted cost per hour to run the Link On Demand microtransit service in Highlands Ranch is \$70.19. The targeted trips per vehicle hour is 3, resulting in an expected cost of \$23.40 per trip. The anticipated annual budget reflects approximately 53,000 vehicle hours per year minus start-up costs, consistent with the current cost-per-hour operating model.

Is your project/funding request scalable? If so, please indicate the least amount of funding you could accept, and how the project scope would be reduced. If not, please explain justification for non-scalable projects.

This vision for this project has three zones that factor into scalability, the western zone in Highlands Ranch, the eastern zone in Parker, and the southern zone in Castle Rock. Each of these zones overlap with the existing service in Lone Tree creating a seamless service and rider experience through Douglas County. Within each of these zones, boundary maps can be adjusted to match service with rider demand, population changes and available funding.

The decision could be made to cover the Highlands Ranch Link On Demand service zone contained in the Southeast Subregional Service Council boundary, without any expansion. This option would cover the costs of operating 8 of the 18 vehicles of the current fleet within the western zone in the Southeast SSC boundary. This area remains in contact with the City of Lone Tree service zone for Link, as well as the RTD light rail stations along the I-25 corridor.

The eastern service zone covers the area Douglas County refers to as the “Green Mile”. The Green Mile consists of the neighborhoods of Grand View Estates, Meridian Village, Sierra Ridge, Stepping Stone, and Stonegate. This option would create a service zone to the immediate east of the City of Lone Tree and Meridian, comprised of three vehicles in operation. The Green Mile zone would increase connectivity with residents to the RTD light rail stations along the I-25 corridor.

Another portion of the eastern service zone is focused on the Town of Parker. This option would create a service zone surrounding the heart of the Town of Parker. Parker Link would be comprised of 6 vehicles that would be able to fulfill the first and last-mile need for many residents looking to connect to the RTD bus and Park-n-Ride infrastructure and the greater RTD transit network.

Are you proposing to purchase vehicles and how will you procure?

No.
Proposed vehicle cost assumptions, if applicable:
Not applicable.
Where will vehicles be serviced and maintained? Note that RTD is unable to service and maintain other organization's vehicles.
The current vendor is responsible for the servicing and maintenance of all vehicles. Their selected leasing partner ensures that the fleet is in good repair and that riders enjoy consistently clean and comfortable rides. Through their extensive footprints and large vehicle fleets, the vendor provides Douglas County with significant operating flexibility to adjust the service as necessary and ensures that the vehicles are always available.
Please attach a line-item project budget. Note that funding for the construction of infrastructure is ineligible.
Please see Attachment 2 for a line-item budget of the proposed service over the next three years.

E) Demonstration of Benefits and Needs

Why is this project needed?
Douglas County, a suburban county in the southern Denver Metropolitan Area, had an estimated 2023 population of approximately 383,910, with 26% (101,437) living in Highlands Ranch and 18% (68,485) living in the Town of Parker. Highlands Ranch has three RTD bus routes and Link On Demand, while Parker has two RTD bus routes and is serviced by a FlexRide area.
While RTD continues to provide strong inter-regional connectivity through the light rail, residents in Highlands Ranch and Parker who lack access to first and last-mile transit experience very limited subregional connectivity, limiting opportunities for travel.
Douglas County seeks to continue this service as an extension of existing RTD services to meet the critical needs in the community.
The County's aging population underscores the need for transit: 27% residents are over the age of 55 and are projected to reach 39% by 2050. By 2032, those aged 65 to 74 years old are expected to grow by 31%, and those aged 75 to 84 years old are expected to grow by 69%. A growing older adult population requires additional transit options to make connections that fixed transit infrastructure cannot cover. Microtransit services demonstrate the ability to fill that gap. An October 2025 survey of ridership for Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch identified that a quarter of riders were 65 years and older, highlighting the importance of transit accessibility for older adults, especially those less familiar with technology. The expansion of Link On Demand into Parker is an anticipatory project to increase transit accessibility for a growing transit-dependent demographic.
Microtransit also serves younger riders for school-related trips not serviced by traditional school buses, low-income households, individuals without vehicles, people with

mobility challenges, commuters, service workers, and remote workers. In the October 2025 survey, riders responded that they used Link On Demand for medical appointments (52%), to get to work (47%), to shop or run errands (69%), and to connect to other public transit (43%). In all, 75% of riders are visiting stores, restaurants, and other businesses more frequently.

Additionally, 88% of users mentioned that Link On Demand offers safe, convenient, and affordable transportation, while 95% said that access to Link made their community a more desirable place to live. These statistics not only highlight the program's success but also underscore its potential to significantly enhance the quality of life and economic vitality across the region, making it a driver for community value creation that impacts people from all walks of life.

Douglas County's Transportation Master Plan 2050 has identified that 80% of Douglas County residents travel alone to work, 2% use public transit (17% when focused on northern Douglas County), and 10% use another mode such as bicycling, walking, or working from home. These data points indicate that residents do not rely on current public transportation infrastructure and therefore must turn to single occupancy vehicles. Origin-Destination analysis reveals that 75.3% of all trips originating in Douglas County end somewhere else in Douglas County. Link On Demand is explicitly designed to provide an attractive, shared-ride alternative to the single occupancy vehicle for the residents of the County.

Who benefits from the project?

People living and working within the Link On Demand service area, or passing through Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree, Meridian, Stonegate or Parker, will benefit from the transportation opportunities. Residents and employees located within Highlands Ranch now have access to free transit services that help connect to regional rail, statewide Bustang services, substantial retail and commercial properties and businesses, as well as medical providers. Link On Demand will bring that same level of access to residents of Parker.

In addition to Link On Demand being used for first and last-mile connections into existing RTD transit stations, residents will be able to utilize the service to travel within the entire service boundary, to include neighboring Lone Tree and Meridian. Given these observations, project partners believe that Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree, Meridian, and Parker businesses will continue to benefit from increased foot traffic and experience economic growth. In Link On Demand's October 2025 ridership survey, 75% of respondents stated they were visiting stores, restaurants, and other businesses more frequently because of the service. Riders were using Link On Demand to shop (69%), make their medical appointments (52%), get to work (47%), and connect to other public transit (43%).

Does the project serve equity populations? Please describe.

Equity considerations have been integrated into the planning and development of this proposal and will continue to be incorporated throughout the implementation phase. The project will serve equity populations throughout the service area that falls under the Southeast Subregional Service Council and the Parker service zone expansion. According to DRCOG's Data Tool, this includes a combined 18,831 low-income households, 58,655 individuals of color, 5,435 people with limited English proficiency, 48,694 older adults, 1,790 households without a vehicle, 19,499 individuals with a disability, and 24,928 cost-burdened households. Many of these individuals face economic, housing, and transportation burdens. This microtransit project helps residents within the expanded service area access fixed route transportation networks, enabling greater access to affordable, safe, multimodal options while providing greater equity and quality of life. Individuals living in affordable housing developments in Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree, Meridian, and Parker will continue to benefit from improved transportation.

Currently, one-third of the fleet of vehicles used to operate Link are equipped to serve those who need wheelchair access. Drivers are certified to utilize this equipment, and all drivers undergo background checks consistent with State Unit on Aging requirements. Additionally, riders who are disabled or require additional accessibility are afforded curb to curb service to improve their access to the Link.

Community engagement efforts will continue to prioritize transit-dependent and equity populations. All project partners have extensive experience conducting outreach and soliciting feedback from community members. Post-contracting activities have included a customer survey and tabling at various community events to incorporate community voices and the human aspects of service into Link On Demand.

Does the project fill a gap in existing transit service? Please describe.

Link On Demand fills two critical gaps in existing transit services:

1. Increasing access to first and last-mile connections to RTD hubs. Multimodal regional hubs throughout the Denver region are important, but they may become unsustainable if individuals cannot access them easily. Since the implementation of Link On Demand in Highlands Ranch, RTD light rail stations continue to remain as riders' top destinations since launch. This is verification that riders use Link On Demand to access the broader transportation network provided by RTD.
2. Enhancing sub-regional connectivity. An integral objective of this project is to support access to new transit opportunities for people who live and work in northern Douglas County. Since launch and expansion of Link On Demand, Douglas County residents can access critical job centers and commercial districts throughout the entire service zone. Expanding Link On Demand into Stonegate and the Town of Parker would support greater access for Parker residents to travel along northern Douglas County to the already existing Link

microtransit zones and make connections to the greater Denver transit network. The ridership survey for Link On Demand indicated that this is already happening in the current zones, with 72% of respondents agreeing that they travel more because of Link and 64% agreeing that Link makes it easier to use buses, trains, and other public transit.

Efforts to improve interregional and subregional connectivity are also informed by community input. Douglas County's Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study concluded in July 2025, and the implementation of transit connectivity for northern Douglas County has been identified as a top priority.

How does the project align with RTD's Strategic Plan? Specifically, how will it impact two if RTD's strategic priorities - Community Value and Customer Excellence?

The project is aligned with RTD's Strategic Plan and contributes towards advancing the goals identified in that plan. While the project is aligned with all four strategic priorities, the service will reinforce Community Value and Customer Excellence specifically.

- A. **Community Value:** Link On Demand has provided a valuable transportation option for the community and will continue to utilize multiple tactics, as outlined by RTD, to ensure success. For example, the project utilizes cross-departmental partnerships between Highlands Ranch, Parker, Douglas County, Lone Tree, and Meridian to promote equitable and accessible transportation throughout the region. The service zone encompasses the entire boundaries of Highlands Ranch and provides cross zone trips into Lone Tree and Meridian to facilitate equal access for everyone, as opposed to a selected subset of the community.
- B. **Customer Excellence:** The project prioritizes the rider to always deliver a high-quality service for all individuals. For instance, the rider app has been designed with input from disability advocacy groups and been thoroughly tested in focus groups of riders with disabilities. Above all else, the service has been designed to be convenient, equitable, and affordable for all riders. To build the service zone, project partners considered popular nearby destinations, job centers, natural boundaries, and existing transit services to ensure that the service will be utilized and efficient.

How has the project (or similar project) performed in the past? Has it been successful and/or met performance metrics? If new, n/a.

Link On Demand has continued to exceed expectations and performance metrics, particularly over the first six months of the launch of expanded service into Highlands Ranch. In the first full month of service, rides surpassed 4,900. The number of rides have increased month over month, with December 2025 finishing with 10,470 rides. Alongside this increase in demand, rider satisfaction has remained high. Link On Demand's average rider rating is 4.9 out of 5. Additionally, service utilization has continued to improve over

time, starting at 2.6 passengers per hour in its first full month of service and improving to 3.4 by December 2025.

Please use the space below to provide any additional information about your project.

Douglas County residents desire for transit within the region. With a public survey conducted with Douglas County residents that fed the 2050 Master Transportation Plan, 37% of respondents agreed that providing a variety of transportation choices is of the highest importance and results from the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study resulted with respondents stating they would use transit at least monthly if it served their destinations. Link On Demand continues to highlight how it addresses local mobility challenges. Future expansion for Link On Demand follows the phased approach outlined in the Integrated Transit and Multimodal Study, with service zones that cover population centers along the southern east-west C-470 corridor, Highlands Ranch to Parker, and north-south along I-25, Lone Tree to Castle Rock. Douglas County is fortunate to have a successful service model established in Lone Tree and a proven vendor to provide local transit. We are grateful for the opportunity to extend our partnership with RTD and address the transit needs of northern Douglas County. This program continues to be a valuable mobility asset and recognized as a successful blueprint that can be replicated throughout the Denver Region.

Application Submission Checklist

Please submit all application material to RTD via the application portal by May 14, 2025, at 5pm MT. When submitting, please begin all file names with your organization name (e.g. RTD_application.pdf).

- Application form (required)
- Line-item project budget (required)
- Map of project location (required)
- GIS layer of project location (required, submit in a .zip file)
- Project schedule (required, either in the application on page 3 or as an attachment)
- Procurement policy (required, either in the application on page 3 or as an attachment)