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RIO METRO
REGIONAL TRANSIT DISTRICT

LONG-TERM STRATEGIC VISION



Rio Metro would like to thank everyone who was involved in developing this Long-Term Strategic Vision Plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why a Vision Plan Now?

How did Rio Metro Develop the Vision?

The Vision



This Long-Term Strategic Vision Plan (hereafter “the Vision Plan” or “the plan”) presents a bold vision for Rio Metro Regional Transit District (RMRTD, hereafter “Rio Metro”) for the next decade and beyond. The plan will help Rio Metro prioritize investments, allocate resources, and guide implementation initiatives in a manner consistent with the organization’s goals. This Executive Summary provides an overview of the visioning process and the key recommendations from the Vision Plan.

Why a Vision Plan Now?

“We need a vision of where Rio Metro RTD is heading and consensus on how to move things forward in this region.”

– Rio Metro Board Member

A History of Success

In the 10 years since Rio Metro was formed, the agency has accomplished much to be proud of, including: successfully launching and operating the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter rail; increasing bus transit service and funding levels for transit throughout its three-county service area; creating an integrated transit network extending over one hundred miles through New Mexico’s most populated areas; and generally providing more mobility choices to better meet the region’s transportation needs.

As a result of the efforts of Rio Metro and its implementation partners (including local communities and transit service providers such as ABQ RIDE), transit ridership has increased dramatically in Rio Metro service area over the past decade.

Responding to Emerging Opportunities & Challenges

After accomplishing most of its founding goals during its first decade, Rio Metro’s leadership desired to create a strategic vision that could guide and focus its initiatives in the next decade and beyond.

There is a growing recognition among regional leaders that transit investments are critically important for preserving and strengthening the region’s quality of life.

Key opportunities at this time include: planning for a comprehensive regional transit services (including current planning for multiple bus rapid transit corridors), better integration of transit and land use (following the preferred growth scenario in the recently-adopted Futures 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan), and using transit to leverage economic development efforts.

Another key opportunity is more effectively organizing the transit activities of the region’s two primary providers—Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE. It should be noted that while the focus of the visioning process was Rio Metro planning and operations, ABQ RIDE was involved in the development of the Vision Plan, including the Vision Framework and Implementation Approach. As a result, the Vision Plan can inform ABQ RIDE planning and operations; and implementation of the Vision Plan will continue to engage ABQ RIDE on achieving shared goals.

In addition, the region that Rio Metro serves faces many challenges, including: growing traffic congestion at constrained bottlenecks, changing demographics and market preferences, and the need for all organizations to support sustainable economic development in the region. By building on its past successes, while also recognizing constraints in existing resources, Rio Metro's leadership believes that the agency can and should play an expanded role in addressing these regional challenges.

How did Rio Metro Develop the Vision?



As part of the visioning process, Rio Metro convened diverse stakeholders – including transit riders – to provide guidance to Rio Metro's leadership and technical staff about stakeholder priorities for investing limited resources.

Goals for the Visioning Process

In order to address these emerging opportunities and challenges, Rio Metro undertook a strategic visioning process. A key goal for the strategic visioning process was to convene Rio Metro's leadership, customers, and partners to develop an agreed-upon Vision Framework that could provide ongoing guidance to staff on stakeholder priorities for how to invest limited agency resources. Specifically, Rio Metro's leadership established the following five goals for the project:

1. Develop a **bold vision** for regional transit.
2. Determine **Rio Metro's role** in achieving that vision and the role of key implementation partners like ABQ RIDE.
3. Build **broad-based support** for the vision.
4. Identify **new tools** to fund and implement the vision.
5. Begin **phased implementation** of the vision.

These project goals informed the development of this Vision Plan at every step of the project.

Inputs to the Visioning Process

The inputs to the visioning consisted of extensive technical assessments and ongoing stakeholder engagement as summarized below.

Technical Assessments

Technical assessments were conducted to establish a firm foundation for the visioning process. These included: a) review of Rio Metro's peer transit agencies, b) an analysis of Rio Metro's operations and organization, and c) an overview of the economic development potential of transit in Rio Metro service area.

Ongoing Stakeholder Engagement

Ongoing stakeholder input was an integral part of the visioning process. Key stakeholders engaged included Rio Metro's Board, staff, customers, implementation partners like ABQ RIDE, and other community and business stakeholders. During the year-long visioning process, Rio Metro gathered input from nearly 250 stakeholders at approximately two dozen stakeholder meetings, staff workshops, widely-promoted community meetings that were open to the public, and publicly-noticed Board meetings. Stakeholder engagement opportunities included:

- **Rio Metro Board:** All Board members were given the opportunity to be interviewed individually at the beginning of the project. Several presentations were given to the Board to understand Board priorities. A Board Visioning Workshop was held to develop a Vision Framework (described below), and the Board was given regular updates and opportunity for input at monthly Board meetings.
- **Rio Metro Staff:** Rio Metro planning, operations, and administrative staff were engaged throughout the visioning process, including kick-off meetings, best practice presentations, and at technical work sessions to vet and refine the implementation approach.
- **Rio Metro Customers and Community and Business Stakeholders:** Nearly a dozen stakeholder outreach meetings as well as widely-promoted community meetings that were open to the public were held across the Rio Metro service area. These were attended by stakeholders representing numerous local communities and diverse perspectives in Rio Metro's service area.
- **ABQ RIDE:** ABQ RIDE management and staff were involved at critical steps of the visioning process. Engagement with ABQ RIDE included: kick-off meetings with management and senior staff, a half-day workshop with management and staff to develop the Vision Framework, and a half-day "plan review" meeting (with a focus on defining early collaboration opportunities between Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE and laying the groundwork for enhanced cooperation and partnerships during implementation of the Vision Plan).

The Vision

New Mission and Vision Statements

To better reflect the clear direction set out in the Vision Framework, Rio Metro has also revised its existing Mission Statement and developed a new Vision Statement. The revised Mission Statement and Vision Statement are summarized below, and both are meant to be a succinct and memorable distillation of the overall Vision Framework:

***Our Mission:** Rio Metro collaborates to provide safe, accessible, efficient, and innovative transportation services for the benefit of our diverse local communities and the regional economy.*

***Our Vision:** Rio Metro is a leader moving our region forward, connecting our diverse residents and communities, and supporting sustainable prosperity.*

Vision Framework

Taking account of the key findings from the technical assessments and stakeholder engagement meetings, the Board approved a Vision Framework for the agency. The Vision Framework consists of six Core Themes supported by three Key Strategies to define the desired outcomes for that theme, as presented below:



Core Theme 1: Exceptional Customer Experience - *Our customers come first in all we do.*

- **Key Strategy 1.1:** Make transit trips as convenient and time-competitive as possible with auto trips.
- **Key Strategy 1.2:** Focus on safety, security, attractiveness, cleanliness, comfort, and tailored amenities both on vehicles and at stops/stations.
- **Key Strategy 1.3:** Improve schedules, service information, and transit awareness through coordination with other transit providers to make using transit as easy as possible.



Core Theme 2: Transformative Regional Services - *We provide a range of services to meet our region's diverse needs.*

- **Key Strategy 2.1:** Expand “regional priority network” to connect key centers and corridors, including added Rail Runner service.
- **Key Strategy 2.2:** Expand local circulators to connect the regional network with residential areas and smaller/rural communities.
- **Key Strategy 2.3:** Support regional transportation demand management (TDM) programs, bicycle/pedestrian, and first/last mile programs to improve access to fixed-route transit.



Core Theme 3: Strong Transit-Centered Communities - *Our services help shape our communities for the better.*

- **Key Strategy 3.1:** Leverage the existing Memorandum of Agreement relationship with MRCOG to better integrate regional transit planning with local land use planning / design.
- **Key Strategy 3.2:** Increase support for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in areas well-served by transit.
- **Key Strategy 3.3:** Promote better pedestrian and bicycle connections to the regional transit system to improve public health outcomes, decrease social / economic isolation, and reduce household transportation costs.



Core Theme 4: Sound Financial Stewardship - *We are good stewards of the public resources entrusted to us.*

- **Key Strategy 4.1:** Pursue efficiency gains across all modes (rail, bus, and demand-response service).
- **Key Strategy 4.2:** Seek new and expanded revenue sources (including local & regional, state & federal, and public-private partnerships) to diversify the funding base and provide a stable funding source for Vision Plan implementation.
- **Key Strategy 4.3:** Pursue most the cost-effective agency structure, potentially including independence from MRCOG, acquisition of capital assets from NMDOT, and enhanced coordination/consolidation with ABQ RIDE.



Core Theme 5: Innovative Programs & Partnerships - *We think outside the box and seek collaboration always.*

- **Key Strategy 5.1:** Integrate transit investments with the regional economic development strategy.
- **Key Strategy 5.2:** Pursue public-public partnerships (including school districts and UNM/CNM) to offer free/discounted transit passes, joint marketing, and education.
- **Key Strategy 5.3:** Pursue public-private partnerships (including major employers) to fund targeted service to employment centers, transit benefits to employees, and joint marketing.



Core Theme 6: Industry-Leading Knowledge & Practice - *Our people take pride in leading the region forward.*

- **Key Strategy 6.1:** Conduct orientation and on-going professional development for staff and Board, including in-person visits with peer agencies.
- **Key Strategy 6.2:** Broaden the stakeholder perspectives provided to Rio Metro leadership and create opportunities for ongoing engagement and leadership development.
- **Key Strategy 6.3:** Become a resource for local jurisdictions to support best practice pilot programs, staff training, and implementation of Vision Plan priorities.

Combined, the Core Themes and Key Strategies in the Vision Framework provide clear direction to Rio Metro Board, staff, customers, and partners on Rio Metro's priority goals and desired outcomes.

Implementation Tactics

Based on the Vision Framework developed and vetted by the Rio Metro Board and key stakeholders, Rio Metro technical staff developed a list of potential Implementation Tactics to achieve the Vision Framework. In total, there are 67 potential Implementation Tactics that might be pursued over the next 20 years (although progress should be measured periodically and the Vision Plan updated every 5 years or so). Twenty-six of those are Priority Implementation Tactics that could be pursued as immediate next steps in the next 5 years. Appendices A and B shows all the Implementation Tactics organized by which of the Core Themes and Key Strategies they support: Appendix A shows Priority Implementation Tactics as described below and Appendix B shows Future Phase Implementation Tactics.

Priority Implementation Tactics

To help provide focus to near-term implementation efforts in the first five years after the Vision Plan is adopted, Rio Metro technical staff identified 26 Priority Implementation Tactics that could be pursued as immediate next steps in the next 5 years. Priority Implementation Tactics are those that: a) can be accomplished in the near-term within existing resources; b) must be accomplished first in order to provide a foundation necessary to achieve other Implementation Tactics in the Vision Plan, and/or; c) must begin now in order to build the momentum needed to address more complex challenges facing the region and achieve the longer-term vision. The following list is illustrative of the Priority Implementation Tactics Rio Metro staff are directed to pursue, in collaboration with public-sector and private-sector partners, in order to achieve the Vision Framework in a timely and cost-effective manner:



- **Tactic Group: Improve perceived safety, security, and cleanliness of the regional transit system.** Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:
 - **Tactic:** Look for cost-share partners to increase funding for security, cleaning, and maintenance of transit vehicles, bus stops, and train stations.
 - **Tactic:** Create a program for passenger reporting of safety and maintenance issues with rapid response by Rio Metro.
 - **Tactic:** Expand security / ambassador presence, including coordination with other law enforcement agencies and potential volunteer public safety / ambassador program.



▪ **Tactic Group: Develop a Regional Transit Network and Service Plan.** Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Identify and pursue incremental improvements to existing rail and bus service that respond to service needs and have potential funding sources.
- **Tactic:** Develop a tiered service concept and map that illustrates the interconnected regional and local network.
- **Tactic:** Define Rio Metro's role in supporting operations of the planned regional Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network.
- **Tactic:** Conduct an assessment of new mobility technologies/services that may disrupt the traditional transit agency business model (e.g. Uber, self-driving cars, etc.).
- **Tactic:** Identify implementation costs and funding sources.



▪ **Tactic Group: Use regional transit to promote economic development.**

Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Advocate for the value of regional transit to key implementation partners including local jurisdictions, business community, etc.
- **Tactic:** Communicate, collaborate, and partner with local and regional economic development agencies/organizations so that future economic development investments are focused within 1/2 mile high-capacity transit nodes and corridors.
- **Tactic:** Partner with MPO/RPO to catalyze more TOD in the region, including: education/capacity building, partnerships with local communities and institutions like UNM, grant programs, updating the existing assessment of TOD potential of parcels that are currently (or will soon be) well-served by high-capacity transit.
- **Tactic:** Form partnerships with local jurisdictions and the private sector to get potential redevelopment sites and districts "TOD-ready" with transit-supportive infrastructure (sidewalks, traffic calming, etc.).



▪ **Tactic Group: Become an industry-leading transit agency.** Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Formalize orientation and professional development programs for staff and Board.
- **Tactic:** Establish in-house professional development and training programs with staff participation required per individual professional development plans.
- **Tactic:** Support efforts to form a regional transit advocacy non-profit organization.



- **Tactic Group: Evaluate and implement cost-effectiveness measures.** Rio Metro staff shall pursue as Priority Implementation Tactics such as:
 - **Tactic:** Conduct a top-to-bottom review of Rio Metro’s entire operations to identify opportunities for efficiency gains including administrative costs, services/operations costs, and overhead costs (GRT payments, etc.).
 - **Tactic:** Enhance the identity of Rio Metro as an operating agency which functions in collaboration with MRCOG, while establishing a timeline for Rio Metro to transition to independence from MRCOG.
 - **Tactic:** Conduct a financial and organizational study of pros and cons of acquisition of capital assets from NMDOT.
 - **Tactic:** Conduct a consolidation feasibility study to be jointly funded with ABQ RIDE, while simultaneously identifying and pursuing near-term opportunities for enhanced collaboration (e.g. the development of a single schedule/map, joint marketing efforts, a single fare payment method, and/or a unified brand in the form of one shared name and logo).



- **Tactic Group: Evaluate and pursue new and expanded funding resources.** Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:
 - **Tactic:** Study the feasibility of waiving of existing annual Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) payments on purchased transportation contracts (e.g. Rail Runner).
 - **Tactic:** Conduct a fare study analyzing the costs/benefits of fare structure, with particular emphasis on a) whether the costs of charging passenger fares outweigh the value of farebox revenue received and b) if Rio Metro should transition to a “fare-free” transit model similar to North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD).
 - **Tactic:** Explore private-sector revenue sources such as sponsorship, advertising, and naming rights.
 - **Tactic:** Investigate the feasibility and timing of a GRT increase and other revenue sources dedicated to Rio Metro operations.
 - **Tactic:** Develop financial model with Department of Tax and Revenue to establish baseline return on investment (ROI) for future transit expenditures per state law regarding tax increment districts (TIDs) and tax increment finance (TIF).
 - **Tactic:** Develop a FTA grant program of regional capital projects.



- **Tactic: Continue ongoing stakeholder engagement.** Rio Metro shall also pursue ongoing stakeholder engagement as needed to support all of the Priority Implementation Tactics.

It should be emphasized this is an *illustrative* list of Priority Implementation Tactics that could (and likely will) change somewhat as needed to respond to new opportunities and adapt to new information.

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1. WHO IS RIO METRO?

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- 1.1 Enabling Legislation
 - 1.2 Governance Structure
 - 1.3 Mission Statement
 - 1.4 Existing Operations
 - 1.5 Major Milestones and Accomplishments to Date
 - 1.6 Current Initiatives and Ongoing Constraints
 - 1.7 Future Opportunities and Challenges
-



1.1 ENABLING LEGISLATION

“We’ve accomplished a lot in our short history. But we’ve reached a point where we are operating as the sum of our inherited parts. I would like for us to work better with our partners to become [...] the new face of transit in the region.”

– Rio Metro Staffer

Rio Metro is the primary regional transit service provider for the central New Mexico region. The New Mexico state legislature passed the New Mexico Regional Transit District Act in 2003. This “enabling legislation” authorized the creation of regional transit districts in each region of the state in order to:

- A. *Serve the public by providing for the creation of regional networks of safe and efficient public transit services;*
- B. *Allow multijurisdictional public transit systems to reduce the congestion of single-occupant motor vehicle traffic by providing transportation options for residents;*
- C. *Decrease automobile accidents by reducing traffic congestion on freeways and streets;*
- D. *Reduce noise and air pollution produced by motor vehicles;*
- E. *Prolong and extend the life of New Mexico’s existing roadways by easing the traffic burden;*
- F. *Provide residents with a choice of transportation alternatives so that seniors, youth, low income and mobility-impaired residents and others unable to drive or afford motor vehicles continue to have full access to the goods, services, jobs and activities of the community;*
- G. *Improve the New Mexico economy by increasing workforce and citizen access to education and higher paying jobs; and*
- H. *Prolong and extend petroleum resources.*

In 2005 Rio Metro was created, at that point named Mid-Region Transit District. It should be noted that Rio Metro’s Long-Term Strategic Vision Plan was developed to help the agency continue to fulfill the legislature’s direction as summarized in the above “purpose statements” from the 2003 *Regional Transit District Act*.

1.2 GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Rio Metro's governance structure is defined in its founding charter. The 19-member governing Board is composed of at least one Director from each governmental unit that is a member of Rio Metro. The number of directors for each of these governmental units is determined by population, except that a governmental unit cannot have a majority of membership on the Board. Each governmental unit appoints, as determined by each member government, an elected official(s) as a Director and may also appoint a designee(s) for this elected official(s) as an Alternate Director. The Board is reconstituted in the year following each official federal census. The term of service for each Director and Alternate Director, if any, is for a minimum of one year.

1.3 MISSION STATEMENT

Rio Metro's existing Mission Statement is shown below:

The Mission of Rio Metro Regional Transit District is to manage a regional, integrated, multimodal public transportation network that is fiscally responsible, innovative, and efficient. Rio Metro strives to deliver service that is responsive to public need, affordable, convenient, and reliable, while providing a safe and secure atmosphere for passengers and employees. Through our mission, Rio Metro Regional Transit District Board of Directors and employees uphold a commitment to establish, maintain, and continually improve public transportation for the benefit of our passengers, communities, and the environment.

Doing our part to provide exceptional service means:

- Keeping you informed on the latest news.
- Holding public meetings.
- Publishing budgets, research and reports.
- Providing transportation that is accessible to all of our customers.
- Establishing community partnerships.

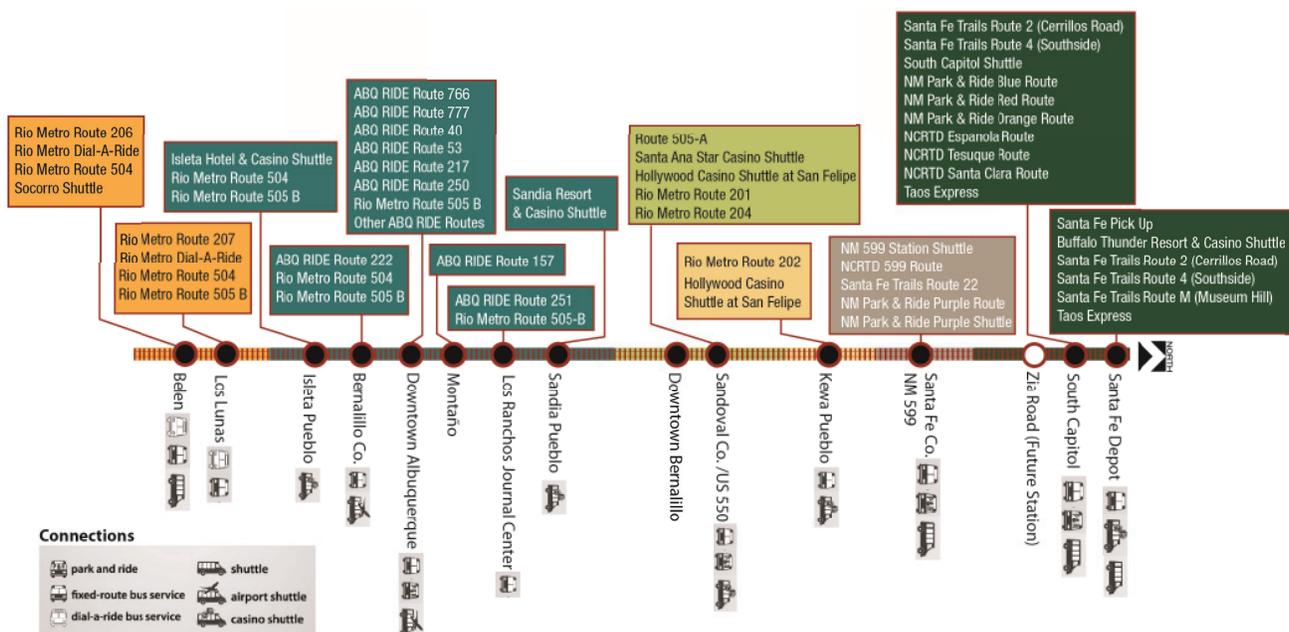
Based on the input received as part of the visioning process, the Mission Statement has been updated and a Vision Statement has been developed; both are described in Section 3.3.

1.4 EXISTING OPERATIONS

Rio Metro offers transit service in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Belen, Bernalillo, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, Bosque Farms, Los Lunas, and Corrales in Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Valencia counties, providing commuter bus and regional commuter rail service. The rail service (*Rail Runner*) is provided for the longer, regional travel trips between outlying communities and the urban destinations of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Rio Metro provides bus and Dial-a-Ride services in Sandoval, Valencia, and Bernalillo counties, as well.

Rio Metro also financially contributes to ABQ RIDE for urban transit service but leaves operational decisions largely to the discretion of ABQ RIDE. Rio Metro also provides select service in the region's rural communities.

It should be noted that Rail Runner assets are largely owned by NMDOT, not Rio Metro. These assets include track, rolling stock, stations, and parking facilities. A Memorandum of Agreement between the two agencies defines the rights and obligations of each for the use of these assets by Rio Metro.



Rio Metro and its partners provide a diverse portfolio of transit services, including Rail Runner commuter rail service and connecting bus services that serve both the general public and specific markets.

1.5 MAJOR MILESTONES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE



In its short history, Rio Metro and its partners have accomplished much to be proud of, including the creation of a fully accessible transportation system that connects people of all ages and backgrounds to employment and educational opportunities throughout the region.

Even as a young agency, Rio Metro has accomplished much the region can be proud of, including:

- Providing 9.5 million passenger trips and 350 million miles of passenger travel, to date.
- Providing accessible transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities residing in the Albuquerque Metro area, Rio Rancho, Los Lunas and Belen. All Rio Metro trains, stations and buses meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements.
- Consolidating several small transit agencies in Valencia and Sandoval counties.
- Providing whole or partial funding to some ABQ RIDE routes of regional significance, enabling ABQ RIDE to extend its services to the Rail Runner and Rio Rancho.
- Providing bus and Dial-a-Ride services in Sandoval, Valencia and Bernalillo counties.
- Creating partnerships with other transit providers resulting in more than 60 connections to other transit services.
- Improvements to the Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program, including the use of transit passes, improved overall program access, and the development of key partnerships, increasing service response and participation.
- Effective marketing and transportation demand management (TDM) efforts to promote the Rail Runner and Rio Metro “brands” and services, such as the popular Rail Runner electronic newsletter, the “Dump the Pump” campaign, the award winning Smart Business Partnership Program, and new Rio Metro branding, all creating a recognizable image for the agency and a unified identity for all Rio Metro services.
- Encouraging the use of alternative modes of transportation in order to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality in central New Mexico.
- The Smart Business Partnership Program which provides employers from Belen to Santa Fe with resources, tools and incentives to reduce the use of single-occupant vehicles and create awareness of public transportation among employees.

These accomplishments instill confidence, as the agency has done so much with so little, and is worthy of taking regional transit services to the next level.

1.6 CURRENT INITIATIVES AND ONGOING CONSTRAINTS

Current Initiatives

In addition to Rio Metro's ongoing transit operations and supporting functions (marketing, financial, etc.), Rio Metro is also currently involved in a number of regional transit initiatives, including:

- Regional BRT planning;
- Service improvement planning throughout the three-county service area; and
- Partnering with local communities on station area plans.

Ongoing Constraints

Financial

Like many local governments, Rio Metro is faced with budgetary constraints which cause them to be prudent in how their limited financial resources are spent. Consequently, the budget is especially tight for operation and maintenance of the Rail Runner. In addition, Rio Metro faces other budgetary challenges, including:

- A lack of capital to match federal grants, e.g. the UNM / CNM project – Rio Metro may have a difficult time convincing the federal government they have enough matching funds, which could jeopardize future federal grant funding.
- Unfunded federal mandates that are on the horizon, such as Positive Train Control. While the deadline for implementation has been extended until December 31, 2018, this could require a capital outlay of an estimated \$30 – 50 million, and an additional \$250,000 to \$500,000 annually to operate and maintain the system.

Asset Ownership

Rio Metro has no substantial capital assets to speak of. NMDOT owns all of the existing right-of-way, as well as the capital equipment (trains). Rio Metro currently owns only about 1½ acres of land. This could limit Rio Metro's ability to pursue debt financing (with no collateral, other than GRT revenue stream, to pledge as security). NMDOT has indicated they want to sell the capital equipment and assets. Rio Metro could improve their financial position if they accept the capital assets as a gift from the state.

Recent Changes in Customer Satisfaction Levels

Due to financial constraints, Rio Metro faces operational constraints which limit the amount of service that can be provided. The gap between the amount of service that can be provided and increasing customer demand for more service emerges in a number of different venues. For example, every two years, Rio Metro conducts extensive surveys of both their riding and non-riding customers. These surveys cover such topics as demographics, rider information, schedules, ticketing, customer service, perks, and partnerships. Historically, Rio Metro has received high marks in most of these categories. But recent dips in the customer satisfaction numbers (in accordance with the most recent survey, conducted in spring, 2015), may be largely due to budget constraints. The most common complaint was about schedule. Customers generally indicated they would like to see more frequency, reduced dwell times, more evening trains, more weekend trains, and fewer maintenance delays. As noted above, existing budget constraints can create challenges when attempting to accommodate customer demand. The positive “take away” from these surveys is that customers like the transit services provided by Rio Metro and would like to see more of them.

1.7 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Futures 2040 Plan

Demand for mass transit is growing at the national level, and the Albuquerque region is a part of that trend. Consequently, the staff of MRCOG has embarked upon an extensive planning process and created the *Futures 2040 Plan*. This study stresses the importance of the role transportation plays in the growth of the region. Listed below are some of the key findings of the plan:

- Future population growth will more than double in the urbanized areas of New Mexico.
- Increased travel demands will occur as a result.
- Miles traveled will increase, hours on the roads will increase, and speeds will decrease.
- Congestion at the river crossings will only grow worse.
- Historical development patterns – we must create a better mix of land uses and improved jobs/housing balance.
- Expanded transit in key locations and activity centers will be critical.
- Transit will improve regional mobility and the economy.
- We must re-think our future and shift our priorities – now is the time to act.

ART Corridor - Transit for Our Future

The City of Albuquerque is looking at providing bus rapid transit service along Central Avenue. This project, called Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART), will enhance transit service along this important east-west corridor. The initial ART would be located along Central Avenue, where many of Albuquerque's most important destinations are located. The three bus routes currently on Central Avenue carry 42% of all ridership, while using only 26% of resources. Central Avenue is generally considered to have tremendous transit-oriented (economic) development opportunity for the city.

Other efforts underway that are dedicated to improving transportation in the metro area include the City of Albuquerque and other local partners like Rio Metro, the Mid-Region Council of Governments and local stakeholders, identifying a potential second ART route that could link the Central Avenue area with a University Blvd. (north/south) corridor bus rapid transit system. ART could be an exciting part of Albuquerque's future.

ART combines many features of rail transit with the flexibility of buses. ART is the most cost-effective technology for the City of Albuquerque's current population and future ridership estimates. Some key elements of ART include:

- Dedicated road, lane or mixed traffic route
- Frequent service
- Prioritized signaling at intersections
- Pre-boarding ticketing
- Level boarding
- Stops that are anywhere from 1/4 to 1/2 mile or more apart

ART will provide quick and efficient bus service with increased dependability and timeliness. ART can reduce dwell time (how long the bus is standing still to pick up passengers) which greatly improves service speed. This combined with advanced signal timing and a dedicated lane allows the ART to move more easily through city traffic. ART, while designed to look and operate like trains, is a considerably less costly alternative to light rail.



Proposed plans for Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART) call for providing improved transit service that combines many features of rail with the flexibility of buses while simultaneously enhancing safety and amenity for all other modes of travel. (Source: ABQ RIDE ART website)

Land Use Challenges and Jobs/Housing Imbalance

While gathering input during the visioning process from a variety of stakeholders representing many interests, it became increasingly clear that land use policies, regulations, and philosophies varied greatly throughout the Albuquerque Metro area. Consistent with the growth patterns in many cities in the Southwest, the story of Albuquerque is primarily one of urban sprawl. These predominant growth patterns make it more and more difficult to provide effective and efficient governmental services to the residents and businesses living in the suburban areas and in the hinterlands of the city. Transportation services are no exception. The cost of providing transportation services becomes increasingly expensive, as vehicles must travel greater distances to serve more sparsely populated areas, away from the city core.

Creating generally consistent and transit-friendly land use regulations among the multiple jurisdictions in Rio Metro service area will present itself as a significant challenge going forward. The current transit initiatives being undertaken by the City of Albuquerque (including ART), along with the Integrated Development Ordinance (IDO) project that is updating and simplifying the City’s land use regulations, are both promising initiatives to create conditions for more transit-oriented development to reduce traffic congestion and low-density sprawl that undermine the cost-effectiveness of transit service. To maximize regional impacts of these initiatives, similar efforts will need to be taken by other jurisdictions in the region to adopt more progressive land-use regulations that encourage more compact development and incentives for transit-oriented development.

Another consistent theme that has emerged is the growing imbalance between housing availability (and affordability) and job centers. Generally, the majority of housing is available on the west side of the Rio Grande Valley while the job centers are located primarily on the east side of the valley. This creates a “commuting culture” that results in congestion, infrastructure degradation, poor air quality, and bottlenecks at the River crossings (see below). The costs of creating the infrastructure to accommodate this growing imbalance between housing and jobs will present itself as a significant financial challenge for local governing officials. Even if this challenge were overcome, the resulting air and noise pollution from the increased traffic will significantly decrease the quality of life in the metropolitan area.

Congested Bridge Crossings

With the growing imbalance between jobs and available housing, more and more traffic will be crossing the Rio Grande, adding to the existing congestion problem at the few crossings that currently exist. Constructing additional lanes and wider bridges will likely be cost-prohibitive, while only addressing the congestion problems for the short-term. Consequently, mass transit presents itself as a more cost effective solution (refer to *Futures 2040 Plan*).

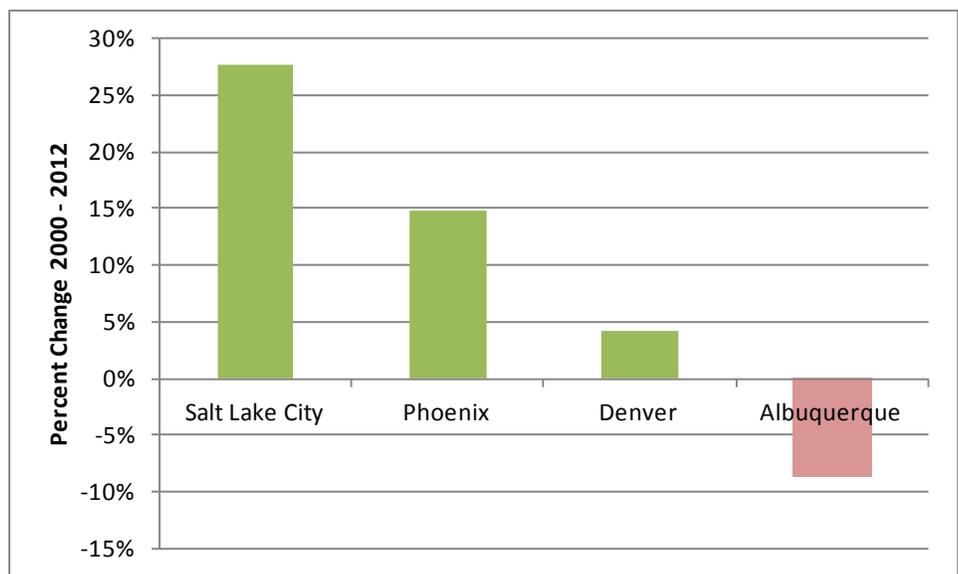


Rio Metro is uniquely positioned to help its partner communities cost-effectively address traffic congestion that undermines economic growth and quality of life.

Economic Development

Economic development has been at the forefront of local government agendas since 2008. If Albuquerque and the surrounding areas are going to be successful in their economic development initiatives, they will need to present themselves as forward-thinking, well-educated, clean, safe, and technologically-advanced communities. The area has most of the components to attract desirable jobs, including: excellent higher education institutions, a major airport, commuter rail, outstanding recreational opportunities, great weather, lower taxes, and reasonable housing opportunities. The two components that can be further developed would be improved land use practices and an effective and efficient multimodal transportation system that includes improved regional transit. Combined, these factors would make a formidable statement to businesses and industries interested in locating to New Mexico.

Frequent, convenient, and reliable public transit is increasingly seen as a critical component of a high quality of life, and is one of the factors that many workers – and especially more educated and highly skilled workers – consider in determining where to locate. In recent years concerns have been expressed that the Albuquerque region might be experiencing a “brain drain,” with young educated people leaving the region instead of staying and contributing to the economy. The research clearly shows that overall employment growth generally and in “knowledge-based industries” specifically is not occurring at the same pace in the greater Albuquerque region as other regions in the Intermountain West, including Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Phoenix and Denver. This likely reflects in part the changing location preferences of educated workers. To put it simply: it may be challenging for the region to create the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth without investing in the kinds of amenities that educated, skilled workers demand, and transit is typically included on that list of amenities.



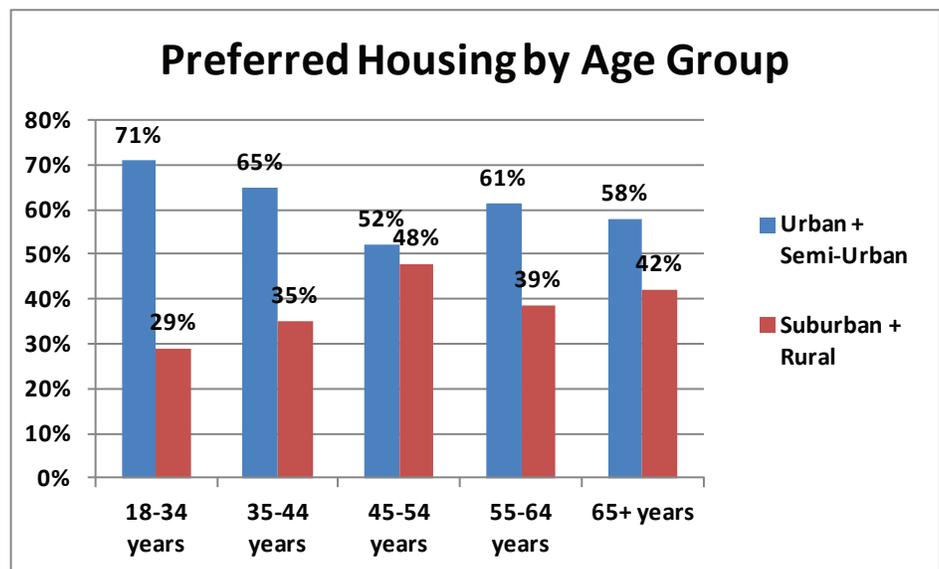
Compared to its aspirational peer regions in the Mountain West and Southwest, the Rio Metro region lags behind in employment growth in knowledge-based industries. (Source: US Census County Business Patterns, 2000 – 2012)

Changing Demographics

Changing demographics – and the associated changes in market preferences – are affecting Rio Metro service area in the same way that they are affecting the rest of the country. Most notably, these include:

- *Aging of the baby boomers.* “Empty nesters” and other baby boomers generally exhibit preferences for smaller homes. As baby boomers are no longer willing or become unable to drive, they are increasingly leaving housing in auto-dependent areas and choosing housing in areas with better mobility choices.
- *Emergence of the millennials.* Millennials generally exhibit a preference for living and working in walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods, and generally accept smaller homes in exchange for shorter commutes. Millennials also have the lowest rates of obtaining drivers’ licenses and auto ownership compared to recent generations, generally preferring other modes (transit, walking, biking, taxis/shared cars) over driving alone.

Each of these demographic changes impacts Rio Metro’s operations in different ways, but taken together suggest a) increasingly strong demand for Rio Metro’s services in the future and b) the need for communities in Rio Metro’s service area to adapt their land use policies and transportation investments to support Rio Metro’s ability to provide cost-effective transit service (and other mobility options) equitably throughout the region.



Younger and older Rio Metro customers generally exhibit a preference for more urban housing located in walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods (Source: Rio Metro 2013 Biennial Rider Survey).

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2. DEVELOPING THE VISION

-
- 2.1 Why this Vision Plan is Needed Now
 - 2.2 Project Goals
 - 2.3 Project Process
 - 2.4 What we Learned:
Summary of Key Findings from White Papers
 - 2.5 What we Heard:
Highlights from Stakeholder Outreach
-



2.1 WHY THIS VISION PLAN IS NEEDED NOW

“We hear about our differences all the time. But for all our region’s diversity across urban, suburban, rural, and tribal areas, it is still essential that we work together for the benefit of all our communities. Improving regional transit is a great place to start, because transit not only connects us to needed economic opportunities and services. It also directly connects our communities to each other so we’re working as one region.”

– Rio Metro Rider

As discussed in Section 1.5 and 1.6, there are a number of current and future challenges and opportunities facing the region. Now that Rio Metro has largely achieved its founding mission and goals, the agency is well-positioned to be a regional leader in leveraging regional opportunities and responding to regional challenges. Indeed, stakeholders in the visioning process noted repeatedly that Rio Metro and its key partner ABQ RIDE are critically important to the future success of the region, noting the following key benefits of expanded regional transit:

- Relieving traffic bottlenecks on roadways and bridges;
- Creating more compact land use patterns;
- Reducing public infrastructure costs;
- Reducing household transportation costs;
- Providing access to school / work opportunities;
- Supporting sustainable economic development;
- Enhancing environmental quality;
- Responding to changing demographics / preferences including aging baby boomers and millennials; and
- Reversing the regional “brain drain” trend, in order to create a “brain gain.”

The consequences of not maintaining and expanding the regional transit system would be dire for the future economic health and quality of life in our region. For example, based on data from the Futures 2040 Regional Transportation Plan as well as other regional planning efforts, recent trends in land use patterns in the Albuquerque region are leading to longer commutes and greater traffic congestion, with residents increasingly locating west of the Rio Grande and employment continuing to cluster on the east side of the river. Without changes to land use patterns, more travel options including transit service, regional congestion and commute time are projected to worsen significantly as a result. In fact, the preliminary modeling of preferred and alternative scenarios in the Futures 2040 plan suggests that significant investment in increased transit service will be required to avoid capital costs for roadway and bridge expansions that the region cannot afford.

2.2 PROJECT GOALS

Based on the current and future trends affecting regional transit in the region, the Board and staff undertook a strategic visioning process with the following five goals:

1. Develop a **bold vision** for regional transit.
2. Determine **Rio Metro's role** in achieving that vision, and the role of implementation partners like ABQ RIDE.
3. Build **broad-based support** for the vision.
4. Identify **new tools** to fund and implement the vision.
5. Begin **phased implementation** of the vision.

These project goals informed the development of this Vision Plan at every step of the project.

2.3 PROJECT PROCESS



Nearly 250 stakeholders were engaged in the visioning process.

To achieve the goals above, this Vision Plan was developed over a year-long, intensive process that consisted of both rigorous technical assessment and inclusive engagement with Board, staff, riders, implementation partners, and other key stakeholders. Below are the key elements of the visioning process:

- **Technical assessments to establish a firm foundation for the visioning process.** These included a review of Rio Metro’s peer transit agencies, an analysis of Rio Metro’s operations and organization, and an overview of the economic development potential of transit in Rio Metro service area. See Section 2.4 for a summary of findings from the technical assessment white papers.
- **Extensive input from Rio Metro staff, customers, implementation partners, and other community and business stakeholders.** Approximately two dozen stakeholder outreach meetings, staff workshops, and publicly-noticed Board meetings were held across Rio Metro service area. In addition, widely-promoted public meetings were held in each of the three counties that Rio Metro serves. These in-person stakeholder engagement opportunities were attended by nearly 250 individuals representing diverse perspectives. In addition to these in-person stakeholder engagement opportunities, a project website was created to educate stakeholder and solicit input, and Rio Metro marketing staff promoted the project and input opportunities through its monthly newsletters and social media channels (e.g. Twitter, FaceBook, and LinkedIn). See Section 2.5 for a summary of stakeholder input.
- **Sustained engagement with ABQ RIDE management and staff at every step of the visioning process.** Engagement with ABQ RIDE included: kick-off meetings with management and senior staff, a half-day workshop held with management and staff to develop Vision Framework, and a half-day “plan review” meeting which focused on defining early collaboration opportunities between Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE and laying the groundwork for enhanced cooperation and partnerships during the implementation of the Vision Plan. See Section 2.5 for a summary of stakeholder input.
- **Numerous interactive work sessions with the Board.**
 - All Board members were given the opportunity to be interviewed individually at the beginning of the project.
 - Three “Listening Session” presentations and conversations were conducted at regularly scheduled Board meetings to understand Board priorities and best practices from other regional transit agencies.
 - A half-day, off-site Visioning Workshop was held to develop the Vision Framework consisting of six Core Themes and 18 Key Strategies. See Chapter 3 for full details on the Vision Framework.
- **Rio Metro staff development of a phased Implementation Approach,** including 26 Priority Implementation Initiatives and 41 Future Phase Implementation Initiatives, to achieve the Board’s Vision Framework. See Chapter 4 for full details on the proposed Implementation Approach.

2.4 WHAT WE LEARNED: Summary of Key Findings from White Papers

Rio Metro also conducted a technical assessment of relevant topics in order to supplement the input provided during the stakeholder engagement process and provide a firm foundation for the development of the Vision Framework and Implementation Approach. This technical assessment took the form of three “white papers” on the topics of:

- Peer Review of Status Quo and Aspirational Peers
- Transit Operations and Organizational Options
- Economic Development Potential of Transit

The issues and opportunities identified in the three white papers informed the initial visioning process and the subsequent development of this Vision Plan. A high-level summary of the key issues identified in the white paper—including those most relevant to Rio Metro’s role in the future of transit in the region—are summarized below. For more details, please see the full versions of all three white papers (75 pages in total) available on the project website at <http://riometro.org/rio-metro-news/502-rio-metro-s-vision-for-the-future>.

Peer Review White Paper

The peer review white paper was written to research and explore comparable agencies’ performance and to provide insights into opportunities for better management, service, and operations of Rio Metro. This specific peer review identified four (4) peer agencies for Rio Metro and its partner agency ABQ RIDE, benchmarked Rio Metro operations (or, in some cases, Rio Metro operations combined with ABQ RIDE operations) and regional outcomes against those peers, and then articulated key “lessons learned” from the benchmarking assessment. The status quo peers were the Stockton and El Paso transit systems and the aspirational peers were Salt Lake City UTA and Denver RTD.

The key issues identified in the peer review white paper are highlighted below:

- **Unique *Regional* Context**
 - Rio Metro service area generally has less population in a larger geographic area compared to peers.
 - ABQ RIDE’s service density approaches the regional service density of some of the Albuquerque region’s aspirational peers (Denver and Salt Lake).
 - A low-density service area requires more resources to provide high-quality service (or only low-quality service can be provided).

- **Unique Service Context**
 - The region's transit services are providing a fairly large number of trips and passenger miles compared to both the status quo and aspirational peers.
 - The region's per capita trips and per capita miles metrics are also similar to or greater than both status quo peers and one aspirational peer (Salt Lake UTA).

- **Financial Resources**
 - The region's transit spending is on par with its status quo peers.
 - The region spends significantly less on transit than its aspirational peers.
 - The region has the highest local financial contribution of any peers (as a percent of operations expenditures).
 - The region's labor costs (as a percent of operations expenditures) are less than all status quo peers and most aspirational peers, but ABQ RIDE's costs are 93% of the region's total.

- **Operational Outputs**
 - Rio Metro has a lower transit service *density* than most peers (meaning that Rio Metro's routes are more widely dispersed from one another than in the peers' service areas; service density is sometimes referred to as "coverage").
 - Rio Metro region has a transit service frequency lower than its status quo peers, but higher than its aspirational peers. Note that this metric is based entirely on ABQ RIDE's service frequency data (i.e., it does not include Rio Metro service frequency data due to data limitations).
 - Rio Metro's farebox recovery is lower than its peers.

- **Regional Outcomes**
 - The region's transit mode share is comparable to status quo peers, but lower than aspirational peers.
 - Overall non-single occupant vehicle (SOV) mode share is lower than for both status quo and aspirational peers.
 - The region performs better than its status quo peers and comparably with aspirational peers in providing access to regional jobs within a 45-minute transit trip.

- **Customer Experience**
 - Rio Metro outperforms all peers on measuring customer satisfaction, in two ways:
 - One of only two peer agencies to measure (or at least report) customer service satisfaction; and
 - Over 93% of customers approve of Rio Metro transit service they receive.

Transit Operations and Organizational Options White Paper

The transit operations and organizational options white paper was written to document existing transit operations and agency structures, and identify preliminary opportunities for changes to better achieve the priorities identified in the stakeholder engagement. The paper includes: a technical review of existing transit operations and agency structures for Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE, the history of Rio Metro and its Board organization, a review of peer Board organizational structures, potential governance options for Rio Metro, and identification of opportunities and potential benefits associated with each opportunity.

The key issues identified in the transit white paper are highlighted below.

- **Agency Governance and Management**
 - Some Board members would like more opportunities to engage and provide oversight and leadership of agency initiatives.
 - With the exception of public comment at Rio Metro Board meetings, riders have no formal mechanism to provide ongoing input.
- **Agency Organization Options**
 - Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE both provide transit service in the region and there is some overlap and duplication.
 - Better coordination with ABQ RIDE is desired by stakeholders.
 - There is strong interest on the Board in moving towards consolidation.
- **Services and Service Area**
 - There is a desire to increase service frequency and system connectivity by the Board, staff, and the public.
 - There are limited service types in the agency's current portfolio (commuter rail, fixed-route bus, dial-a-ride).
 - Rio Metro serves a dispersed service area, but there are periodic requests to expand service.
 - There are limited resources to accommodate new service expansion, including expansions geographically, hours of service, or service frequency.
- **Ridership**
 - Rio Metro has a mix of both "transit-dependent" and "choice" riders, and there is a desire and demand to continue to serve both ridership types.

Economic Development Potential of Transit White Paper

The white paper on economic development potential of transit was written to assess the current and future potential for Rio Metro operations and initiatives to influence regional economic development. The paper provided an overview of the potential economic development benefits of transit, identified key regional trends and initiatives to leverage and achieve expanded economic development benefits from transit, and identified specific opportunities for expanded economic development benefits from transit investment in the Albuquerque region.

The key issues identified in the economic development white paper are highlighted below.

- **Transit and Cost-Effective Economic Development**
 - Transit's role in regional economic development isn't widely understood.
 - Transit investments aren't generally coordinated with economic development initiatives.
 - Transit's critical role in connecting people to economic opportunity is underutilized.
- **Transit and Cost Savings for Local Governments**
 - Constrained local government budgets cannot meet future road and bridge infrastructure needs.
 - Effective transit services can lengthen the life of deteriorating roadway/bridge infrastructure.
 - Transit can facilitate reduced infrastructure and service costs for local governments.
- **Transit and Neighborhood Reinvestment**
 - Leapfrog development makes providing transit services more challenging and expensive.
 - Depressed property values can result from poor land use practices.
 - Inconsistent land use and zoning policies throughout the region contribute to the problem.
- **Transit and More Efficient Land Use Patterns**
 - Regional transit has not played a significant role in shaping land use.
 - More congestion will likely result (especially at constrained bottlenecks and bridge crossings).
 - It remains unclear how future growth can be accommodated cost-effectively.
 - More compact development patterns are typically more cost-effective to serve than sprawling development patterns.

For the full versions of all three white papers, please see the project website at <http://riometro.org/rio-metro-news/502-rio-metro-s-vision-for-the-future>.

2.5 WHAT WE HEARD: Highlights from Stakeholder Outreach

Nearly 250 stakeholders were engaged in the visioning process at numerous technical staff meetings, stakeholder outreach meetings, widely-promoted community meetings open to the public, and publicly-noticed Board meetings. These included: Rio Metro Board, staff, and customers; key implementation partners like local elected officials and ABQ RIDE; and other community and business stakeholders. See the Acknowledgements at the beginning of this plan for a full list of organizations that were engaged and represented in the development of the Vision Plan.

Key messages voiced during the stakeholder outreach and engagement included the following: a focus on safety first; the need for Rio Metro to help address first/last mile barriers to access the existing transit system; a strong desire for more transit service, especially in off-peak, non-commute times; an encouragement of an increased role for Rio Metro in ensuring that transit investments are integrated with land use planning and economic development goals; a push for enhanced partnerships with both private-sector and public-sector partners; and the hope that Rio Metro can make better use of technology to increase user convenience and build ridership.

A high-level summary of some of the most salient input provided by various stakeholder groups throughout the visioning process is summarized below (organized by which constituency provided the input). For full summaries of the outreach events, including attendees, presentation materials, and documentation of all feedback received, please see the project website at <http://riometro.org/rio-metro-news/502-rio-metro-s-vision-for-the-future>.

Rio Metro Board

- “We need a vision of where Rio Metro is heading and consensus on how to move things forward in this region.”
- “Transparency – have this organization make clear to everybody how it works and how [to partner with us] to get things done.”
- “Transit does not [always] get you to where you need to go. Need [...] to get you to your destination.”
- “We need to emphasize the benefits of transit, [...], such as congestion reduction, improved economy, creation of jobs, environmental benefits, quality of life...”
- “The [regional] community needs to come together to solve some of the growth issues we’re experiencing. TOD could be a catalytic force that could help to resolve these issues.”
- “Become relevant to a greater number of people. [...] Increased level of ownership in transit is critical to the region’s success.”

Rio Metro Planning and Operations Staff

- “We need to support this visioning process to attract choice ridership [...] choice riders care about time, cost, and convenience.”
- “We don’t have an umbrella brand, and we need one.”
- “We’ve accomplished a lot in our short history, but we’ve reached a point where we are operating as the sum of our inherited parts. I would like for us to work better with our partners to become [...] the new face of transit in the region.”
- “We provide funding to ABQ RIDE to provide services, [...] Rio Metro has regional commuter rail service, and [...] we have these rural boutique operations. We are like a blended family.”
- “One or two or ten or twenty years down the road, what are we hoping to become? We need a strong, overarching vision with objectives and targets.”

ABQ RIDE Management and Staff

- “Boomers and Millennials are looking for transit alternatives, such as BRT. People are beginning to embrace public transportation, but it’s been slow [in this region].”
- “To gain further support, we need to expand options and provide seamless service...”
- “We need to eliminate duplication between the transit authorities [...] a regional transportation district that covers everything...”
- “We need a consolidated 3-year service plan [...] that addresses what a regional network would look like, including regional standards for urban, rural, and commuter service.”
- “We need a sufficient, dedicated funding source [...] and the ability to plan for transit based on its needs.”

Transit Riders and the Business Community

- “Ninety percent of our current transit problems are attributable to land use policies.”
- “Development used to follow transit; now transit is trying to keep up with development. Transit should be driving development again.”
- “...there is a disconnect between where the jobs are and where people can afford to live. [...] Current transit systems do not accommodate these people, and it is a challenge for them to get to work.”
- “We would love for transit to be part of growth [but] it needs to expand and include the west side. It can’t just continue to focus on the City of Albuquerque’s interior transportation corridors.”
- “[W]e should stop focusing on [building additional] river crossings and look to transit to be the solution to traffic congestion.”

For full summaries of the outreach events, including attendees, presentation materials, and documentation of all feedback received, please see the project website at <http://riometro.org/rio-metro-news/502-rio-metro-s-vision-for-the-future>.

Focus Issue: The Role of Rio Metro in Promoting Local and Regional Economic Development

Rio Metro plays an important role in the economy of the Albuquerque region, including providing critical connections between workers and jobs, helping to make the region attractive for new businesses and households, and encouraging more focused development patterns near transit. Moving forward, Rio Metro is interested in maximizing the potential of future Rio Metro activities to leverage positive economic development outcomes. As discussed in the Vision Framework in Chapter 3 and the Implementation Approach in Chapter 4, Rio Metro's role in promoting economic development will be in the following areas:

- 1. Continue to provide high-quality transit service to major employment centers and incentive programs that promote employee transit ridership.** Rio Metro already works with ABQ RIDE and other transit providers to ensure good transit connections to major employment centers. Rio Metro also operates the Smart Business Partnership (SBP) program that provides tools that allow employers to directly promote and incentivize transit ridership to their employees. Rio Metro should continue and enhance these efforts to not only capture a larger share of the employee commute trips, but also to stimulate economic opportunity by providing affordably priced, congestion reducing travel options.
- 2. Leverage new transit investments by coordinating them with economic development initiatives.** In the future, new or enhanced transit service or enhanced amenities for transit passengers should be coordinated with economic development initiatives in order to cost-effectively achieve transit objectives and economic development objectives. Economic development potential should also be an explicit factor when Rio Metro contemplates new transit investments, including connecting to job concentrations (see above) and the potential to stimulate development near stations (see below).
- 3. Encourage development near transit.** There are a variety of roles Rio Metro can play in encouraging development near transit. Rio Metro should focus on the following initiatives:
 - Consider economic development goals in property acquisition, use, and disposition. While Rio Metro is not currently a major landowner, existing Rio Metro-owned properties and potential acquisitions should be used to advance regional transit-oriented development (TOD) goals where possible. Sound Transit in Seattle adopted a TOD Policy that encourages consideration of future potential TOD in property acquisition, use, and disposition. The agency also makes sure to consider how the siting, configuration, or design of a transit facility can facilitate future TOD on nearby properties (i.e. getting the area "TOD ready") even if the agency itself doesn't own those properties.¹
 - Play a proactive role in local and regional planning efforts that encourage transit-supportive land use patterns. Rio Metro and other transit operators have an important role to play in implementing the *Future 2040* plan, which focuses development in centers, corridors, and transit nodes. Pace Transit, in suburban Chicago works closely with local jurisdictions to provide feedback on local planning efforts and development projects, has developed its own TOD guidelines, and has built an organizational culture that embraces land-use planning and urban design as core to the agency's mission of providing high-quality transit.
 - Provide information, technical resources, and act as a "convener" to facilitate discussion, publicize best practices, and encourage TOD in the region. In Denver, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) has long acted as a key regional resource related to TOD, including holding capacity-building meetings and workshops for developers, planners and the general public.

¹ The New Mexico state constitution's anti-donation clause prohibits public agencies from disposing of property at below market value, except in cases where a finding of blight has made as part of designation as a Municipal Redevelopment Area. However, Rio Metro could play a leading role in property assemblage that has high TOD potential, and then sell or lease to private developers at fair market rates.

Best Practice Case Study: HealthLine BRT, Cleveland Ohio

Cleveland's HealthLine BRT along the Euclid Avenue corridor provides an excellent example of how close collaboration between a transit agency and other stakeholders—including the City, local institutions, non-profits, and developers—can generate significant economic development benefits.

The Euclid Avenue corridor connects downtown Cleveland through Midtown to University Circle, a district that includes Case Western Reserve University and multiple health-related institutions and research centers. The corridor suffered decades of disinvestment. After several years of planning, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) settled on BRT as a cost-effective means to connect the corridor.

GCRTA, the City of Cleveland, MidTown Inc. (a local Community Development Corporation), and the Cleveland Foundation together funded the creation of an economic development strategy for the corridor to leverage the investment in the new BRT line, with the following *non-transportation* goals:

- Promote long-term economic and community development along the Euclid corridor via policies that encourage transit-oriented development and provide reliable public transportation service; and
- Improve the quality of life of those living, working, or visiting the Euclid corridor by improving the pedestrian environment, creating a sense of place, improving access to employment and cultural centers, and improving regional air quality.

Achieving these goals required coordinated efforts among numerous entities:

- **The City of Cleveland** assembled funding for the installation of fiber-optic cables, reconstruction of outdated water and sewer lines, “undergrounding” of power lines, installation of new streetlights, and improvements to bicycle and pedestrian connections. The City also provided incentives for development via its Vacant Property Initiative, offering forgivable construction loans to spur job creation.
- **The State of Ohio** awarded \$9 million to the City of Cleveland through the Clean Ohio Brownfield Revitalization Fund and Ohio Job Ready Sites Programs. These funds allowed for the acquisition, site cleanup, and site development of vacant commercial and industrial properties.
- **Educational and medical institutions** played a critical role in facilitating TOD along the corridor. Due to the proximity to the HealthLine and encouragement of shared parking facilities, new institutional buildings along the corridor were able to reduce surface parking and orient toward the street to support increased transit usage.
- **Local Community Development Corporations (CDCs)** worked to attract businesses and development back to the corridor and promoted the pending BRT investment as part of their economic development initiatives.

As a result of these collaborative partnerships and a commitment creating economic development benefits from new transit investments, the HealthLine BRT has been credited with catalyzing \$5.8 billion in investment along its corridor since its opening in 2008.



Cleveland RTA's collaboration with public-sector and private-sector partners on the HealthLine Bus Rapid Transit service resulted in the region seeing new \$5.8 billion in investment along the corridor since its opening in 2008.

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3. OUR VISION

-
- 3.1 A Bold but Realistic Vision
 - 3.2 The Vision Framework
 - 3.3 Core Themes and Key Strategies
-



3.1 A BOLD BUT REALISTIC VISION

“Even if you don’t personally ride transit now, you should still support better transit because your employees and customers might take transit. Or your neighbors might take transit. And as you get older and may no longer be able to drive, how will you get to the grocery store or the doctor if we don’t have good transit in place? Maybe more of our kids would stay here after high school if transit were better. The truth is, transit supports everything we’re trying to do to jumpstart this region’s economy and leave it better for the next generation.”

– Rio Metro Smart Business Partner

Responding to the current and future opportunities and challenges summarized in Chapter 1, as well as the stakeholder input and technical findings summarized in Chapter 2, a consensus vision emerged. This chapter describes that vision as well as how the vision was refined to ensure that it was both bold enough to inspire and yet realistic enough to be implementable.

3.2 THE VISION FRAMEWORK

After the Vision Framework (described below) was developed based on extensive input from Rio Metro leadership, customers, and implementation partners including ABQ RIDE, Rio Metro revised its mission statement and developed a new vision statement to better reflect the priorities expressed in the Vision Framework. The revised mission statement and vision statement are summarized below and both are meant to be a succinct and memorable distillation of the overall Vision Framework.

Revised Mission Statement

A mission statement is typically a concise summary of the organization's core purpose and values. As described in Section 1.1, Rio Metro's existing Mission Statement was adopted in 2012. To better reflect the renewed purpose of the organization that has evolved through the visioning process, Rio Metro has revised and consolidated its existing mission statement to be more succinct and memorable, and to provide clarity and focus to the organization's efforts to achieve the objectives of the Vision Plan:

Our Mission: *Rio Metro collaborates to provide safe, accessible, efficient, and innovative transportation services for the benefit of our diverse local communities and the regional economy.*

Adoption of this Vision Plan by the Board will also adopt this revised Mission Statement to provide Rio Metro and its implementation partners with renewed clarity on the organization's core purpose in the region in all its day-to-day operations and services.

Vision Statement

A vision statement is meant to evoke the future outcomes that an organization hopes to achieve and what role the organization will play in accomplishing those outcomes. A vision statement must also be succinct in order to be: a) memorable to the organization's leadership, staff, customers, and implementation partners and; b) relevant to both day-to-day operations and longer-term decision-making.

Currently, Rio Metro does not have an organizational vision statement. Rio Metro has developed the following vision statement to provide clarity and focus to the organization's efforts to achieve the objectives of the Vision Plan:

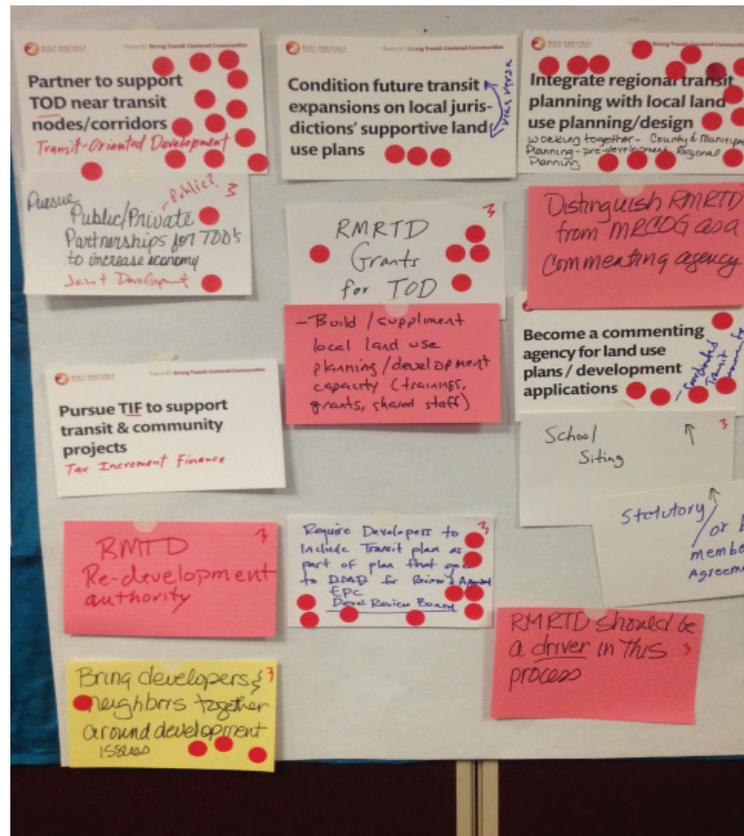
Our Vision: *Rio Metro is a leader moving our region forward, connecting our diverse residents and communities, and supporting sustainable prosperity.*

Adoption of this Vision Plan by the Board will also adopt this new Vision Statement to provide Rio Metro and its implementation partners with a renewed focus on its efforts to achieve the long-term objectives of the Vision Plan and lead the region forward.

3.3 CORE THEMES AND KEY STRATEGIES

Taking into account multiple conversations with Rio Metro Board members, management, staff, and transit riders, as well as implementation partners like ABQ RIDE, service providers, residents, and the business/development community, Rio Metro developed a Vision Framework for the agency. As shown in Figure 3.1, the Vision Framework consists of a) six Core Themes, with each of the six Core Themes supported by b) three Key Strategies (for a total of 18) which help define the desired outcomes within each Core Theme.

The Core Themes and Key Strategies included in the Vision Framework were vetted with Rio Metro Board and staff, ABQ RIDE management and staff, and other stakeholders during the visioning process, and were ultimately approved by Rio Metro Board at the conclusion of the visioning stage of the project. Combined, the Core Themes and Key Strategies in the Vision Framework provided clear direction to Rio Metro in crafting the implementation approach described in the following Chapter 4.



The Core Themes and Key Strategies included in the Vision Framework were developed through consensus dialogue with Rio Metro Board and staff, ABQ RIDE management and staff, and other stakeholders.

Figure 3.1 Vision Framework: Core Themes and Key Strategies



Core Theme 1: Exceptional Customer Experience - *Our customers come first in all we do.*

Keeping our existing riders and attracting new riders is central to realizing our vision. Residents and visitors who regularly choose transit over the private vehicle will make this decision based on the quality of their travel experiences. Was their journey on-time? Safe? Convenient? Enjoyable?

- **Key Strategy 1.1:** Make transit trips as convenient and time-competitive as possible with auto trips.
- **Key Strategy 1.2:** Focus on safety, security, attractiveness, cleanliness, comfort, and tailored amenities both on vehicles and at stops/stations.
- **Key Strategy 1.3:** Improve schedules, service information and transit awareness through coordination with other transit providers to make using transit as easy as possible.



Core Theme 2: Transformative Regional Services - *We provide a range of services to meet our region's diverse needs.*

As our region grows, it is increasingly important for our residents to be able to travel between communities for employment, housing, services, tourism and other opportunities that don't respect jurisdictional boundaries. Additionally, Rio Metro's services must be integrated with other providers that serve communities beyond our District, such as Santa Fe and Socorro.

- **Key Strategy 2.1:** Expand the "regional priority network" to connect key centers and corridors, including added Rail Runner service.
- **Key Strategy 2.2:** Expand local circulators to connect the regional network with residential areas and smaller/rural communities.
- **Key Strategy 2.3:** Support regional transportation demand management (TDM) programs, bicycle/pedestrian, and first/last mile programs to improve access to fixed-route transit.



Core Theme 3: Strong Transit-Centered Communities - *Our services help shape our communities for the better.*

Developing the interconnection between land use and transit not only results in increased transit ridership and more cost-effective and efficient services, but can also help our diverse communities—regardless if they are urban or rural—to achieve their unique visions.

- **Key Strategy 3.1:** Leverage existing MOA relationship with MRCOG to better integrate regional transit planning with local land use planning/design.
- **Key Strategy 3.2:** Increase support for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in areas well-served by transit.
- **Key Strategy 3.3:** Promote better pedestrian and bicycle connections to the regional transit system to improve public health outcomes, decrease social / economic isolation, and reduce household transportation costs.



Core Theme 4: Sound Financial Stewardship - *We are good stewards of the public resources entrusted to us.*

Our region's transit network requires predictable and adequate funding to maintain current service levels and keep vehicles in good repair. Also, our public funding requires us to be accountable to taxpayers and operate as efficiently as possible, all while meeting our diverse transit needs.

- **Key Strategy 4.1:** Pursue efficiency gains across all modes (rail, bus, and demand-response service).
- **Key Strategy 4.2:** Seek new and expanded revenue sources (including local & regional, state & federal, and public-private partnerships) to diversify the funding base and provide a stable funding source for Vision Plan implementation.
- **Key Strategy 4.3:** Pursue the most cost-effective agency structure, potentially including independence from MRCOG, acquisition of capital assets from NMDOT, and enhanced coordination/consolidation with ABQ RIDE.



Core Theme 5: Innovative Programs & Partnerships - *We think outside the box and seek collaboration always.*

For our region's transit services to offer benefits beyond simply transportation, we will need active participation from a variety of sectors, including our riders, the business community, public schools and universities, other public agencies and civic organizations.

- **Key Strategy 5.1:** Integrate transit investments with the regional economic development strategy.
- **Key Strategy 5.2:** Pursue public-*public* partnerships (including school districts and UNM/CNM) to offer free/discounted transit passes, joint marketing, and education.
- **Key Strategy 5.3:** Pursue public-*private* partnerships (including major employers) to fund targeted service to employment centers, transit benefits to employees, and joint marketing.



Core Theme 6: Industry-Leading Knowledge & Practice - *Our people take pride in leading the region forward.*

We must ensure that the region's transit providers have the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate this transformation and to empower our Board members to lead in realizing this vision at both the regional and local levels.

- **Key Strategy 6.1:** Conduct orientation and on-going professional development for staff and Board, including in-person visits with peer agencies.
- **Key Strategy 6.2:** Broaden the stakeholder perspectives provided to Rio Metro leadership and create opportunities for ongoing engagement and leadership development.
- **Key Strategy 6.3:** Become a resource for local jurisdictions to support best practice pilot programs, staff training, and implementation of Vision Plan priorities.

Focus Issue: Coordination and Consolidation of Transit Operations

Transit service integration is a challenge for riders and decision-makers across the West. Like the Albuquerque region, a majority of transit trips are not carried on the regional system in communities as diverse as Seattle, San Francisco, and Phoenix.

Governance solutions that promote enhanced coordination and partnerships across different transit operators can help to improve the rider experience while reducing redundancy of effort. Coordination efforts focus on three things:

- Focusing on customer experience by creating a seamless (or frictionless) experience
- Increasing partnerships between agencies to build relationships and trust at all levels
- Prioritizing incremental collaboration initiatives by tackling the “low-hanging fruit” first

Full consolidation (mergers) of different transit operators is another option that may accomplish the same goals of improving the rider experience while reducing redundancy of effort. However, full consolidation can be more difficult to accomplish than enhanced coordination, and the anticipated benefits of consolidation may not always be realized in the short-term.

Best Practice Case Study: Phoenix Case Study

The Phoenix region has gone from highly-fragmented transit systems run by cities to an integrated system with three major providers operating under one regional brand: Valley Metro. The systems are the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA), City of Phoenix, and Tempe.

Each system contracts with private providers for service, but riders see a “seamless system” with a single fare system, customer service, marketing programs, and centralized service planning, all under the Valley Metro brand. Getting to an integrated system has been evolutionary over a period of decades starting in 1985, as described in the Figure 3.2 below:

Figure 3.2: Time Line to Integrated Transit in Phoenix

1980	Highly fragmented transit systems run by cities
1985	Voters approve ½ cent sales tax for freeways and transit, RPTA formed
1993	Valley Metro begins service under regional brand, local services continue under Valley Metro brand
2002	Valley Metro Inc. formed to design, construct, and operate 57 miles of light rail
2004	Voters approve continued sales tax with more for transit
2008	First 20 miles of light rail opens for service
2012	RPTA and Valley Metro combine with one CEO and a goal to integrate service

Funding

Under the Valley Metro brand there is one regional fare structure set by RPTA. The RPTA Board of Directors and City of Phoenix City Council set and approve fare changes. The three operating agencies incur the cost of operations, and the other sponsoring agencies reimburse the operating agency monthly. Cities throughout the region purchase on a cost-per-mile basis based on operations expenses, depreciation of facilities, and vehicles. The per-mile cost of service is passed onto those entities funding transportation service for their respective jurisdictions.

Coordinated Service Planning

RPTA oversees transit services creation and implementation. The general process for coordinated service planning works like this:

1. A jurisdiction goes to RPTA planners with an idea for a new route;
2. RPTA determines the cost and which agency can best operate the service;
3. The jurisdiction sends funds through RPTA to the operating agency; and
4. The RPTA Board periodically revises existing routes for demand and efficiency.

Local jurisdictions retain the authority to implement additional service funded by local resources, including transit ballot initiatives.

It should be noted that despite Phoenix's success in coordinated service planning, the Phoenix region has not achieved full coordination of decision making on regional transit: for example, regional bus service has its own Board, light rail has a separate Board represented by the five cities with light rail service, and paratransit is outside the regional brand and run by the counties (and paratransit riders have to transfer between systems when they cross county lines). For Rio Metro region, the success of a centralized service planning model will be contingent on a thoughtful allocation of Board seats so that each jurisdiction feels that it has the power to advocate for local needs while also being advocates for a truly regional system.



Phoenix RPTA and partner transit agencies have cooperated to create a seamless experience for their riders across agencies (e.g. an umbrella “Valley Metro” brand, single customer service line, unified fare structure, and universal fare card) and have increased cost-effectiveness by actually consolidating duplicative functions (e.g. marketing and service planning) at the regional level.

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4. IMPLEMENTING OUR VISION

-
- 4.1 Implementation Tactics
 - 4.2 Priority Implementation Tactics
 - 4.3 Performance Measurement System
-



Rio Metro technical staff, in collaboration with ABQ RIDE, have developed an Implementation Approach that consists of two components: a) Implementation Tactics that will help Rio Metro accomplish the goals and desired outcomes in the Vision Framework and b) a preliminary Performance Measurement system to provide clarity, transparency, and accountability to Rio Metro and its partners as they implement the Vision Framework. Each of these components is discussed below.

4.1 IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS

“For any of this work we’ve all been doing to make a difference, we need to immediately pivot to focus on implementation, including holding each other accountable for actually accomplishing the vision.”

– Rio Metro Board member

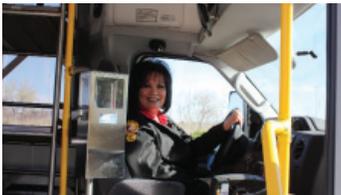
Based on the Vision Framework developed and vetted by the Rio Metro Board and key stakeholders, Rio Metro technical staff developed a list of potential Implementation Tactics necessary to achieve the Vision Framework. In total, there are 60 potential Implementation Tactics that might be pursued over the next 20 years. Appendices A and B shows all the Implementation Tactics organized by which of the Core Themes and Key Strategies they support: Appendix A shows Priority Implementation Tactics as described below and Appendix B shows Future Phase Implementation Tactics.

4.2 PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS

To help provide focus to near-term implementation efforts in the first five years after the Vision Plan is adopted, Rio Metro technical staff identified 26 Priority Implementation Tactics that could be pursued as immediate next steps. Priority Implementation Tactics are those that a) can be accomplished in the near-term within existing resources; b) must be accomplished first in order to provide a foundation necessary to achieve other Implementation Tactics in the Vision Plan, and/or c) must begin now in order to build the momentum to address more complex challenges facing the region and achieve the longer-term vision. Following is a list of Priority Implementation Tactics Rio Metro staff are directed to pursue, in collaboration with public-sector and private-sector partners, in order to achieve the Vision Framework in a timely and cost-effective manner:



Tactic Group: Improve perceived safety, security, and cleanliness of the regional transit system.



Rio Metro heard emphatically from stakeholders that safety, security, cleanliness were fundamentally important to the “customer-friendliness” of the system.

Throughout the visioning process, stakeholders mentioned that Rio Metro should keep its laser-like focus on maintaining safe, secure, and clean transit operations, even while expanding its services, programs, and general leadership role in the region. To respond to this direction, Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Look for cost-share partners to increase funding for security, cleaning, and maintenance of transit vehicles, bus stops, and train stations.
- **Tactic:** Create a program for passenger reporting of safety and maintenance issues with rapid response by Rio Metro.
- **Tactic:** Expand security / ambassador presence, including coordination with other law enforcement agencies and a potential volunteer public safety / ambassador program.

Supports: Core Theme 1 (Exceptional Customer Experience), and specifically Key Strategy 1.2.



Tactic Group: Develop a Regional Transit Network and Service Plan.

Stakeholders that participated in the visioning process consistently asked for expanded service, including more routes, more frequent service, especially during off-peak periods, and new service types tailored to different markets (e.g. commuter express buses) and community contexts (e.g. small circulators for rural areas, etc.). Rio Metro heard loud and clear that when it comes to transit service in the region, there is no “one size fits all” solution. For this reason, Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Identify and pursue incremental improvements to existing rail and bus service that respond to service needs and have potential funding sources.
- **Tactic:** Develop a tiered service concept and map that illustrates the interconnected regional and local network.
- **Tactic:** Define Rio Metro’s role in supporting operations of the planned regional BRT network.

- **Tactic:** Conduct an assessment of new mobility technologies/services that may disrupt the traditional transit agency business model (e.g. Uber, self-driving cars, etc.).
- **Tactic:** Identify implementation costs and funding sources.

Supports: *Core Theme 2 (Transformative Regional Services), and specifically Key Strategies 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.*



Tactic Group: Use regional transit to promote economic development.

Throughout this process, Rio Metro leadership, stakeholders, and implementation partners have recognized that promoting economic development and expanding economic opportunity must become a central part of the agency’s mission. As identified in the “Economic Development Potential of Transit” white paper, the Rio Metro service area is missing many opportunities to better harness the potential of regional transit to connect workers with employment, educational opportunities with safe and affordable mobility options, lower household transportation costs by reducing auto dependency, and reduce taxpayer-funded public spending on roadway expansions and other infrastructure by facilitating more transit-oriented development. Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Advocate for the value of regional transit to key implementation partners including local jurisdictions, business community, etc.
- **Tactic:** Communicate, collaborate, and partner with local and regional economic development agencies/organizations so that future economic development investments are focused within 1/2 mile high-capacity transit nodes and corridors.
- **Tactic:** Partner with MPO/RPO to catalyze more TOD in the region, including: education/capacity building, partnerships with local communities and institutions like UNM, grant programs and updating the existing Rio Metro assessment of TOD potential of parcels that are currently (or will soon be) well-served by high-capacity transit.
- **Tactic:** Form partnerships with local jurisdictions and the private sector to get potential redevelopment sites and districts “TOD-ready” with transit-supportive infrastructure (sidewalks, traffic calming, etc.).

Supports: *Core Theme 3 (Strong Transit-Centered Communities), and specifically Key Strategies 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.*

Supports: *Core Theme 5 (Innovative Programs and Partnerships), and specifically Key Strategies 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3.*

Supports: *Core Theme 6 (Industry-Leading Knowledge and Practice), and specifically Key Strategy 6.3.*



Tactic Group: Evaluate and implement cost-effectiveness measures.

Rio Metro and its partner agency ABQ RIDE already operate relatively cost-effectively compared to both their status quo and aspirational peers.¹ However, Rio Metro Board, staff, and implementation partners all expressed during the visioning process a strong desire for “continuous improvement” in the cost-effectiveness of its operations. To pursue this goal, Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Conduct a top-to-bottom review of Rio Metro’s entire operations to identify opportunities for efficiency gains including administrative costs, services/operations costs, and overhead costs (GRT payments, etc.).
- **Tactic:** Enhance the identity of Rio Metro as an operating agency which functions in collaboration with MRCOG, while establishing a timeline for Rio Metro to transition to independence from MRCOG.
- **Tactic:** Conduct a financial and organizational study of pros and cons of acquisition of capital assets from NMDOT.
- **Tactic:** Conduct a consolidation feasibility study to be jointly funded with ABQ RIDE, while simultaneously identifying and pursuing near-term opportunities for enhanced collaboration (e.g. the development of a single schedule/map, joint marketing efforts, a single fare payment method, and/or a unified brand in the form of one shared name and logo).

Supports: Core Theme 4 (Sound Financial Stewardship), and specifically Key Strategies 4.1 and 4.3.



Tactic Group: Evaluate and pursue new and expanded funding sources.

One thing was clear from the technical assessments conducted as part of this visioning process: Rio Metro will need new and expanded financial resources to successfully implement this Vision Plan. Therefore, Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Study the feasibility of obtaining a waiver of existing annual Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) payments on purchased transportation contracts (e.g. NMRX).
- **Tactic:** Conduct a fare study analyzing the costs/benefits of the fare structure, with particular emphasis on a) whether the costs of charging passenger fares outweigh the value of farebox revenue received and b) if Rio Metro should transition to a “fare-free” transit model similar to NCRTD.
- **Tactic:** Explore private-sector revenue sources such as sponsorship, advertising, and naming rights.
- **Tactic:** Investigate the feasibility and timing of a GRT increase and other revenue sources dedicated to Rio Metro operations.
- **Tactic:** Develop a financial model with Department of Tax and Revenue to establish a baseline return on investment (ROI) for future transit expenditures per state law regarding tax increment districts (TIDs) and tax increment finance (TIF).
- **Tactic:** Develop a FTA grant program of regional capital projects.

Supports: Core Theme 4 (Sound Financial Stewardship), and specifically Key Strategy 4.2.

¹ For more details, see the peer review white paper available on the project website (hard copies available by request).



Tactic Group: Become an industry-leading transit agency.

As a young agency, Rio Metro has accomplished much to be proud of during its brief existence. However, during the visioning process, Rio Metro Board, staff, and stakeholders acknowledged the need for Rio Metro to build deeper expertise at all levels of the organization and to become more innovative. For this reason, Rio Metro staff shall pursue Priority Implementation Tactics such as:

- **Tactic:** Formalize orientation and development programs for Board members.
- **Tactic:** Establish in-house professional development and training programs with staff participation required per individual professional development plans.
- **Tactic:** Support efforts to form a regional transit advocacy non-profit organization.
- **Tactic:** Advocate for the value of regional transit to key implementation partners including local jurisdictions, business community, etc.

Supports: *Core Theme 6 (Industry-Leading Knowledge and Practice), and specifically Key Strategies 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3.*



- **Tactic: Continue ongoing stakeholder engagement.** The visioning process has built tremendous momentum and support for a bold vision for regional transit. For this reason, Rio Metro staff shall also pursue ongoing stakeholder engagement as needed to support all of the Priority Implementation Tactics described above.

Supports: *All the Core Themes and Key Strategies.*

It should be emphasized this is an *illustrative* list of Priority Implementation Tactics that could (and likely will) change somewhat as needed to respond to new opportunities and adapt to new information.

For most of the Priority Implementation Tactics, Rio Metro will be the lead implementer. However, the successful implementation of this plan will require collaboration among several partners, most notably ABQ RIDE, local planning departments, and the business community.

The envisioned timeline for the Priority Implementation Tactics described above is in the five years after Board adoption of the Vision Plan.

4.3 PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Participants in the visioning process – including Rio Metro Board members, riders, public agency implementation partners, the business community, and other stakeholders – consistently spoke of the need to ensure momentum and accountability for implementation of the Vision Plan. For this reason, it will be critically important for Rio Metro to measure the region’s progress towards the outcomes prioritized in the Vision Plan for the Vision Plan to be considered successful.

Performance measurement can allow Rio Metro to be more nimble and responsive in its ongoing operations by creating a regular feedback loop on whether existing resources are being used most cost-effectively. In addition, performance measurement can also increase Rio Metro's competitiveness for new funding sources especially under new broad-based criteria being emphasized for federal transit funds. Furthermore, regular reporting of Rio Metro's performance to its Board, staff, riders, business community, and general public helps maintain and expand support for Rio Metro as a trusted and valuable institution that plays a vital role in ensuring the region's high quality of life.

Rio Metro has developed an illustrative performance measurement framework, as shown in Figure 4.1. The illustrative framework consists of 11 priority indicators that support the 18 Key Strategies. The indicators are the thresholds (or benchmarks) that indicate what would be considered success in that area. Note that because some of the Key Strategies are more qualitative and/or do not lend themselves to a simple, one-dimensional measure of success, there are 11 indicators (not 18). The indicators were developed in close consultation with Rio Metro staff to ensure that they could be collected using known data sources and with existing or planned resources.

It should be emphasized that the framework is illustrative and will be further refined during the implementation phase immediately following adoption of the Vision Plan. In particular, ABQ RIDE will be a key partner in Rio Metro's development of final performance measures, as ABQ RIDE is a major transit service provider in the region. The success of regional transit will therefore be a reflection of the mutual success of Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE. In addition, a monitoring and reporting plan for all indicators will also be developed during the implementation phase, describing what performance data are collected (and by whom) and the frequency by which performance data are reported (and how).

Even though the final performance measurement framework may change from what is shown in Figure 4.1, the preliminary framework shown is meant to demonstrate the manner in which Rio Metro will begin to expand its approach to performance measurement in order to successfully implement the Vision Plan. For example, the final performance measurement will contain several "stretch goals" for Rio Metro and its regional implementation partners, while also remaining realistic and achievable within existing or planned capacity, competencies, and resources.

In this way, the final performance measurement framework developed during the implementation phase will become the "report card" by which Rio Metro management and staff commit to be held accountable to by the Board, riders, implementation partners, taxpayers, and other community and business stakeholders. Going forward, this performance measurement framework will also inform Rio Metro's prioritization of how it invests operational and financial resources. For example, Rio Metro will be seeking to align any and all partnership agreements to ensure that those agreements further Rio Metro's progress in successfully implementing the Vision Plan.

NOTE: All performance measurement systems need to be responsive to unanticipated circumstances (e.g. reduction in funding, unavailability of data, lack of participation from implementation partners, etc.). For this reason, Rio Metro's leadership should periodically assess the final performance measurement system that is developed during the implementation phase and make adjustments to the metrics and indicators as needed, including in response to new information, unanticipated constraints, or other unforeseen issues.

Figure 4.1 Preliminary Performance Measurement System

(illustrative, to be refined during implementation)



Exceptional Customer Experience. *Our customers come first in all we do.*

- **Customer safety:** Minimum of 95% customer satisfaction on biennial rider survey with perceived (self-assessed) safety at stations/stops and on-vehicles.
- **Customer satisfaction:** Minimum of 90% overall customer satisfaction (e.g. reporting 3, 4, or 5) on biennial rider survey and maximum of 1% customer complaints on a quarterly basis (as measured by total rail + bus complaints/ total rail + bus trips).



Transformative Regional Services. *We provide a range of services to meet our region's diverse needs.*

- **Transit service availability:** XX% of households are within a 1/4 mile of existing transit service (as appropriate to the surrounding land use context and likely ridership demand) that connects them to the tiered regional transit network.
- **Transit system accessibility:** XX% of households have convenient and comfortable non-automobile (walk / bike) access to the tiered regional transit network in 20 minutes or less.
- **On-time performance:** Minimum of XX% (exact percentage to be determined during implementation phase) of all transit trips will have an on-time arrival and departure (schedule adherence of +/- 5 minutes), with potential emphasis on trips to/from high-capacity nodes. Demand-response service will adhere to federally-defined on-time performance standards that are legally required for that service type.



Strong Transit-Centered Communities. *Our services help shape our communities for the better.*

- **Market share for transit and supportive modes:** Minimum of XX% commute mode share for transit and supportive modes such as carpool, taxi, bicycling, walking, and telecommuting (as measured by total single-occupant vehicle commute trips/total commute trips and tailored appropriately for urban, suburban, rural service contexts).
- **Transit leveraging and catalyzing new development growth.** XX% of new development growth (as measured by residential units and commercial square footage) will be transit-oriented development (as measured by households with vehicle ownership below the regional average) or transit-adjacent development (as measured by location within 1/2 mile distance from stops/stations of the priority regional transit network).



Sound Financial Stewardship. *We are good stewards of the public resources entrusted to us.*

- **Service efficiency & productivity:** Compared to Rio Metro’s status quo and aspirational peers, and while recognizing the different operating characteristics of Rio Metro’s different modes and unique service area contexts:
 - Maintain current high-efficiency on a cost-per-passenger mile basis; and
 - Look for opportunities to increase efficiency on a cost-per-passenger trip basis.



Innovative Programs & Partnerships. *We think outside the box and seek collaboration always.*

- **Transit leveraging/catalyzing economic development:** Collaborating with ABQ RIDE, increase participation in Smart Business Partnership (SBP) so that:
 - XX% of employees and students within 1/2 mile of Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE transit are associated with SBP organizations and eligible for SBP benefits; and
 - XX% of employees and students at SBP organizations receive a subsidized, discounted, or free transit pass through federal pre-tax commuter benefits or bulk purchase contracts with employers and educational institutions.



Industry-Leading Knowledge & Practice. *Our people take pride in leading the region forward.*

- **Board and staff as regional and industry leaders:**
 - 100% of new Board members, Leadership Committee members, and staff will participate in “Rio Metro 101” orientation within their first three months at the organization; and
 - 50% of Board members, Leadership Committee members, and staff will participate in professional development opportunity of some kind at least once every year.
- **Staff as change agents in achieving the vision:**
 - Minimum of 95% of employees report that their work plays a meaningful role in helping Rio Metro achieve the Key Strategies in the Vision Plan that they themselves are most passionate about; and
 - Minimum of 95% of employees report that Rio Metro is headed in the right direction necessary to achieve the Key Strategies in the Vision Plan.

Focus Issue: Implementing the Vision will require New Funding Sources

All of Rio Metro's previous audits and the peer review done as part of this visioning process have found that the agency is a good steward of existing financial resources. Even so, as part of this vision Rio Metro is committing itself to a top-to-bottom review of potential strategies to increase operational cost-effectiveness in all areas. Per the peer review, Rio Metro region invests less in transit than its aspirational peers in the Denver and Salt Lake regions that many stakeholders in the visioning process pointed to as models to emulate. For these reasons, it must be stated clearly and directly: Rio Metro will need additional financial resources to successfully implement this Vision Plan. While Rio Metro will continue to make good use of its existing funding sources, potential new funding sources are described below.

Federal Funding Sources

Over 80 federal programs may be used for some type of transit and transportation assistance. The most common federal transportation funding sources are:

- Federal Transit Administration Assistance
- Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)
- Veterans Transportation Services
- Older Americans Act (OAA)
- Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

State Funding Sources

In 2012, New Mexico reported providing \$6.6 million to transit in the state, the lowest level in the last five years, which ranked it 27th in the nation in terms of state support for public transit (or 26th in terms of per capita funding of \$3.30 per resident). A summary of state funding sources (ordered chronologically by the number of states that employ this funding source is shown) is below:

- Gas tax (13 states)
- Bonds (10 states)
- General funds (11 states)
- Registration/title fees (8 states)
- General sales tax (6 states)
- Motor vehicle/rental car sales tax (6 states)
- Interest income (7 states)
- State transportation fund (4 states)
- Trust fund (4 states)

Other state transit funding sources include lottery funds, casino funds, toll authority funding, and payroll mobility tax. Rio Metro should evaluate the viability of increasing existing funding sources or pursuing additional funding sources to meet future needs of the region.

Regional GRT Increase

One additional funding source available to Rio Metro is an increase in the regional Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) dedicated to Rio Metro transit. Such a measure would be submitted to voters in Rio Metro's three-county service area and approved by a simple majority. In 2014, voters in 18 states considered 61 transit ballot with 42 of these succeeding at the ballot box for a 69% success rate. Historically, transit measures have had a 71% success rate, but low voter turnout combined with other factors may have ultimately hurt the overall 2014 success rate.

Some keys to a successful transit ballot measure:

- Develop a clear transit improvement plan (“this is what it means for me”);
- Organize a broad base of supporters;
- Use “champions” to make your case;
- Articulate a clear, simple message and use it consistently; and
- Target high voter turnout elections (presidential election years).

Two relevant cases studies of successful transit ballot measures are summarized below.

Best Practice Case Study: Denver FasTracks

“FasTracks” plan: 122 miles of LRT, 18 miles BRT, new park-n-rides, expanded bus service, and redevelopment of Union Station. The yes campaign spent \$3.6 million and had the support from all 41 mayors plus the Chamber, industry, and environmental groups.

Seven years earlier voters rejected a conceptual transit ballot measure opposed by RTD’s Board with a 58% no vote. The yes campaign spent \$650,000 (versus \$50,000 for the no campaign). The failed “Guide the Ride” vote in 1997 prompted backers of a metro-wide transit system to redouble their efforts.

In 2001-2003 a comprehensive, region-wide FasTracks plan was developed in a highly inclusive process. The resulting map with all the improvements was a centerpiece in the campaign. The campaign stressed two key messages “You can’t stop growth – need to plan for it” and “The time is now.” A sign of the strength of the well-organized and well-timed yes campaign was that the measure passed despite the fact that one of two daily papers, the then-Governor and the then-Executive Director of CDOT opposed the campaign.



When Denver metro voters approved additional resources for Denver RTD, the agency was able to dramatically expand transit service to all its partner communities, and develop new bus-train intermodal stations and new TOD opportunities at major transit nodes.

Best Practice Case Study: Ann Arbor, MI

In May 2014 Ann Arbor area voters gave a resounding 71% yes vote to expand property taxes annually by \$35 on a \$100,000 home to fund a five-year Transit Improvement Plan that would expand service by 44%, purchase new buses, build park-n-rides, bus stops, and shelters. The increased millage is expected to raise \$5.4 million annually. Service improvements started in August 2014. The yes campaign spent \$54,427 and the opposition spent \$15,037.

Before the 2014 election, the last time voters in Ann Arbor went to the polls to approve a tax for public transit was more than 40 years ago when they approved the original millage. Early polling showed support from 63 percent of voters. Government, business and environmental leaders, and the presidents of the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, and Washtenaw Community College supported the campaign.

MoreBuses.org utilized a campaign slogan of “More buses! More places! More often!” The Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority provided 31 separate online maps detailing a major restructuring of routes, locations of more frequent bus service, and extended hours of service across its entire system.

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5. ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND MATERIALS

Appendix A: Priority Implementation Tactics (Years 1-5)

Appendix B: Future Phase Implementation Tactics



During the Vision Plan process, the project team developed several interim deliverables summarizing the key messages from stakeholder engagement and key findings from technical assessments. These interim deliverables provided the foundational material for the development of the Vision Framework. The Vision Framework was in turn vetted with Rio Metro Board, ABQ RIDE leadership and staff, as well as community and business stakeholders in order to develop this final Vision Plan. Each of the interim deliverables that informed the development of the Vision Plan are listed below and are available on the project website at <http://riometro.org/rio-metro-news/502-rio-metro-s-vision-for-the-future>. Hard copies of these interim deliverables (or any other work product created during the Vision Plan process) are available from Rio Metro.

What We Heard

- Stakeholder Interview Summaries (October 2014)
- Board Visioning Workshop Summary (March 2015)
- ABQ RIDE Visioning Workshop Summary (April 2015)
- Business and Community Outreach Summary (May 2015)
- Public Workshops Outreach Summary (September 2015)

What We Learned

- White Paper: Economic Development Potential of Transit (March 2015)
- White Paper: Peer Agency Review of Both Current and Aspirational Peers (May 2015)
- White Paper: Transit Operations and Organizational Options (July 2015)

Strategic Vision Framework Briefing Book

- Briefing Book PowerPoint presentation (November 2015)

Appendix B: Future Phase Implementation Tactics (continued)

✓ = Directly supports Key Strategy

✓ = Indirectly supports Key Strategy

Core Themes	Key Strategies	Future Phase Implementation Tactics																			
		Tactic: Allow all-door boarding on buses and specify low-floor buses with curb-level boarding to reduce dwell time.	Tactic: Install signal pre-empt to reduce time buses spend waiting at red lights.	Tactic: Work with local communities to get more dedicated bus lanes to remove buses from congested mixed flow lanes to reduce travel time.	Tactic: Work with other transit providers to develop better coordinated schedules to improve transfer efficiency.	Tactic: Invest in capital improvements to maintain rolling stock/rail in a State of Good Repair to reduce breakdown/downtime and increase service reliability and schedule adherence.	Tactic: Implement additional service to reduce headways and thereby reduce total travel time.	Tactic: Invest in capital improvements to maintain rolling stock/rail in a State of Good Repair as possible (double tracking, centralized traffic control, etc.)	Tactic: Negotiate MOUs, MOAs, and contracts with other agencies as needed to achieve other implementation tactics focused on making transit trips as convenient and time-competitive as possible with auto trips.	Tactic: Increase funding to allow for more regular inspection and timely cleaning and maintenance of passenger environment.	Tactic: Prioritize public art and placemaking investments at stations and stops.	Tactic: Develop a single-schedule map regional fare payment method, and other departments/field offices.	Tactic: Develop a single customer service number and quickly direct callers to local other modes and service providers.	Tactic: Implement wayfinding and signage to improve legibility and usability of the system and create consistent branding across all modes and providers.	Tactic: Increase frequency of Rail Runner service.	Tactic: Implement regional BRT network to urban areas.	Tactic: Implement other regional transit services such as commuter express buses to extend end-of-line services to suburban communities.	Tactic: Create high-frequency local networks in urban areas with transit-supportive policies (land use, parking management, etc.)	Tactic: Develop service expansion plans for smaller communities and rural areas based on cost-recovery thresholds (TRD).	Tactic: Partner with MPO and ABQ RIDE to develop regional TMO/TMA with dedicated and pooled funding.	
 Theme 3: Strong Transit-Centered Communities	Strategy 3.1: Leverage existing MOA relationship with MRCOG to better integrate regional transit planning with local land use planning / design.	✓	✓						✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Strategy 3.2: Increase support for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in areas well served by transit.																✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Strategy 3.3: Promote better pedestrian and bicycle connections to the regional transit system to improve public health outcomes, decrease social / economic isolation, and reduce household transportation costs.																✓	✓	✓	✓	
 Theme 4: Sound Financial Stewardship	Strategy 4.1: Pursue efficiency gains across all modes (rail, bus, and demand-response service).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓									✓	✓	
	Strategy 4.2: Seek new and expanded revenue sources (including local & regional, state & federal, and public-private partnerships) to diversify the funding base and provide a stable funding source for Vision Plan implementation.								✓	✓										✓	✓
	Strategy 4.3: Pursue most cost-effective agency structure, potentially including independence from MRCOG, acquisition of capital assets from NMDOT, and enhanced coordination/consolidation with ABQ RIDE.																				

Appendix B: Future Phase Implementation Tactics (continued)

- ✓ = Directly supports Key Strategy
- ✓ = Indirectly supports Key Strategy

Core Themes	Key Strategies	Future Phase Implementation Tactics																				
		Tactic: Develop a comprehensive bicycle program to improve transit bike integration (e.g. bike to buses, bike parking, bike sharing, bike connections to transit nodes, etc.)	Tactic: Partner with MPO/PO to provide dedicated staff to focus on land use transit integration, including providing technical assistance to local communities, planning initiatives, and development review processes	Tactic: Develop regional transit standards (e.g. complete streets roadway designers and development review processes)	Tactic: Partner with MPO and local jurisdictions to conduct a comprehensive inventory of local and regional pedestrian and bicycle networks to identify infrastructure quality, network connectivity, and collision hot spots	Tactic: Partner with local jurisdictions to apply for grant funding to address priority pedestrian/bicycle needs and issues	Tactic: Partner with local jurisdictions and school districts on safe routes to transit throughout life region	Tactic: Develop level of service targets appropriate for different modes and corridors or a significant loss of funding	Tactic: Create "Worst Case Scenario" Service Plan to prioritize service in the event of a significant loss of funding	Tactic: Expand high-discount transit programs in partnership with ABO, RIDE, and HES (Institutes of Higher Education)	Tactic: Partner with UNM/CNM for cost-sharing on expanded services targeted to their populations	Tactic: Work with public agencies to develop and implement transit-supportive parking management policies	Tactic: Work with public agencies to develop and implement transit-supportive policies that are or can be well served by transit	Tactic: Expand the Smart Business Partnership Program to include dedicated staff changes to agency transit-supportive employee benefit packages afforded to the unique circumstances (e.g. private sector, transit riders, educational institutions, etc.)	Tactic: Develop charter for Executive Leadership Committee and begin recruiting members (e.g. private sector, transit riders, educational institutions, etc.)	Tactic: Partner with MPO/PO to develop a technical assistance program to provide grant funding and/or staff resources to local communities to foster transit-supportive policy and planning initiatives	Tactic: Continue engaging stakeholder engagement					
 <p>Theme 5: Innovative Programs & Partnerships</p>	Strategy 5.1: Integrate transit investments with the regional economic development strategy.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Strategy 5.2: Pursue public-public partnerships (including school districts and UNM/CNM) to offer free/discounted transit passes, joint marketing, and education.	✓					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	
	Strategy 5.3: Pursue public-private partnerships (including major employers) to fund targeted service to employment centers, transit benefits to employees, and joint marketing.	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓							✓
 <p>Theme 6: Industry-Leading Knowledge & Practice</p>	Strategy 6.1: Conduct orientation and on-going professional development for staff and board, including in-person visits with peer agencies.																		✓		✓	
	Strategy 6.2: Broaden the stakeholder perspectives provided to Rio Metro leadership and create opportunities for ongoing engagement and leadership development.											✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Strategy 6.3: Become a resource for local jurisdictions to support best practice pilot programs, staff training, and implementation of Vision Plan priorities.	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓