



Board of Directors Handbook
March 2024



RIO METRO
REGIONAL TRANSIT DISTRICT

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.

Vision

Rio Metro is a leader moving our region forward, connecting our diverse communities, and supporting sustainable prosperity.



Contents

Our History	1
Our Services.....	2
Overview.....	2
New Mexico Rail Runner Express.....	4
Bus Routes.....	5
Dial-a-Ride	6
Job Access.....	7
ABQ RIDE	7
Our Board of Directors	9
Structure	9
Responsibilities & Opportunities.....	10
Relationship to the Chief Executive Officer.....	11
Board Meeting Expectations	11
Our Employees	12
Our Partners.....	14
Mid-Region Council of Governments	14
North Central Regional Transit District	15
New Mexico Department of Transportation	15
Herzog Transit Services.....	16
All Aboard America	17
Our Finances	18
Our Riders and the COVID-19 Ridership Recovery.....	20
Our Capital Priorities	22
Our Strategic Vision	24
Appendix A: Staff Contacts.....	25
General Inquiries	25
Board Meetings.....	25
Public Relations	25
Appendix B: Recommended Resources.....	26

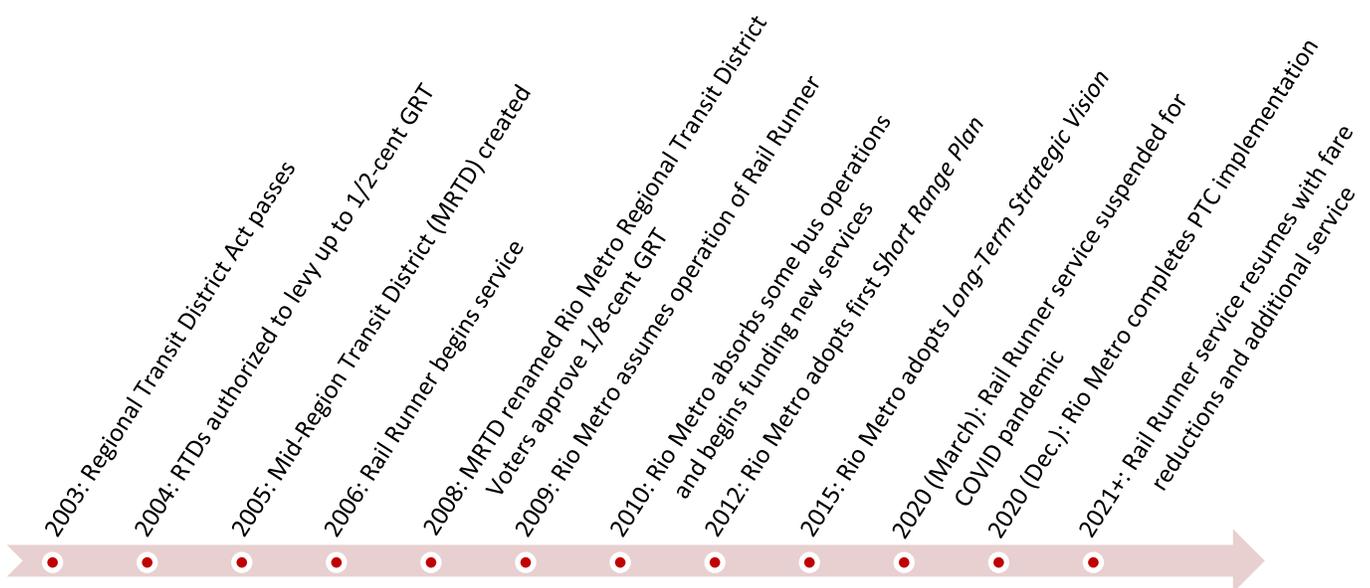
Our History

In 2003, the New Mexico legislature passed the Regional Transit District Act, which authorized the creation of multi-jurisdictional transit systems. The following year, the legislature gave regional transit districts the authority to levy up to a ½-cent gross receipts tax. These two actions paved the way for the formation of the Mid-Region Transit District (encompassing Bernalillo, Sandoval and Valencia counties), which was certified by the New Mexico Transportation Commission in March 2005.

The primary motivation for creating the Mid-Region Transit District was the long-term operation and maintenance of the New Mexico Rail Runner Express. In the mid-2000s, the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) oversaw the planning, design, construction and initial operation of the Rail Runner on behalf of the New Mexico Department of Transportation. In July 2006, Rail Runner service began between Albuquerque and the Town of Bernalillo, before expanding south to Belen in February 2007 and north to Santa Fe in December 2008. That same year, the Mid-Region Transit District was renamed the Rio Metro Regional Transit District, and voters approved a ⅛-cent gross receipts tax (GRT). Per the ballot language, half of the GRT revenue was dedicated to the Rail Runner, and the remainder was authorized to fund Rio Metro’s transit system at large.

With a revenue stream secured, Rio Metro assumed operation and maintenance of the Rail Runner from MRCOG in 2009. Shortly thereafter, Rio Metro acquired bus services from several of its member agencies, including the City of Belen’s, Village of Los Lunas’ and the City of Rio Rancho’s dial-a-ride programs, and Sandoval County’s Sandoval Easy Express commuter bus service. Funds were also used to establish ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro bus routes that connect Rail Runner stations to outlying areas.

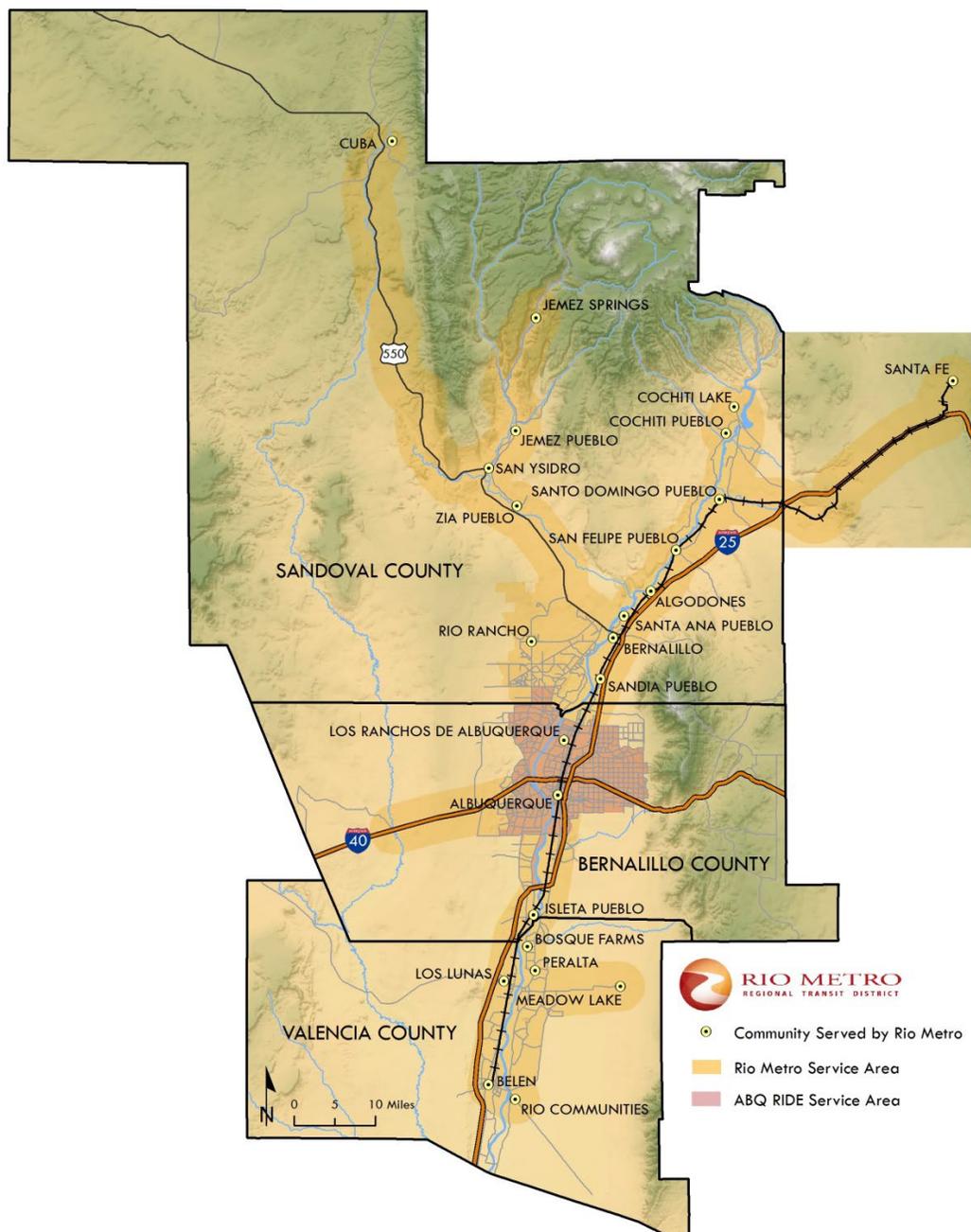
Since then, Rio Metro has matured these transit services while facing significant challenges. Notably, Rio Metro implemented a \$65 million, federally-mandated Positive Train Control (PTC) system just prior to Congress’s December 31, 2020 deadline. Today, Rio Metro is making steady ridership gains as it recovers from the COVID pandemic—all while introducing additional Rail Runner service and advancing projects that were delayed because of PTC implementation.



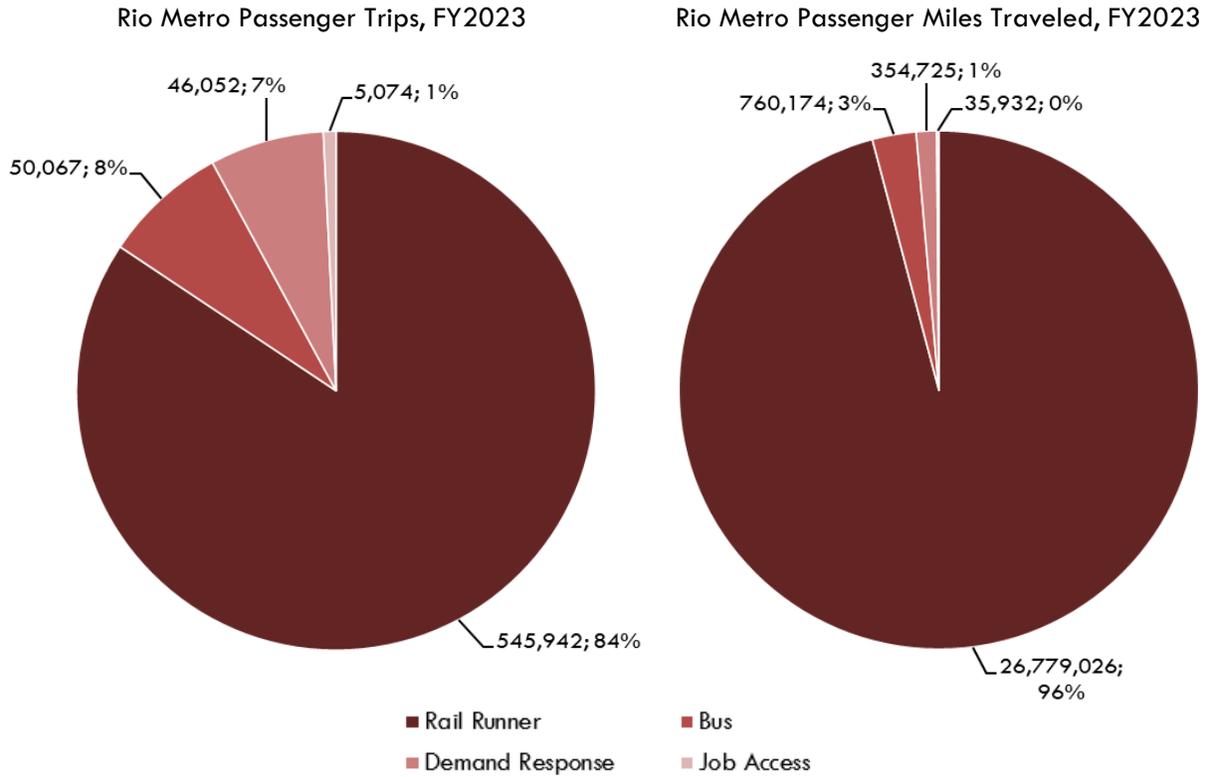
Our Services

Overview

While Rio Metro's official boundary includes Bernalillo, Sandoval and Valencia counties, its reach extends well beyond its jurisdiction. The most obvious example is Rail Runner service to Santa Fe County. However, other transit agencies, including ABQ RIDE, NMDOT Park-and-Ride, North Central Regional Transit District, Santa Fe Trails and Socorro Public Transportation, also provide vital connections to/from the Rail Runner and the communities that they serve. Rio Metro is truly part of a larger, interconnected transit network, and the Rail Runner is the backbone of that network.



As suggested by its history, Rio Metro also provides an uncommon combination of intercity, urban, suburban, and rural transit services, including the New Mexico Rail Runner Express; eight bus routes that primarily serve Sandoval and Valencia counties; dial-a-ride programs in Valencia County, the City of Rio Rancho/Village of Corrales and small areas of Bernalillo County; and the Job Access program in Bernalillo County. Combined, these services provided 647,135 passenger trips and 27,929,857 passenger miles traveled in fiscal year (FY)2023 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023).



New Mexico Rail Runner Express

The Rail Runner, which connects 15 stations along a 100-mile corridor between Belen and Santa Fe, is Rio Metro’s most popular and well-known service. In FY2023, 84 percent of Rio Metro’s passenger trips and 96 percent of its passenger miles traveled were accrued via the Rail Runner; by the end of FY2023, lifetime Rail Runner passenger trips exceeded 13 million, and passenger miles traveled surpassed 567 million. The relatively high ratio of passenger miles traveled to passenger trips attests to the Rail Runner’s most defining statistic: the average passenger trip length exceeds 45 miles, which is farther than most all other commuter railroads.

When service began on July 14, 2006, the Rail Runner connected only three stations: Downtown Albuquerque, Los Ranchos/Journal Center and Sandoval County/US 550. Service eventually reached Los Lunas and Belen in late 2006/early 2007, and Santa Fe in December 2008. From that time on, Rail Runner service levels remained relatively consistent up until March 2020, when the Governor suspended service for almost a year because of the COVID pandemic. After resuming Rail Runner service, Rio Metro added even more trains in FY2023 when compared to pre-COVID levels. Today, 26 weekday, 15 Saturday, and 9 Sunday trains travel the corridor.

As a commuter rail service, the Rail Runner is generally distinguished from light rail, streetcar, and heavy rail (e.g., subway) modes because it travels over and shares a standard gauge railway with national freight and passenger rail operators (i.e., Amtrak and BNSF); relies on diesel rather than electric propulsion; provides regional connections between suburban and rural communities and urban centers; generally travels longer distances with more widely spaced stations; and can travel at relatively higher speeds (up to 79 mph). Also, ticketing, fare structures and other commuter rail operating practices are typically different than other rail modes.

Furthermore, as the name “commuter rail” suggests, the majority of the Rail Runner’s ridership comes from workers commuting between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. However, the Rail Runner also serves New Mexicans and visitors throughout central and northern New Mexico through its extended network of partner transit providers. In effect, the Rail Runner helps link nine counties and over 50+ connecting bus routes.



Bus Routes

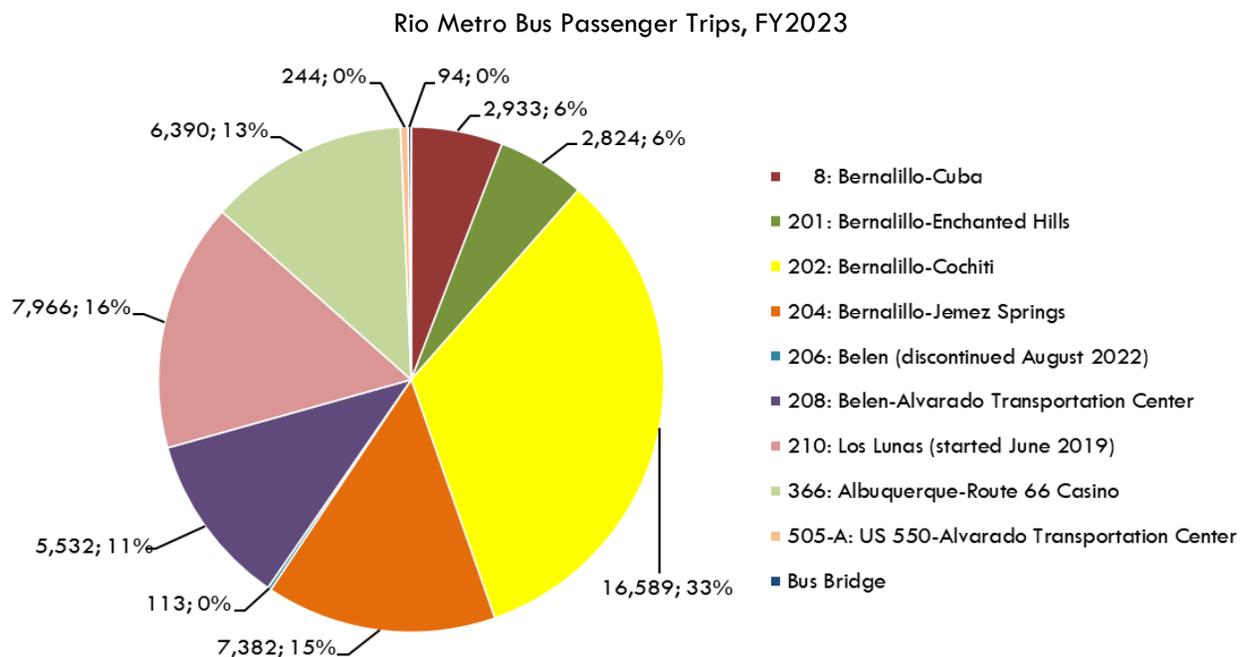
Eight Rio Metro bus routes fan out from Rail Runner stations and other transit centers to serve outlying neighborhoods and rural communities. Four connect the Sandoval County communities and pueblos of Cuba, Jemez, Jemez Springs, San Ysidro, Zia, Santa Ana, Kewa, Cochiti, and Cochiti Lake with the Sandoval County/US 550 Rail Runner Station and/or the Kewa Rail Runner Station. All or portions of these routes were originally branded as the Sandoval Easy Express, and were operated by the Mid-Region Transit District under contract with Sandoval County before being formally incorporated into Rio Metro.



In contrast, bus routes in Valencia County have changed more significantly with demand. In FY2018, Rio Metro started a route from Belen to the Alvarado Transportation Center (ATC) to supplement the lack of midday Rail Runner service in Valencia County. At the end of FY2019, Rio Metro also converted a morning/evening route in west Los Lunas to an all-day route along NM 6 and NM 47 that extends from west Los Lunas to Bosque Farms. Post-COVID, Rio Metro discontinued two underperforming routes—one connecting west Belen neighborhoods to the Belen Rail Runner Station, and another connecting the Los Lunas Rail Runner Station to the UNM Valencia Campus.

In Bernalillo County, one route links the Central and Unser Transit Center in Albuquerque to the Route 66 Casino Hotel. Another route connects the Sandoval County/US 550 Rail Runner Station to the ATC to replace an early morning Rail Runner train that was discontinued in FY2012.

In FY2023, these routes and Rail Runner bus bridge services accounted for 50,067 passenger trips (eight percent of Rio Metro’s ridership) broken down by route below.



Dial-a-Ride

Generally categorized as a “demand response” service, dial-a-ride is a shared-ride service that does not operate on a fixed route, but instead delivers passengers directly from their desired origin to their desired destination; therefore, passengers are required to make reservations through a dispatcher. Rio Metro operates two dial-a-ride programs that were acquired from member agencies and generally still reflect the operating characteristics established by those agencies. Valencia County Dial-a-Ride was previously operated by the City of Belen and Village of Los Lunas.



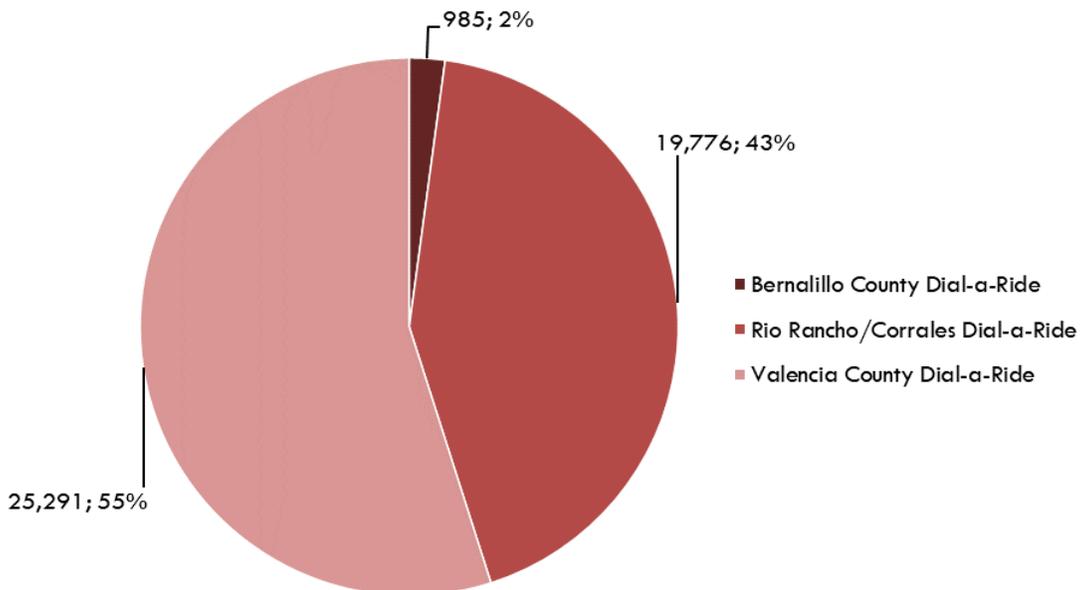
It provides curb-to-curb service to riders of all ages and abilities across most of Valencia County, and is especially vital to persons living in rural communities such as Meadow Lake and El Cerro Mission who lack access to a vehicle. In 2018, this service was expanded to the Pueblo of Isleta through a cost-sharing partnership with the Pueblo. Valencia County residents may also schedule trips to medical appointments in Albuquerque.

Rio Rancho/Corrales Dial-a-Ride, formerly Rio Transit, provides door-to-door service within Rio Rancho, Corrales, the Cottonwood area, and to medical appointments in Albuquerque. This service is limited to seniors ages 62+ and individuals with disabilities ages 18+. From its start in 2010, this service was available to Rio Rancho residents. Service expanded to Corrales in June 2022.

In 2023, Rio Metro took over two ABQ RIDE routes, Route 222 connecting the Bernalillo County/Sunport Rail Runner Station, Sunport, Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center and Kirtland Air Force Base, and Route 251, connecting the Los Ranchos/Journal Center Rail Runner Station, Northwest Transit Center, Intel and south Rio Rancho. Instead of operating these routes as peak-hour fixed routes as ABQ RIDE had previously done, Rio Metro operates them upon request as a dial-a-ride service.

In FY2023, these three dial-a-ride services combined to provide 46,052 passenger trips (seven percent of Rio Metro’s ridership).

Rio Metro Dial-a-Ride Passenger Trips, FY2023



Job Access

The Job Access program is a continuation of MRCOG's Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program. JARC was once a distinct federal program to provide taxi-based work transportation for low-income individuals. While the federal program has been discontinued, Rio Metro continues to provide this service for Bernalillo County residents receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or living within 150 percent of the Federal poverty level. In order for a person to use the Job Access program, bus service must not be available at the time of their trip, or their bus trip would exceed 1.5 hours, or the nearest bus stop is farther than ¼-mile from their home or job. A person can only be enrolled in the program for up to one year and may also be issued an ABQ RIDE bus pass. In FY2023, the Job Access program provided 5,074 passenger trips (less than one percent of Rio Metro's ridership). Today, one contractor, zTrip, supports the Job Access program.



ABQ RIDE

In FY2011, Rio Metro began contracting with ABQ RIDE through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to provide specific services within Bernalillo County and southern Sandoval County:

- Bus routes 222, 250 and 251, which connect the Bernalillo County Rail Runner Station and the Sunport; the Downtown Albuquerque Rail Runner Station and the Sunport; and northwest Albuquerque/Rio Rancho and the Los Ranchos/Journal Center Rail Runner Station, respectively;
- Extending bus routes 96 and 155 from the Northwest Transit Center to the intersection of Southern and Unser boulevards in Rio Rancho during peak hours; and
- Funding support for other routes such as the 790 Blue Line Rapid Ride.

Post-COVID, ABQ RIDE was forced to cut many of these routes because of an inability to find enough drivers and maintainers; and, as noted on the previous page, Rio Metro took over routes 222 and 251 as part of its dial-a-ride operations. Nevertheless, the MOU in recent years has not required that Rio Metro's contribution support specific routes, giving ABQ RIDE greater budgeting flexibility as it recovers from the COVID pandemic. In FY2023, Rio Metro contributed \$4,355,000 to ABQ RIDE, which accounted for a nine percent share of ABQ RIDE's FY2023 budgeted revenues.

This partnership also allowed all passengers with a valid Rail Runner ticket to ride ABQ RIDE buses for free (when ABQ RIDE had previously charged a fare), and arranges for ABQ RIDE bus bridge service in emergency situations that would require transport of Rail Runner passengers by bus.

Ultimately, ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro serve complementary roles. While Rio Metro carries about one-tenth the passengers of ABQ RIDE, both agencies serve similar numbers of passenger miles traveled because of trip length. In FY2019, the average ABQ RIDE passenger trip length was 3.7 miles; the average Rio Metro passenger trip length was 41.1 miles. This key difference reflects how and where each agency operates. ABQ RIDE serves the urban and suburban context of Albuquerque where origins and destinations are relatively close to one another. Rio Metro, however, tends to operate in a more regional and rural context, linking more distant communities and transit systems.



Our Board of Directors

Structure

The Regional Transit District Act requires that a board must include at least one director from each member government, and prohibits one government from holding a majority of seats if the district includes more than three governments. With those requirements in mind, Rio Metro’s bylaws allocate seats based on population, which results in 21 directors distributed across the following governments:

Board of Directors Roster (March 2024)

Member Government	Name	Title
City of Albuquerque	Joaquín Baca	Councilor, District 2
	Dan Champine	Councilor, District 8
	<i>Tammy Fiebelkorn, Vice Chair</i>	Councilor, District 7
	Renée Grout	Councilor, District 9
	Tim Keller	Mayor
	Nichole Rogers	Councilor, District 6
City of Belen	<i>Steven Tomita, Chair</i>	Planning and Economic Dev. Mgr.
Bernalillo County	Adriann Barboa	Commissioner, District 3
	Walt Benson	Commissioner, District 4
	Steven Michael Quezada	Commissioner, District 2
Town of Bernalillo	Jack Torres	Mayor
Village of Bosque Farms	Vacant	--
Village of Corrales	Mel Knight	Councilor, District 3
Village of Los Lunas	Michael Jaramillo	Public Works Director
Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque	Joe Craig	Mayor
City of Rio Communities	Thomas Nelson	Councilor
City of Rio Rancho	Jim Owen	Councilor, District 1
	Robert Tyler	Councilor, District 3
	Vacant	--
Sandoval County	Michael Meek	Commissioner, District 3
Valencia County	Joseph Bizzell	Commissioner, District 4

Associate Members (Non-Voting)

Member Government	Name	Title
Isleta Pueblo	Vacant	--
North Central Regional Transit District	Anthony Mortillaro	Executive Director

The bylaws also allow the board to confer non-voting, associate membership to another government that provides financial contributions or connecting/complimentary transit services, or that is significantly impacted by Rio Metro’s services. Two governments, Isleta Pueblo and the North Central Regional Transit District, have been granted associate membership.

Full member governments must appoint as many elected officials to the board as their population warrants. Directors, in turn, may appoint another elected official or employee from their agency as an alternate director to serve temporarily in their absence or permanently should they so choose. Nevertheless, the Regional Transit District Act requires that only elected officials may vote to acquire land or issue bonds. Board members are expected to serve at least one year, unless their term in office expires or they are replaced by their member government.

Responsibilities & Opportunities

The Board of Directors' authority is established by the Regional Transit District Act. While the Act allows the board to delegate certain powers by resolution, only the board can:

- Adopt board policies and procedures;
- Approve the purchase of land by negotiated sale;
- Take legal action that does not involve traffic or toll violations;
- Establish fare policy;
- Issue bonds; and
- Approve route or schedule changes that affect 25 percent or more of Rio Metro's system.

The Act also gives the board other powers that are further detailed in Rio Metro's contract and bylaws. These two documents set the rules and expectations for:

- Establishing committees;
- Scheduling, advertising, calling, conducting and adjourning board and committee meetings;
- Appointing officers;
- Meeting attendance;
- Compensation as allowed by the Per Diem and Mileage Act, including the reimbursement of reasonable expenses;
- Adopting an annual budget;
- Conducting an annual audit;
- Procuring materials, equipment, labor, constructions and professional services, and legal counsel;
- Entering into joint use and service agreements with other governments;
- Investing; and
- Selecting an official seal.

In light of these responsibilities and the demands of their elected office, the potential exists for a director to passively "rubber stamp" what comes before them or to merely ensure that Rio Metro adheres to its basic fiduciary obligations. However, a good director will contribute in more meaningful ways.

By the nature of their elected office, directors have the pulse of their communities. Thus, they serve as a conduit for their constituents—Rio Metro's customers—by advocating for their transportation needs at board meetings and other Rio Metro forums. Conversely, directors can promote the value of Rio Metro's services to their local communities.

Board members also serve by identifying ways that Rio Metro and its member governments can align plans and capital projects to benefit their respective agencies. For example, a member government may be drafting

a land use plan along a corridor served by a Rio Metro bus route. In this case, questions about appropriate transit-supportive land use densities, multi-modal design standards and pedestrian/bicyclist “last mile” connections can be addressed so that the existing bus route and the land uses it serves function more harmoniously.

In addition to being a good reference for board members, the American Public Transportation Association’s *Transit Board Member Handbook* highlights one other key role for board members—system innovation. An engaged board can greatly impact the future of their organization—especially by implementing Rio Metro’s long-term strategic vision.



Relationship to the Chief Executive Officer

Per Rio Metro’s founding contract, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) oversees the district’s day-to-day affairs and may be hired or removed by the board. The CEO is required to “...see that all policies, directions and orders of the board are carried out”; however, the contract also stipulates that such direction must come from the board in total: “Unless the board has authorized such exercise of authority, decisions or instruction of individual board members or committees shall not be binding on the Chief Executive Officer.”

These clauses highlight the unique relationship between the CEO and the Board of Directors. The CEO’s role is to take action on policies adopted by the board. In doing so, the CEO has day-to-day control over many of the topics covered in this handbook, such as hiring employees, contracting and operating services, communicating with customers, developing a budget, auditing financial records and administering board meetings. This frees the board to focus on more broad-based policies that will contribute to Rio Metro’s long-term success.

Board Meeting Expectations

The Board of Directors currently meets monthly on the third Friday at noon in the MRCOG boardroom (virtual access via Zoom is also typically available). Board meetings are led by the Chair or Vice Chair, who are typically voted to their respective offices each June. The Chief Executive Officer and most managers are present, and the Office Manager records the minutes. All meetings allow for public comment.

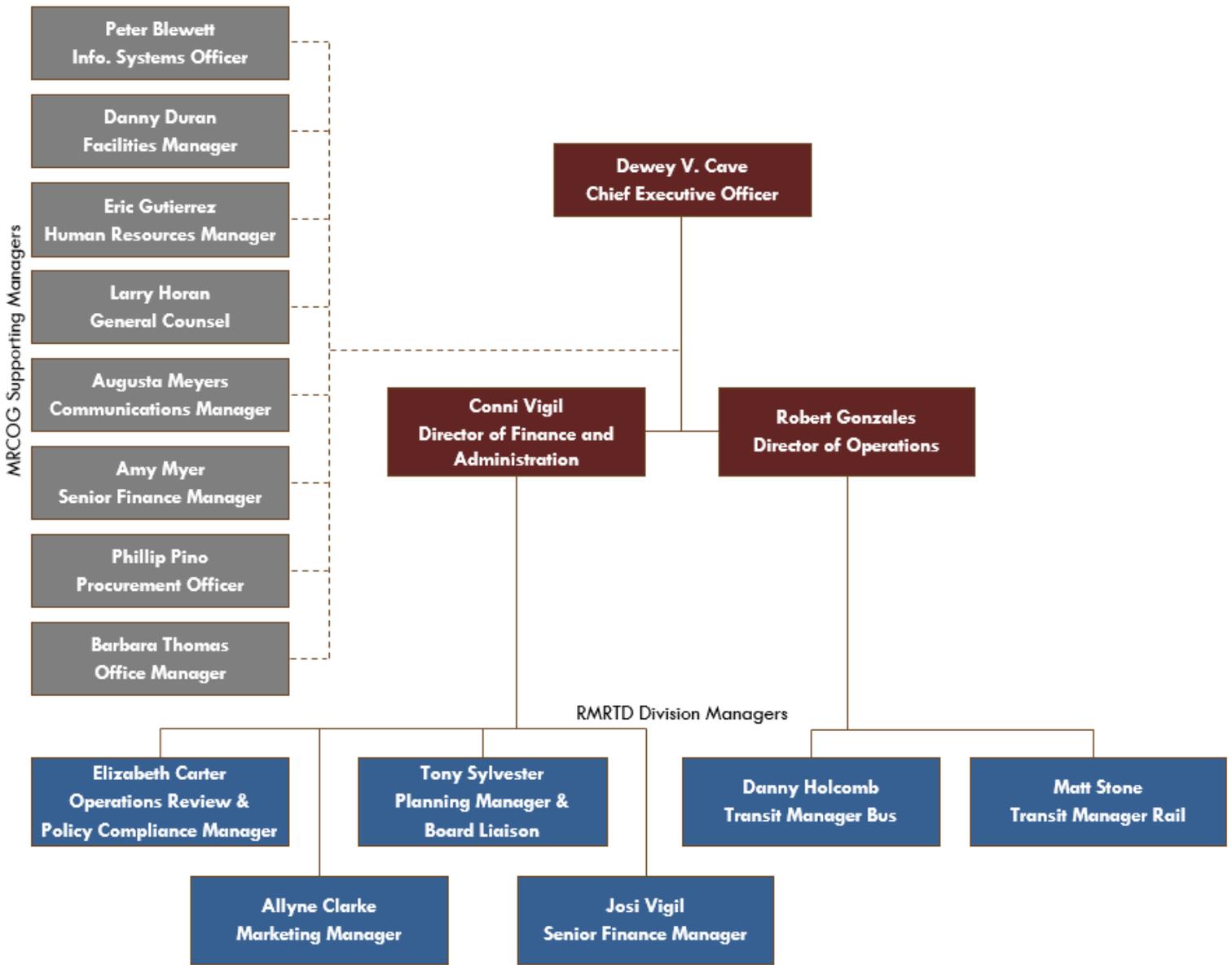
A majority of directors (11 of 21) constitutes a quorum, and is required for the board to take action on items subject to their authority. When an absence arises, it is the director’s responsibility to notify and arrange for their alternate director’s attendance.

To ensure compliance with the State of New Mexico Open Meetings Act, the board adopts an open meetings resolution each May or June that includes the meeting schedule for the upcoming fiscal year. Also, each meeting’s agenda packet is typically finalized and emailed to the board at least three days prior to the meeting; and, in the event of a cancellation, notice is also distributed by email.

Our Employees

Although Rio Metro is an independent agency, its main office is located at the MRCOG building. This is owed, in part, to MRCOG's development and management of the Rail Runner prior to Rio Metro's existence. Furthermore, MRCOG's Executive Director, Dewey V. Cave, also serves as Rio Metro's CEO, and Rio Metro and MRCOG continue to share certain administrative, communications, facility maintenance, finance, legal, human resources, information technology and procurement personnel.

Rio Metro's day-to-day operations are overseen by two directors: Conni Vigil, the Director of Finance and Administration, and Robert Gonzales, the Director of Operations. As shown in the organizational chart below, the two directors directly report to the CEO and also oversee six managers:



- Transit Manager Rail: Rail Runner operations, facility maintenance, capital improvements, safety, dispatching and customer service;
- Transit Manager Bus: Contracted and directly-operated bus operations, including all Rio Metro fixed routes and dial-a-ride services;
- Marketing Manager: Marketing and advertising, website, social media and graphic design;
- Operations Review & Policy Compliance Manager: Compliance with federal and state policies and Job Access program administration;
- Planning Manager and Board Liaison: Short- and long-range planning and capital project management, and Rio Metro board oversight; and
- Senior Finance Manager: Budget, grants, purchasing, accounting, payroll and NTD reporting.

Employees positioned under these managers work from several locations across Rio Metro’s service area. Administrative, customer service, dispatch, Job Access, finance, marketing and planning personnel work from the MRCOG building in Albuquerque. Valencia County personnel work from the Valencia County Transit Facility located near the intersection of NM 6 and NM 47 in Los Lunas. Sandoval County personnel work from the Sandoval County Transit Facility on Idalia Rd. west of Unser Blvd. in Rio Rancho. Rail Runner operations and maintenance personnel work from the rail yard on Iron Ave. west of Broadway Blvd., but are commonly in the field to perform their duties.



Our Partners

Mid-Region Council of Governments

MRCOG was established in 1969 to provide a regional planning forum for central New Mexico governments. In addition to Rio Metro, MRCOG is home to several organizations, including Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico, the Economic Development District and the Rural Transportation Planning Organization.

Of all MRCOG-affiliated organizations, Rio Metro coordinates most closely with the Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MRMPO). Rio Metro provides annual funding to MRMPO for planning support from their areas of expertise (sociodemographic analysis, transportation modeling, public outreach, etc.), to advance Rio Metro's plans, studies, grant applications and other projects. More so, MRMPO is responsible for developing and implementing federally-mandated transportation plans and programs that affect the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area (AMPA), including:



- the long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), most recently *Connections 2040*;
- the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which includes the selection of projects to receive federal funds over a seven-year period; and
- Roadway access and other regional transportation policies.

MRMPO's plans and programs are approved by the Metropolitan Transportation Board (MTB), of which Rio Metro is a member. And, while many of Rio Metro's directors serve on the MTB and MRCOG Board of Directors on behalf of their member governments, *Rio Metro is a distinct agency over which neither the MTB nor MRCOG Board of Directors have authority.* Understandably, with several meetings at MRCOG each month, directors should not hesitate to contact Rio Metro staff if they have questions about the relationship of the MTB, MRCOG Board of Directors and Rio Metro Board of Directors.

Rio Metro also participates on three staff-level technical committees that serve the MTB. The Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) reviews and provides recommendations on items scheduled to come before the MTB. In turn, the Transportation Program Task Group is a standing technical committee that is primarily responsible for drafting and amending the TIP prior to TCC review and MTB approval. Lastly, the Congestion Management Process Committee satisfies a federal mandate to identify congested corridors and develop strategies to improve the transportation network's efficiency.



North Central Regional Transit District

The North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) is a key contributor to Rio Metro's success. The NCRTD's iconic blue buses provide connections from the Rail Runner to Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe and Taos counties. Equally as important, the NCRTD dedicates half of the gross receipts tax revenue it collects in Santa Fe County as that county's contribution to Rail Runner operations. In FY2023, that contribution was \$3.8 million. Because of Rio Metro and the NCRTD's close relationship, Rio Metro's is an ex officio member of the NCRTD Board of Directors. Likewise, NCRTD is an associate member of the Rio Metro Board of Directors.



New Mexico Department of Transportation

As the owner of all Rail Runner right-of-way and vehicles, the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) necessarily has a close relationship with Rio Metro. Formalized most recently in a 2013 memorandum of agreement (MOA), Rio Metro is generally responsible for all Rail Runner operations, maintenance, planning, design, construction, scheduling, fare policy and collection, procurement, budgeting, accounting, marketing and other day-to-day activities. Rio Metro is also required to report on these activities to the New Mexico State Transportation Commission every July. In return, NMDOT allows the use of its right-of-way and vehicles, directs certain funds to the Rail Runner (e.g., trackage fees from Amtrak and BNSF), provides project support as needed, and serves as lead negotiator with railroads and other parties. The MOA has no termination date. Instead, it requires 12 months written notice of termination by either party, except in cases of emergency. To keep up-to-date on MOA activities, NMDOT Rail Bureau and Rio Metro staff usually meet bi-weekly.



In addition to the Rail Runner, NMDOT and Rio Metro also partner to provide bus service. Rio Metro is one of many recipients of Section 5310 (seniors and individuals with disabilities) and Section 5311 (rural) federal formula grants that are administered by NMDOT. Rio Metro also provides funding for a portion of NMDOT Park-and-Ride's Purple Route, which, in concert with the Rail Runner, connects Albuquerque to Santa Fe and Los Alamos.

Herzog Transit Services

While Rio Metro is responsible for operating the Rail Runner on behalf of NMDOT, Rio Metro does not directly operate the Rail Runner. Rather, Rio Metro contracts with Herzog Transit Services to carry out three primary responsibilities: train operations, maintenance of vehicles, and maintenance of way. Herzog Transit Services also manages other commuter rail services, including the Altamont Commuter Express (Stockton, CA) and the Trinity Railway Express (Dallas, TX).



Although they are not Rio Metro employees, Herzog's engineers, conductors, ticket agents and security officers arguably have Rio Metro's most visible roles. Besides ensuring that our customers have a great experience on the Rail Runner, they are responsible for train startup and inspections, operating the train safely and efficiently in accordance with the schedule and regulations, collecting fares, performing passenger counts, and many other tasks.

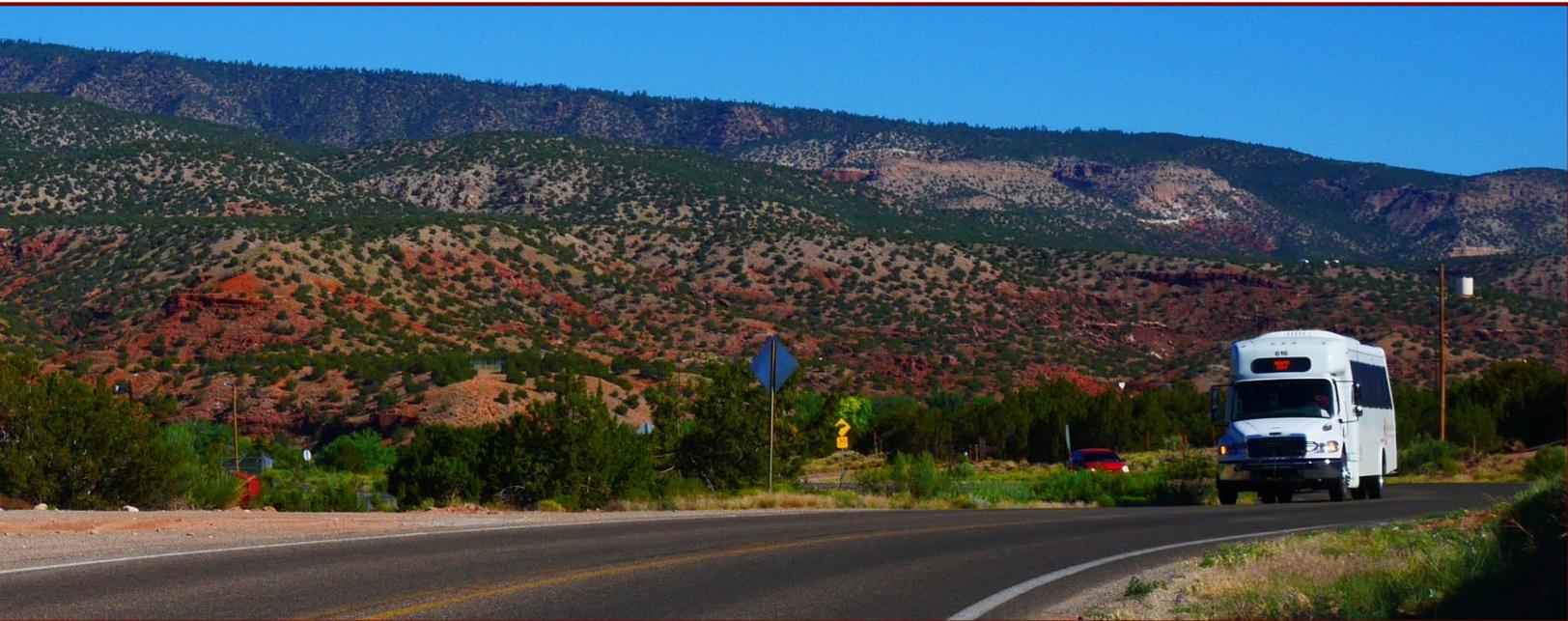


Behind the scenes, but no less important, Herzog's maintenance crews ensure that the Rail Runner remains in a state of good repair. At the most basic level, the Rail Runner's "rolling stock"—9 locomotives, 9 cab cars and 13 coach cars—need to be fueled, cleaned, and inspected on a daily basis. When the need arises, running repairs can occur outside of the shop with minimal impact to operations. However, preventative maintenance and more significant repairs may require a vehicle to be rotated out of service or placed in the shop mid-day or overnight. Major repairs and overhauls can even necessitate pulling a vehicle from service for multiple days or weeks, or even transporting it back to the manufacturer. For these reasons, the Rail Runner has enough vehicles to maintain an appropriate spare ratio in the event that a vehicle must be removed from service.

Maintaining the “way”—the track, signals and other infrastructure—is equally important to the Rail Runner’s success. Herzog crews perform routine maintenance such as replacing ties and ballast; repairing bridges, culverts and fencing; and conducting track inspections. They also ensure that all signals; switches; crossing lights and gates; and train control and communications systems are operating correctly to keep train passengers and drivers at crossings safe. Rio Metro’s most recent contract with Herzog was executed in September 2021 and expires in 2029.

All Aboard America

While Rio Metro directly operates all Valencia County bus services and the Rio Rancho/Corrales Dial-a-Ride, Rio Metro contracts some bus routes to All Aboard America (AAA). AAA currently operates all bus routes that extend into rural Sandoval County, and routes 366 and 505 in Bernalillo County. AAA also operates NMDOT’s Park-and-Ride routes. Rio Metro’s contract with AAA was executed June 2023 and expires in 2028, with the option to extend for three additional years.



Our Finances

As noted previously, Rio Metro has the authority to levy up to a ½-cent gross receipts tax within its district boundary. To fund existing services, voters approved a ¼-cent gross receipts tax in 2008, half of which is dedicated to the Rail Runner. Rio Metro also receives a gross receipts tax contribution from the North Central Regional Transit District for Rail Runner operations within Santa Fe County.

Gross receipts taxes provide a relatively stable source of local (non-federal) revenue. However, they are generally tied to the health of the regional economy and can fall during economic downturns, placing added pressure on Rio Metro's services when they may be needed most.

Fares are a second source of local revenue. Although fares make up a significantly smaller share of Rio Metro's local revenue than gross receipts taxes, it is the funding source over which the Board of Directors has the most immediate control. Some agencies, such as the North Central Regional Transit District, have historically charged no fares to stimulate ridership and eliminate the expense and boarding delay associated with fare collection. Recently, ABQ RIDE went fare free permanently in November 2023 for equity reasons, as have other transit agencies nationwide post-COVID. Rio Metro's dial-a-ride and bus services went fare free during the pandemic, and have remained fare free since. Rio Metro has also offered discounted fares on the Rail Runner post-COVID.

While Rio Metro has the authority to issue bonds as another source of local revenue, it does not because it has relatively few assets to serve as collateral—primarily because NMDOT owns all Rail Runner right-of-way and vehicles. However, NMDOT collects fees from Amtrak and BNSF for their use of the tracks. Per the MOA with NMDOT, these fees are passed along to Rio Metro on a reimbursable basis.

Rio Metro's largest source of revenue comes from federal grants, several of which are determined by formulas based on operating and demographic characteristics (vehicle revenue miles, directional route miles, passenger miles traveled, population, etc.). Federal funds that Rio Metro commonly receives directly from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) or as a recipient through NMDOT include:

- 5307 Urbanized Area (capital and limited operations);
- 5307 Small Urbanized Area (capital and operations);
- 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Senior and Individuals with Disabilities (capital);
- 5311 Other-than-Urbanized (rural) Areas (capital, operations and administration);
- 5337 State of Good Repair (capital maintenance of railroad right-of-way and vehicles);
- 5339 Bus and Bus Facilities (capital);
- Section 130 Railroad-Highway Crossings; and
- Flex funds (STP, CMAQ, CRP, etc.) received through the MRMPO TIP and statewide processes.

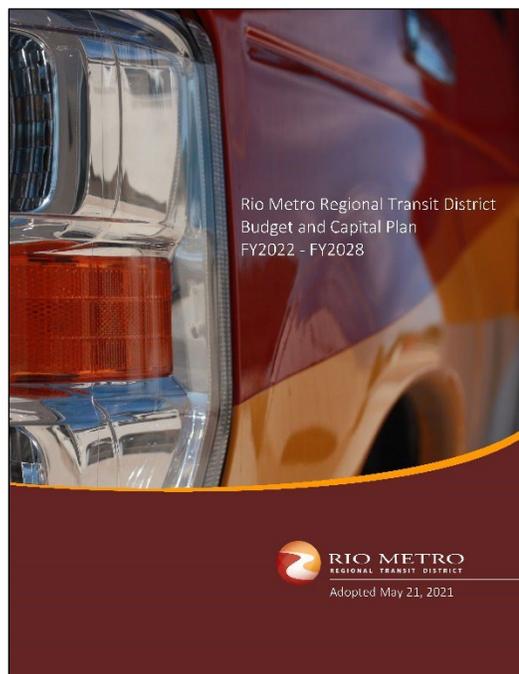
While Rio Metro could not operate its services without federal funding, accepting these funds comes with substantial obligations above and beyond state and local requirements. Civil rights, environmental, labor, procurement, property acquisition, and safety, are just some of the categories of additional FTA regulation. Rio Metro is also subject to project-level and National Transit Database reporting, and a comprehensive federal review and inspection every three years (i.e., the triennial review).

Each fiscal year, Rio Metro separately budgets these revenues between rail and transit (non-rail) services. Excluding the influence of COVID-19 relief funds and carryover, in FY2024 the Rail Runner is projected to receive approximately \$69.1 million in new revenue (\$20.0 million gross receipts tax and other local funds; \$1.5 million fares; \$2.2 million Amtrak/BNSF trackage fees; \$45.4 million federal funds). Rail expenditures will total \$34.0 million for operations and maintenance and \$48.3 million for capital improvements.

Again, excluding COVID-19 relief funds and carryover, in FY2024 transit services are projected to receive \$25.6 million in revenue (\$17.3 million gross receipts tax and other local funds; \$8.3 million federal funds). Transit expenditures will total \$17.5 million for operations and maintenance and \$8.7 million for capital improvements, including approximately \$5 million as a board-mandated cash reserve.

The budget appears before the board for approval each May, packaged as part of Rio Metro's *Budget and Capital Plan*. First adopted in 2012 under the title *Short Range Plan*, the *Budget and Capital Plan* is updated annually and includes four sections:

1. **Rail and transit budgets.** In addition to the upcoming fiscal year's budget, this section also projects revenues and expenditures for the following six years. This not only helps anticipate future needs, but also better aligns Rio Metro's budget with the six-year horizon of MRMPO's Transportation Improvement Program.
2. **New Mexico Rail Runner Express Capital Plan.** The NMRX Capital Plan satisfies the requirement in Rio Metro's MOA with NMDOT to jointly develop a five-year minimum capital maintenance plan/capital improvement plan for the NMRX system. Through its relationship to Rio Metro's Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan, the NMRX Capital Plan also satisfies the federal requirement that projects receiving Section 5337 State of Good Repair funding be included in a recipient's TAM Plan.
3. **Transit Capital Plan.** The Transit Capital Plan describes Rio Metro's non-rail capital needs, with particular emphasis on revenue vehicle and service vehicle replacement. Like the NMRX Capital Plan, the Transit Capital Plan also describes plans and studies.
4. **Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan.** The ICIP prioritizes unfunded and underfunded projects vetted in the previous sections for inclusion in the State of New Mexico's ICIP database. That database, in turn, becomes the basis for requesting capital outlay and other state funds from the legislature and cabinet departments (e.g., NMDOT).

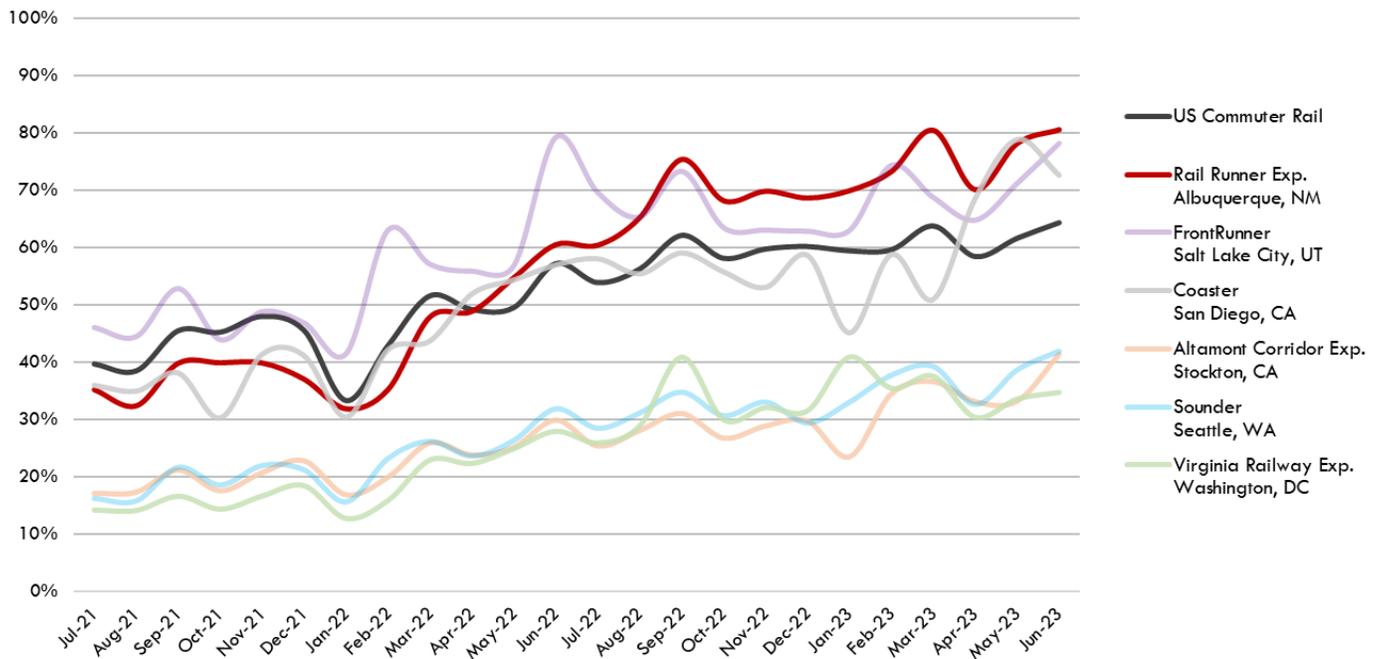


Our Riders and the COVID-19 Ridership Recovery

During the COVID pandemic, the Governor shut down Rail Runner service for approximately a year. Across the nation, peer commuter railroads that remained open saw ridership plummet as white-collar commuters transitioned to working from home.

The chart below attests to the dramatic impact of the pandemic on commuter rail ridership and the gradual recovery thereafter. At the beginning of FY2022 (July 2021), shortly after resuming full service, the Rail Runner was serving 35 percent of its pre-COVID (FY2019) ridership. Comparably, national commuter rail ridership was slightly ahead at 40 percent. Two years later, at the end of FY2023, the Rail Runner was outpacing national commuter rail ridership recovery, 81 percent vs. 64 percent.

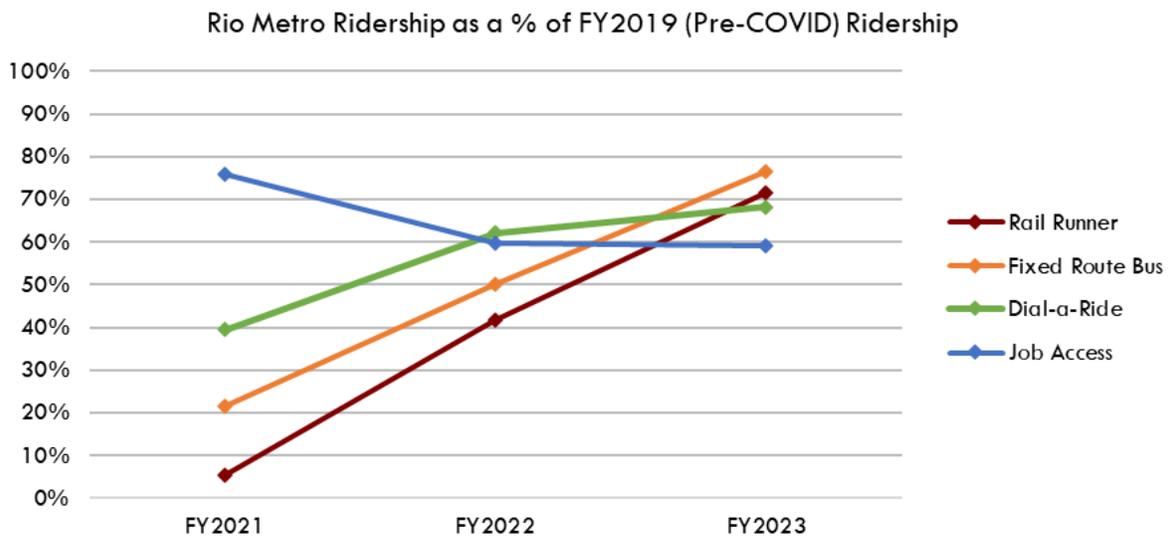
Rail Runner, US and Peer System Commuter Rail Ridership Recovery
(percentage of FY2019 Ridership)



With a higher percentage of traditional, peak-hour commuters working from home post-COVID, many commuter rail agencies have revised their schedules. Common changes include more evenly distributing service throughout the day, and running trains in both directions rather than favoring the suburbs to downtown in the morning and vice versa in the evening. After conducting a rider survey in 2022, Rio Metro took similar action to bolster the Rail Runner’s ridership recovery. In August 2022, Rio Metro began piloting two additional trains in each direction on weekdays and Saturdays. Those trains were made permanent in June 2023, as well as one additional train in each direction on the Sunday schedule.

To further incentivize ridership, Rio Metro and the state of New Mexico also partnered to reduce fares by 75 percent for an entire year beginning April 2022. After that period ended and normal fares resumed, Rio Metro reduced the cost of monthly passes by 50 percent to attract workers, students, and other people more likely to ride the Rail Runner on a regular basis.

The impact of COVID pandemic on Rio Metro’s other services is likewise waning. At the end of FY2023, Rio Metro bus, dial-a-ride, and Job Access ridership were at 76 percent, 68 percent, and 59 percent of pre-COVID levels, respectively. To improve the rate of recovery and expand service, Rio Metro also modified and/or discontinued some bus routes in response to poor ridership, and introduced dial-a-ride service into Corrales.



Rio Metro’s marketing division continues to keep a pulse on riders through a biennial customer survey. This survey is particularly useful for identifying changes that can improve passenger satisfaction and potentially bolster ridership, as was done in 2022 ahead of the aforementioned Rail Runner schedule changes. Some of the key findings from the 2022 survey include:

- 46 percent of Rail Runner trips were work related, but 34 percent of those commuters were working on a hybrid/remote schedule and taking fewer trips post-COVID;
- 32 percent of Rail Runner trips were for leisure;
- 54 percent of Rail Runner riders expected to ride more in the six months following the survey; and
- An inconvenient schedule (i.e., not enough frequency) was the leading deterrent to riding the Rail Runner.

Day-to-day, Rio Metro’s customer service agents and marketing staff communicate with riders in a variety of ways, including by phone, email, station message boards, recorded message on a toll-free line, text alerts for specific trains and bus routes, twitter posts @RioMetroAlerts, and posts on Rio Metro’s website and social media accounts. Customer service agents also monitor station security cameras, reconnect passengers with lost items, and much more.

Our Capital Priorities

After implementing its federally-mandated \$65 million positive train control (PTC) system in 2020, Rio Metro pivoted to other longstanding Rail Runner capital needs. Notably, the Rail Runner’s new passenger Wi-Fi system went live in December 2023. The satellite-based Starlink Wi-Fi system provides excellent coverage in the remote and rugged terrain that the Rail Runner traverses.

Several other Rail Runner projects are currently under construction and will come online in 2024 and 2025. The Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) project will implement CTC and PTC along a 4.7-mile stretch of double track in Downtown Albuquerque where train movements currently occur within “restricted limits” and may not exceed 20 mph. CTC will enable speeds up to 60 mph, which will save passengers traveling through Downtown Albuquerque almost 9 minutes. Furthermore, CTC will provide dispatchers markedly better oversight of train movements. The CTC project is scheduled for completion in July 2024.

The CTC project will be joined by two siding projects. Scheduled to open in March 2024, the Alameda Siding—located between Alameda Blvd. and Alameda Rd.—will introduce a 1,500-foot passing siding to a 14-mile stretch of single track between Griegos Rd. in Albuquerque and the Town of Bernalillo that currently offers no passing opportunities. One year later, the 6,000-foot Broadway Siding—located where Broadway Blvd. meets I-25—will provide a similar opportunity south of Albuquerque. These sidings will improve the on-time performance of Amtrak, BNSF and Rail Runner trains.

The NMRX Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) is the next major Rail Runner capital project on the horizon. From the Rail Runner’s inception, staff have maintained the 31-vehicle fleet beneath an undersized, open-air canopy that serves a single track. This exposes staff and vehicles to blowing sand, dust, snow, etc., and requires a repositioning move to inspect/service each railcar axle. The existing Rail Runner yard also includes a parts warehouse in such poor condition it is beyond rehabilitation, and several other 1960s-era buildings. In 2022, Rio Metro completed a conceptual design report for the OMF that includes a maintenance shop, offices, multiple tracks and turnouts, servicing and fueling platform, and train wash. Rio Metro has been awarded approximately half the funding for the \$50 million first phase, and is actively pursuing grants for the remainder.

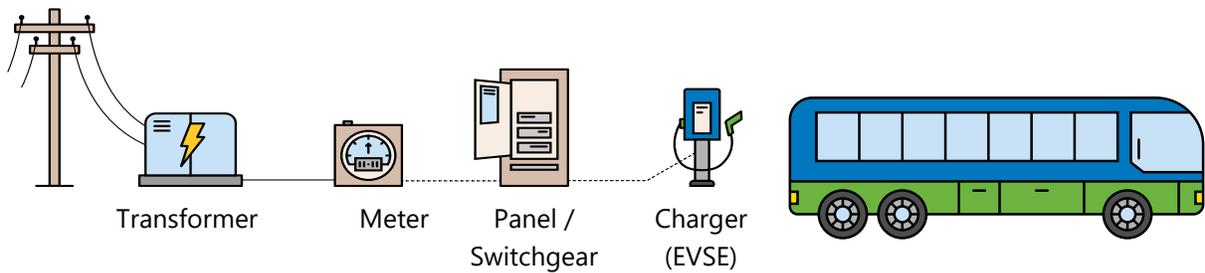


Rio Metro is also pursuing capital projects that benefit its bus services. The Valencia County Transit Facility (VCTF), Phase 1 is Rio Metro answer to the lack of space for its staff and vehicles at the facilities it currently leases from the Village of Los Lunas. The VCTF can also accommodate the future growth of its bus operations

in Valencia County. Opening in April 2024, the VCTF will feature an 8,500 square-foot, LEED-certified administration building; secure staff and bus parking areas; utilities; drainage; landscaping; fencing and gates; security cameras and access controls. Rio Metro competed for and was awarded a \$6 million Section 5339 Bus and Bus Facilities grant from FTA to fund this project.



In the coming years, Rio Metro will transition to a zero-emission bus fleet through the guidance of its recently completed Zero Emission Transition Plan. Already, staff are working on a design for site and electrical upgrades at the Sandoval County Transit Facility (SCTF) that will enable battery electric vehicle charging by 2027. This outcome will require PNM to extend higher voltage power to the SCTF to support the Level 2 and DC fast chargers that the new bus fleet will need. Rio Metro will then pursue similar upgrades at the VCTF with the goal of transitioning its entire bus fleet by 2036.



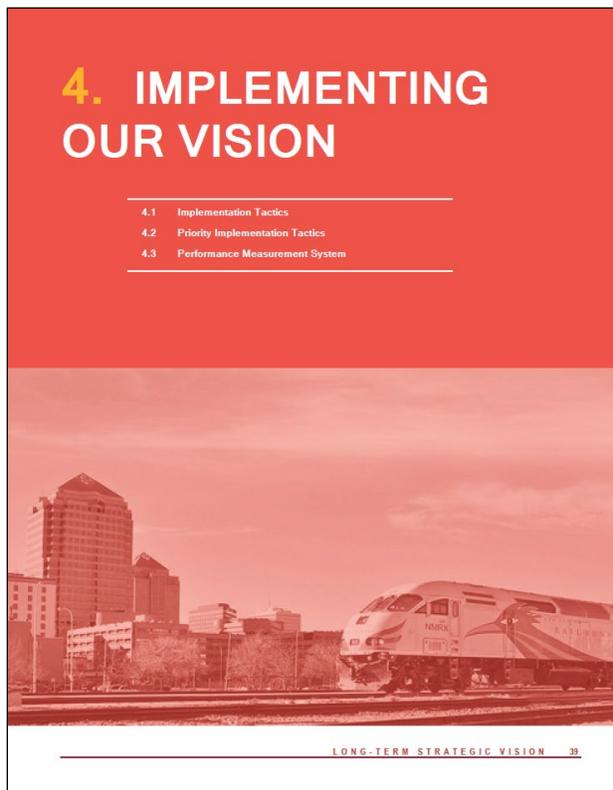
Our Strategic Vision

In its first decade (2006-2015) of service, Rio Metro and its partners accomplished much to be proud of, including successfully launching and operating the New Mexico Rail Runner Express; expanding bus service throughout the three-county service area; facilitating an integrated transit network that spans multiple transit providers; and providing new transit options to better meet the region’s transportation needs. Recognizing these successes—and the opportunity for transit to play an even greater role in the region’s prosperity—Rio Metro’s board adopted a *Long-Term Strategic Vision* in late 2015 to lay the foundation for the next decade and beyond. This vision focuses on six core themes:

1. **Exceptional Customer Experience.** *Our customers come first in all we do.*
2. **Transformative Regional Services.** *We provide a range of services to meet our region’s diverse needs.*
3. **Strong Transit-Centered Communities.** *Our services help shape our communities for the better.*
4. **Sound Financial Stewardship.** *We are good stewards of the public resources entrusted to us.*
5. **Innovative Programs & Partnerships.** *We think outside the box and seek collaboration always.*
6. **Industry-Leading Knowledge & Practice.** *Our people take pride in leading the region forward.*

As with high-priority capital projects, executing the vision took a back seat to PTC implementation in the late 2010s. With PTC implementation now in the rearview mirror, staff is refocusing on some of the vision’s key “tactics”. Perhaps one of the most significant tactics is the creation of a regional transit network and service plan. As a first step in that direction, Rio Metro is participating in *ABQ RIDE Forward*, the City of Albuquerque’s comprehensive review of its existing transit network and plan for its future transit network. This effort began in 2022 and is scheduled to conclude in 2024. Rio Metro staff anticipate pivoting off of the City’s final proposal to ensure it integrates well with its largest transit partner.

Under the theme of sound financial stewardship, the vision also recommends that Rio Metro “Conduct a consolidation feasibility study to be jointly funded with ABQ RIDE, while simultaneously identifying and pursuing near-term opportunities for enhanced collaboration”. In November 2023, the Rio Metro Board of Directors adopted a resolution to study the potential consolidation of ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro after the City of Albuquerque took similar action. This effort will ramp up in 2024, and will explore various opportunities on the spectrum from cooperation to full consolidation.



Appendix A: Staff Contacts

General Inquiries

If you have questions about what you've read, suggestions for ways we can improve our services in your community, or any other concerns, we encourage you to contact Rio Metro's Chief Executive Officer, Director of Finance and Administration or Director of Operations:

Dewey V. Cave
Chief Executive Officer
(505) 247-1750
dcave@mrcog-nm.gov

Robert Gonzales
Director of Operations
(505) 724-3649
rgonzales@mrcog-nm.gov

Conni Vigil
Director of Finance and Administration
(505) 843-1708
cvigil@mrcog-nm.gov

Board Meetings

For questions regarding board meetings (schedules, agendas, attachments, minutes, etc.), please contact:

Barbara Thomas
Office Manager
(505) 724-3616
bthomas@mrcog-nm.gov

Tony Sylvester
Planning Manager and Board Liaison
(505) 724-3635
tsylvester@mrcog-nm.gov

Public Relations

Rio Metro's Communications Manager is here to help you respond to media requests, and also to promote Rio Metro's services in your community.

Augusta Meyers, Communications Manager
(505) 724-3626
ameyers@mrcog-nm.gov

When talking with the press, you are welcome to use this handbook as a quick reference. Please remember that Rio Metro's services are truly region wide—spanning the boundaries of our member communities to connect residents with jobs, classrooms, social services and other transit providers. The following list of basic talking points also describe the range of services offered by Rio Metro.

- Rio Metro operates and maintains the New Mexico Rail Runner Express, which serves 15 stations along a 96-mile corridor from Belen to Santa Fe.
- Partnerships with other local transit systems provide 50+ (mostly free) bus connections to and from Rail Runner stations.
- Rio Metro operates 8 bus routes and 2 dial-a-ride programs.
- The Rio Rancho/Corrales Dial-a-Ride program is provided for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The Valencia County Dial-a-Ride program is open to everyone.
- Rio Metro's fleet includes 9 locomotives, 22 cab and coach railcars, 44 buses and 3 minivans.
- Pre-COVID Rio Metro's bus and rail services served almost one million passenger trips and 40 million passenger miles annually.
- As of January 2024, Rio Metro's ridership had recovered to 80 percent of pre-COVID levels.

Appendix B: Recommended Resources

If you wish to dive more deeply into the topics covered in this handbook, please consider the following resources:

American Public Transportation Association Transit Board Member Handbook (August 2018)

Prepared by the nation's leading transit association, this handbook addresses issues common to transit boards, including the roles and responsibilities of board members, the job of the chair, evaluating board performance, selecting a CEO, and much more.

<https://www.riometro.org/DocumentCenter/View/244>

Bylaws of the Rio Metro Regional Transit District (November 2023) / Mid-Region Transit District Governmental Unit Contract (March 2005) / Mid-Region Transit District Certification (March 2005)

Rio Metro's bylaws establish rules for budgeting and finance; the official seal; and Board of Directors' committees, meetings, conduct and business, and membership. The bylaws' authority flows from the governmental unit contract and certification that created the Mid-Region Transit District.

<https://www.riometro.org/253/Rio-Metro-Board> (scroll to "Board Resources")

National Transit Database

As a recipient of federal funds, Rio Metro is required by the Federal Transit Administration to report operating and financial information to the National Transit Database (NTD). In turn, the FTA publishes data sets and summary profiles for each urban transit agency, which allow agencies to evaluate their performance and compare themselves to their peers.

<https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd>

New Mexico Rail Runner Express Project Development History (October 2009)

What did it take to make the Rail Runner a reality? This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Rail Runner's origins, and is particularly helpful for understanding what went into some of the earliest decisions. Topics include rolling stock acquisition, negotiations with BNSF, selection of the preferred route into Santa Fe, station development, branding and naming, and capital and operating costs.

<https://www.riometro.org/DocumentCenter/View/250/New-Mexico-Rail-Runner-Express-Project-Development-History-PDF>

Regional Transit District Act (2003)

Chapter 73, Article 25 of the New Mexico Statutes authorizes the creation of regional transit districts and establishes the laws that govern them.

<https://nmonesource.com/nmos/nmsa/en/item/4409/index.do#!b/a25>

Rio Metro Regional Transit District Long-Term Strategic Vision (November 2015)

Rio Metro's *Long-Term Strategic Vision* presents a bold, forward-thinking, consensus vision for transit's role in the Albuquerque region. The plan recommends strategies and implementation tactics framed around six core themes: exceptional customer experience, transformative regional services, strong transit-centered communities, sound financial stewardship, innovative programs and partnerships, and industry-leading knowledge and practice.

<https://www.riometro.org/252/Rio-Metro-Strategic-Vision>

Rio Metro Regional Transit District Budget and Capital Plan (May 2023)

Originally adopted in 2012 as the *Short Range Plan* and updated annually, the *Budget and Capital Plan* includes four key components: the annual budget and six-year budget projections, New Mexico Rail Runner Express Capital Plan, the Transit Capital Plan, and the Infrastructure Capital Improvements Plan.

<https://www.riometro.org/DocumentCenter/View/1449>

Rio Metro Regional Transit District Website

Rio Metro's website provides quick access to Rail Runner and bus schedules, fares, maps, station information, and more. The marketing division also updates the home page with the latest news, events, promotions and any temporary schedule changes or alerts.

<http://riometro.org/>

Title VI (Civil Rights)

Rio Metro is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participating in, denied the benefits of, or discriminated against when using our services on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or any other characteristics protected by law. Notice of Rio Metro's Title VI policy is posted in all vehicles, and the process for filing a Title VI complaint is available on our website.

<http://riometro.org/315/Title-VI-Non-Discrimination-Notice>

UNM/CNM/Sunport Study: Alternative Alignments Identification and Assessment (March 2014)

This assessment is the culmination of a four-year process to determine the appropriate mode (bus rapid transit) and preferred alignment for a high-capacity transit system connecting UNM, CNM and the Sunport. Rio Metro, ABQ RIDE and other project partners continue to advance the project and are drafting plans for an initial service concept.

<http://riometro.org/DocumentCenter/View/255/UNM-CNM-Sunport-Study-Alternative-Alignments-Identification-and-Assessment-PDF>

This Page Intentionally Blank

