

May 16, 2025

Rio Metro Board

**Update on the Rio Metro / ABQ
RIDE Transit Consolidation Study**

Christof Spieler, Huitt-Zollars

Agenda

- **Introduction and Background**
 - Involved participants
 - Background on Council Resolution
 - Scope of project
- **About the Study**
 - Phases: Understanding, Best Models, Scenarios, Recommendations
- **What we've learned**
 - High level conclusions from existing conditions
 - Conclusions from peer study
 - What problems can changes in governance solve
- **Where we're going**
 - Goals
 - Scenario Strategy
 - Next Steps

Introduction and Background

Project Management Team

- **Rio Metro**
 - Tony Sylvester
 - Danny Holcomb
 - Karen Mullins
- **ABQ RIDE**
 - Andrew de Garmo
 - Chris Payton
 - Mike Davis
- **Huitt-Zollars**
 - Christof Spieler
 - Madeleine Pelzel
- **Nelson/Nygaard**
 - Suzie Birdsell
 - Sam Ergina

Subject Matter Experts

- **Rio Rancho**
 - Jamie Marrufo
 - Amy Rincon
- **Rio Metro**
 - Connie Vigil
 - Grant Brodehl
- **ABQ RIDE**
 - Leslie Keener
 - Shaun Gibson
 - Lynette Martinez
 - Rob Romero
 - Karen Lopez
 - Sara Young
 - Thomas Martinez
 - Unions: Casey Padilla, Louis Montoya, Augustine Romero, Stephanie Gomez, Justin Aragon
- **NMDOT**
 - Kevin Olinger
 - Bill Craven
- **COG / MPO**
 - Kendra Montanari

Workshop Participants

- **Rio Metro**

- Tony Sylvester
- Danny Holcomb
- Karen Mullins
- Steven Tomita
- Connie Vegil
- Grant Brodehl

- **ABQ RIDE**

- Andrew de Garmo
- Chris Payton
- Mike Davis
- Kevin Sourisseau
- Jeff Hertz
- Tom Menicucci
- Leslie Keener

- **NMDOT**

- Kevin Olinger
- Bill Craven

Council Resolution

- This study was initiated by the City of Albuquerque City Council in 2023.
- It directed the City of Albuquerque and Rio Metro Regional Transit District to conduct a study for consolidation.
- This study is analyzing all parts of each agency, from union agreements to fleet maintenance to long-range planning to budget efficiencies.



City of Albuquerque

City of Albuquerque
Government Center
One Civic Plaza
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Legislation Details (With Text)

File #: R-23-163
Type: Resolution
File created: 9/6/2023
Status: Enacted
In control: City Council
Final action: 10/2/2023
Enactment #: R-2023-080

Enactment date: 10/23/2023
Title: Directing The City Of Albuquerque Transit Department And Rio Metro Regional Transit District To Conduct A Study For Consolidating ABQ Ride And Rio Metro And Develop A Consolidation Plan; Appropriating Funding To Fund The Study And Plan (Benton)

Sponsors: Isaac Benton
Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. R-163, 2. R-163 Enacted

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
10/23/2023	2	City Clerk	Published	
10/15/2023	2	Mayor	Signed by the Mayor	
10/10/2023	1	City Council	Sent to Mayor for Signature	
10/2/2023	1	City Council	Amended	Pass
10/2/2023	1	City Council	Passed as Amended	Pass
9/18/2023	1	City Council	Postponed	Pass
9/6/2023	1	President	To be heard at the Council Meeting	
9/6/2023	1	City Council	Introduced	

CITY of ALBUQUERQUE
TWENTY-FIFTH COUNCIL

COUNCIL BILL NO. R-23-163 ENACTMENT NO. _____

SPONSORED BY: Isaac Benton

RESOLUTION

Directing The City Of Albuquerque Transit Department And Rio Metro Regional Transit District To Conduct A Study For Consolidating ABQ Ride And Rio Metro And Develop A Consolidation Plan; Appropriating Funding To Fund The Study And Plan (Benton)

DIRECTING THE CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE TRANSIT DEPARTMENT AND RIO METRO

City of Albuquerque

Page 1 of 6

Printed on 5/1/2025
powered by Legistar™

Scope of this Study

- **This study began by identifying the project purpose, needs, and goals**
- **We studied peer transit agency organization models**
- **We have evaluated the current services**
- **We have spoken to many stakeholders**
- **We are creating scenarios**
- **We will evaluate those scenarios**
- **We will produce a final report with implementation information**

About the study

Through this study, we will create a shared understanding of the current strengths and weaknesses of each organization and what benefits may be gained from a different governance model for Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE.

Our work includes three primary phases



Understanding

- What are the current needs?
- What are the future goals?
- Who are the stakeholders for this decision?
- How is service and governance working today?

Our work includes three primary phases



Understanding

- What are the current needs?
- What are the future goals?
- Who are the stakeholders for this decision?
- How is service and governance working today?



Best Models

- What is working well for our peer organizations?
- How can current operations be improved?
- What is the best model to meet our goals?

Our work includes three primary phases



Understanding

- What are the current needs?
- What are the future goals?
- Who are the stakeholders for this decision?
- How is service and governance working today?



Best Models

- What is working well for our peer organizations?
- How can current operations be improved?
- What is the best model to meet our goals?



Best Scenario

- What are the possible scenarios?
- What are the opportunities and obstacles?
- Which is the best scenario?

We have had two successful workshops.



Workshop 1:
project purpose,
needs, goals,
background

Understanding

- What are the current needs?
- What are the future goals?
- Who are the stakeholders for this decision?
- How is service and governance working today?



Workshop 2:
opportunities and
obstacles, draft
scenarios

Best Models

- What is working well for our peer organizations?
- How can current operations be improved?
- What is the best model to meet our goals?



Best Scenario

- What are the possible scenarios?
- What are the opportunities and obstacles?
- Which is the best scenario?

After evaluating the scenarios against the Status Quo, we will have another workshop with both agencies and work toward a Recommended Scenario with short-term and long-term implementation recommendations.

What We've Learned

The issues outlined in the resolution are not what we are finding as the primary issues that Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE are facing.

Today we will give you a high-level overview of some of our findings, and the full Existing Conditions report will be provided.

SERVICE



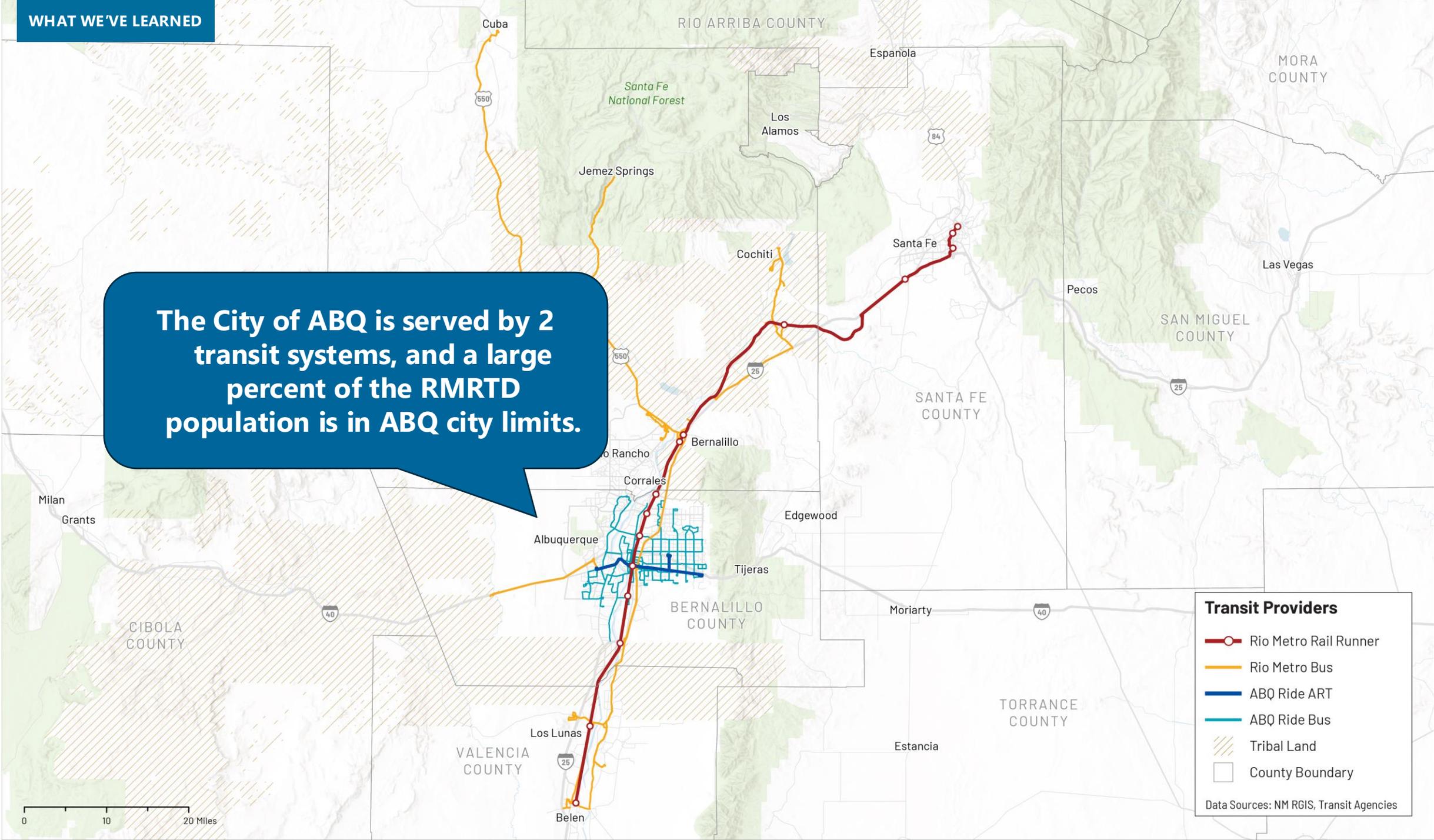
**Albuquerque and ABQ RIDE
are a significant part of Rio
Metro RTD, and Rio Metro
and ABQ Ride already
coordinate service.**



**What we've
learned**

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

The City of ABQ is served by 2 transit systems, and a large percent of the RMRTD population is in ABQ city limits.

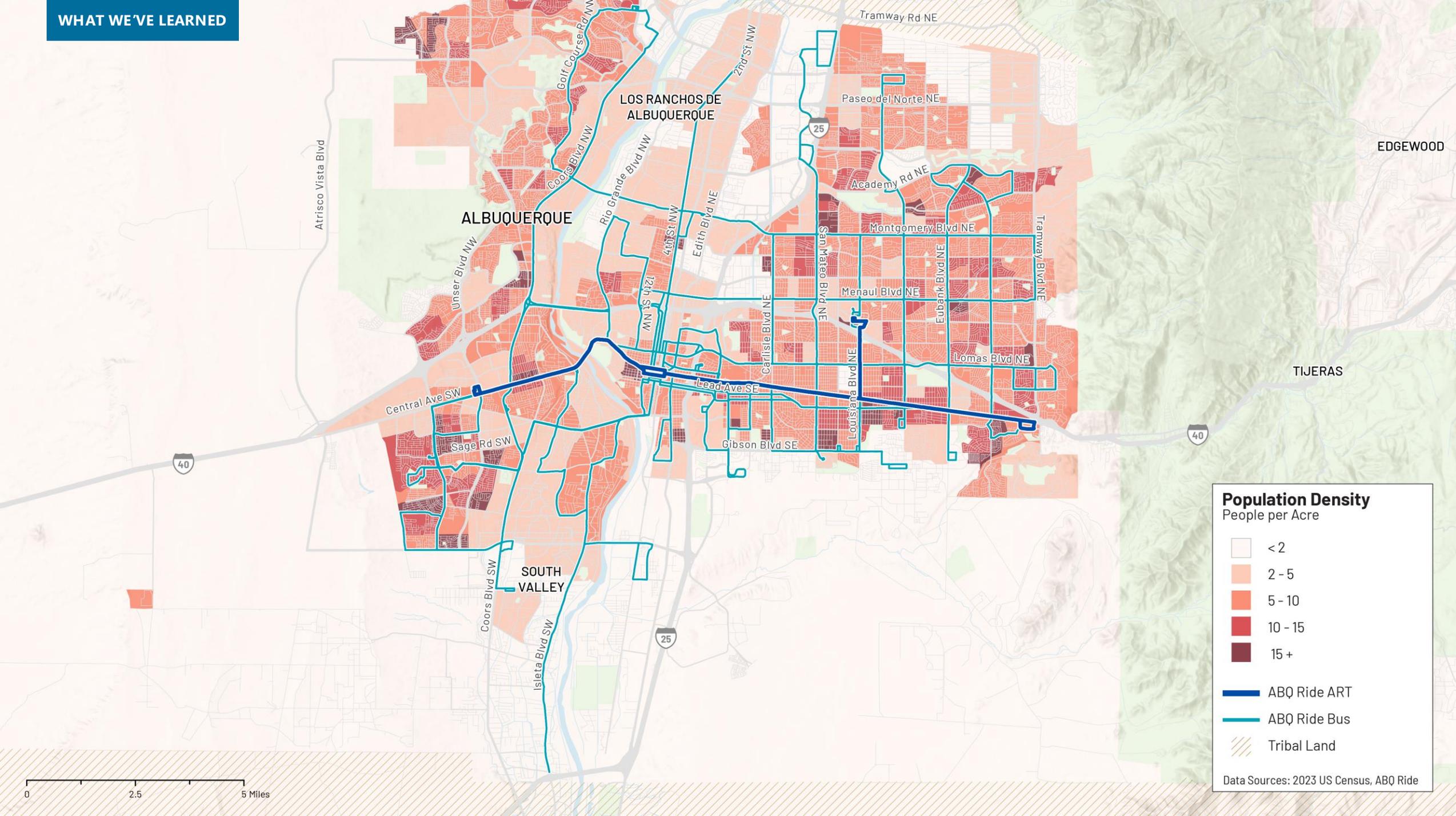


**ABQ Ride's service footprint
generally matches
population patterns**



**What we've
learned**

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

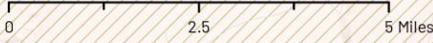


Population Density
People per Acre

- < 2
- 2 - 5
- 5 - 10
- 10 - 15
- 15 +

ABQ Ride ART
ABQ Ride Bus
Tribal Land

Data Sources: 2023 US Census, ABQ Ride



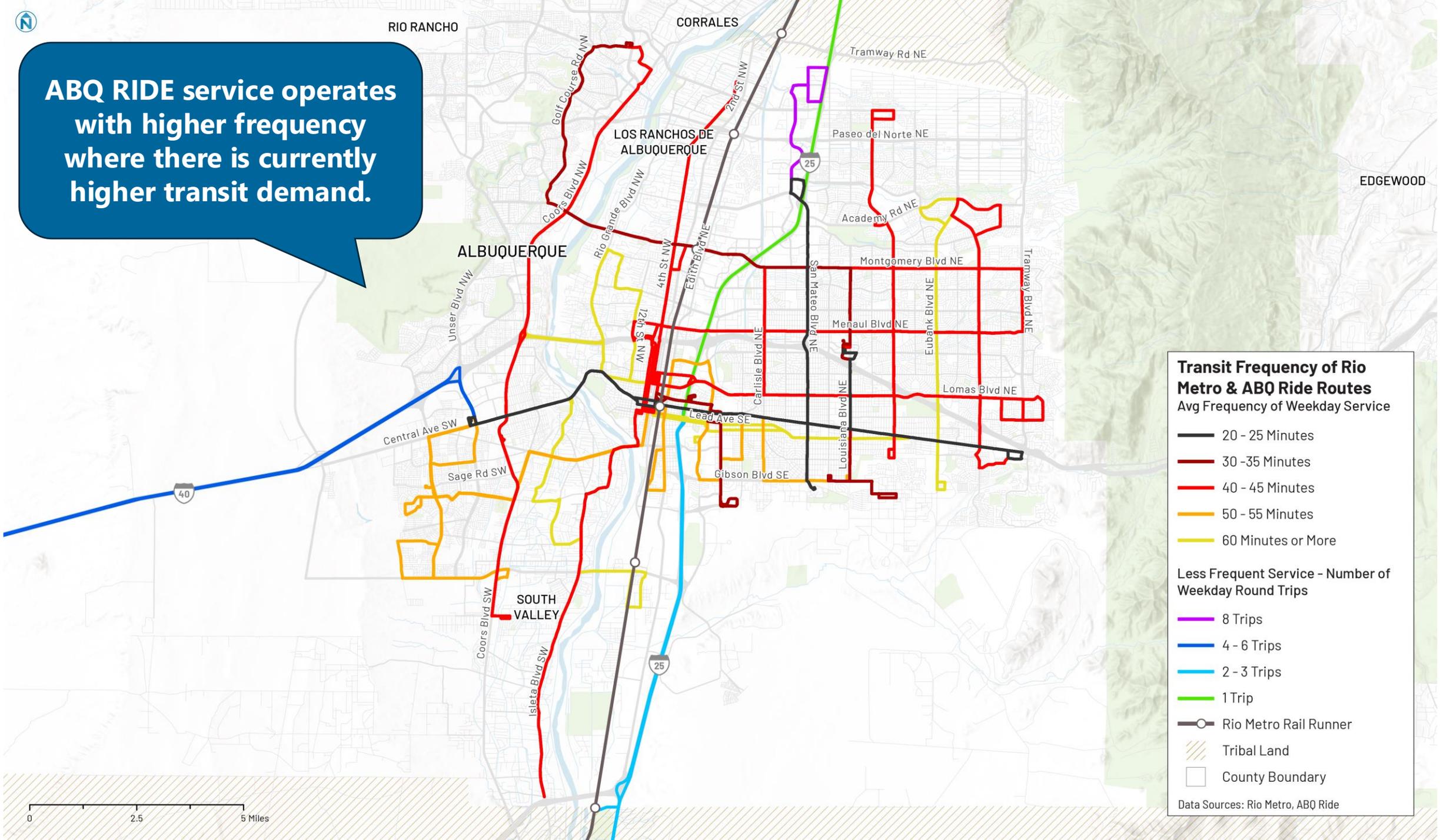


RIO RANCHO

CORRALES

EDGEWOOD

ABQ RIDE service operates with higher frequency where there is currently higher transit demand.



Transit Frequency of Rio Metro & ABQ Ride Routes
Avg Frequency of Weekday Service

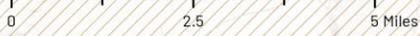
- 20 - 25 Minutes
- 30 - 35 Minutes
- 40 - 45 Minutes
- 50 - 55 Minutes
- 60 Minutes or More

Less Frequent Service - Number of Weekday Round Trips

- 8 Trips
- 4 - 6 Trips
- 2 - 3 Trips
- 1 Trip

- Rio Metro Rail Runner
- ▨ Tribal Land
- County Boundary

Data Sources: Rio Metro, ABQ Ride



Riding the bus in Albuquerque is often uncomfortable for riders waiting, riders on board, operators, and people maintaining the system.



**What we've
learned**

ABQ Ride is not currently operating full pre-pandemic service. Return to full service will increase operating costs.

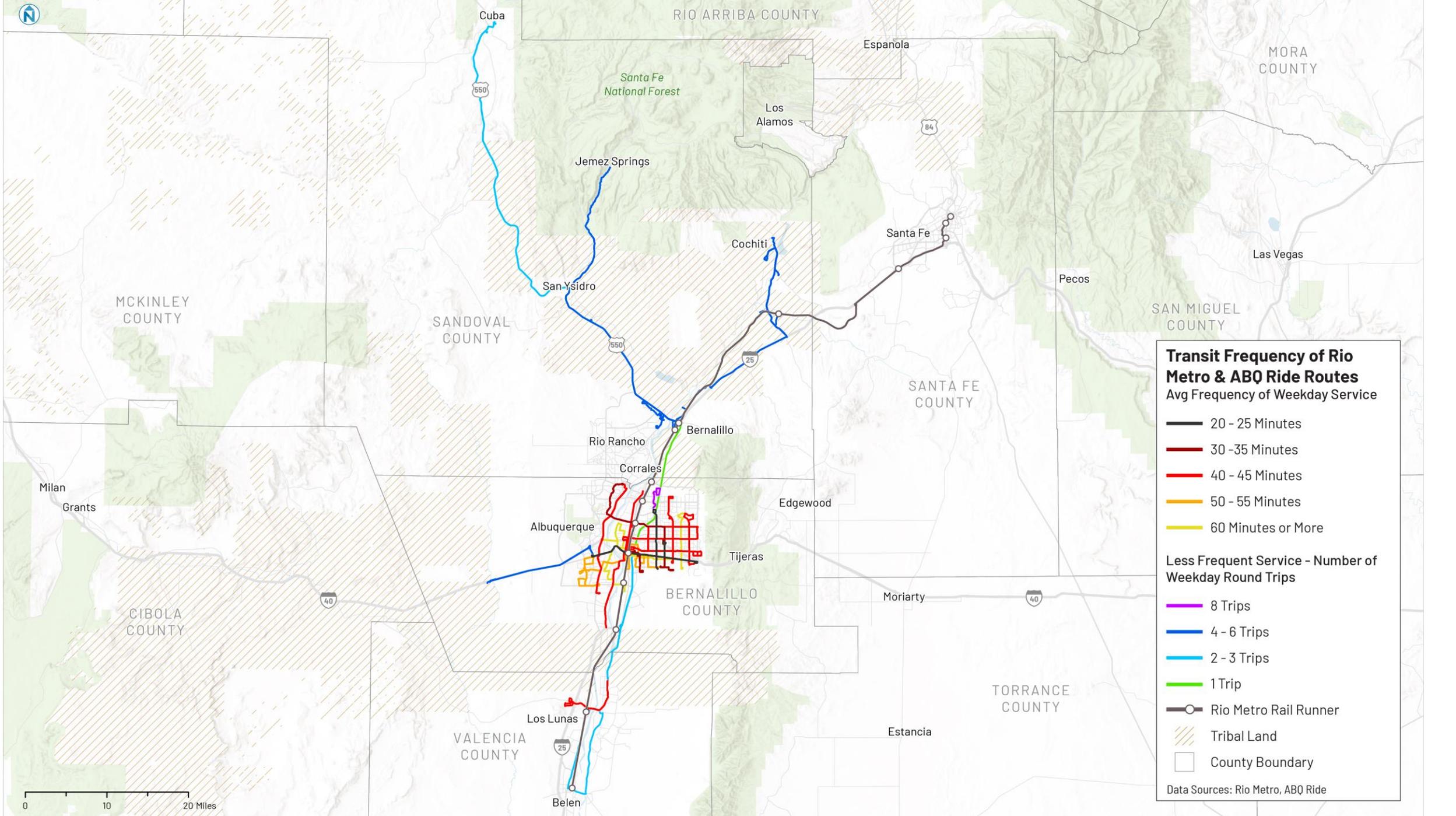


**What we've
learned**

Rio Metro' service is expansive due to the nature of how it was established, but it is generally low frequency and limited in span of service.



**What we've
learned**



Transit Frequency of Rio Metro & ABQ Ride Routes
Avg Frequency of Weekday Service

- 20 - 25 Minutes
- 30 - 35 Minutes
- 40 - 45 Minutes
- 50 - 55 Minutes
- 60 Minutes or More

Less Frequent Service - Number of Weekday Round Trips

- 8 Trips
- 4 - 6 Trips
- 2 - 3 Trips
- 1 Trip

- Rio Metro Rail Runner
- ▨ Tribal Land
- County Boundary

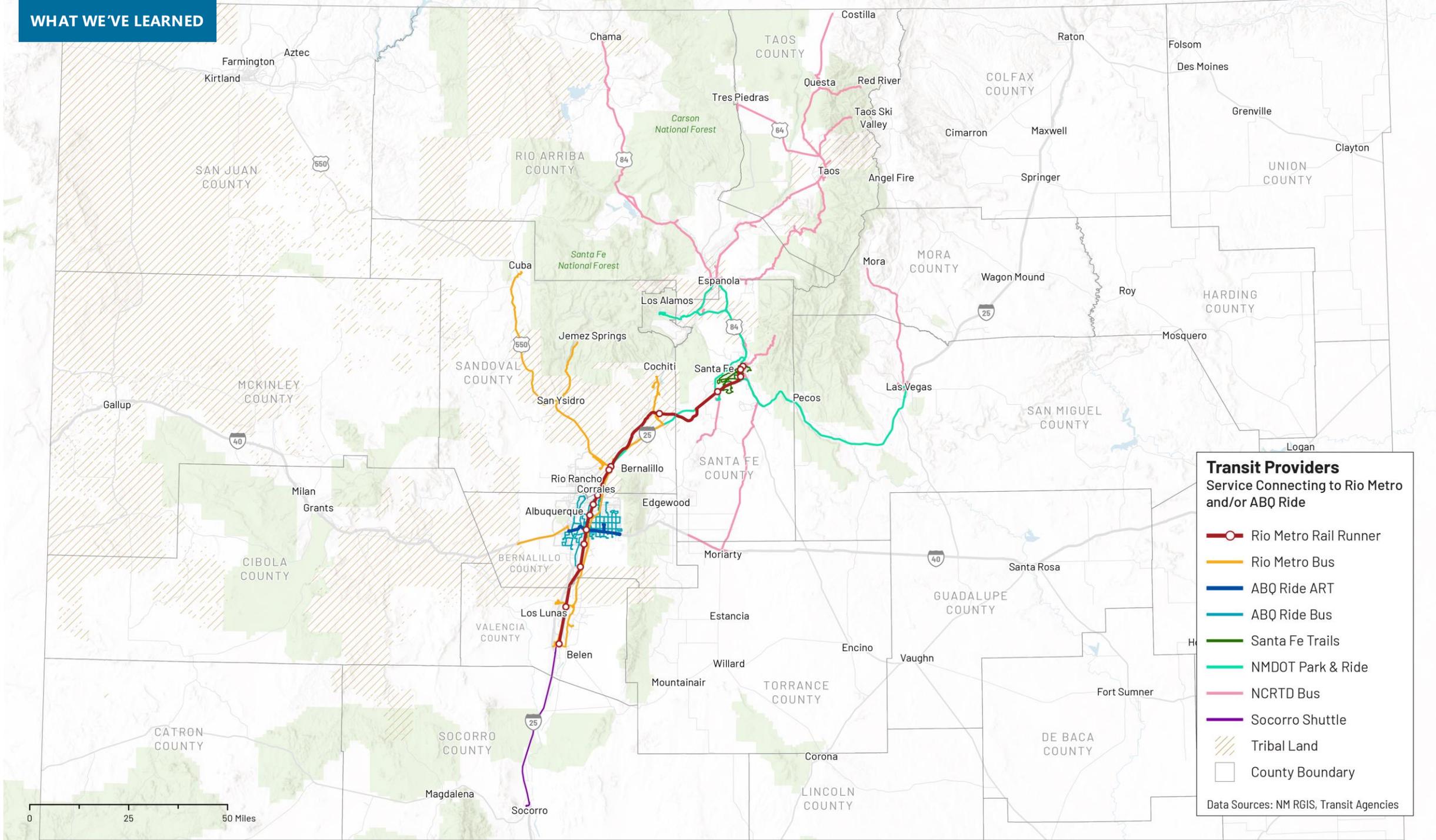
Data Sources: Rio Metro, ABQ Ride

Rio Metro overlaps with five other transit agencies, all of which have planned for transfers to Rio Metro service.



**What we've
learned**

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

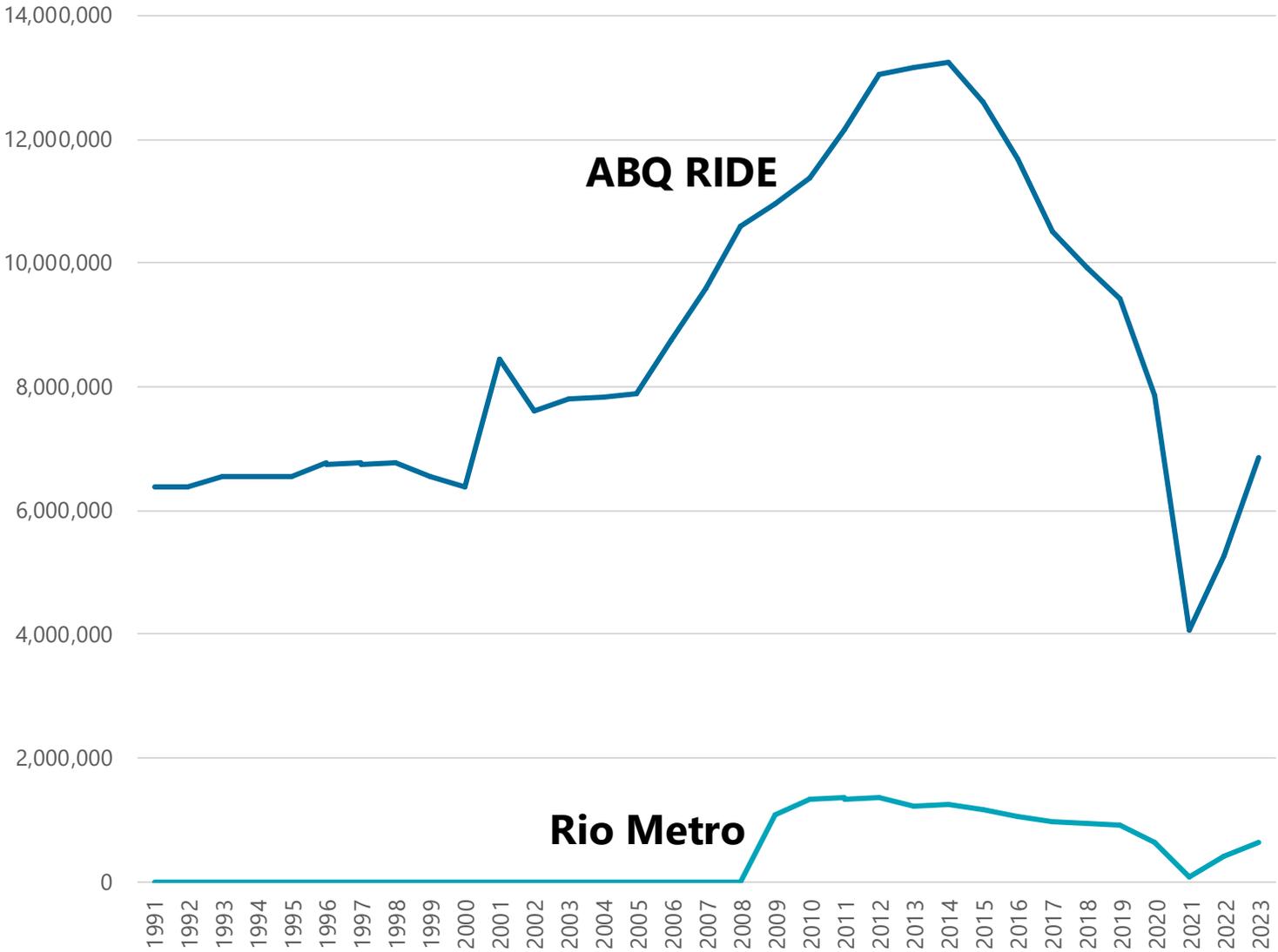


**Both ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro
had declining ridership prior to
COVID.**

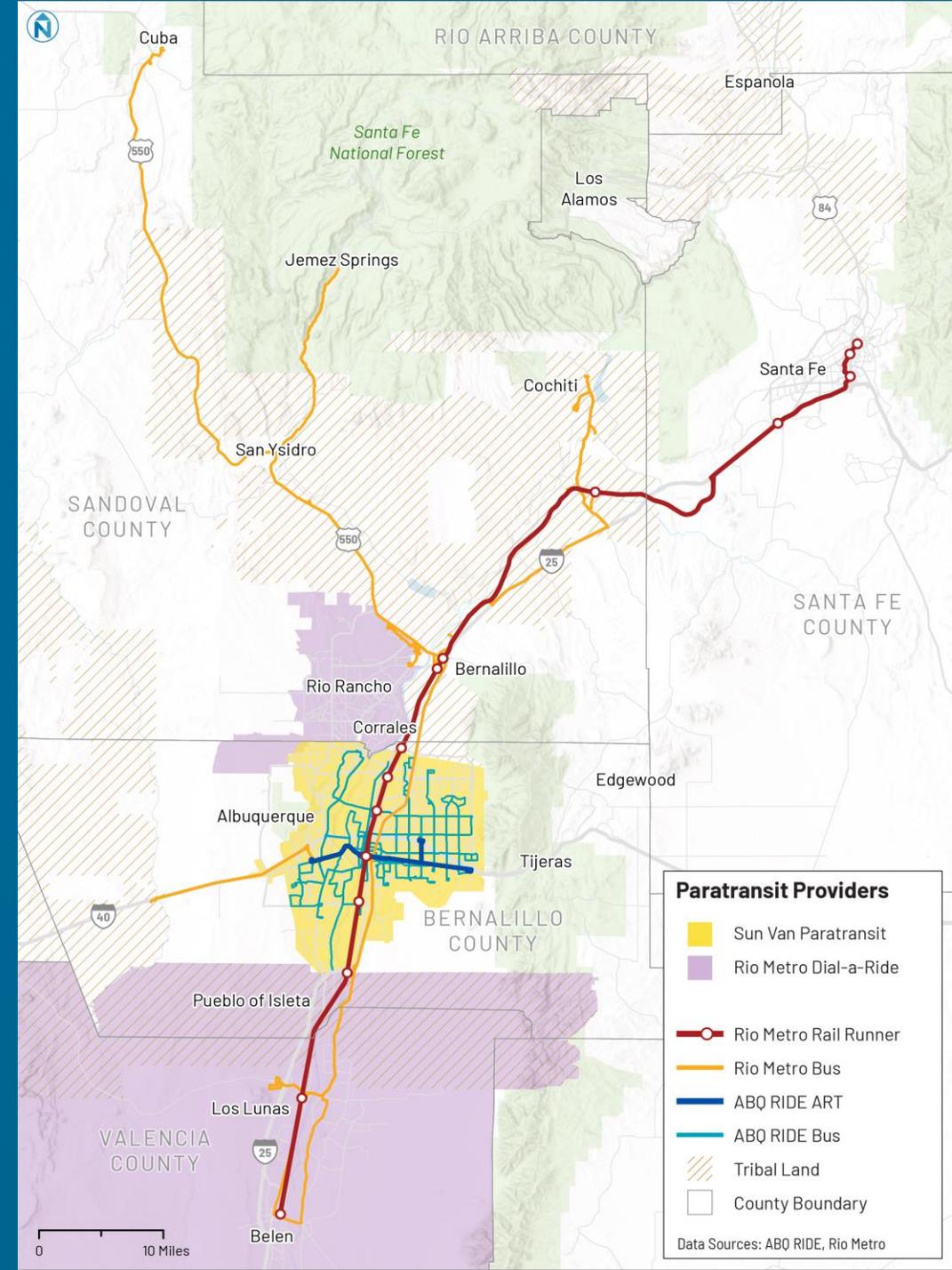


**What we've
learned**

Annual Passenger Trips



Unlike fixed route service, it is not possible to transfer between the two agencies' paratransit services.



STAFFING



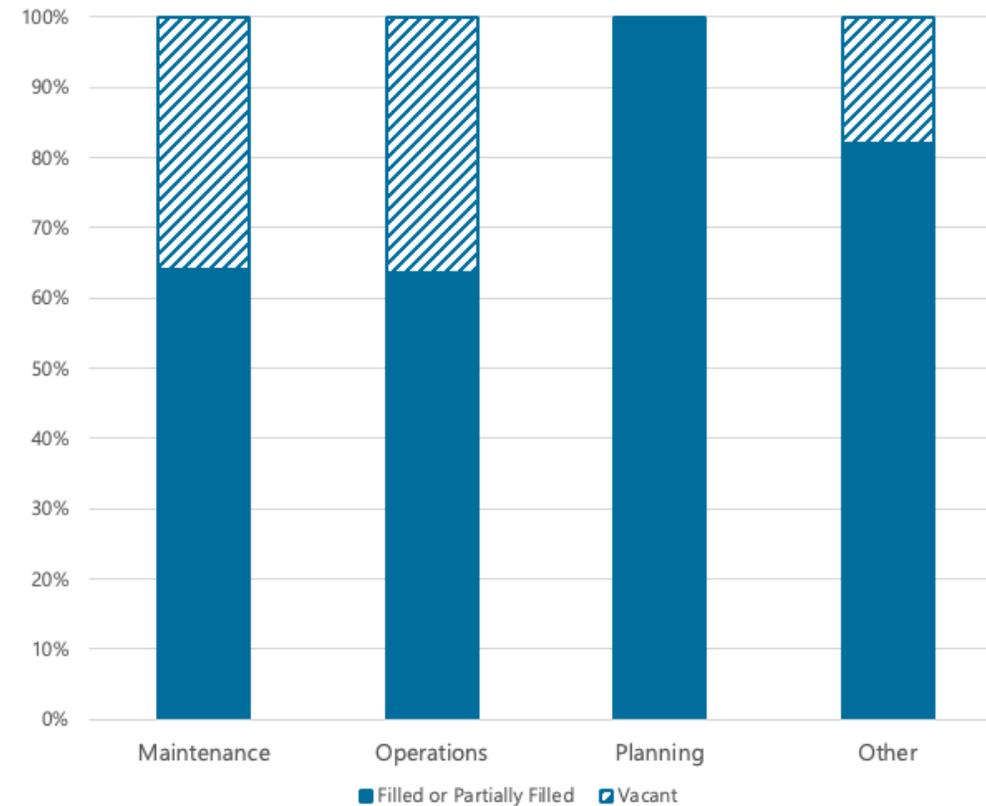
ABQ RIDE is a large department within the City of Albuquerque that uses a significant amount of full-time staff time from other City departments.



**What we've
learned**

ABQ Ride is suffering from an operator and maintenance shortage. Difficult schedules, required overtime, low pay, and safety concerns were cited as the main reasons.

Percentage of ABQ RIDE Vacant Positions by Position Type



Transit maintenance workers are unionized with all other maintenance workers at the City. Transit operators used to be unionized with maintenance but broke out into their own union.



**What we've
learned**

ABQ Ride has some of the best and most complete in-house ability to maintain transit vehicles in the country, while much of the other city vehicle maintenance is contracted out.



**What we've
learned**

Rio Metro is housed within the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG), and transit makes up a significant part of the workload of many MRCOG staff members.



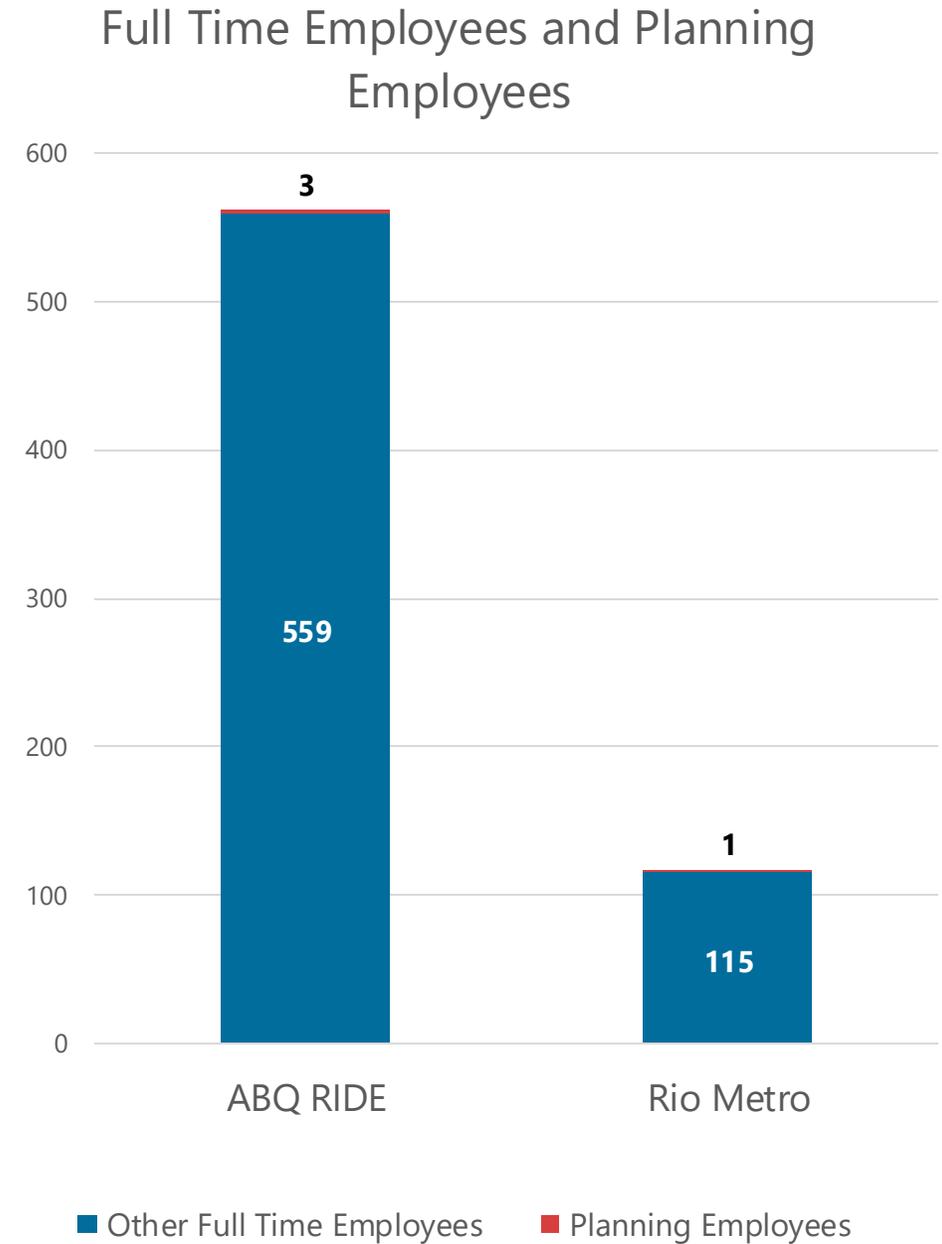
**What we've
learned**

Rio Metro has a mix of unionized and non-unionized operators, and unions are different by contractor and directly operated positions.



**What we've
learned**

Despite big differences in total staff numbers, planning capacity is limited at both agencies.

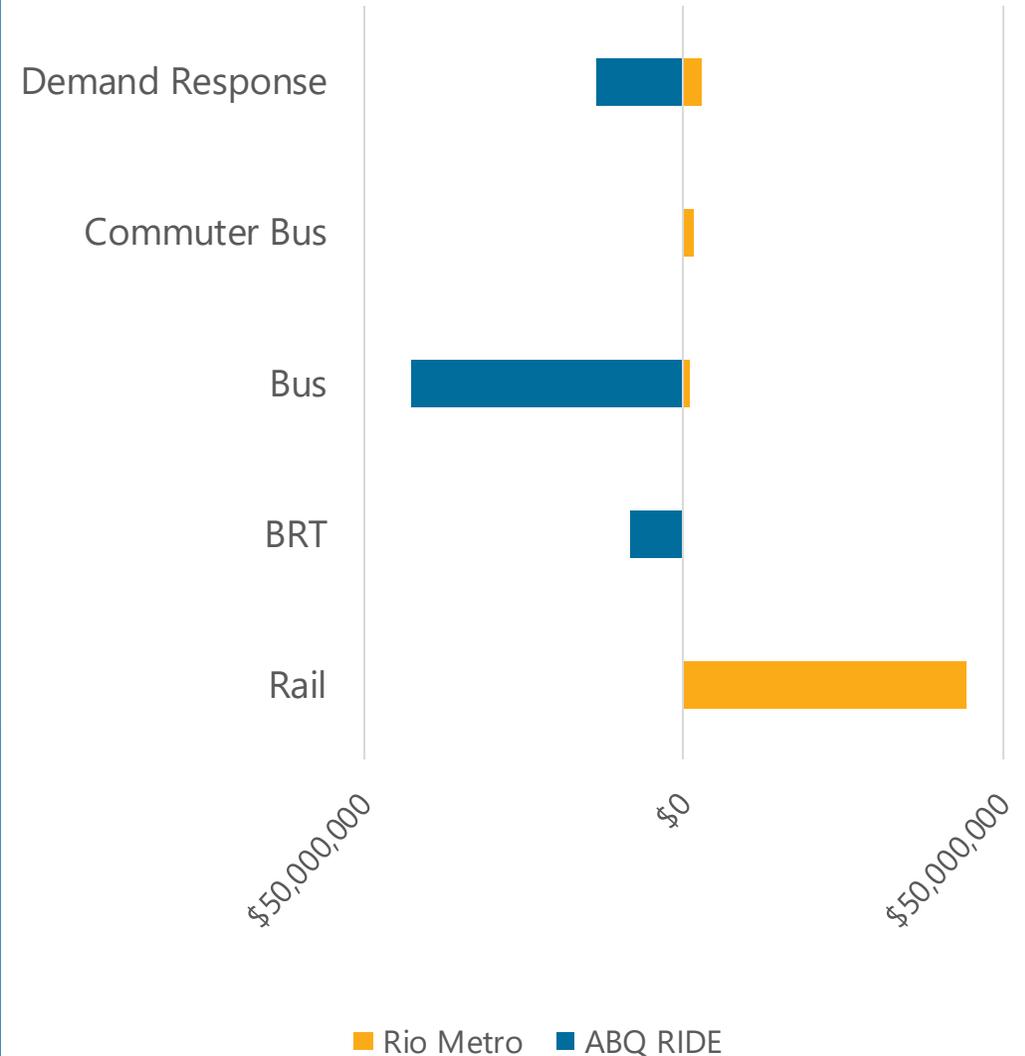


FUNDING



The two agencies are similar in total budget but spend that budget in very different ways.

ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro Operating Expenses

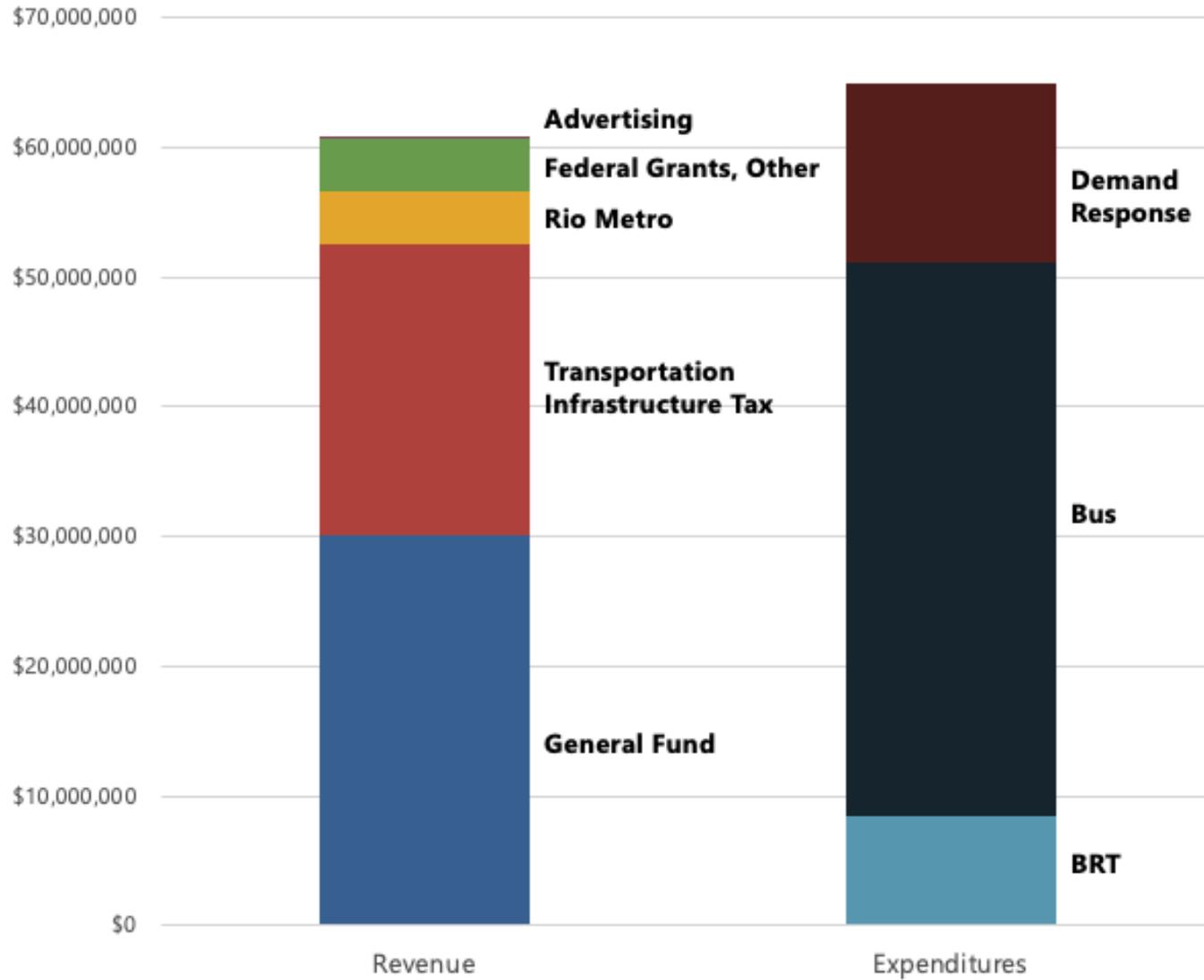


ABQ Ride's funding is a mix of dedicated sources and the general fund.



**What we've
learned**

ABQ RIDE Funding

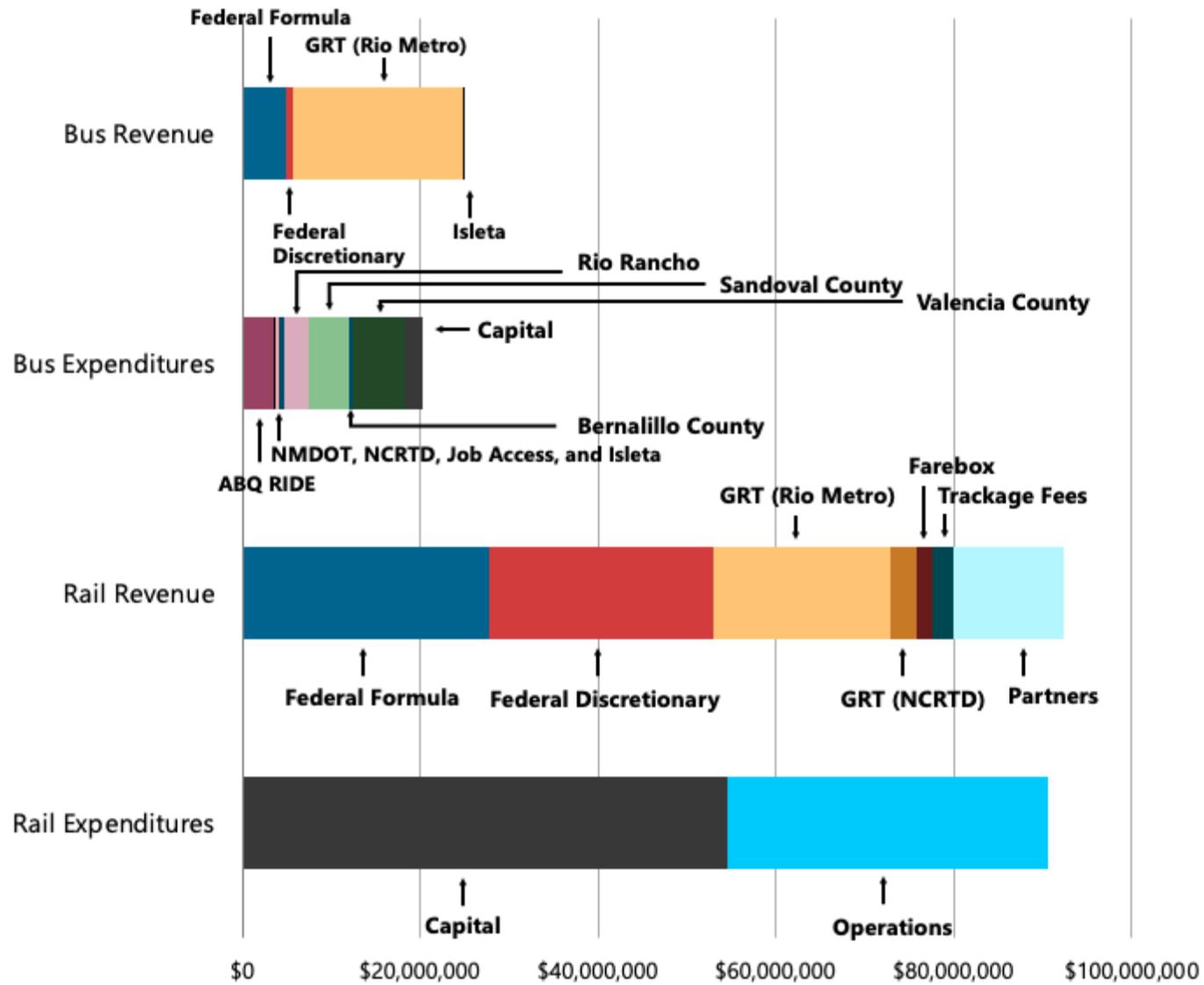


Rio Metro has a complex mix of local and federal funding tied to specific rural and urban operations.



**What we've
learned**

Rio Metro Budget



Rio Metro funds service provided by three other transit operators – ABQ Ride, NMDOT, and NCRTD. It also receives funding from NCRTD.



**What we've
learned**

GOVERNANCE



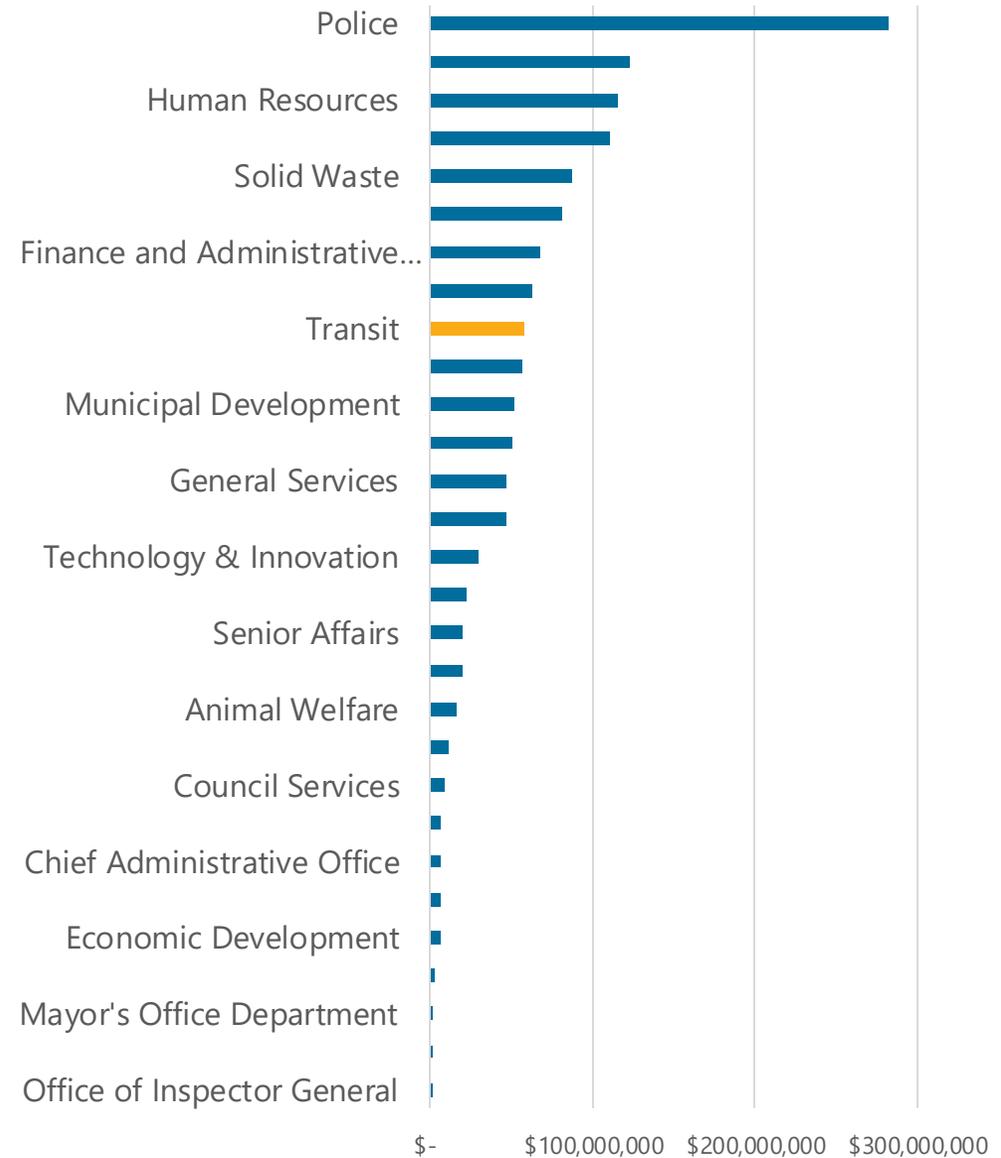
Rio Metro depends on agreements with NMDOT and NCRTD.



**What we've
learned**

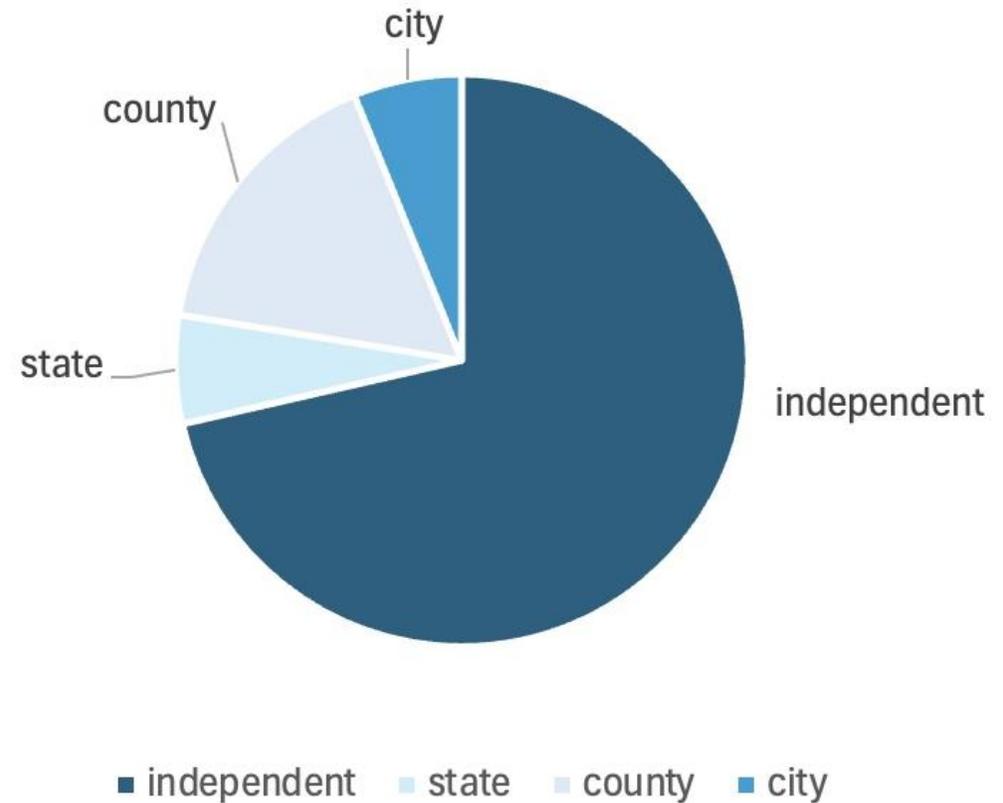
As a city department, ABQ Ride competes for funding, resources, and attention against other city departments.

City of Albuquerque FY2025 Budget



Most big cities have independent transit agencies with dedicated funding sources.

50 largest bus agencies



**Rio Metro and ABQ Ride
already both share functions
with other agencies.**



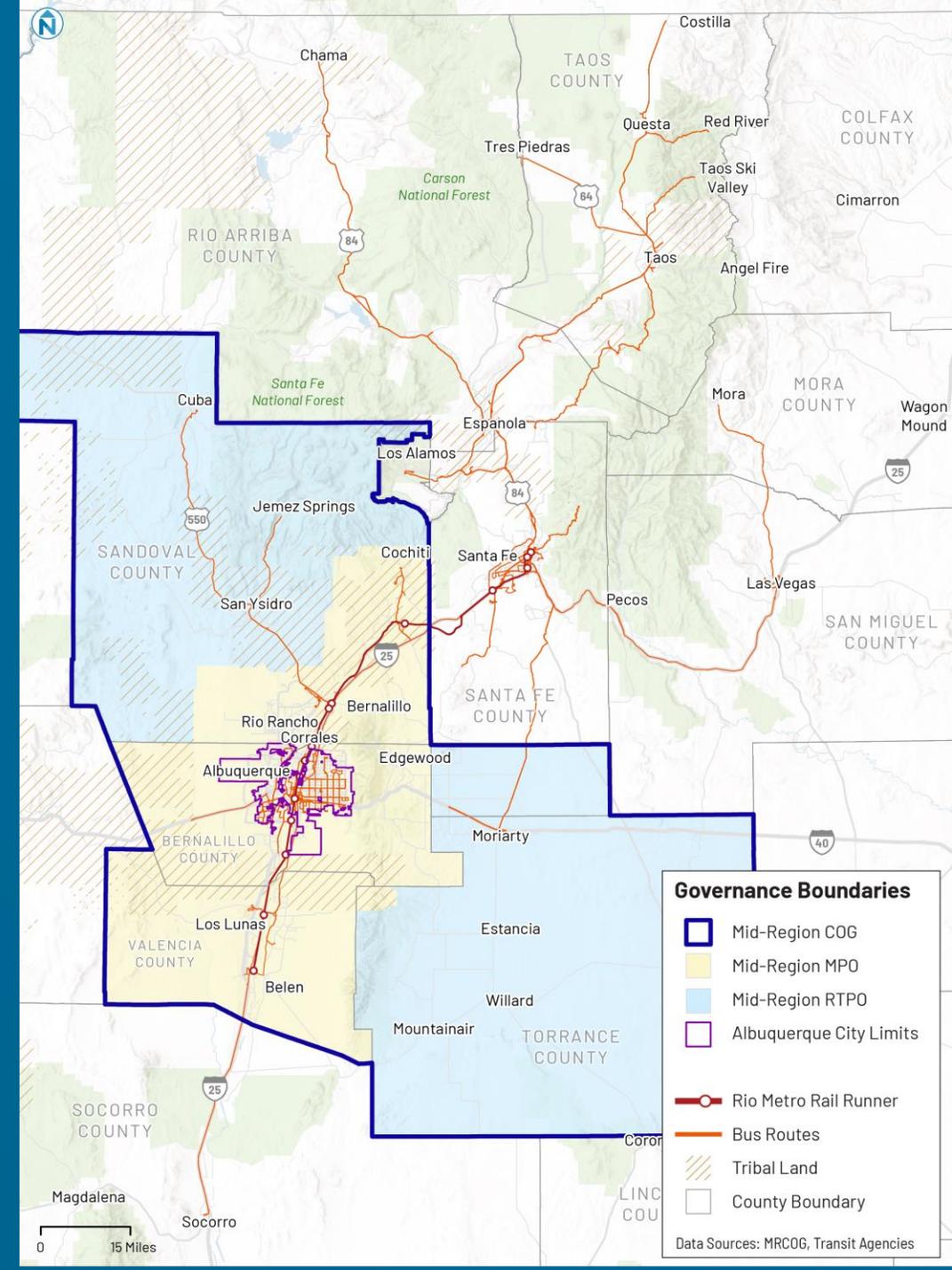
**What we've
learned**

Rio Metro gets payroll support from the City of Albuquerque and some vehicle maintenance from ABQ Ride.



**What we've
learned**

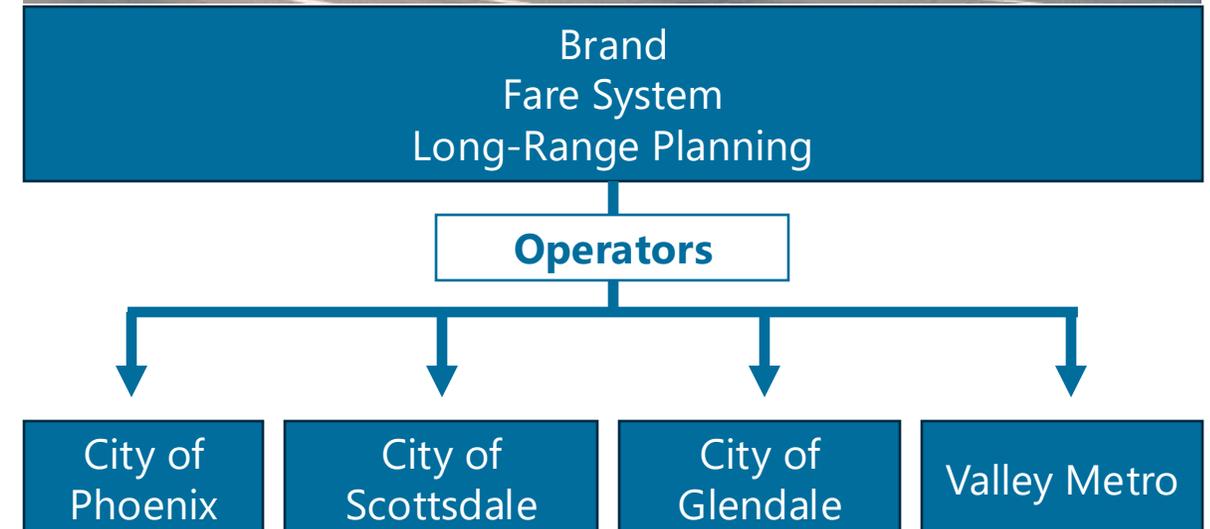
There is no agency clearly responsible for creating a regional transit vision.



Case studies

Valley Metro – Phoenix Area

- Valley Metro partially consolidated multiple member cities who operate their own services
- The regional service is consolidated from a branding, administrative, and long-range planning perspective, while routes are operated by one or multiple contributors between member cities and the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA).
- Example of partial consolidation of multiple operators. Operators can maintain their own operations while consolidating under one agency that coordinates multiple services and unifies them under a single brand, making the experience more convenient for riders.



Greater Portland, ME Metro

- A study of seven transit agencies serving multiple modes led to recommendations for coordination and integration of functions including information and branding, fare payment, service standards, and fleets. Two of the transit agencies have merged since the study was completed.
- This study completed by Nelson\Nygaard helped us gain insight into potential territorial politics surrounding consolidation.
- The resulting consolidation occurred across a spectrum of coordinated agreements, activities, functions, and policies depending on appetite without merging of all agencies.



For Immediate Release:

October 24, 2024

Greater Portland Metro Board of Directors Votes to Merge the South Portland Bus Service with Greater Portland Transit District

Rabbittransit – Harrisburg, PA

- In 2022, two transit agencies – Capital Area Transit (CAT) and rabbittransit – fully merged into Susquehanna Regional Transportation Authority (SRTA).
- The transit agencies merged to increase service efficiency, avoid service reductions, and improve qualifications for grants. The agencies had previously been operating in closer partnership for three years pre-merger.
- The SRTA currently uses the rabbittransit branding for simplification. Existing buses with CAT branding are still used with a sticker underneath saying, “a service of rabbittransit”.
- Consolidating has been an effective tool to cut costs and improve efficiency. Maintaining existing naming and branding, made for a smoother transition for riders.



Chicago Agencies

- Illinois lawmakers proposed legislation to consolidate CTA, Pace, and Metra. The RTA would be replaced with Metropolitan Mobility Authority, which would oversee operation of all services.
 - Spurred by critical public feedback about the current state of service, which the agencies link to lack of funding.
- Meanwhile, the RTA's most recent vision document positions the organization with more authority over the region and regional operations, another potential option for restructuring organizational relationships.
- Current outcome is TBD
- Example of Transit consolidation not always being a transit supplier-side initiative. There are also many options for how agencies and their operations can coordinate with each other, including one taking on more control at the regional level.



San Bernardino County, CA Transportation Authority

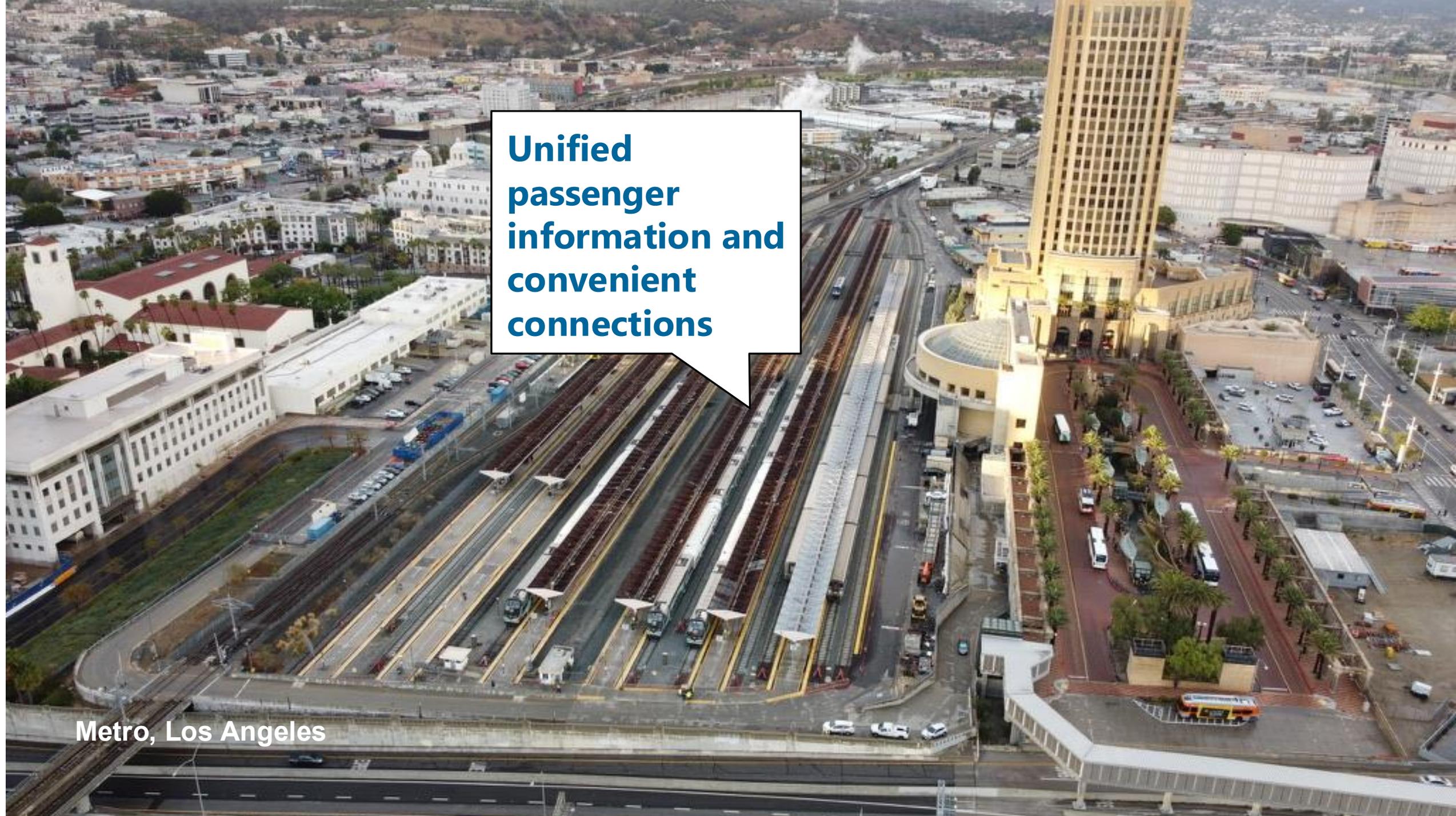
- In response to increased costs and reduced ridership, Omnitrans and SBCTA conducted a study in 2020 to consider Omnitrans integrating fully into SBCTA.
- The study reviewed areas of functional overlap to determine potential for increased efficiency and better productivity from services to offset higher costs and lower revenues.
- The study determined that there were minimal benefits to consolidation. Those benefits did not exceed the high costs of combining two organizations that operate key functional areas very differently.
- Consolidating two agencies would have had high costs between labor transition, service and structure reorganization, and asset management.



**Challenges solved by
changes in governance**

There are many reasons why transit may be run from within a City department or as an independent agency.

**What problems can
consolidation solve?**

An aerial photograph of Los Angeles Union Station, showing the extensive rail yard with multiple tracks and several passenger trains. The station building is a prominent feature on the right side, with its iconic tower. The surrounding urban landscape of Los Angeles is visible in the background. A white speech bubble with a black border is overlaid on the image, containing blue text.

**Unified
passenger
information and
convenient
connections**

Metro, Los Angeles



**Broader regional
funding base for
urban and
suburban transit**

MBTA, Boston



More efficient operations by combining systems

Rabbittransit, York/Gettysburg/Harrisburg, PA

Are there efficiencies to be had?

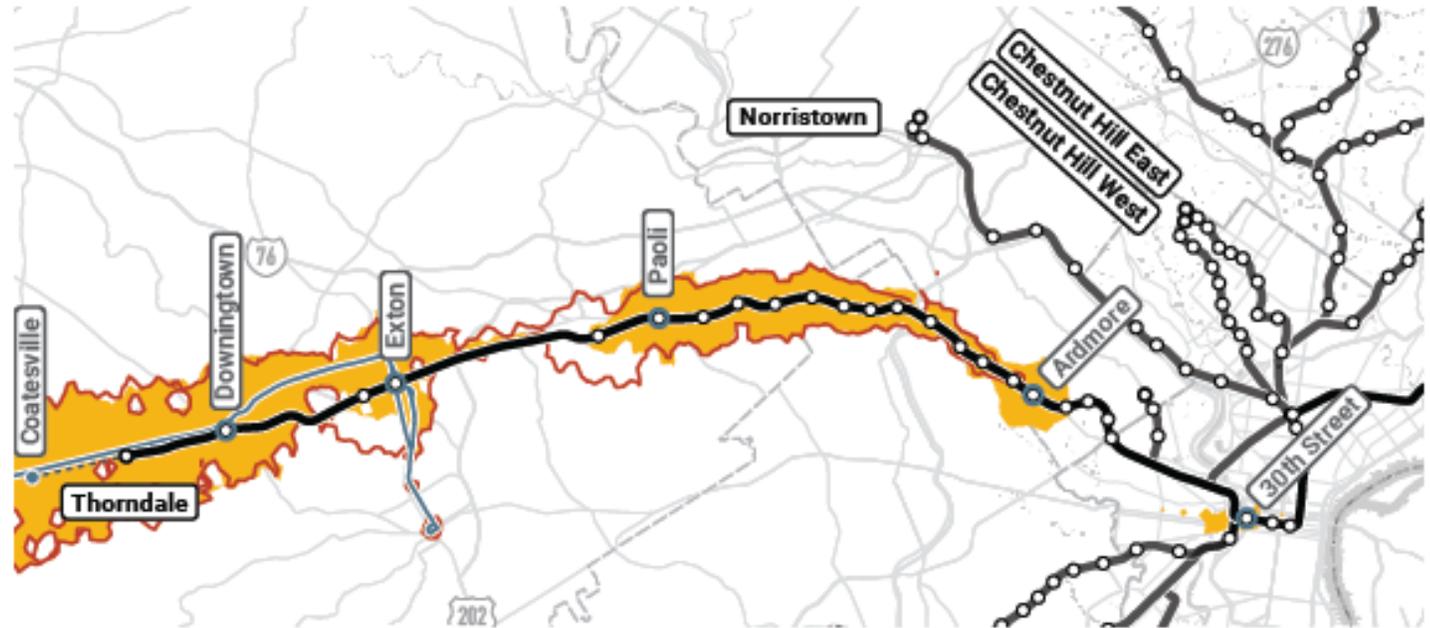
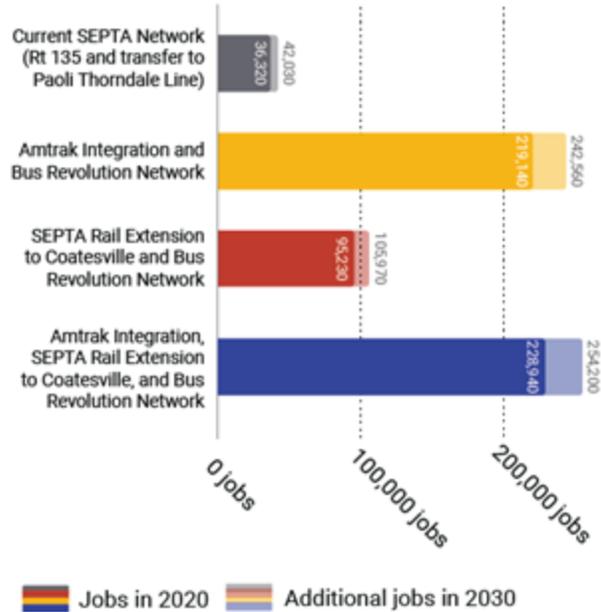
**Single statewide
agency = lower
operating costs
than Northeastern
neighbors**

New Jersey Transit



Agency integration can lead to huge benefits for riders

60 Minute Job Access on the SEPTA Network from the Coatesville Station Area (AM Peak)



Jobs Accessible in 60 Minutes with New Options

Analysis completed for AM Peak transfer.

- Area accessible in 60 minutes with Amtrak Fare Integration
- Area accessible in 60 minutes with SEPTA Rail Extension

- SEPTA Regional Rail
- SEPTA Regional Rail station
- SEPTA Rail Service to Coatesville
- Amtrak Keystone Corridor stations
- SEPTA Rt 135 Bus

Amtrak Integration in Coatesville, PA

How are the public and jurisdictions represented across the service area?

**Board elected by
the public**

BART, San Francisco

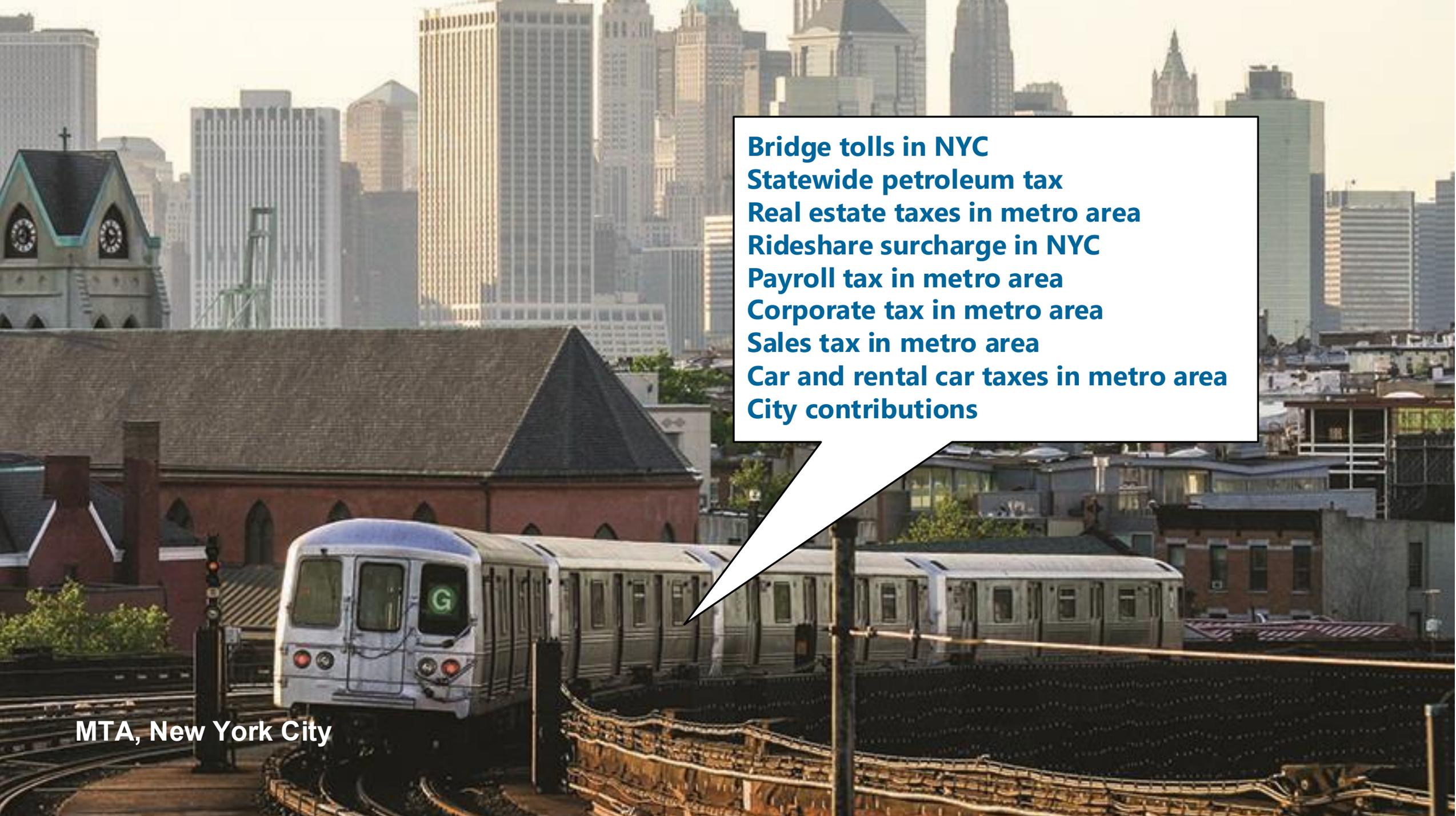




**Board has one
elected and one
citizen member
from each
member city**

Hampton Roads Transit, Norfolk/Virginia Beach/Newport News

Who is taxed, and how?



Bridge tolls in NYC
Statewide petroleum tax
Real estate taxes in metro area
Rideshare surcharge in NYC
Payroll tax in metro area
Corporate tax in metro area
Sales tax in metro area
Car and rental car taxes in metro area
City contributions

MTA, New York City

**How is service allocated
across different areas?**

Legal formula allocates service between east and west sides of county

King County Metro, Seattle



**How do you bring
together two different
staff and cultures?**



Agency organized based on predecessors:

- **Urban transit**
- **Suburban transit**
- **Commuter Rail**

SEPTA, Philadelphia

Where we're going

Governance is not an end to itself. It is a way to provide good transit.

The shared goals for this project are about the transit service your agencies provide.

Reaching these goals and overcoming the obstacles we have been discussing with you will be a fairly large undertaking, and this study is the first step.

We have established six Goal Areas

1) **Service**

- Passenger-facing
- Includes safety, ridership, routes, fares

2) **Funding**

- Includes local, state, and federal funding streams

3) **Staffing**

- Operators and mechanics

4) **Accountability and transparency**

- Decision-making, goal and vision setting, long term planning, priorities, political support
- Includes office staff, planners, HR, governing board

5) **Coordinated Vision**

6) **Efficiency**

Sometimes governance is not the only way to achieve these goals, and we are predisposed to asking if these goals can be achieved without a massive restructuring—making them more feasible.

As we develop the governance scenarios, we will establish how and why they each support the goals.

Draft Goals

Subject Area: Service

- Provide a useful, reliable, and connected regional transit service for people of all abilities

Draft Objectives:

- ABQ Ride operates the proposed frequent network? Recovery network?
- Rio Metro to double the amount of service it operates and offer express service?
- Operate paratransit service that can be used throughout the service area

Draft Goals

Subject Area: Funding

- Create a sustainable sufficient funding stream

Draft Objectives:

- Operate with sufficient known and dedicated funding sources
- Detangle transit funding from other City funding priorities

Draft Goals

Subject Area: Staffing

- Hire and retain the staff needed to operate service

Draft Objectives:

- Develop a hiring environment that is desirable and where turnover is low
- Operate with appropriate union contracts and levels

Draft Goals

Subject Area: Coordinated Vision

- Prioritize long term planning to grow transit service to meet current and future needs

Draft Objectives:

- Operate transit service in an environment with clear and concise decision-making and efficient processes built for longevity
- Gain political support and ability to influence policy and land use
- Grow internal planning capabilities and coordinate grant writing

Draft Goals

Subject Area: Accountability and transparency

- Have an accountable and transparent process internally and to the public

Draft Objectives:

- Have dedicated decisionmakers that have expertise in transit operations
- Transit agency structure such that the public feels like they have a say in what transit gets provided and that the money they put in benefits them

Draft Goals

Subject Area: Efficiency

- Use public tax dollars efficiently to provide the most benefit to the public

Draft Objectives:

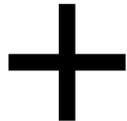
- Combine administrative functions to avoid duplication (if there is any)
- Avoid duplication of facilities, like vehicles maintenance
- Lower the cost of service per mile/hour

Scenario Strategy

City of Albuquerque
ABQ Ride

Rio Metro

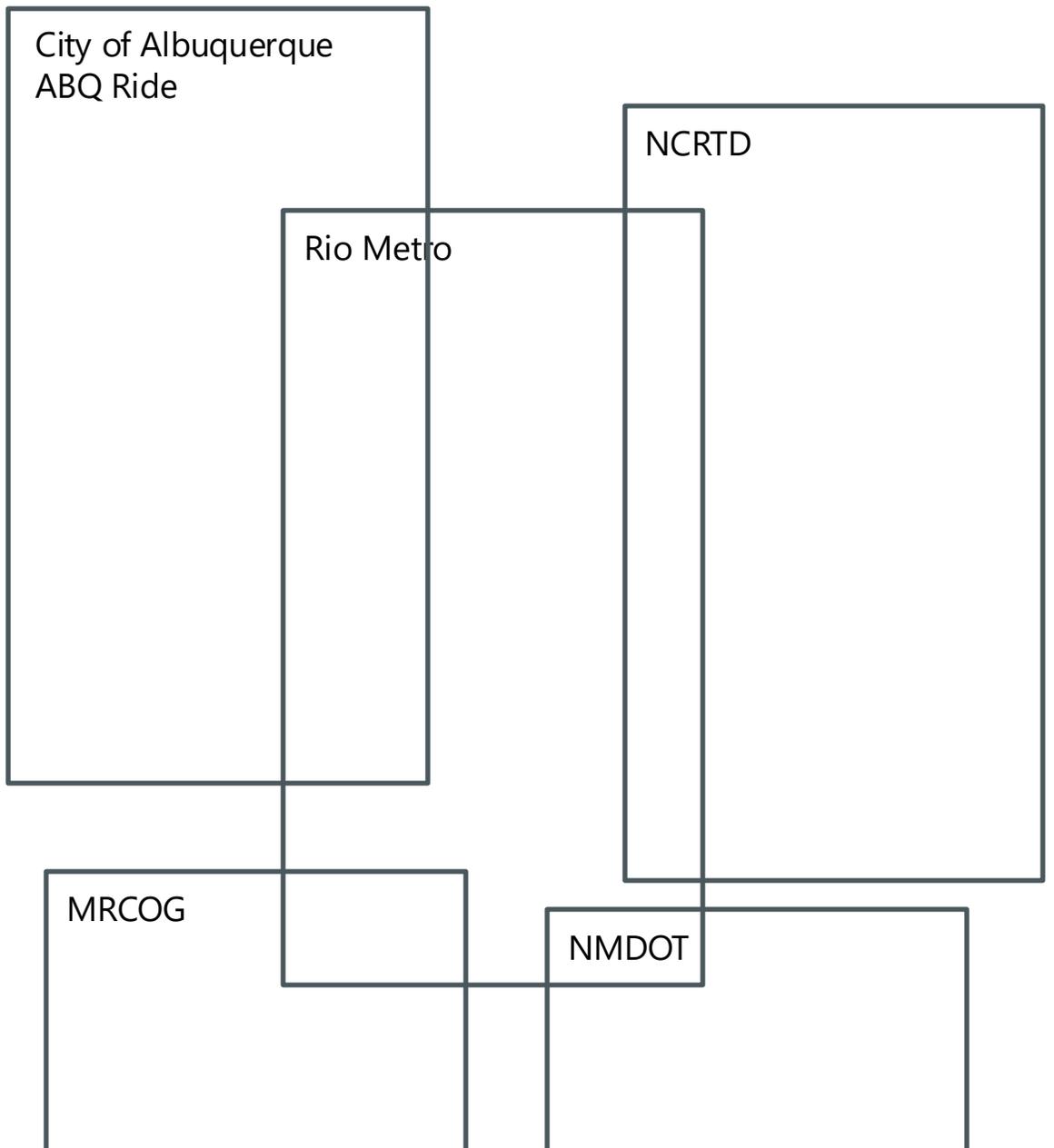
City of Albuquerque
ABQ Ride



Rio Metro



New agency!



Next Steps



Thank You!

 HUITT
ZOLLARS


NELSON
NYGAARD

Christof Spieler

Madeleine Pelzel

Suzie Birdsell

Sam Ergina