

**Rio Metro / ABQ RIDE
Consolidation Study**

**EXISTING
CONDITIONS and
PEER REVIEW**

June 2025

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Rio Metro / ABQ RIDE Transit Consolidation Study

Rio Metro Regional Transit District (Rio Metro) and ABQ RIDE are the two major agencies providing transit service in the Albuquerque metropolitan area. Both agencies are shaped by the specific context of New Mexico: it is a largely rural state whose population is majority urban, which requires a mix of urban services, connections between cities and towns, and rural services.

Rio Metro provides transit services in Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Valencia counties and is primarily focused on connecting riders between municipalities and across the region, most notably with the Rail Runner, providing connections to key destinations outside of the City of Albuquerque. In addition to the Rail Runner, Rio Metro operates seven fixed-route bus services and six dial-a-ride services.

ABQ RIDE is run by the City of Albuquerque and provides bus and paratransit services throughout the city and extending beyond City limits into Bernalillo County. The ABQ RIDE system currently has 24 fixed-route services, including two BRT routes known as Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART). ABQ RIDE also operates a microtransit service ("ABQ RIDE Connect") in two zones.

ABQ RIDE is permanently fare-free on all of its services. Rio Metro is also fare-free for bus service, but charges fares for Rail Runner based on distance traveled.

This study was initiated by the City of Albuquerque City Council in 2023.

This study will create a shared understanding of the current strengths and weaknesses of ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro and will determine what benefits may be gained from consolidation or a different governance model. ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro are different agencies with different leadership structures and funding sources, but they work closely together. They are major stakeholders in each other's planning efforts, and both make decisions thinking about the bigger picture of transit across the region that feed into the Metropolitan Planning Organization's long-range plans.

Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE have unique circumstances as they are both transit agencies within larger governmental organizations—Rio Metro inside the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) and ABQ RIDE within the City of Albuquerque. **This study evaluates the two agency's internal and cooperative structures with the goals of improving service, funding, staffing, accountability, coordinated vision, and efficiency.**

SERVICE



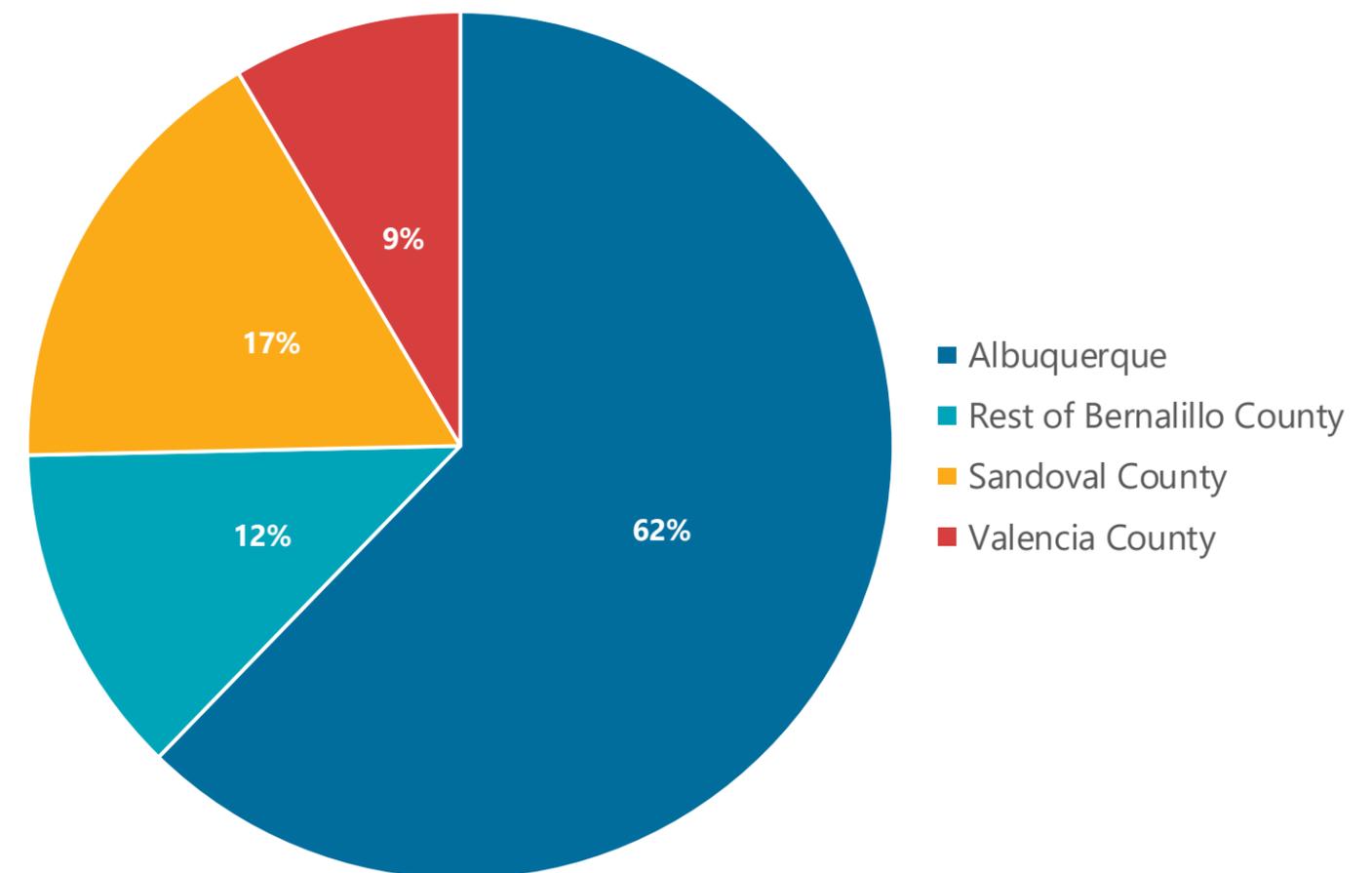
RULES TO



Albuquerque and the ABQ RIDE service area are a significant part of Rio Metro RTD.

- The City of Albuquerque is served by both Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE.
- Almost two thirds of the RMRTD population lives in Albuquerque, and Bernalillo County in total represents 74% of the population within Rio Metro's boundaries.
- ABQ RIDE services are predominantly within city limits or immediate surroundings. Meanwhile, Rio Metro operates limited service within city limits, focusing its services to the surrounding areas, it provides some funding to ABQ RIDE.
- **Combined, ABQ Ride and Rio Metro provide a range of transit service and modes across the majority of the three-county area, albeit ununiformly.**

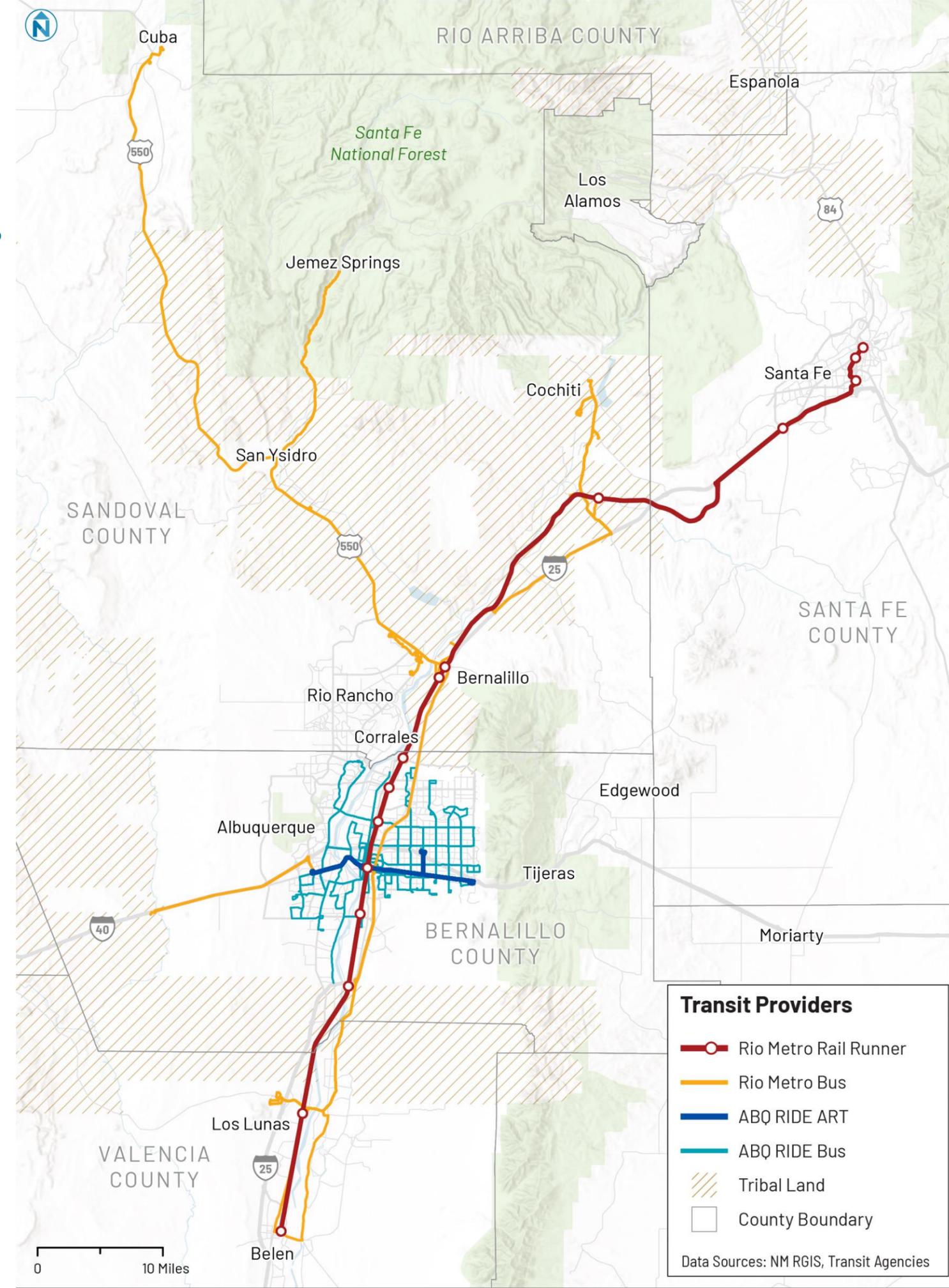
Rio Metro Service Area Population



Data Source: 2023 US Census

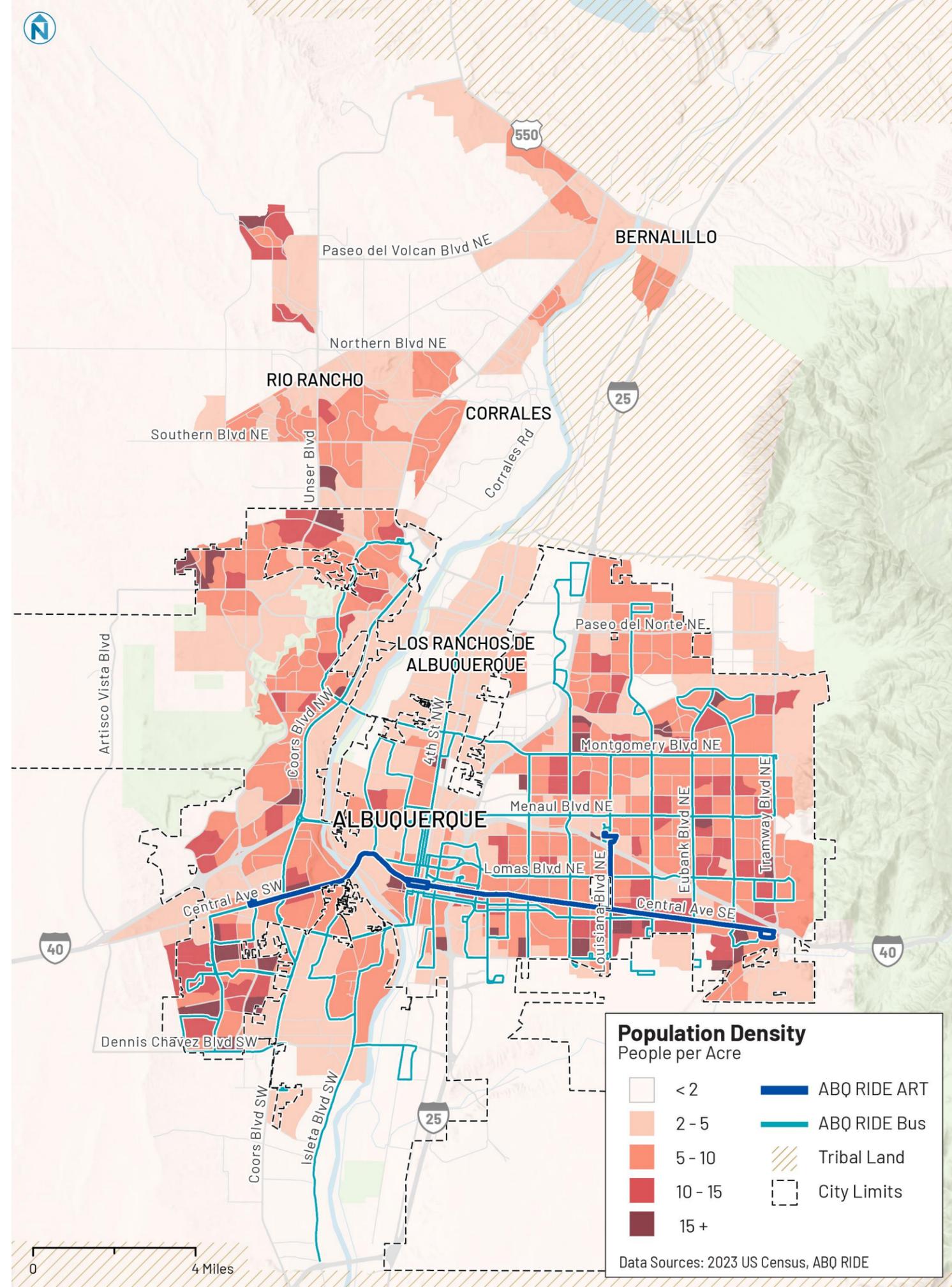
Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE already coordinate service.

- When looking at the two systems and their routes, there is little to no duplication in services. The two systems serve distinct markets from one another.
- Many bus routes have coordinated connections to Rail Runner, which is the spine of the regional system. Both systems connect for transfer opportunities at transportation hubs. In particular, Alvarado Transportation Center is a convenient transfer hub, and ABQ RIDE buses also connect to Rail Runner at Montañito.
- All ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro bus services are fare-free, adding to the ease of transferring between the two systems.
- **Duplicative, uncoordinated and/or unconnected services are often a motivation for consolidating agencies. ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro serve distinct markets while connecting for transfers at key locations, meaning consolidation wouldn't necessarily improve service.**



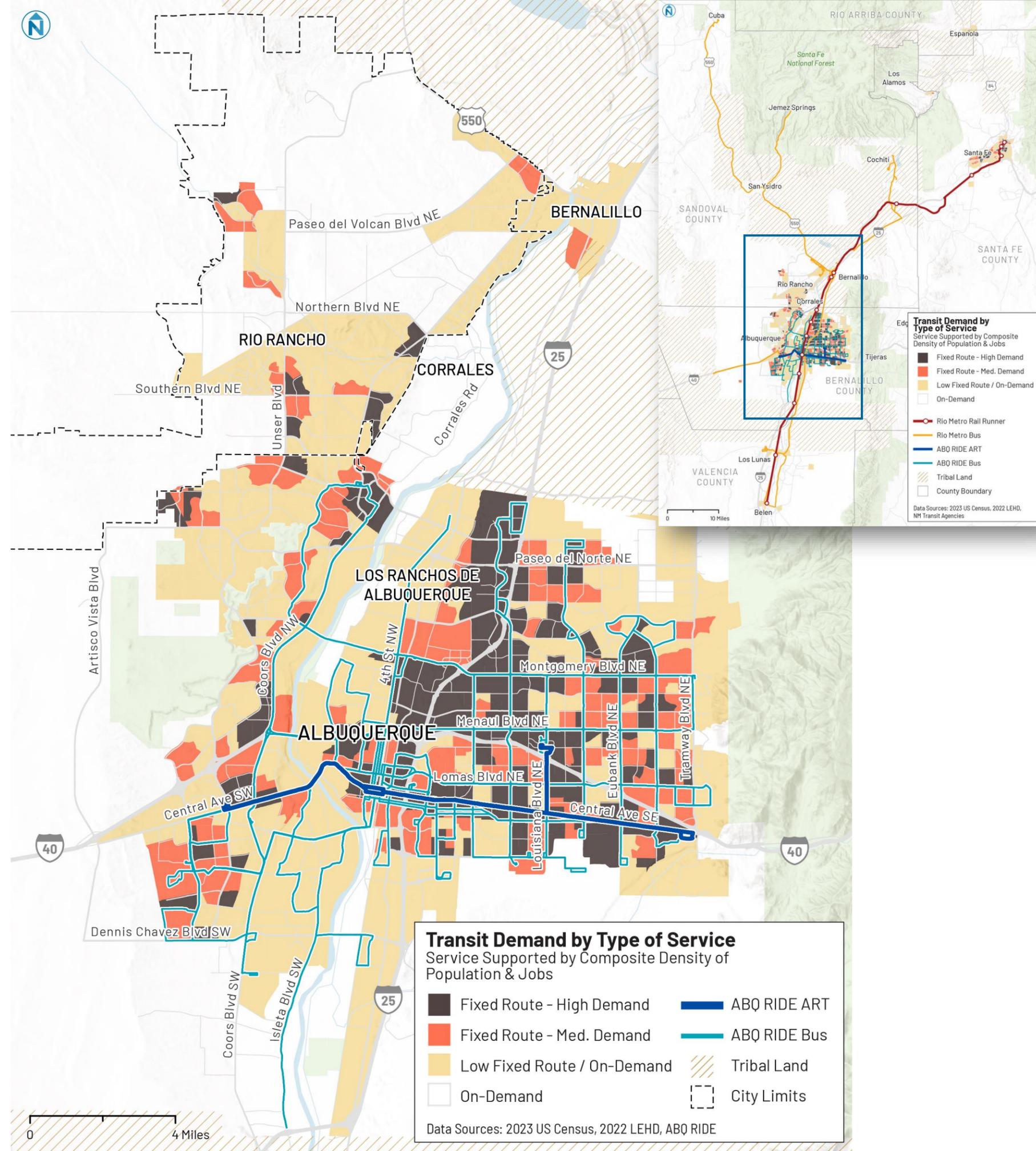
ABQ RIDE's service footprint generally matches population patterns.

- The City of Albuquerque's boundary and the ABQ RIDE service footprint both generally match population boundaries. Albuquerque had approximately 562,000 residents in 2023.
- Bus routes match density in most directions, with ART connecting along the city's densest commercial corridor, Central Avenue. Population density generally drops off dramatically at city limits, so there is little demand to extend routes beyond the city.
- **One of the primary reasons why some agencies would consolidate is because of overlapping or missing service area, which does not apply to ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro.**



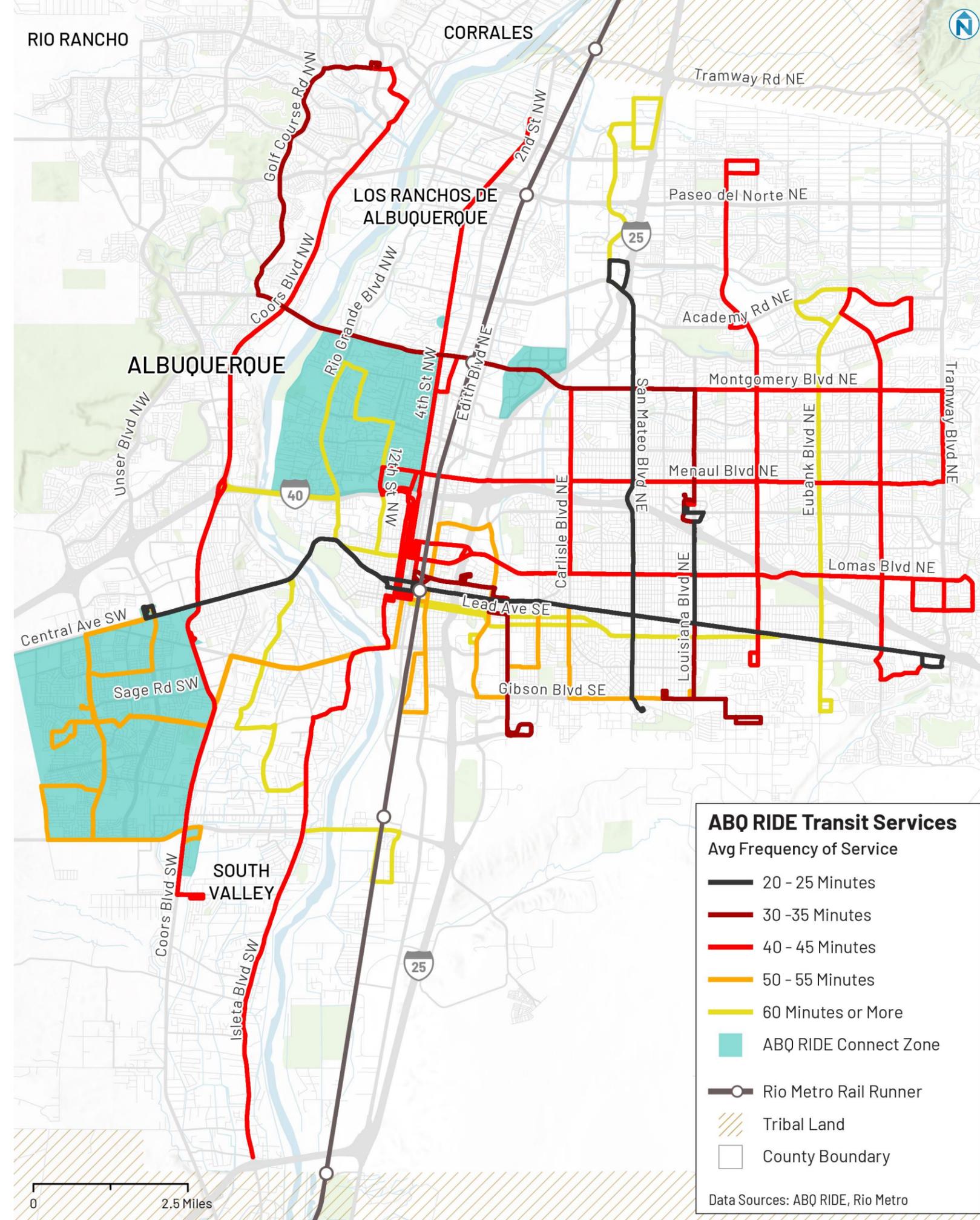
Rio Rancho has the comparable density to many areas of the City of Albuquerque, but it does not have fixed route service.

- One notable exception to the match between fixed route service and demand for transit is Rio Rancho, where population and employment density in some areas could warrant fixed-route transit service, but there is currently only on-demand service provided by Rio Metro.
- ABQ RIDE previously served southern Rio Rancho with several commuter routes. Rio Rancho had approximately 107,00 residents in 2023.
- However, service in Rio Rancho may not currently match the demand, which has more similar development patterns to Albuquerque than to the rest of the Rio Metro service area.**



ABQ RIDE service operates with higher frequency where there is currently higher transit demand, but staff shortages are a challenge in delivering more frequent service.

- Overall, ABQ RIDE's highest frequencies today cover the most important service areas, but this service is still not as frequent as before the pandemic.
- The Recovery Network, part of ABQ RIDE Forward, plans to increase frequency on most corridors, and operate four local routes frequently.
- ABQ RIDE does not currently have the operator or maintenance staff to support the level of service in the Recovery Network, but the goal is to hire up to these levels.

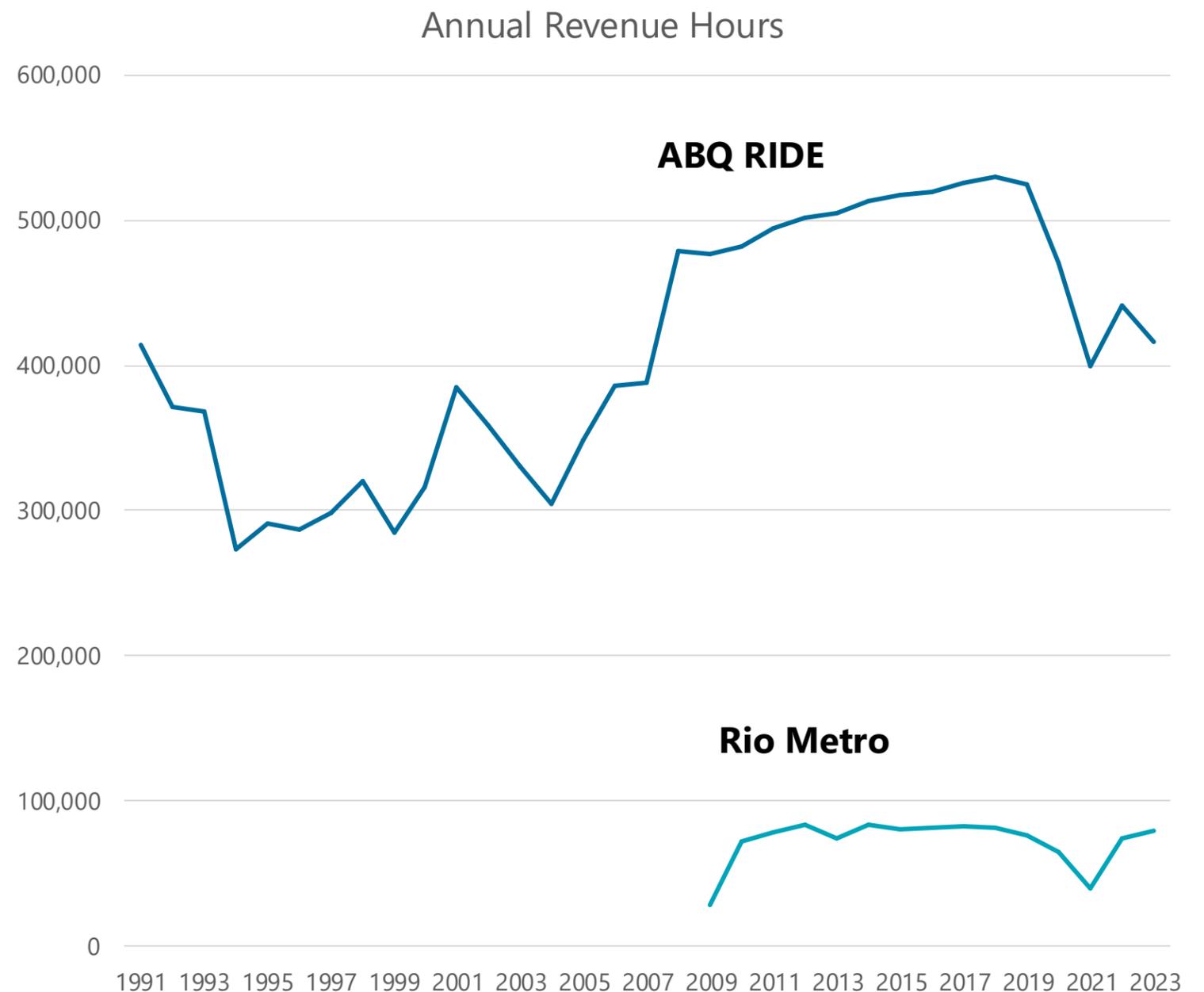


Security is an issue in Albuquerque for riders at stops, riders on board, operators, and maintenance personnel.

- ABQ RIDE's recently completed Long-Range Security Plan highlights how security and safety issues affect many parts of the system.
- Recurring incidents at bus stops and on-board buses affect bus driver and maintenance personnel productivity, and the stress of these incidents often lead to employees leaving ABQ RIDE.
- Safety concerns have led to a negative public perception of ABQ RIDE, which has negatively impacted ridership.
- The Security Plan highlights the progress made by ABQ RIDE over the last two years by implementing the Transit Safety Officer program, the addition of Transit Security Officers and Police Service Aides to ride buses, and an aggressive cleaning program to improve the appearance of transit facilities and buses, among other strategies.
- The Plan identifies several ways to continue to improve security including a revised management structure and increased number of security forces working under Albuquerque Police Department (APD), playing to the strengths of both ABQ RIDE and APD's expertise. Most security staff would be unarmed, but able to effectively contact backup support when needed. Implementing a system to uniformly track safety data will help to understand how well the program is working and how to continually improve safety and security.
- **Hiring, retention, and ridership issues are all connected to both perceived and real safety and security issues. Implementing the Long-Range Security Plan is an important step in improving the entire ABQ RIDE system.**

ABQ RIDE is currently operating 60% of pre-pandemic service, while Rio Metro is operating fully restored service.

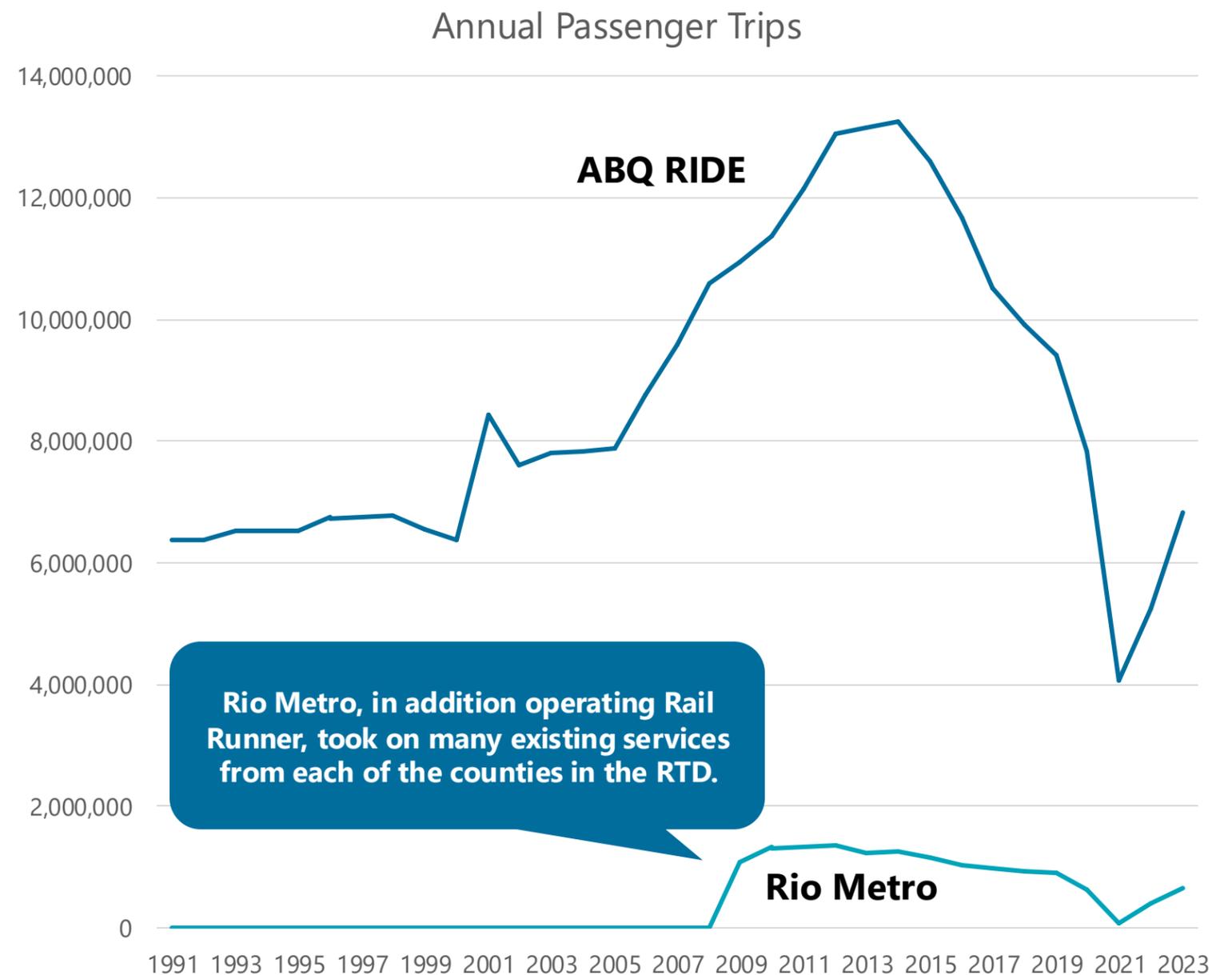
- Rio Metro cut some service at the onset of the pandemic but fully restored service by 2023.
- ABQ RIDE cut service in 2020 and again in 2021 and has not been able to increase service beyond 60% of pre-pandemic service due to staffing shortages.
- ABQ RIDE needs 249 bus operators to operate full service but 112 of those positions are vacant. It also needs 134 maintenance positions but 51 of those are vacant. ABQ RIDE has been hiring 100 new operators and mechanics per year, but the new hires have been offset by continued staff attrition.
- As long as ABQ RIDE is unable to fill vacant operator positions, it does not spend its full budget. Any budget savings ABQ RIDE generates can potentially be used by other city departments in supporting their needs.



Data Source: NTD 1991-2023

ABQ RIDE ridership is down dramatically from its 2015 peak, but ridership is growing now even as service isn't.

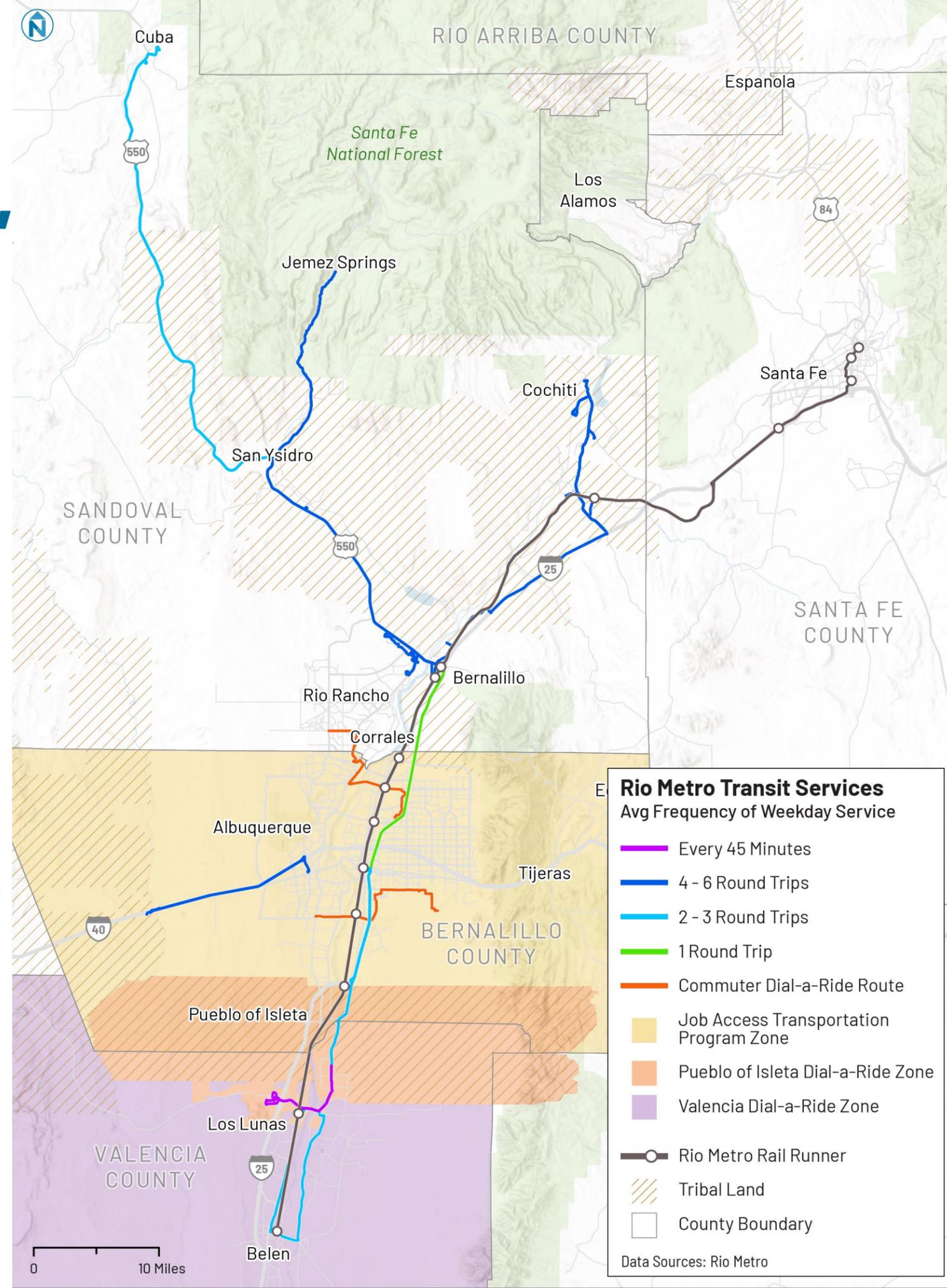
- Transit ridership grew dramatically from 2005 to 2015 as Rio Metro opened Rail Runner and ABQ RIDE expanded service and added Rapid Ride service.
- From 2015 to 2019 ABQ RIDE lost a third of its ridership. This matches national trends driven by a strong economy and lower gas prices, but the drop here was much more severe than elsewhere.
- ABQ Ride lost due to COVID, with 2021 at 43% of 2019 levels. However, ridership has rebounded since and was at 73% in 2023. The first five months of 2025 were at 80% of 2019. Notably, service levels have been essentially constant since 2021, so this growth reflects strong demand. Rio Metro also lost riders due to COVID and is now at 71% of 2019 ridership.



Data Source: NTD 1991-2023

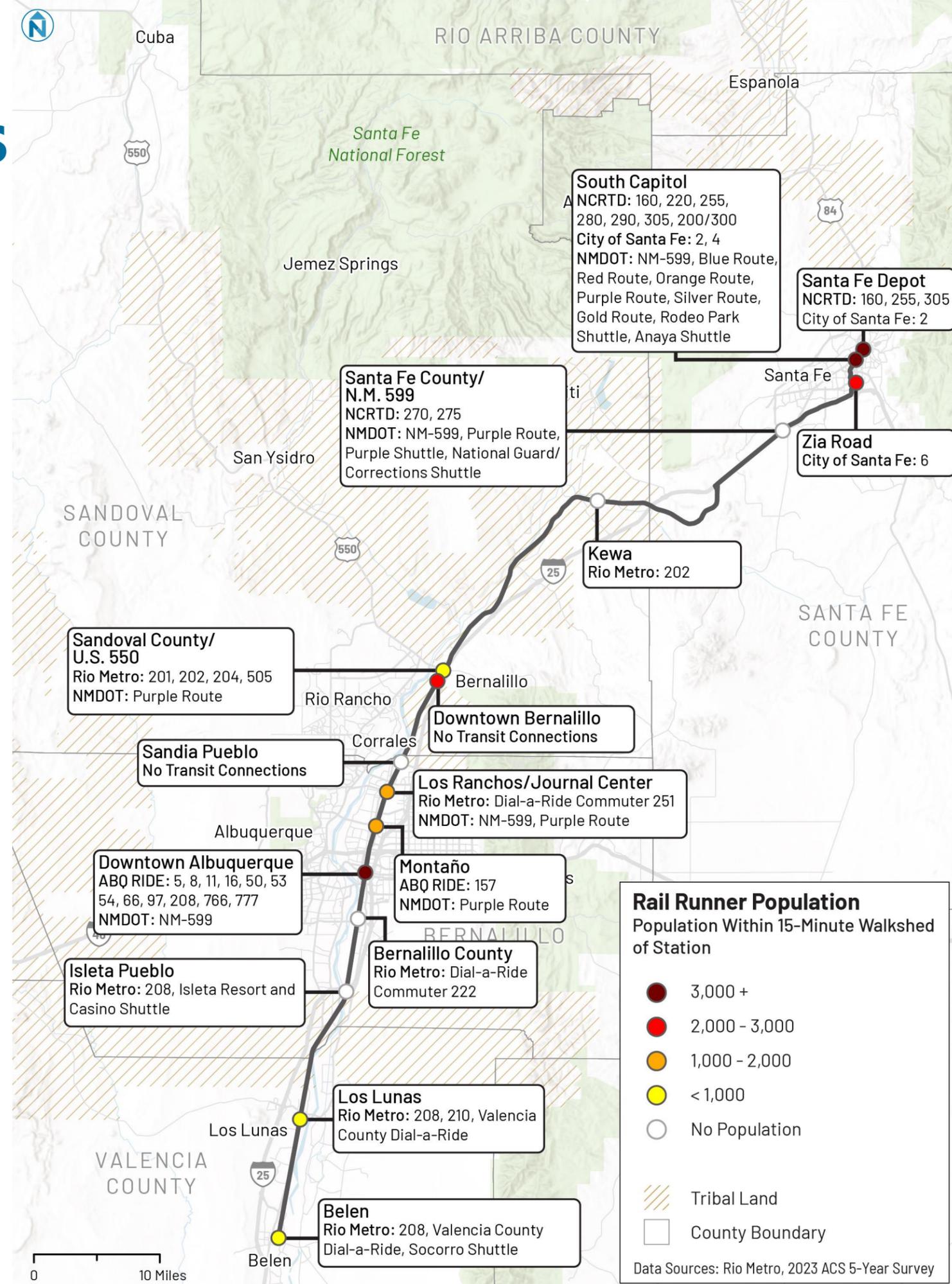
Rio Metro serves an expansive geographic area, but it is generally low frequency and limited in span of service.

- When Rio Metro was established, it took over then operating transportation services in the counties in its service area. These service types vary widely in how and where they operate and didn't necessarily form a cohesive network.
- Rio Metro fixed routes operate a limited number of trips – typically between one and eight round trips per day on weekdays. Rio Metro does not operate weekend service. Two fixed routes require a reservation at least a day before. Service is limited based on the amount of funding Rio Metro to distribute across a large area.
- This limited level of service makes it challenging to rely on transit for many trip types and may not align with potential riders' shift times or medical appointments or allow spontaneity for other types of travel like visiting friends.
- Using Rio Metro services today other than Rail Runner require riders to be savvy and to have very particular trip times and purposes.
- **Increasing the frequency, span, and days of Rio Metro service could greatly increase the usability of this service, as well as simplifying the rules and constraints of dial-a-ride service.**



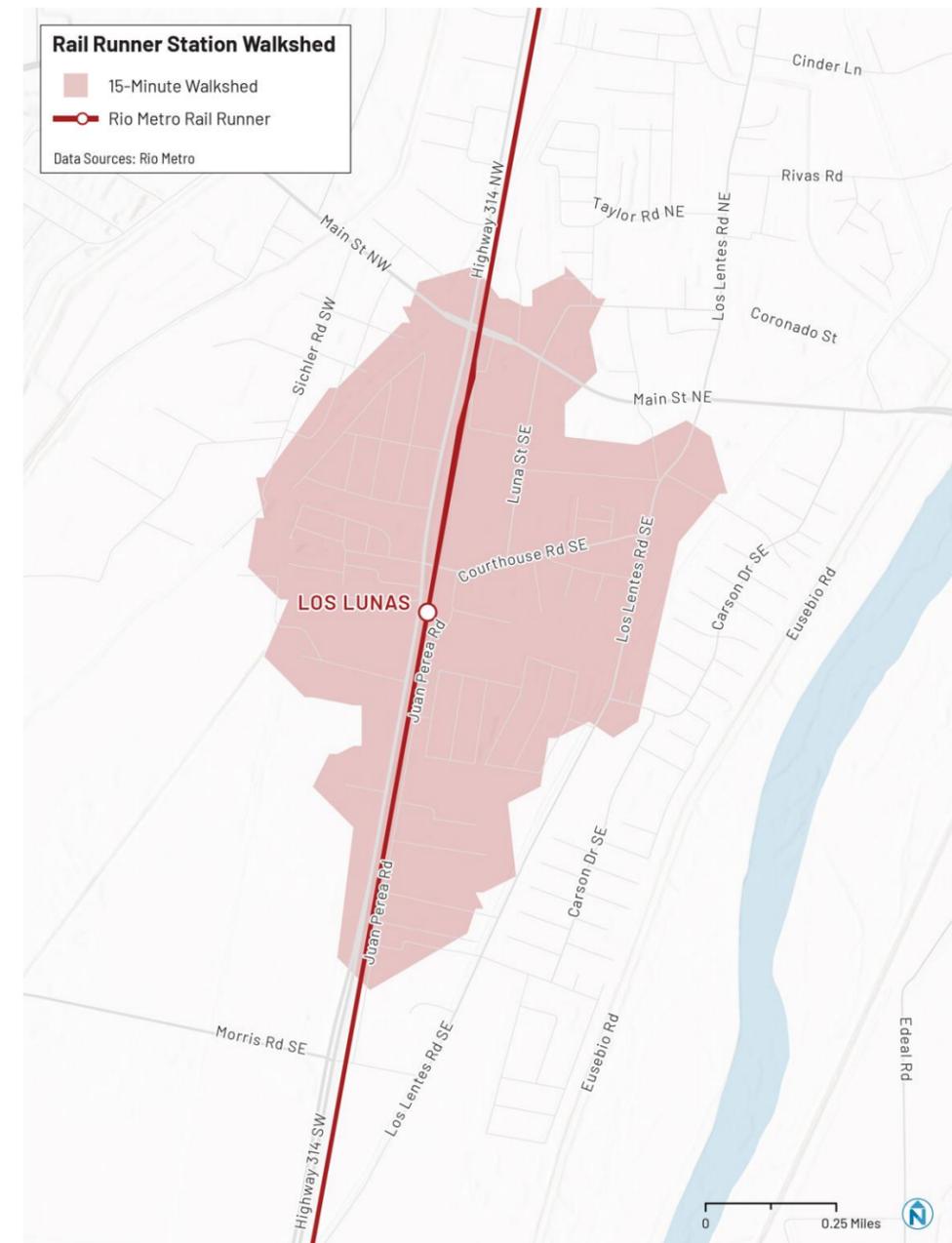
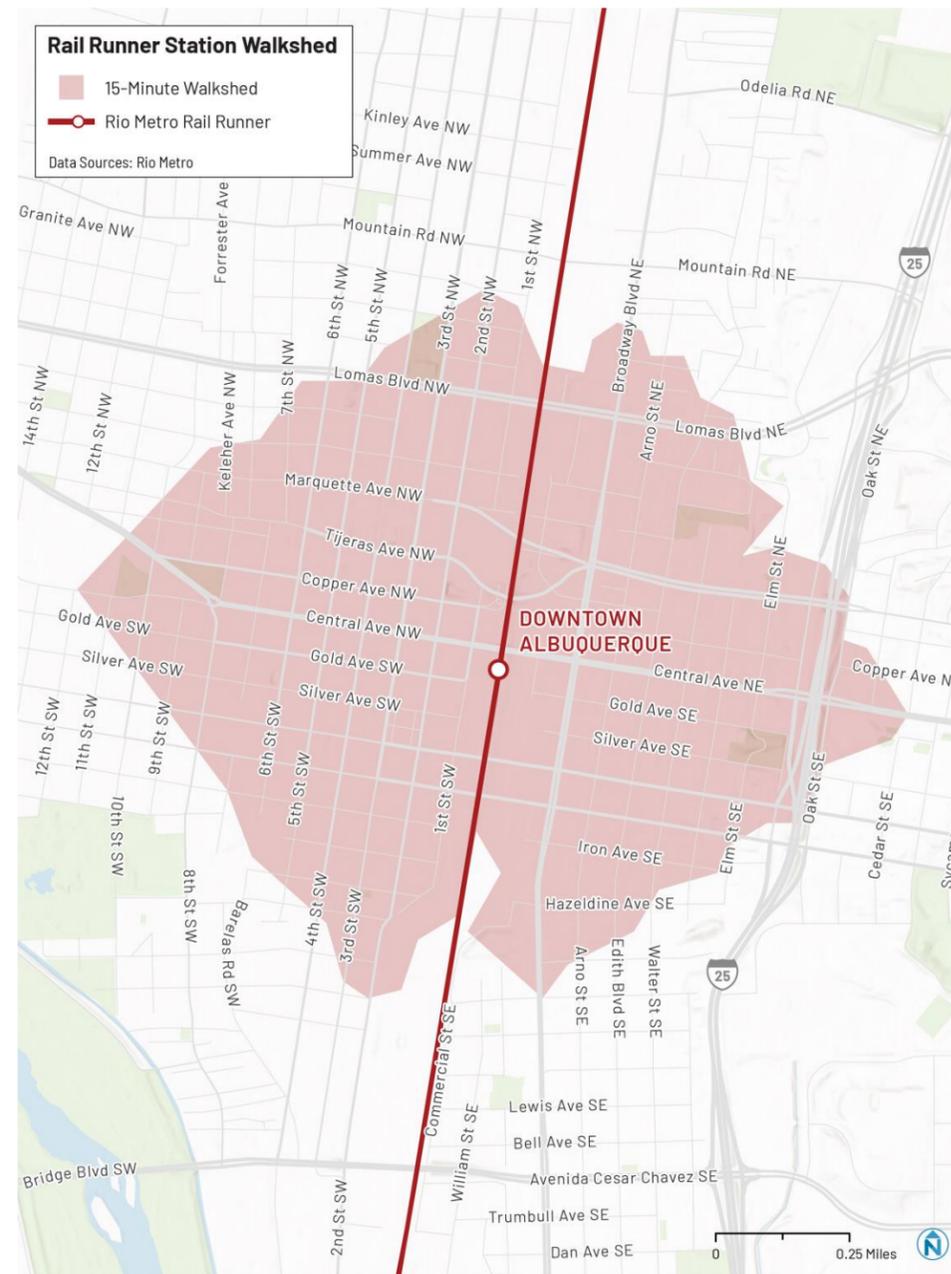
Rail Runner has 15 stations and serves as the spine of otherwise disconnected transit systems.

- The Rail Runner is the backbone of a regional system, which spreads across a large portion of the state and connects with many transit service providers.
- The population density and transit connectivity around stations varies drastically, with some stations like Sandia Pueblo without any residences within a 15-minute walk and no transit connections and others with thousands of people and many transit connections.
- While most stations have many connections to other transit, current schedules and frequencies undermine the effectiveness of the route coordination.
- While the Rail Runner connects a large portion of central New Mexico, it is slower than driving on I-25, and not very frequent, limiting its ability to be competitive with private automobiles.
- **Growing ridership on Rail Runner is limited by the fact that it is not competitive with driving.**



Walkability around Rail Runner stations varies drastically.

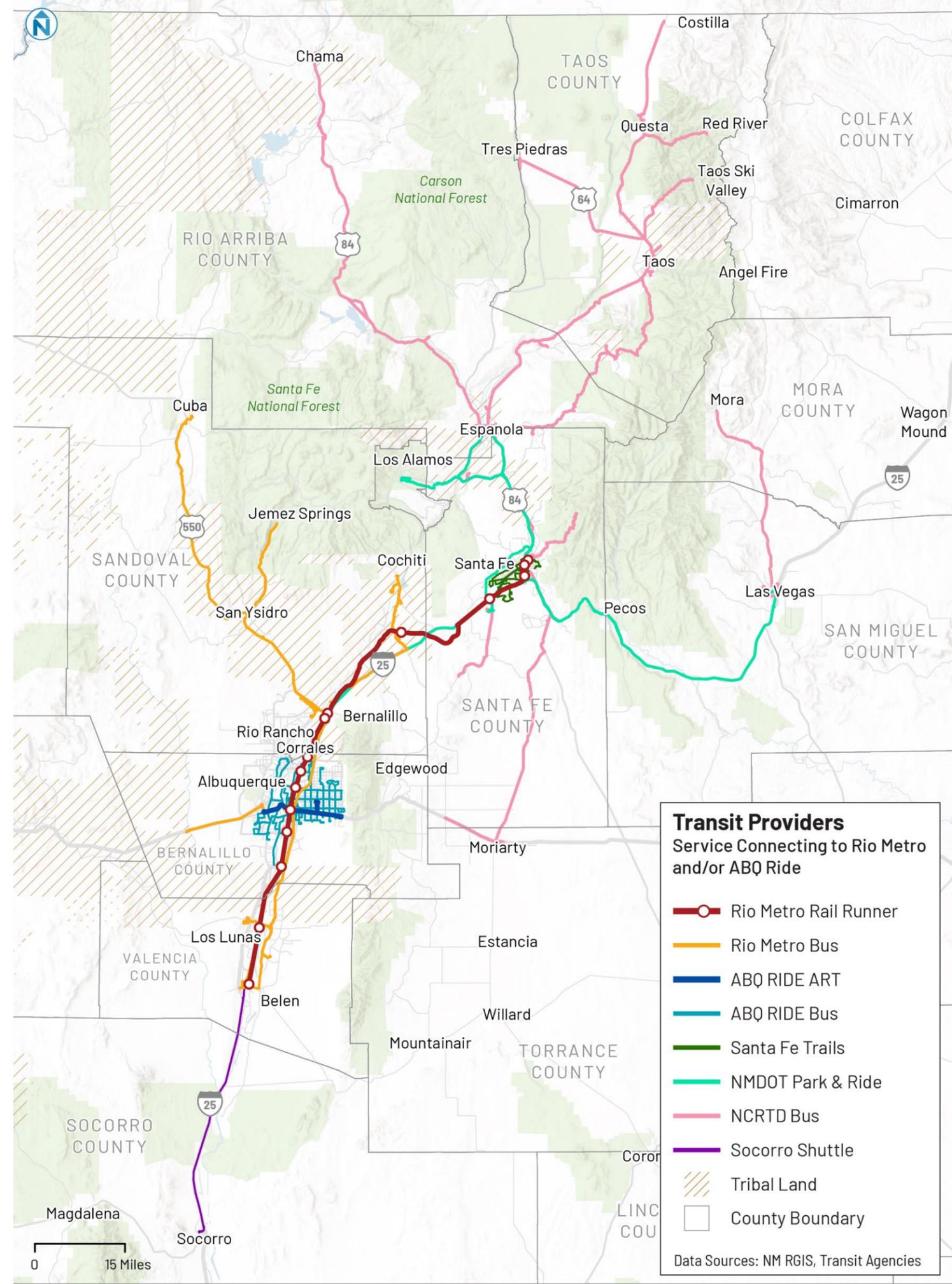
- Most stations serve residents within a 15-minute walkshed or allow communities in surrounding areas to connect to the rest of New Mexico through local transit service to the Rail Runner.
- Local street development patterns greatly effect the usability of Rail Runner for residents, as shown by the walkshed diagrams to the right of the Downtown Albuquerque and Los Lunas.



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

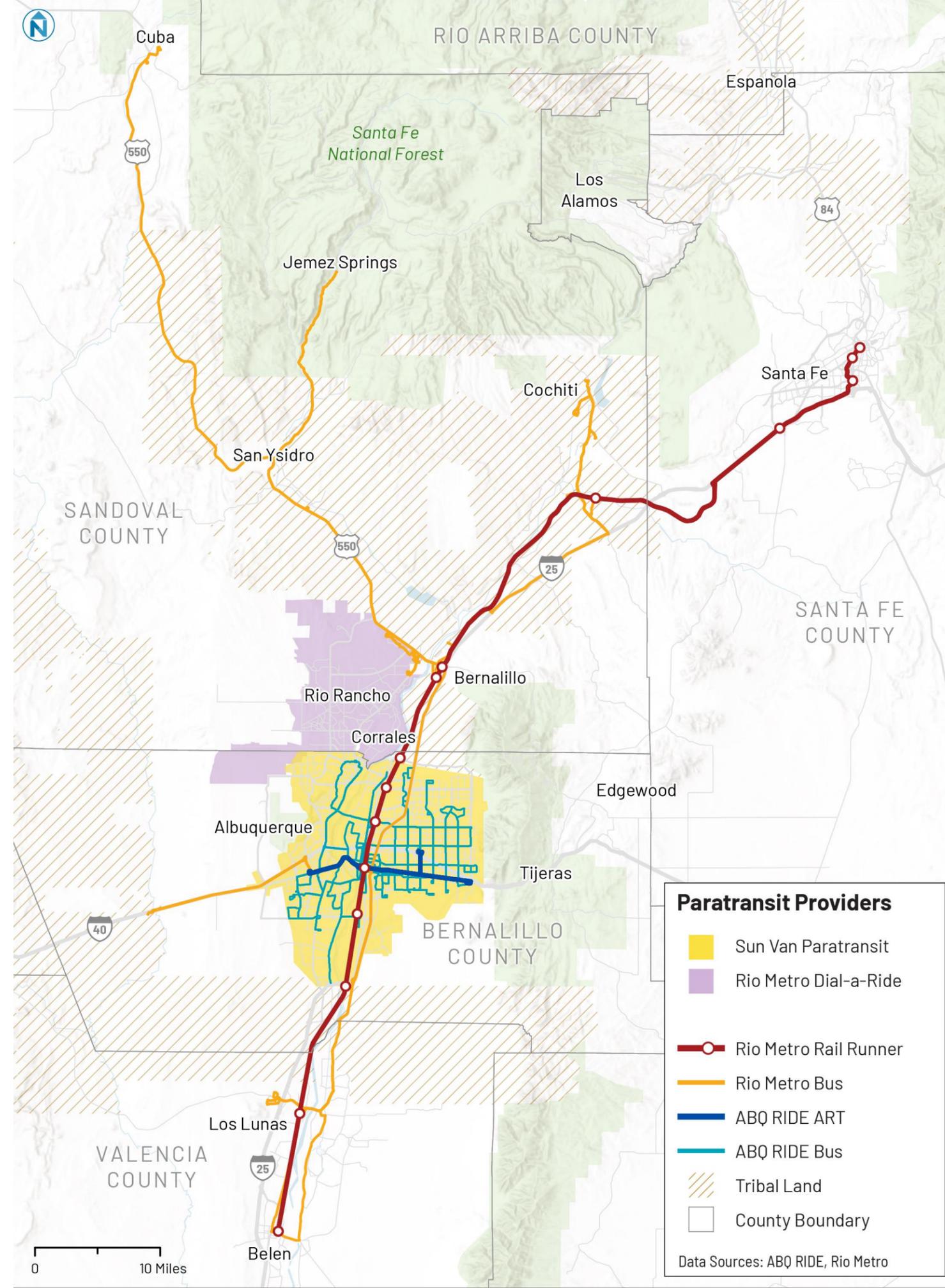
There are several major transfer hubs that connect other transit agencies to Rio Metro service.

- The Socorro Shuttle connects to the Rail Runner at Belen Station with coordinated schedules.
- ABQ RIDE connects to several Rail Runner Stations and connects to Rio Metro bus at the Alvarado Transportation Center and the Central & Unser Transit Center.
- NMDOT Park and Ride connects to the Rail Runner at NM-599 Station and the South Capitol Station in Santa Fe and replaces one early morning Rail Runner trip between Albuquerque and Santa Fe.
- NCRTD services connect to the Rail Runner at the at NM-599 Station and the South Capitol Station in Santa Fe.
- Santa Fe Trails connects to several Rail Runner stations in Santa Fe.



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

- ABQ RIDE offers Sun Van paratransit service in most of the City of Albuquerque, some parts of unincorporated Bernalillo County, and in the Village of Los Ranchos.
- Rio Metro offers Dial-a-Ride for all residents within Valencia County and Pueblo of Isleta, and for all older adults and adults with disabilities within Rio Rancho and Corrales.
- Paratransit and Dial-a-Ride services are not designed for transfers between the agencies, nor is it possible to do so in a coordinated way.
- If people from the Rio Metro service area need to take Dial-a-Ride into the city, Rio Metro does take them out of their service area (with limits). However, ABQ RIDE does not provide rides outside of its defined service area.
- There is no eligibility reciprocity. Customers who want to ride both paratransit services must submit separate eligibility applications or transfer one eligibility to the other as a visitor.
- Both agencies operate separate call centers and use separate booking software. However, ABQ RIDE is getting new paratransit software, which will increase its ability to coordinate with Rio Metro.
- Unlike the fixed route service, the paratransit service has both duplication of back of house infrastructure and disconnected service for passengers.**



While services physically connect, passenger information isn't always clear.

- Both Rio Metro and ABQ Ride make efforts to inform passengers of both agencies' services. Rio Metro has a web page that lists bus connections at all stations. The ABQ Ride system map shows Rio Metro service.
- However, printed and online materials often do not provide details on key connections or service integration. Even where buses and trains are scheduled for a convenient transfer, that transfer is not shown in the schedule.
- For example, the NMDOT Purple Route, which is funded by Rio Metro and replaces an early morning Rail Runner trip, is not shown on the Rail Runner schedule. Passengers would need to know to look at another agency's website.
- Real time information displays also do not show connections.



Rio Metro's mix of service models and method of communicating services make the rider experience more difficult.

- While Rio Metro's website provides online information about its different types of service, their types of service lack clear and intuitive branding. There are Dial-a-Ride services with age and disability eligibility requirements, Dial-a-Ride services with no eligibility requirements and that operate curb-to-curb or door-to-door, and Dial-a-Ride commuter services with no eligibility requirements, but that have stops like a typical fixed-route service. Most of these services require calling to make a reservation at least a day before, making them less accessible for day-to-day trip planning.
- The only rider guide linked on the Rio Metro website specifically focuses on Demand Response in Rio Rancho and Valencia County and is out of date (September 2022).

	Sandoval County	Valencia County	Isleta Pueblo	Bernalillo County	Rio Ranches /Corrales (in Sandoval County)
Fixed Route Commuter					
Fixed Route				 (366)	
Dial-a-Ride (General Public)					
Dial-a-Ride Commuter Fixed Route				 (222, 251)	 (251)
Dial-a-Ride (Seniors and Disabled)					
Job Access					

STAFFING



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

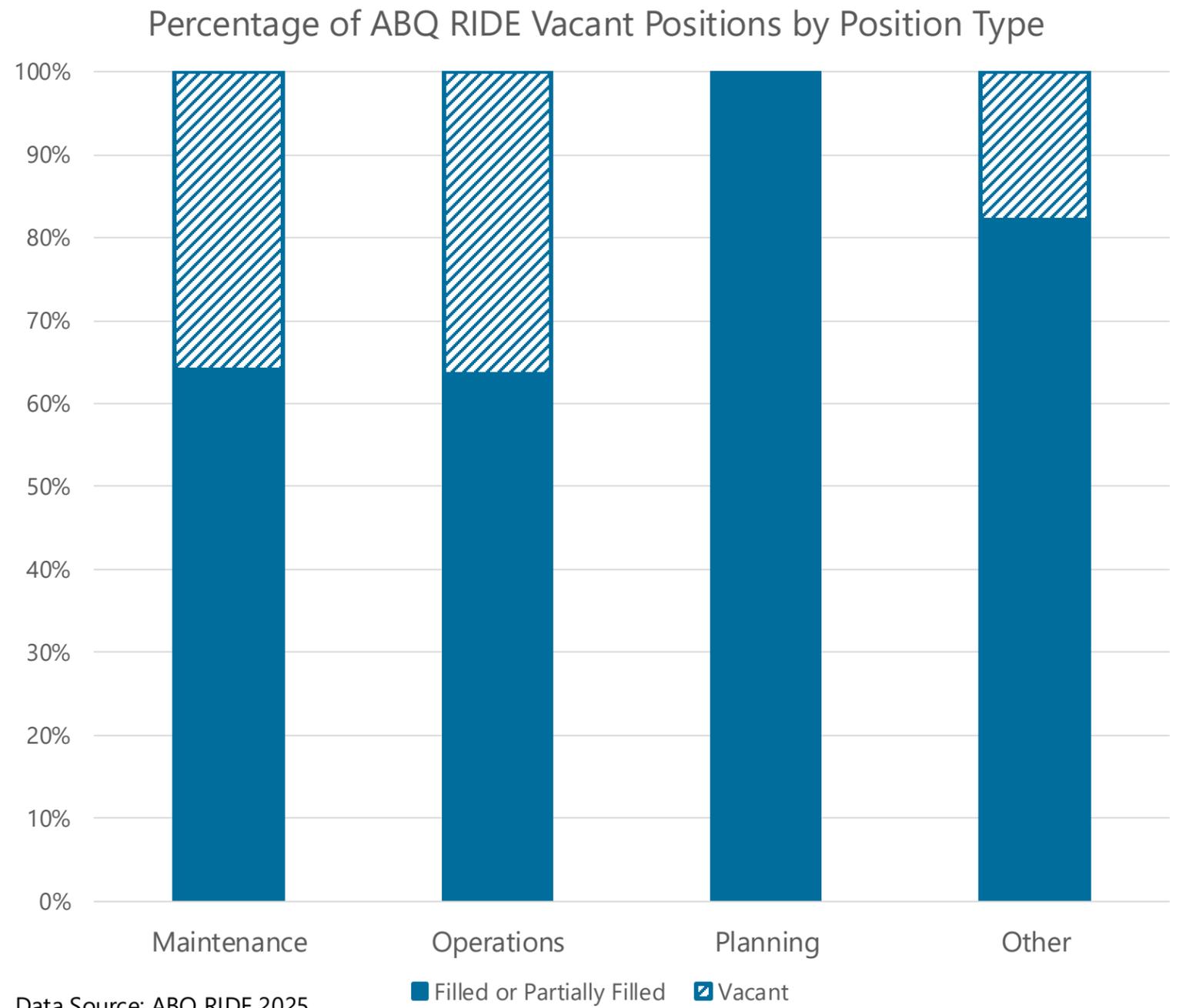
- ABQ RIDE is budgeted to have over 500 full time employees, 60% of which are driver positions.
- ABQ RIDE has some administrative staff within the department, but it also relies on staff within other departments, some of whom are assigned to ABQ RIDE 100% of the time.
 - The staff that are split between ABQ RIDE and other departments often must keep track of different regulations for all other City departments that are different than ABQ RIDE; for example, ABQ RIDE interfaces with FTA and other federal guidelines and funding while other departments do not.
 - This is especially an issue in purchasing, where the FTA allows a micro-purchase amount of \$250,000 and the City has a limit of \$10,000.



ART Station

ABQ RIDE is suffering from an operator and maintenance shortage.

- Many ABQ RIDE employees have difficult schedules, required overtime, low pay, and safety concerns. These issues span many different divisions including operators, mechanics, call center, and paratransit providers.
- These factors make it hard for ABQ RIDE to be competitive in the hiring market in Albuquerque and once hired, it is also difficult to keep employees.
- The hiring process for transit employees is slow, and frequently a potential hire accepts another job before the onboarding process is completed with ABQ RIDE. However, there are ongoing efforts to shorten the timeline between accepting a new hire and their first day of employment.



Transit vehicle maintenance workers are classified with all other vehicle maintenance workers at the City.

- Notably, the maintenance workers are classified together with other City maintenance workers, which means positions to maintain transit buses are treated the same as positions to maintain other large vehicles that may not be as complex.
- ABQ RIDE maintenance workers also work drastically different hours than other City maintenance workers due to the needs of running transit service. This is a major issue in terms of mechanic retention, because the quality of life is better in other departments with the same wages.
- The union representing transit vehicle maintenance workers holds meetings during peak transit work shifts, meaning that although unionized transit workers are in a large bargaining unit, they are sometimes underrepresented in what gets brought to the bargaining table because they are less able to attend meetings.



ABQ RIDE
Maintenance Facility

ABQ RIDE has some of the most complete in-house abilities in the country to maintain specialized transit vehicles, making it difficult to contract out work without paying large premiums.

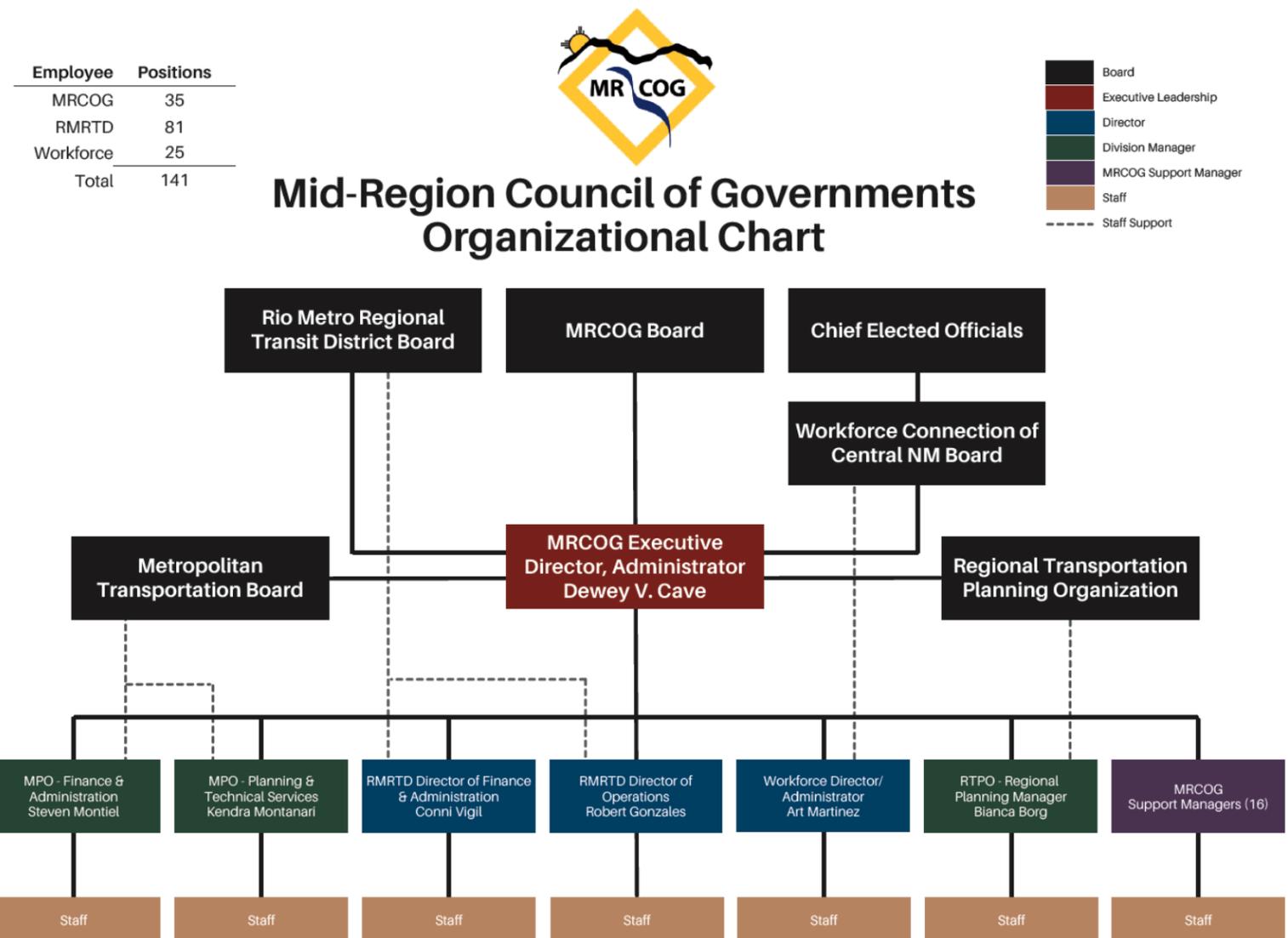
- ABQ RIDE essentially has full in-house ability to do everything except build a new bus. This includes engine rebuilding, painting, and fixing both electric and combustion engines, which many large transit agencies in the United States cannot.
- This requires a broad range of skills, and the diversity and challenge of the work is part of what keeps some mechanics in the department.
- Most complete in-house abilities in the country to maintain specialized transit vehicles, making it difficult to contract out work without paying large premiums.
- **Despite the difference in skillsets, ABQ RIDE mechanics are part of the same pay structure as other mechanics in the City with no extra compensation for the type of labor nor work schedule that they perform.**



ABQ RIDE maintenance facility

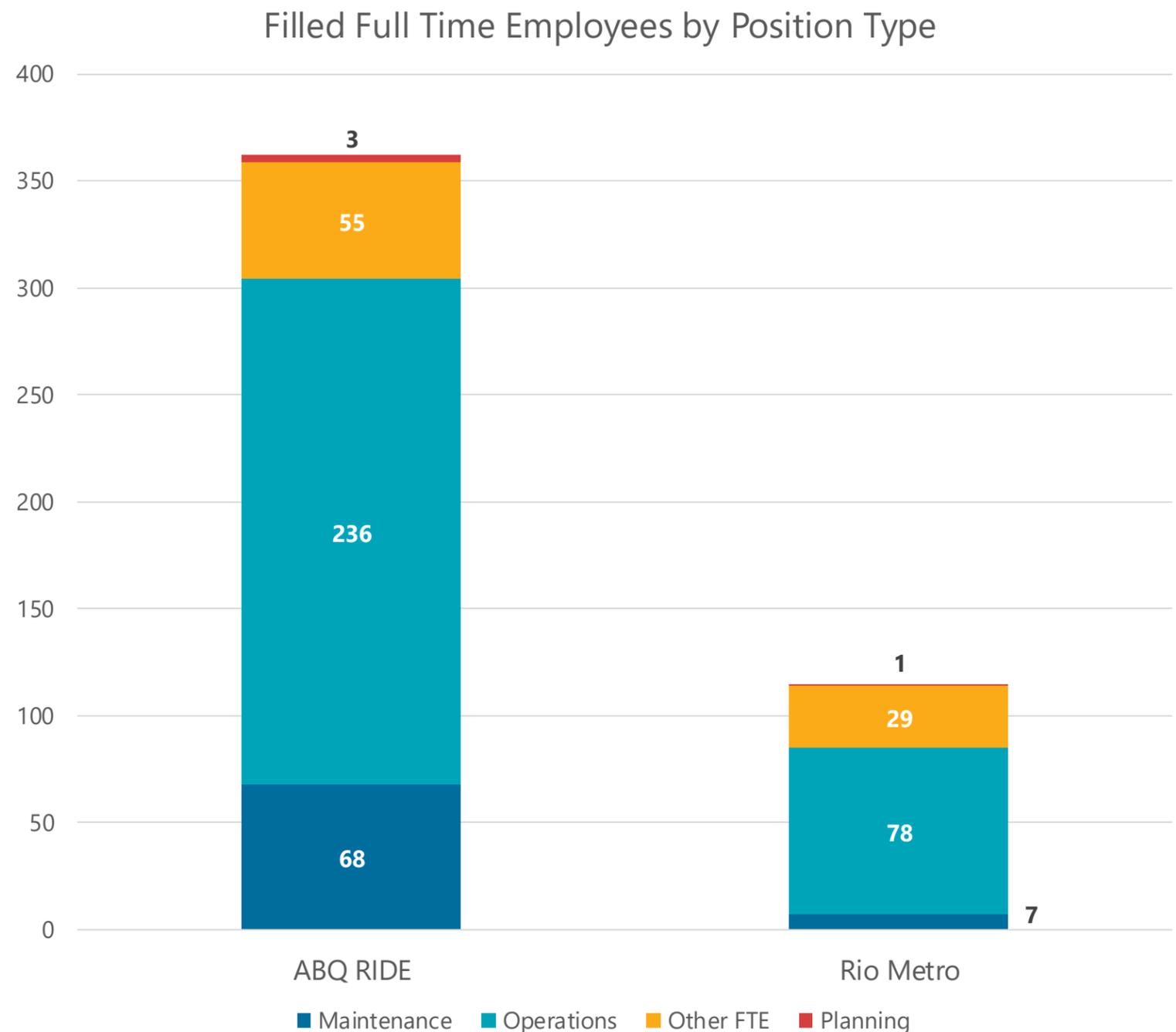
Rio Metro is housed within the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG), and transit makes up a significant part of the workload of many MRCOG staff members.

- While Rio Metro is an independent agency with its own board, it shares an Executive Director with MRCOG and has since its founding in 2005. This Executive Director responds to many boards, including that of Rio Metro, and oversees the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), and the Workforce Connection of Central NM in addition to Rio Metro.
- Rio Metro has 115 administrative and operations staff members. Rio Metro also has many contracted rail operations and bus and demand-response operations workers.
- Although many of Rio Metro's administrative needs are met within the agency, some full-time MRCOG employees spend a large portion of their time working for Rio Metro. This includes Legal, HR, Accounting, and Purchasing.



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

- Rio Metro, by comparison to ABQ RIDE, is a small agency with very few staff—in part because so much of the operation is contracted out, especially the Rail Runner.
- Neither agency has the typical amount of in-house planning staff for transit agencies and regions of this size. ABQ RIDE has one senior planner and two principal planners, and Rio Metro has one planning manager who is also the liaison to the Board. Additionally, the MRCOG MPO does not have any dedicated transit planners.
- Rio Metro contracts service to Herzog, All Aboard America, and Z Trip, making the number of in-house staff lower than the number of total staff required to operate their services. Rio Metro has a mix of unionized and non-unionized operators, and unions are different by contractor and directly operated positions.
- **Not having dedicated planning staff hinders the ability to plan for both a short- and long-term vision to improve service and think regionally while also taking on day-to-day challenges as they arise.**



Data Source: ABQ RIDE 2025, Rio Metro 2025

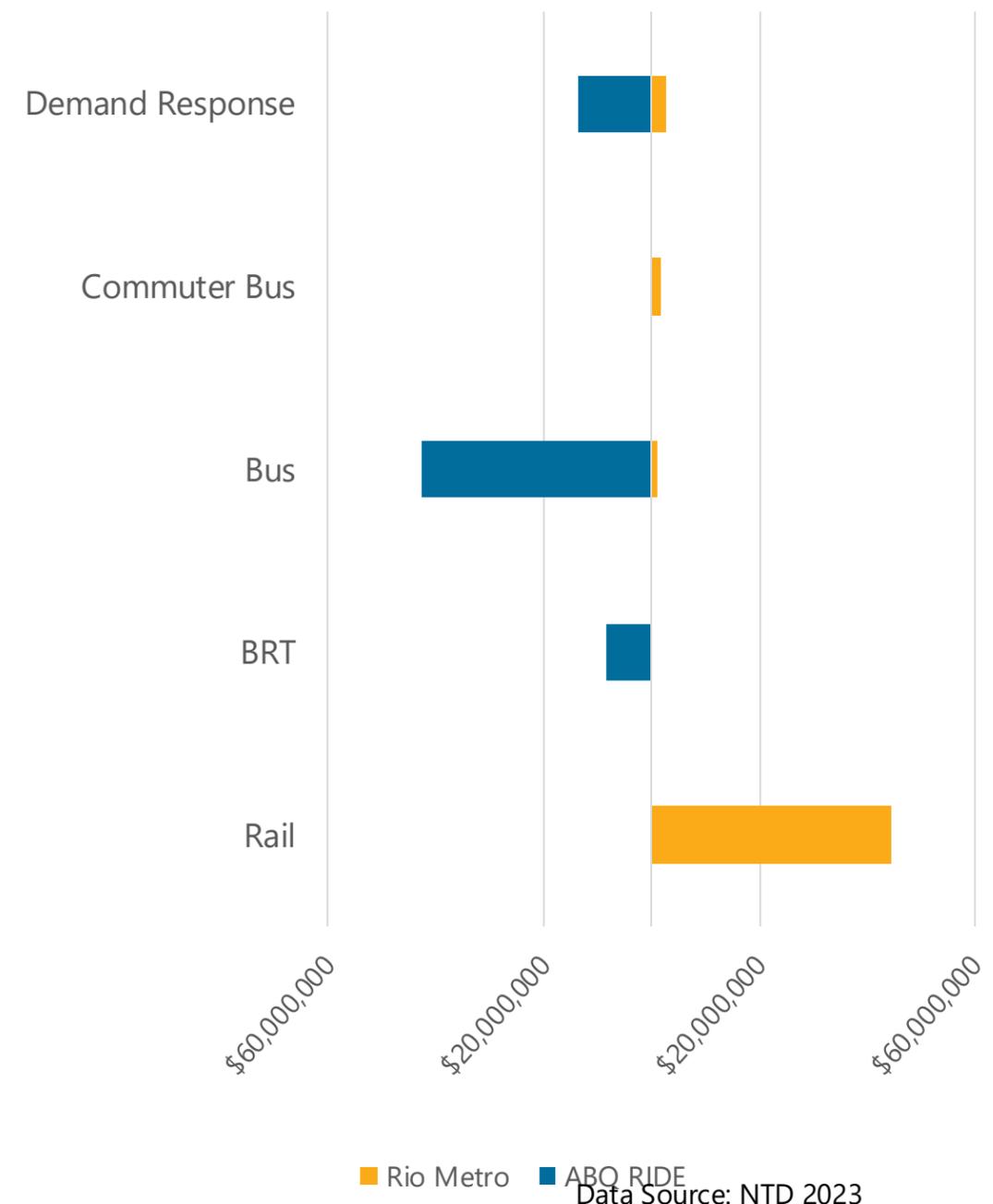
FUNDING



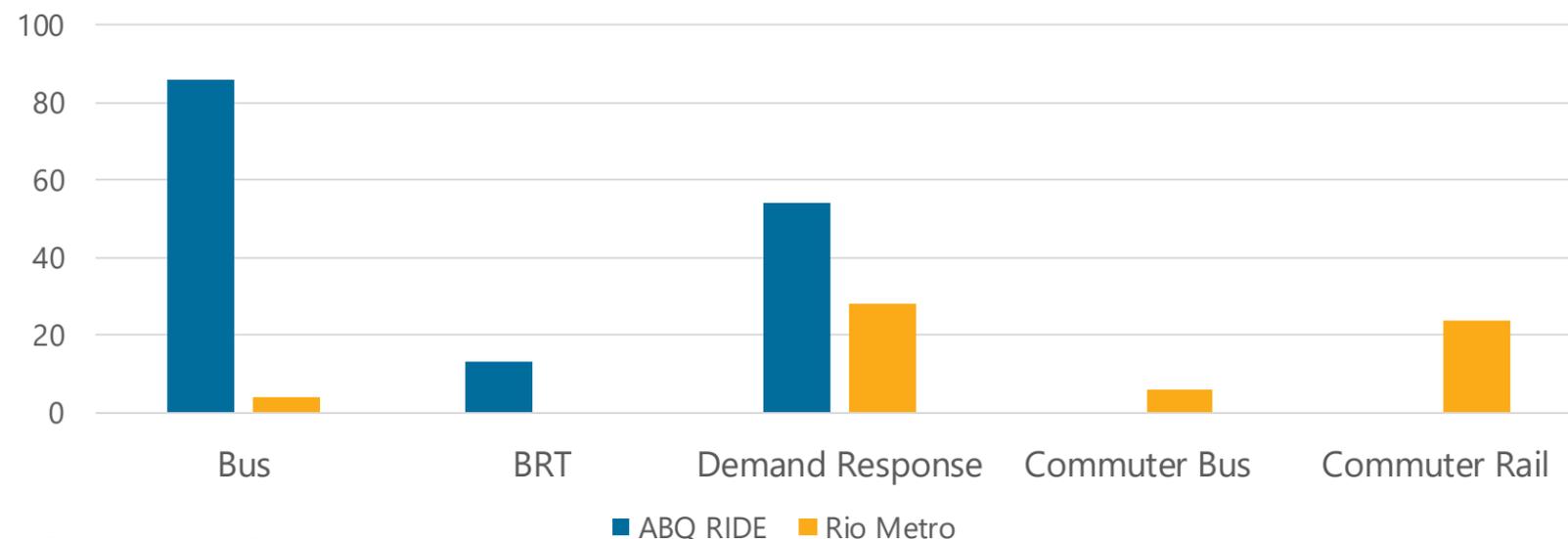
The two agencies are similar in total budget but spend that budget in very different ways.

- The distribution of types of service between Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE is very different, shown clearly by the operating expenses.
- ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro operate different sets of services using different types of vehicles and allocate their operating budgets accordingly.
- ABQ RIDE primarily operates bus service, as well as demand-response service. Meanwhile, Rio Metro primarily operates commuter rail and demand-response services, and the majority of its operating expenses go towards rail service.
- **Since the two agencies allocate their resources towards operating such different services, there are no major efficiencies to be gained through consolidation.**

ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro Operating Expenses



ABQ Ride and Rio Metro Vehicles in Max Service

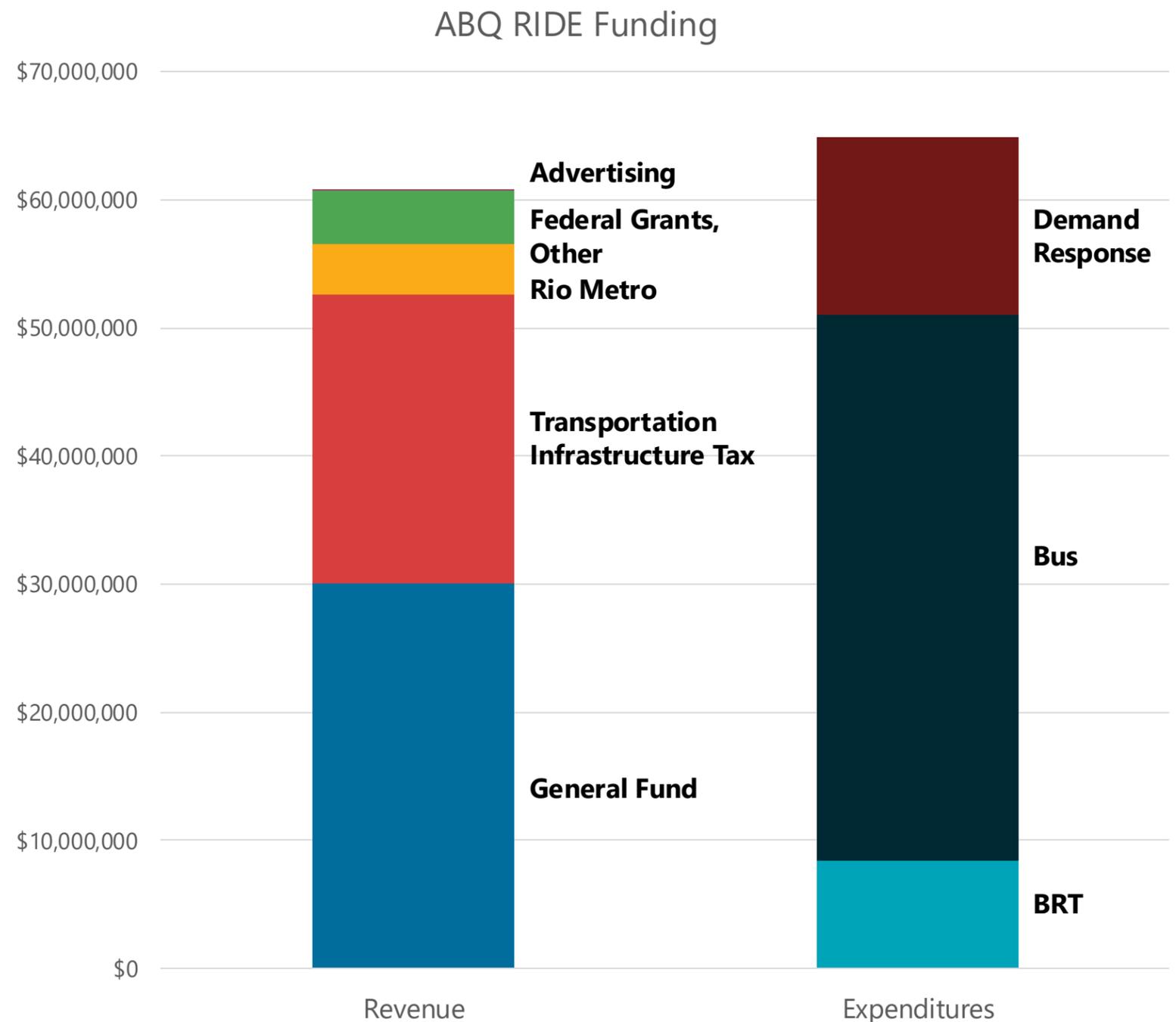


Data Source: NTD 2023

Data Source: NTD 2023

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

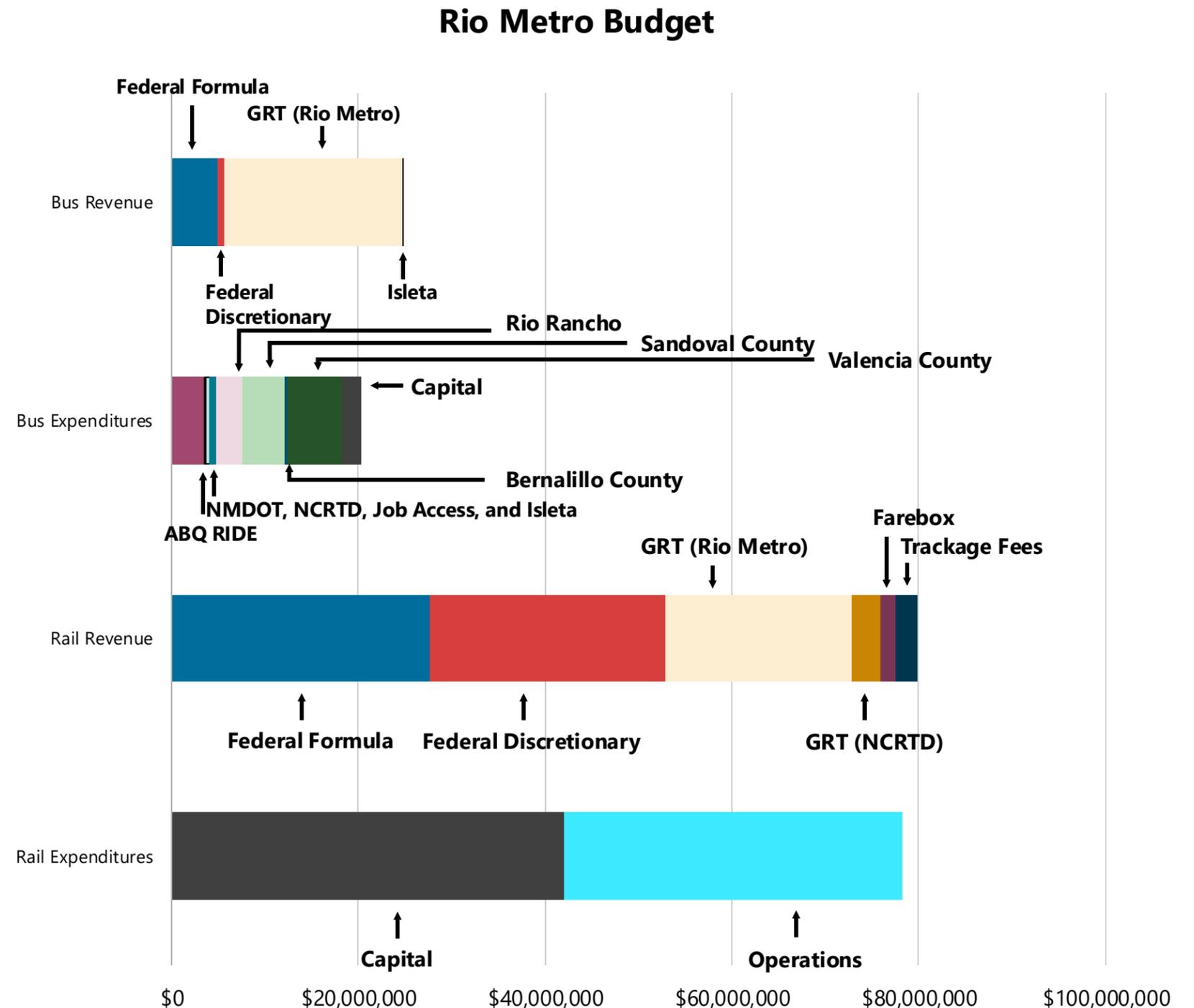
- ABQ RIDE operates with a mix of federal funding, the City's Transportation Infrastructure Tax and general fund, and Rio Metro, with potential changes to these allocations year over year based upon sharing these funds with varied priorities.
- Within the City's Transportation Infrastructure Tax, the ratio between transit and other transportation funding changes every few years. For the past 5-10 years, transit has been getting 38% of the tax funding.
- ABQ RIDE's funding is not stable, as the proportion allotted in the Transportation Infrastructure Tax can be shifted towards roadbuilding and maintenance and away from transit the next time the tax is reauthorized. The general fund allotment is up to the Mayor and Council's discretion.
- Any budget savings ABQ RIDE generates can potentially be used by other city departments in supporting their needs.



Data Sources: National Transit Database 2023, Albuquerque budget 2025.. Revenue and expenditure totals are different because of different years and because the two sources handle administrative costs differently but are representative.

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

- Rio Metro has a much more complicated funding picture than ABQ RIDE, as Rio Metro’s funding is divided into two buckets from the start. This is because Rail Runner and other transit operations are eligible for different kinds of funding. Rio Metro effectively operates two budgets. Within those two budgets, there are federal formula funds, which can be spent only in part of the service area, but not in all of it.
- Rio Metro receives Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) from the Rio Metro service area and additional GRT from the North Central RTD area to support Rail Runner’s operations to Santa Fe. GRT is a taxing mechanism similar to sales tax. These two taxing bases fund a large portion of Rio Metro’s budget in addition to federal funding.
- Rail Runner represents a significant share of Rio Metro’s budget.
- **The mix of dedicated revenues means that merging agencies would not provide any opportunities to spend funds differently.**



Data Sources: National Transit Database 2023, Rio Metro budget 2025. Revenue and expenditure totals are different because of different years and because the two sources handle administrative costs differently but are representative.

Rio Metro funds service that is provided by three other transit operators: ABQ RIDE, NMDOT, and NCRTD. It also receives funding from NCRTD.

- Rio Metro funds service provided by three other transit operators:
 - Rio Metro provides \$3.5 million in bus operating funds to ABQ RIDE. This was formerly linked to specific routes but now is used as general support in recognition of the role the ABQ RIDE network plays in connecting riders to Rail Runner.
 - Rio Metro funds part of the NCRTD Mountain Trail Route at \$15,000 a year. This serves the eastern part of Bernalillo County, which is outside NCRTD's service area but inside Rio Metro's.
 - Rio Metro funds one trip per weekday on the NMDOT Park and Ride Purple Route at roughly \$200,000 a year, which takes the place of an early morning Rail Runner trip.
- NCRTD transfers part of its GRT to Rio Metro to partially offset the cost Rail Runner service within the NCRTD area (Santa Fe), which extends outside the Rio Metro taxing area. This is part of the original arrangement for funding Rail Runner. Losing this funding would jeopardize Rail Runner service.



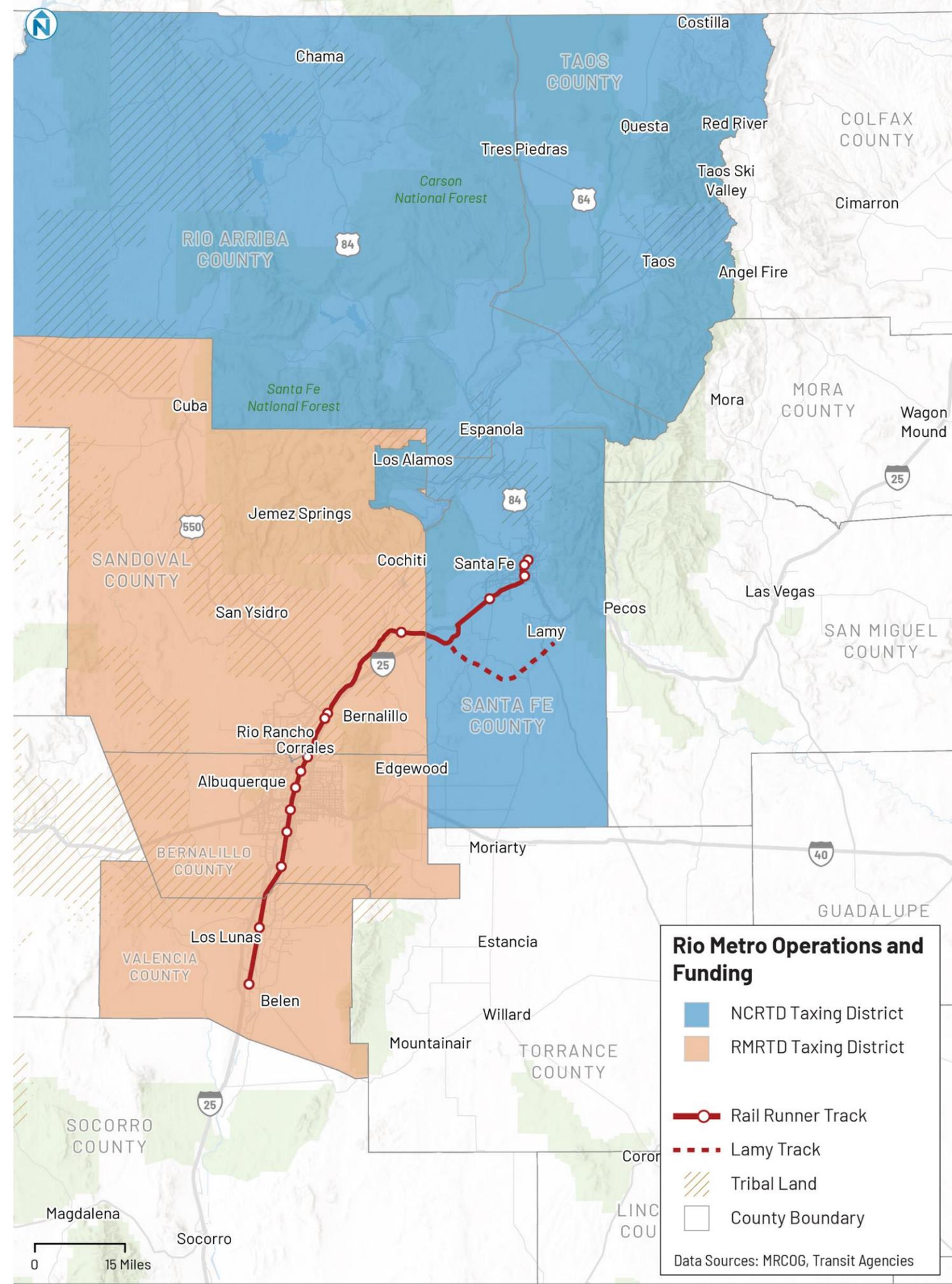
South Capital Transportation Center

GOVERNANCE



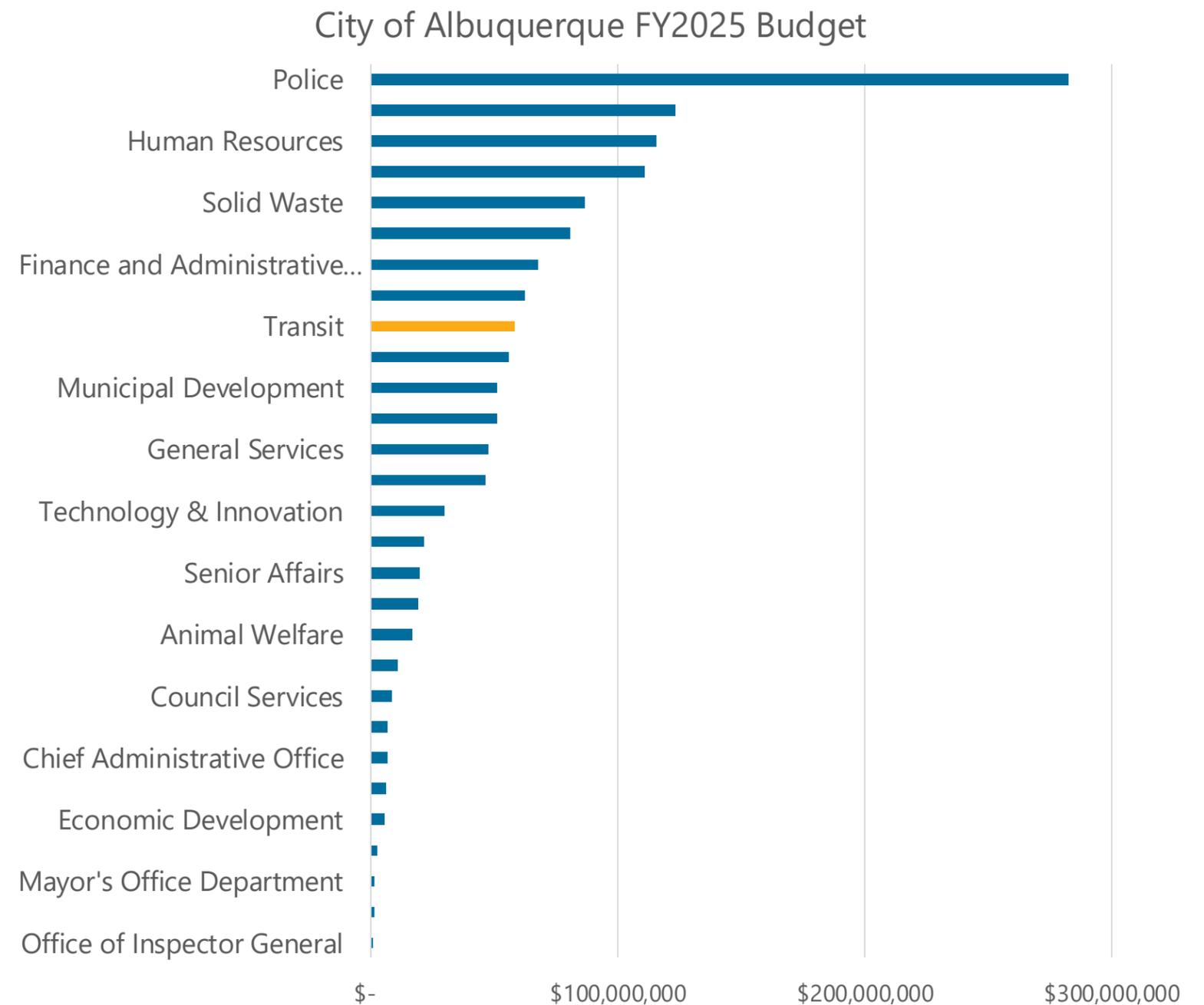
Rio Metro depends on agreements with NMDOT and NCRTD.

- The Rail Runner project was initiated by the state. After the agreed-upon project was well underway, the governor and legislature created a governance structure to operate the service. The track is owned by NMDOT, which purchased it from BNSF. NMDOT also owns the equipment and all Rail Runner property, which creates some issues with FTA payback for capital funding.
- Rio Metro operates the Rail Runner and manages the track. Through agreements between both agencies, Rio Metro maintains the track and dispatches all trains on it. Rio Metro also receives the payments that Amtrak and BNSF make to use the track and coordinates day-to-day with those railroads. NMDOT approves all projects and oversees the condition of the infrastructure.
- Rio Metro contracts out operations and maintenance of Rail Runner and is in charge of state of good repair on the Lamy-to-Belen portion of the Glorieta Subdivision, which has Amtrak service, but cannot use any GRT revenue to do so.
- The service is funded largely with GRT collected in the Rio Metro and NCRTD service area. NCRTD transfers an agreed upon share of its GRT for this purpose.
- **Any consolidation or change in governance structure would need to address all of these complex agreements.**



As a city department, ABQ RIDE competes for funding, resources, and attention against other City departments, but there are some benefits.

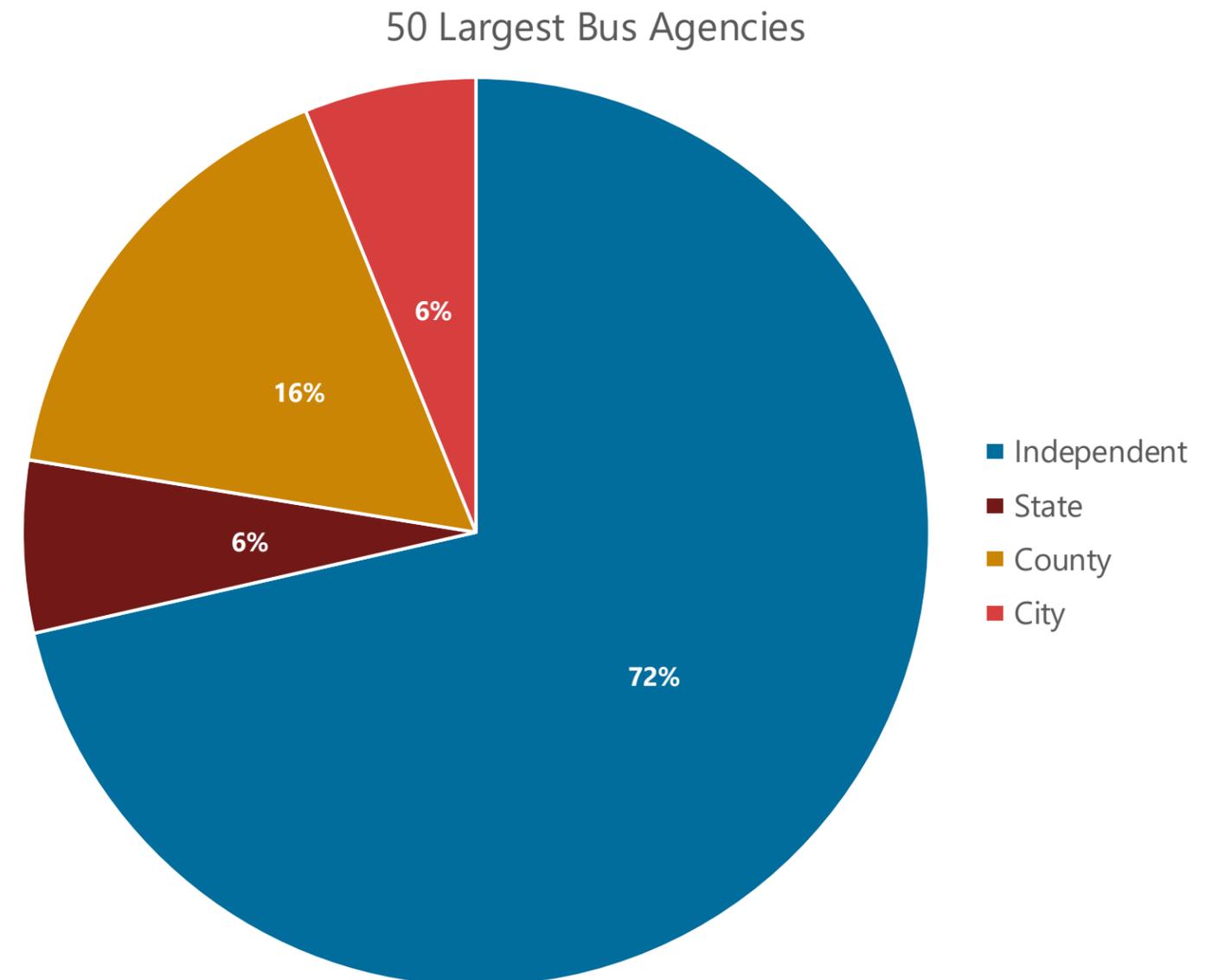
- ABQ RIDE does have some internal HR capacity, but it is limited as the City of Albuquerque's Central HR handles compensation and classification for all employees. It also determines pay scales and increases.
- ABQ RIDE is just one of the many City departments competing for time on the City Council agenda.
- ABQ RIDE competes for City resources as well. In the last approved budget for the city, transit ranked 9th in funding allocation among departments.
- Albuquerque has a strong mayor system, where the mayor sets the agenda at City Council and proposes the budget.
- Conversely, some challenges faced by independent agencies, such as operating in right-of-way controlled by other entities, are not issues for ABQ RIDE as a part of the City.
- **Given all the other priorities and demands on the City, ABQ RIDE gets less attention than transit agencies with a separate board.**



Data Source: City of Albuquerque 2025

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

- Of the largest transit operators in the United States, close to 3/4 of them are independent agencies. These are created under state law and are legally and organizationally separate from any city or county.
- Most of these independent agencies were created in the 1970s and 1980s to take over service formerly operated by cities or private operators.
- Independent agencies are governed by boards that are either appointed by local jurisdictions or (in rare cases) elected.
- Most independent agencies have dedicated funding sources such as sales taxes. These agencies are not dependent on contributions from cities or counties and are not competing for funding with other entities.
- ABQ RIDE is in the small minority of city-run agencies. Rio Metro is an independent agency.
- **Many of the main governance challenges faced by ABQ RIDE are related to being a part of the City of Albuquerque, and these challenges are not shared by the majority of large transit operators in the country who are separate agencies.**



Data Source: 50 largest agencies based on Raw Monthly Ridership, Federal Transit Administration, March 2024. Governance type from agency websites.

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

- Both share functions with other agencies, and neither ABQ RIDE nor Rio Metro does everything in house.
- All MPOs and RTPOs in New Mexico are within a COG or an EDD (Economic Development District), but Rio Metro is the only transit agency in the state that is within a COG. The COG Executive Director is also the executive director for Rio Metro, as well as for the MPO, the RTPO, the Economic Development office, and Workforce Connection of Central NM.
- ABQ RIDE maintains some Rio Metro vehicles at the Ken Sanchez Center, with Rio Metro funding one mechanic at the facility.
- Many of Rio Metro's original staff were previously City of Albuquerque employees. Through an MOU, Rio Metro employees maintain their City pension and receive some payroll support.



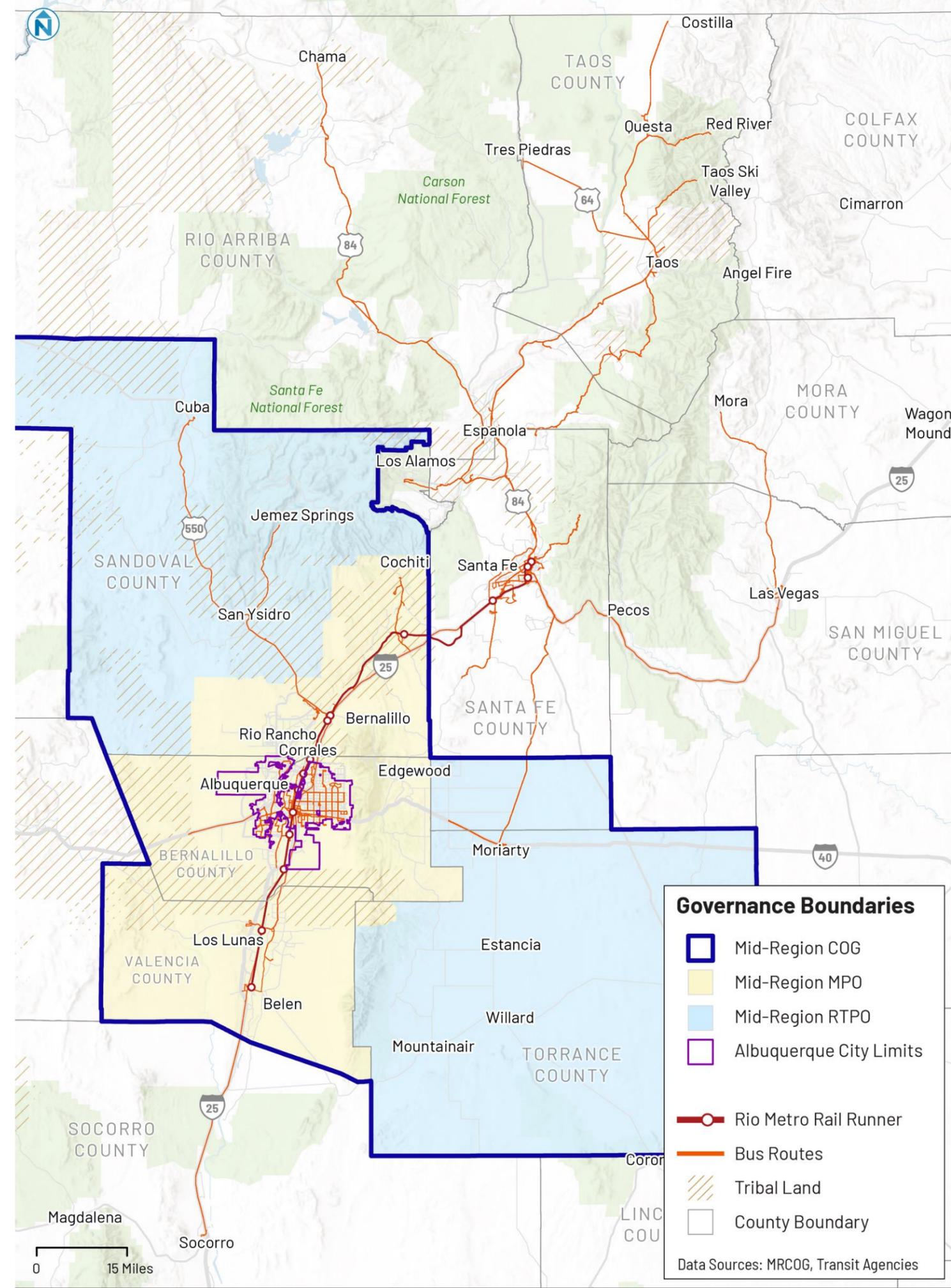
Alvarado Transportation Center

Rio Metro serves and represents a multitude of jurisdictions.

- In addition to members representing the Albuquerque, Rio Metro's board includes Bernalillo County, Sandoval County, Valencia County, City of Belen, City of Rio Communities, City of Rio Rancho, Town of Bernalillo, Village of Bosque Farms, Village of Corrales, Village of Los Lunas, and Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque.
- Isleta Pueblo is an associate member.
- NCRTD has a non-voting advisory member.
- **Rio Metro serves a wide variety of communities with very different transportation needs.**

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

- The Mid-Region MPO is responsible for publishing the federally mandated long-range plan, but it defers to the agencies for the portions that pertain to transit. The MPO does not have a transit planner on staff.
- ABQ RIDE completed a network redesign study, but it is limited to the area that ABQ RIDE serves. ABQ RIDE has several capital projects in the works.
- Rio Metro has studied increasing Rail Runner service, but it does not have a master plan for the entire network.
- Historically, major projects in the region (like commuter rail and BRT) have originated with elected officials, not agencies.
- The 2015 Rio Metro Long Term Strategic Vision, which was a collaborative effort between ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro, does not have dedicated staff time or follow up planning efforts.
- **In general, the council members who make decisions for ABQ RIDE are dealing with a wide range of issues and likewise, the Rio Metro Board members, many of which are councilmembers and mayors throughout the region, are also leaders with a wide range of responsibilities and concerns.**



PEER REVIEW

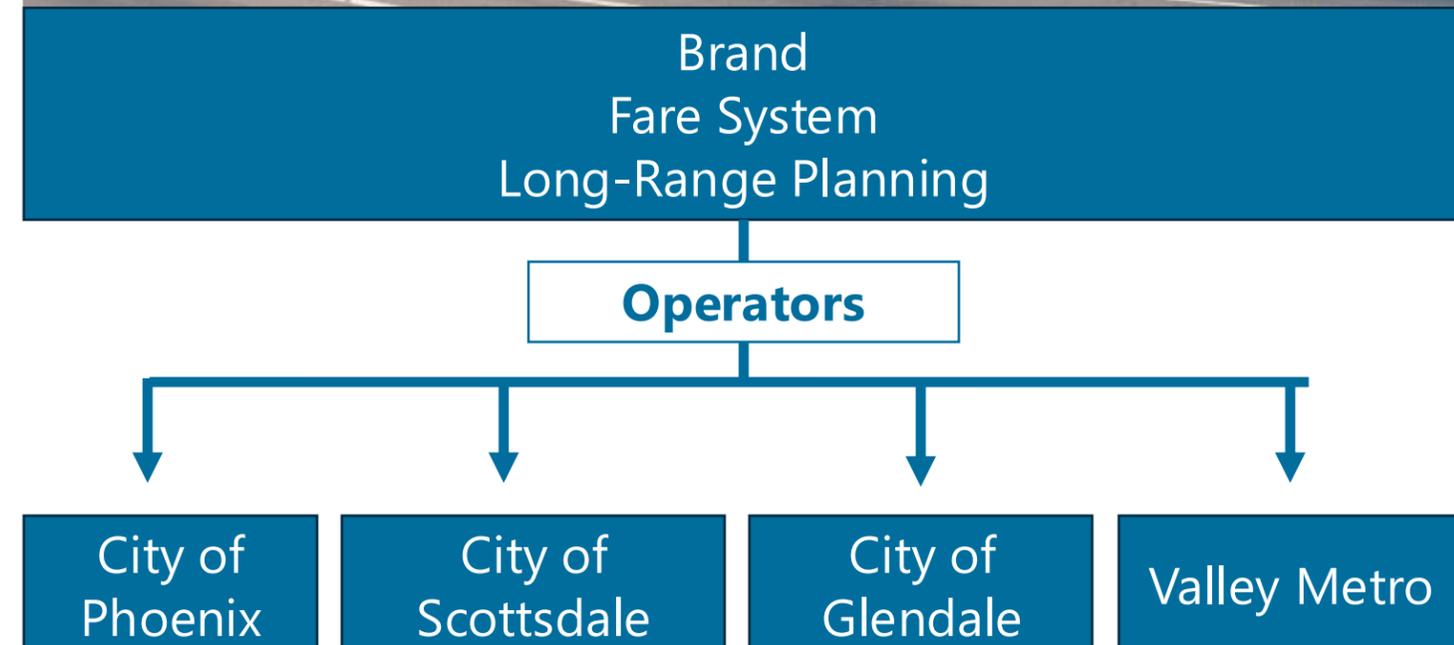


Peer Review Introduction

- Huitt-Zollars and Nelson\Nygaard are working with Rio Metro Regional Transit District and ABQ RIDE, which is currently operated by the City of Albuquerque, to study governance opportunities and challenges particularly in context of the relationship the two agencies have with one another.
- The study will consider the costs and benefits of different models for agency organization and governance and ultimately recommend potential relationship scenarios between the two agencies and the structure required to effectively operate under those relationships.
- As part of studying potential consolidation, the project team conducted a peer review of systems that chose to either consolidate or remain separate, and to what extent consolidation or increased coordination occurred. This review presents best practices and lessons learned by other transit operators in the United States. These lessons will be considered through the rest of the project. This review highlights peers that ultimately came to different decisions on whether to consolidate and if so, how to bridge multiple agencies/operators. Paratransit systems were also reviewed as a separate consideration for service consolidation, in cases where existing paratransit operate differently from fixed-route service. The peers are:
 - Valley Metro (Phoenix, AZ)
 - Greater Portland Metro (Portland Area, ME)
 - rabbitransit (Harrisburg, PA)
 - San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (San Bernardino County, CA)
 - Chicago Agencies (Chicagoland, IL)
 - Access Services (Los Angeles County, CA)
 - Norwalk Transit District (Norwalk and Surrounding Areas, CT)
 - Charlotte Area Transportation System (Charlotte, NC)

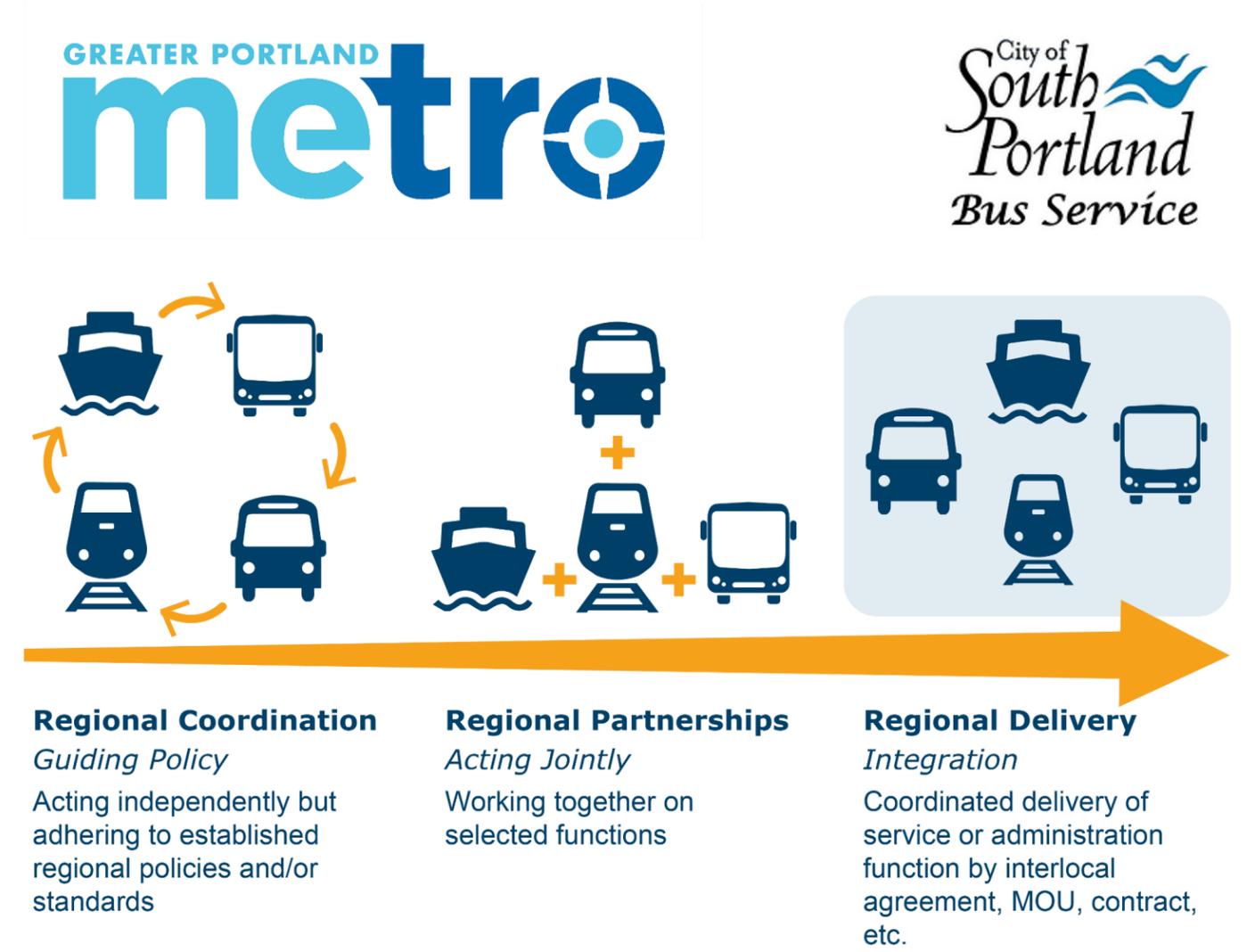
Valley Metro Phoenix Area, AZ

- The Phoenix metropolitan area (Maricopa County) offers an example of regional coordination across multiple member cities, transit agencies and a regional transit operator.
- Regional transit coordination is achieved through a shared regional funding source and governance structure (regional transit board). While regional investments have largely focused on large infrastructure projects like light rail, the region has also coordinated on the external communication of the service, including branding, marketing and passenger information systems.
- The region also coordinates on service delivery in a handful of ways. One strategy is contracting. Several local transit providers use the same transportation service provider as the regional transit service. Working with the same contractor reduces competition for resources like drivers; it also supports shared use of some facilities.
- ADA paratransit service is also consolidated in Maricopa County, making the service simpler for riders and reducing administrative costs associated with individual service providers.
- The partial consolidation model balances efficient service delivery with local autonomy to create simple, easy to use transit services.



Greater Portland Metro Portland Area, ME

- Greater Portland Metro in Maine conducted a study of seven transit agencies that operate multiple modes to determine whether to consolidate. The study led to recommendations for coordination and integration of functions including information and branding, fare payment, service standards, and fleets.
- The resulting consolidation occurred across a spectrum of coordinated agreements, activities, functions, and policies depending on appetite without merging of all agencies.
- This study completed by Nelson\Nygaard helped gain insight into potential territorial politics surrounding consolidation and the capacity to which agencies can coordinate without consolidation.
- Since the study was completed, South Portland Bus Service has merged into the Greater Portland Transit District, and all services now operate under the Greater Portland Metro brand. Other regional providers are now considering the benefits of consolidating with Greater Portland Metro.
- Other areas of coordination closely considered by participating agencies were adopting the same fare media and fare structure, sharing bus stops, and adopting consistent branding for inter-city services.



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

Source: Greater Portland Metro

rabbittransit

Harrisburg, PA

- In 2018, the agency operating Capital Area Transit (CAT) in Harrisburg, PA contracted with rabbittransit in York, PA to manage their system. In 2022, the two transit agencies fully merged into Susquehanna Regional Transportation Authority (SRTA).
- York and Harrisburg are 25 miles apart, so the two networks are connected only by an express route. Thus, the merger did not have significant benefits in connectivity for bus riders. Instead, the merger was intended to create a more efficient organization. The two systems now share administrative staff, service planners, marketing, and call center. They also use the same fare system and are able to procure equipment and supplies jointly. In addition to more efficiency, this allows the merged system to maintain a higher level of in-house expertise.
- The largest source of funding for the agency is federal funding. The state encouraged the merger and allocated additional operating funds and funding for a new operations facility.
- 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," but new buses will be painted for rabbittransit and the CAT branding will disappear over time.
- Full consolidation can be an effective tool to cut costs and improve service efficiency. Maintaining existing naming and branding can be one way for merging agencies to create a smoother transition for riders.



San Bernardino County Transportation Authority

San Bernardino County, CA

- In response to increased costs and reduced ridership, Omnitrans and San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (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. Specifically, different labor structure and human resources systems and processes were a significant barrier to consolidating the two agencies. In addition, while the agencies' functions, principles, and objectives complemented each other, they did not have enough functional overlap to merit merging.
- Consolidating two agencies incurs high costs between labor transition, service and structure reorganization, and asset management. The study found that a key benefit to consolidation is to deduplicate service, rather than combining complementary services, which would not have been the case for these agencies.



Chicago Agencies Chicagoland, IL

- Illinois lawmakers proposed legislation to consolidate Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) operating only within the City of Chicago, Pace the suburban bus provider, and Metra the regional rail provider. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) would be replaced with Metropolitan Mobility Authority, which would oversee operation of all services. The proposal was spurred by critical public feedback about the current state of service, which the agencies argued was due to a 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.
- The Chicagoland transit agencies already operate under a consolidated model for paratransit services. Pace ADA Paratransit operates paratransit service for the entire RTA region. It serves within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of any Pace bus route as well as within that radius around CTA bus routes and rail stations. The paratransit provider also operates between transfer locations across the six-county region. Since Metra is a commuter rail service, it is not required to provide paratransit, but it does offer its own shuttle service called the P-8, which picks up customers within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of a non-accessible Metra station and brings them to the next accessible station along the same line.
- Consolidation is not always a supplier-side initiative. Transit consolidation can often be perceived by the public and lawmakers as the most effective route to reducing costs and making service more efficient, but the relationship between the agencies that may consolidate is a key factor in cost reduction.



Access Services

Los Angeles County, CA

- Access Services is the paratransit agency that facilitates paratransit service provision for the entire Los Angeles County. The agency is Los Angeles County's Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA). CTSA's were created in California in 1979 to facilitate better coordination among transportation providers.
- Access Services does not actually operate paratransit service. The Access Paratransit service is a system where the CTSA enters into and administers federally funded regional contracts with independent private transit providers, as well as leases vehicles to those providers.
- Service is split across Los Angeles County into six regions and offers curb-to-curb shared ride service between any locations within 3/4 of a mile around fixed bus routes served by any of the 46 Los Angeles County fixed-route operators and 3/4 of a mile around METRO rail station. The service area does extend into surrounding counties that have Los Angeles County fixed-route service.
- The benefits of a regional paratransit agency are the dedicated resources and services for paratransit without the need to try and share staff or operations with other services. Information can also be better centralized, though regional service areas require smaller service regions that customers need more guidance to navigate.



Norwalk Transit District Norwalk and Surrounding Areas, CT

- Norwalk Transit District is another example of an agency that provides regional paratransit services outside of its fixed route service area. Norwalk Transit District paratransit services are split into five service areas: Norwalk ADA, Stamford ADA, Town of Westport, Town to Town Westport, and Town to Town Wilton.
- Norwalk ADA is available within 3/4 of a mile around Norwalk Transit bus routes within Norwalk. Stamford ADA is available within Stamford city limits and within 3/4 of a mile around any CT Transit bus route within Greenwich, Darien, Norwalk, and certain areas of New York. Town of Westport is available for travel within Westport town limits. This paratransit service is the only one that is also available to adults 65 years or older who do not have a disability or impairment. The Town to Town service areas are intercity paratransit operations that take ADA-qualified residents of Westport and Wilton, respectively, and bring them to other cities. Both services offer paratransit to each other's jurisdictions, as well as Norwalk, Weston, New Canaan, Darien, Stamford, and Greenwich. Wilton's Town to Town paratransit service is only available for medical trips.
- While service areas are distinct from each other, this paratransit service model consolidates the administration of service, including fare payment – though fares are not uniform for all service areas – as well as scheduling, and submitting an ADA eligibility application.
- The benefits are service and operations efficiencies, considering how many logistics there are to navigate and the technological infrastructure it requires to operate. Funding will need to be clearly coordinated so the local agency can properly operate the service.

NORWALK Transit District

Advisories Accessibility Español

RIDER'S GUIDE SERVICES SCHEDULES & MAPS COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FARES QUICK LINKS

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY
Americans with a Disability Act (ADA) Paratransit Services

ADA Paratransit Introduction

ADA Paratransit transportation services consist of a variety of door-to-door services for people with disabilities. You need to fill out an application to become eligible to ride.
Services are different in each town. Select your town, below, to learn more about the services that are available.

Norwalk
Services in Norwalk for people with a disability.
[LEARN MORE](#)

Westport
Services in Westport for people with a disability.
[LEARN MORE](#)

Stamford
Services in Stamford for people with a disability.
[LEARN MORE](#)

Wilton
Services in Wilton for people with a disability.
[LEARN MORE](#)

Charlotte Area Transportation System Charlotte, NC

- Charlotte Area Transportation System (CATS) is currently undergoing a process to become its own transit agency separate from the City of Charlotte, under which it is now a city department. This process involves approving two state senate bills currently undergoing review.
- The primary bill is Senate Bill 584, the “Metropolitan Public Transportation Authority Act”. This bill allows the creation of a metropolitan public transportation authority in North Carolina. The requirements to create this authority is specifically designed to only permit this authority in the Charlotte area. The bill explains how the authority can behave, what its board structure looks like, and a its relationship to acquiring assets and capital for its operations. The language is unclear whether CATS will be allowed to keep its name or must create a new one under this authority.
- Bill 584 can only become effective if Senate Bill 145 becomes law. Bill 145 allows existing transportation-related taxes to be distributed to the new transportation authority. The bill can only become law if the Current Operations Appropriations Act for the 2025-2026 fiscal year becomes law.
- This case presents a scenario of a transit agency separating from city council jurisdiction. It presents the importance of the logistics involved in creating a transit agency and how the political arena will dictate the transition process from governance, operations, and funding perspectives. It is also an example of state law change being the impetus and requirement for a new transit agency to form.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA SESSION 2025		FILED SENATE Mar 25, 2025 S.B. 584 PRINCIPAL CLERK
S		D
SENATE BILL DRS15200-MCxf-100		
Short Title:	Local Govt Transportation System Financing.	(Public)
Sponsors:	Senators Rabon, Craven, and Sawyer (Primary Sponsors).	
Referred to:		
1	A BILL TO BE ENTITLED	
2	AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE SUPPLEMENTAL SOURCES OF REVENUE FOR LOCAL	
3	GOVERNMENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM FINANCING.	
4	The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:	
5		
6	PART I. RESERVED	
7		
8	PART II. REVISIONS TO CURRENT LOCAL SALES TAX FOR PUBLIC	
9	TRANSPORTATION	
10	SECTION 2.1. G.S. 105-506.1 reads as rewritten:	
11	"§ 105-506.1. Definitions.	
12	The definitions in G.S. 105-164.3 and the following definitions apply in this Article:	
13	...	
14	(3)	Public transportation system. – Any combination of real and personal property established for purposes of public transportation. The systems may include one or more of the following: structures, improvements, buildings, equipment, vehicle parking or passenger transfer facilities, railroads and railroad rights-of-way, rights-of-way, bus services, shared-ride services, high-occupancy vehicle facilities, car-pool and vanpool programs, voucher programs, telecommunications and information systems, integrated fare systems, and the interconnected bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that supports public transportation, bus lanes, and busways. <u>The term includes tunnels and other infrastructure designed to rapidly transport people, freight, or vehicles through automated means.</u> The term does not include, however, streets, roads, or highways except to the extent they are dedicated to public transportation vehicles or to the extent they are necessary for access to vehicle parking or passenger transfer facilities.
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28	(4)	Transportation authority. – <u>For the purposes of Part 2 of this Article, a metropolitan public transportation authority created pursuant to Article 34 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes.</u> For the purposes of Parts 3 and 4 of this Article, a regional public transportation authority created pursuant to Article 26 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes; and for the purposes of Parts 3 and 5 of this Article, a regional transportation authority created pursuant to Article 27 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes."
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		SECTION 2.2. Reserved.
		SECTION 2.3. G.S. 105-507.3(b) reads as rewritten:
		 * D R S 1 5 2 0 0 - M C X F - 1 0 0 *

Key Takeaways

- **Transit agency consolidation results in the most benefit when there is overlapping and duplicative transit service.**
- **The logistics for consolidation like union and labor merging, technology and program changes, and other administrative infrastructure are very high without existing similarities.**
- **Partial consolidation models can provide benefits to the rider experience and centralize communication, marketing, and network planning without requiring the high costs of merging agencies.**
- **Regional paratransit is typically organized as one transit agency serving multiple districts or jurisdictions, or a separate agency is solely dedicated to paratransit across a region that includes multiple transit agencies.**



ABORIDE

637

1808

ABORIDE

