Rio Metro / ABQ RIDE Consolidation Study
Final Report

December 2025

Table of Contents

The process of studying the current challenges and potential benefits of consolidating ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro has resulted in four primary recommendations.

This study was initiated by the City of Albuquerque City Council in 2023, with the goal of creating a shared understanding of each system's strengths and what benefits may be gained from consolidating the two agencies or organizing the agencies under a different governance model.

Transit governance changes are usually undertaken to solve a specific issue, often the desire to raise more funding for transit or use funds more efficiently. However, the primary challenges for ABQ RIDE are within the agency, with difficult operations schedules, staffing shortages, and safety concerns. At Rio Metro, the agency lacks regional vision setting and both fixed route and demand response services could better serve the public.

A major part of this project was the creation of different potential governance options, or scenarios. In addition to studying the ability for the current governance model to meet the needs of Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE, five other models were evaluated. Each scenario includes discrete changes to the current governance model. While some elements of each scenario could be combined, the scenarios were designed to be distinct and complete to be evaluated independently to show the benefits and drawbacks of certain changes.

While full consolidation was considered, it was not found to solve the challenges that the agencies or region face. The two agencies do not currently operate duplicative service, and that the mix of dedicated revenues means that merging agencies would not provide any opportunities to spend funds differently.

The primary recommendations draw from the strengths of each of the evaluated scenarios and aim to make it easier for the most pressing challenges of operating transit in the region to be addressed. **The recommendations are designed to strengthen transit services across the through staffing and operation changes, implementing the ABQ Ride Forward Network, and working toward a more unified regional network overall. This includes coordinating demand response services to eliminate barriers for riders transferring between services or using more than one service, increasing accessibility for all in the region.**

ABQ RIDE PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION

Restructure ABQ RIDE's relationship to the City.

Giving ABQ RIDE greater autonomy within the City of Albuquerque could help it solve many of its major challenges by allowing it to have increased control over hiring/staffing, grants, and procurement to more closely align with its needs as a transit agency and as a recipient of Federal Transit Administration funding. An alternative, if that first approach meets obstacles, is to become an independent agency with close City coordination and long-term funding.

RIO METRO PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Hire a General Manager for Rio Metro.

A General Manager for rail and bus will guide network planning, inter-agency coordination, and regional transit strategy.

Form a standing committee within the Rio Metro board and add transit riders as non-voting board members.

The standing committee within the Rio Metro board and the new board members will work closely with the General Manger to provide input on regional vision.

JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a modern, integrated regional network of demand response services.

An easy-to-use demand response system will enhance accessibility in the region, strengthening the services and helping the region's most vulnerable residents. Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE jointly embark on this process.

Support the formalization of regional network planning and passenger information, and hire new transit planners, including one at the MPO.

Additional planning capacity will make service more useful and connected by evaluating and matching regional services with demand and provide clear passenger information, making service more useful and connected. Rio Metro takes initial steps in this process through service evaluation.

While full consolidation between ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro is not worth the cost and disruption to services and operations, there are opportunities for efficiency gains and structural changes that can improve transit across the region for providers and passengers.

The core purpose of the Rio Metro / ABQ RIDE Consolidation Study, and the City Council resolution it originated from (R-23-181), was to determine if consolidating the agencies is the best way to achieve quality, sustainable transit operations in the region. This study finds that full consolidation would not be the most effective way to achieve those objectives and would incur significant costs to implement.

Using a multi-criteria framework organized by stakeholder and agency goals, full consolidation was evaluated across many criteria, as were four other governance scenarios and the current governance model for ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro. The criteria leveraged an existing conditions analysis and comprehensive stakeholder interviews to determine current strengths and challenges at both agencies, and the evaluation considered how effectively different governance structures could enhance strengths and address challenges.

Instead of full consolidation, this study identified governance recommendations that blended the most efficient and useful gains from different scenarios.

There are steps that Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE could take to better serve the region. These steps include regional demand response re-organization, increased ABQ RIDE autonomy, and better prioritization of transit advocacy and planning at Rio Metro and MRCOG. The study used the scenario evaluation to extract recommendations and ultimately build a recommended governance scenario. The study then transformed these recommendations into a phased implementation roadmap to reach that governance scenario.

The recommended governance scenario can set the stage for future consolidation between ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro. Full consolidation between ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro is not needed to achieve quality transit service as there are meaningful steps that can be taken that could improve agency coordination and service integration to the benefit of both agencies as well as passengers across the region.

As discussed in this study, the way that the two agencies are organized right now does not align with an environment where agency consolidation yields significant benefits. Those conditions typically include duplicative service and administrative redundancies.

However, the recommendations from this study can potentially facilitate a smoother transition to a consolidated regional transit agency in the future. The implementation of the study's recommended governance model positions both agencies to have more autonomy from organizations they sit within, to create stronger connections between planning and logistics for providing service, and even to pilot integrating some services like regional demand response, microtransit, and ABQ RIDE paratransit operations. There are some possible future scenarios where revisiting consolidation could make sense: a major capital program, a new GRT to bolster funding/financial stability, or the need to strengthen workforce stability.

The recommendations from this study identified lower cost and lower effort changes to ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro that would incur similar benefits as full consolidation between the agencies. While they lower the barriers to future consolidation the recommendations focus on the key purpose of the study, which is to find the best way to achieve quality, sustainable transit operations in the region.

INTRODUCTION

The analysis shows that consolidating Rio Metro and ABQ Ride would not achieve the envisioned benefits and would not address the pressing issues addressing the agencies or region or the anticipated goals.

The core purpose of the Rio Metro / ABQ RIDE Consolidation Study, and the City Council resolution it originated from (R-23-181), was to determine if consolidating the agencies is the best way to achieve quality, sustainable transit operations in the region.

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 with a majority urban population, which requires a mix of urban services, connections between cities and towns, and rural services.

Rio Metro is an independent agency that provides transit services in Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Valencia counties. It 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 within the City of Albuquerque.

Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE coordinate on several aspects of their service. Both agencies operate fare free, although ABQ RIDE services are fare-free systemwide while Rio Metro only provides bus services fare-free. It charges fares for Rail Runner based on distance traveled. Some ABQ RIDE bus routes have coordinated connections to Rail Runner, which is the spine of the regional system. Both systems connect at transportation hubs, which facilitates transfers between systems, but passenger information systems are less well coordinated.

This study was initiated by the City of Albuquerque City Council in 2023, with the goal of creating a shared understanding of each system's strengths and what benefits may be gained from consolidating the two agencies or organizing the agencies under 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.**

Full consolidation was considered, along with four other governance models that present paths to strengthening the delivery of transit service. While 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. More important, each agency is facing challenges – such as hiring drivers and mechanics - which would not necessarily be addressed through a consolidated model. Instead, the analysis suggests that organizational changes to each agency offer potential to address current challenges, strengthen transit services regionally and create a foundation from which increased coordination is possible.

Study Approach

Huitt-Zollars and Nelson\Nygaard worked with Rio Metro Regional Transit District and ABQ RIDE and the City of Albuquerque to study governance opportunities and challenges. The study focused on the operations of each agency individually and the relationship the two agencies have with one another. It considered the costs and benefits of different models for agency organization and governance and ultimately recommended potential relationship scenarios between the two agencies and the structure required to effectively operate under those relationships.

This study began by framing transit operations governance around key considerations. These include the region's and service operators' current needs, future goals, and decision-making networks.

The first step was studying what works and what doesn't with existing service, staff structure, passenger experience, and funding mechanisms.

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.

The region's needs and peer governance models led to developing a range of governance scenarios from status quo to full consolidation.

The project team worked with stakeholders to identify goals, which led to evaluation criteria based on each goal for each scenario. This process created a scoring rubric that identified how and to what extent each scenario helps ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro.

Through further stakeholder engagement related to scenarios and their relationship to project goals, the project team developed a final list of recommendations and built an implementation plan for a governance structure that best fits the priorities of both transit agencies.

Report Format

Introduction

The introduction outlines the study's approach and purpose and gives an overview of the primary recommendations. This chapter also summarizes existing conditions and peer review research and analysis that acted as the foundation for the project outcomes.

Recommendations and Implementation

The recommendations and implementation chapter presents final recommendations for governance changes for ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro and maps out the steps towards achieving that governance model.

Goals and Scenarios

The scenarios took the findings from background work and developed them into a range of governance models that transformed the region's needs into the project's final recommendations.

Appendix

The appendix includes the full existing conditions and peer review reports that provide context and background into how ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro currently operate and how that compares to national peers.

ABQ RIDE operates as a department within the City of Albuquerque. Its service footprint generally matches population patterns (i.e., services are available where the demand is greatest).
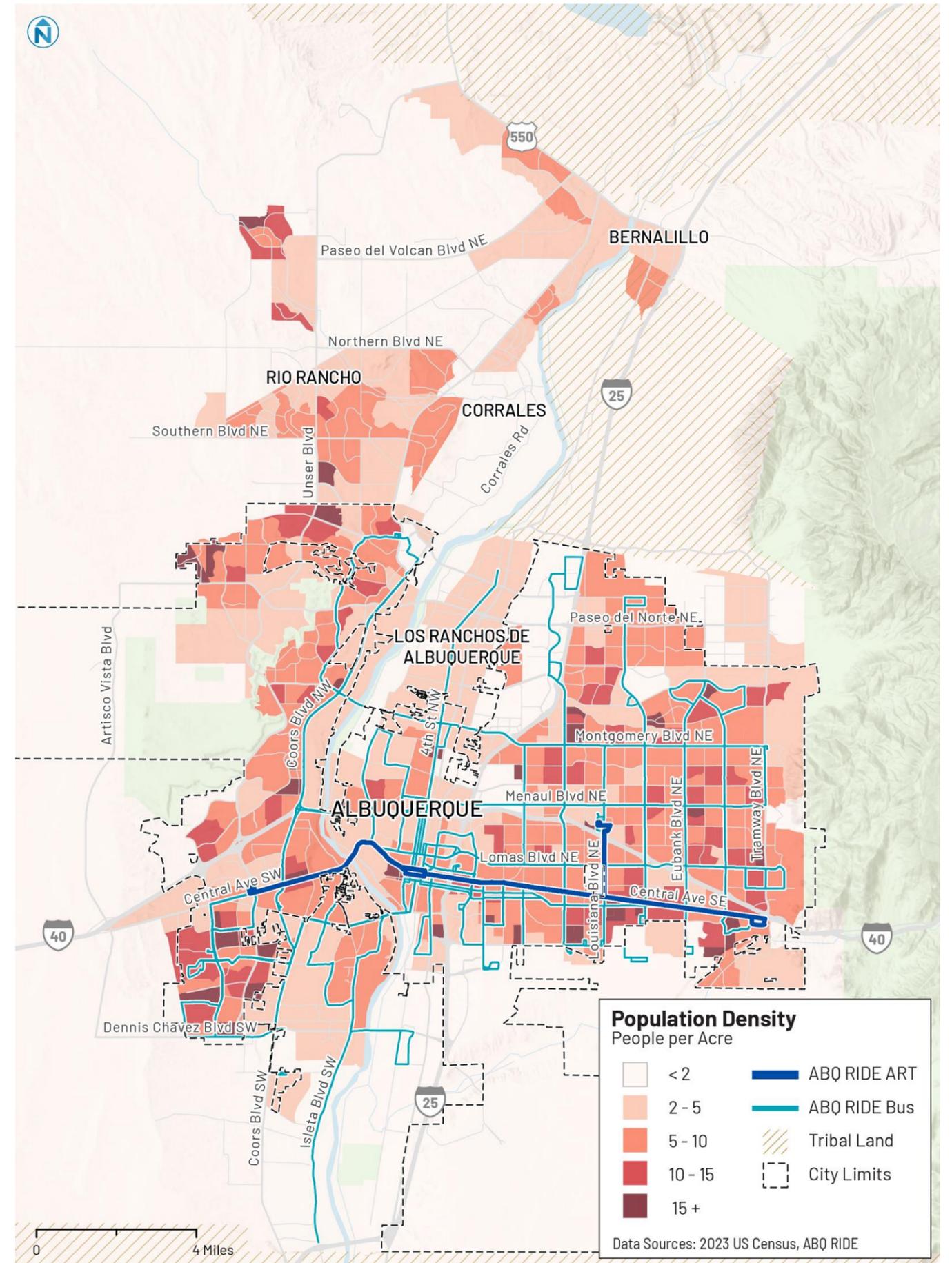
Overview

ABQ RIDE is a city department and operates under a Mayor-appointed department Director. It shares many City services with other departments like security, trash, and administrative services. 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.

Service

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 serve neighborhoods and communities where population and employment density is highest and the highest frequency route – the ART route – operates along the city's densest commercial corridor, Central Avenue. Population density generally drops off dramatically at city limits, so there is little need to extend ABQ RIDE's local routes beyond the city.

Rio Rancho does have comparable density to many areas of the City of Albuquerque, but it does not have fixed route service. Population and employment density in some areas of Rio Rancho 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.


Population Density
People per Acre

< 2	ABQ RIDE ART
2 - 5	ABQ RIDE Bus
5 - 10	Tribal Land
10 - 15	City Limits
15 +	

Data Sources: 2023 US Census, ABQ RIDE

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

Funding

ABQ RIDE is funded by a combination of federal grants, City of Albuquerque's Transportation Infrastructure Tax and General Fund contributions, advertising, and transfers from Rio Metro. General Fund allocations are not based on a formula and instead are allocated as part of the city's budgeting process with some supplement from Rio Metro and Bernalillo County. This means ABQ RIDE must compete with other city departments for General Fund Contributions, and resources are not consistent year over year.

Within the City's Transportation Infrastructure Tax (through a gross receipts tax or GRT), the ratio between transit and other transportation funding can change every few years. In the first two iterations of the Transportation Infrastructure Tax, there was a 10-year expiration (first passed in 1999, renewal passed in 2009, another renewal passed in 2019). The last renewal did not include an expiration. Each renewal increased transit's share (20%, then 36%, then 38%). However, Transit's portion of the tax is not fixed, and City Council could change how much funding transit gets at any time – either from the General Fund or the Transportation tax.
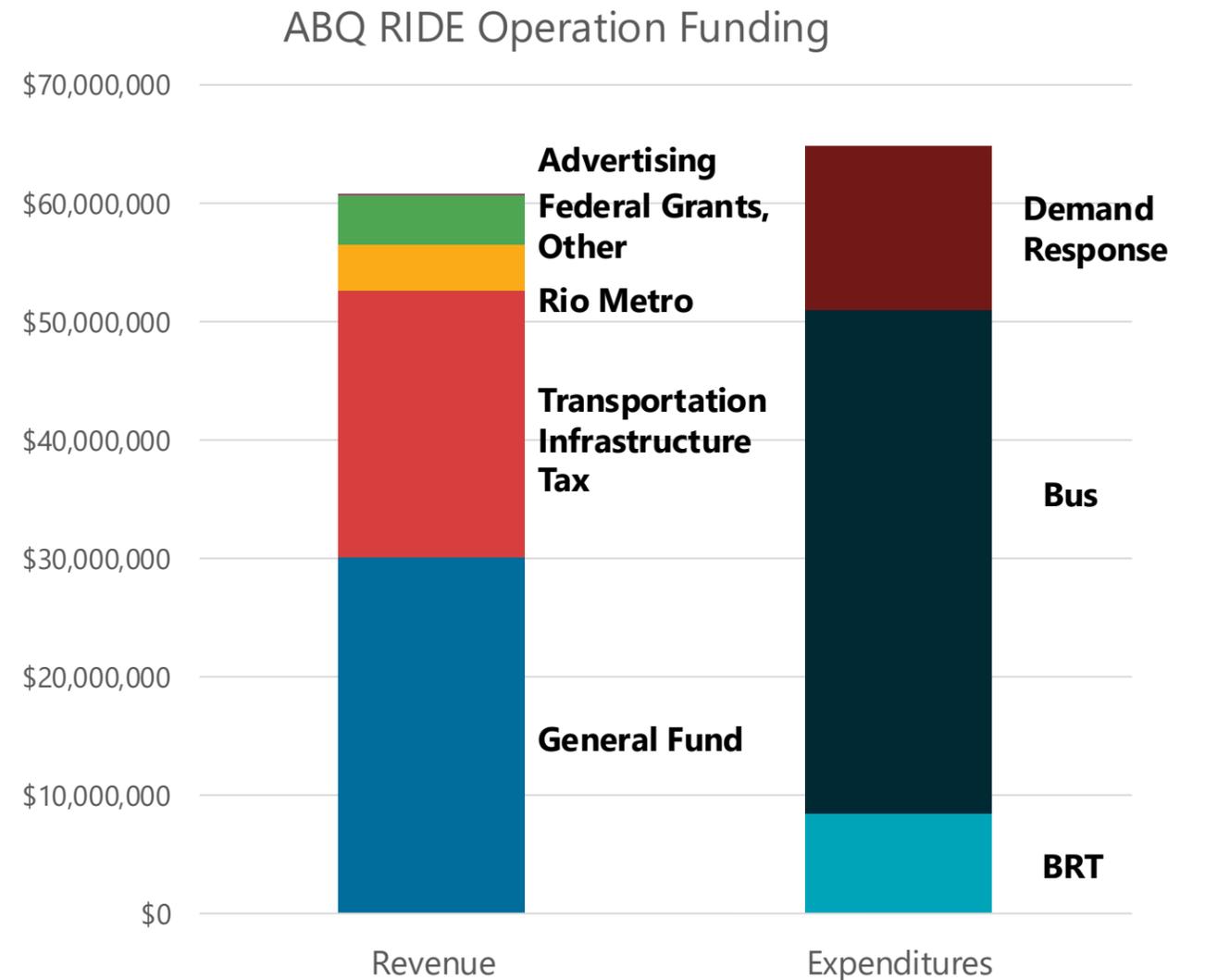
ABQ RIDE Operation Funding

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 serves an expansive and sparsely populated area. Its services are generally low frequency with limited hours of service.
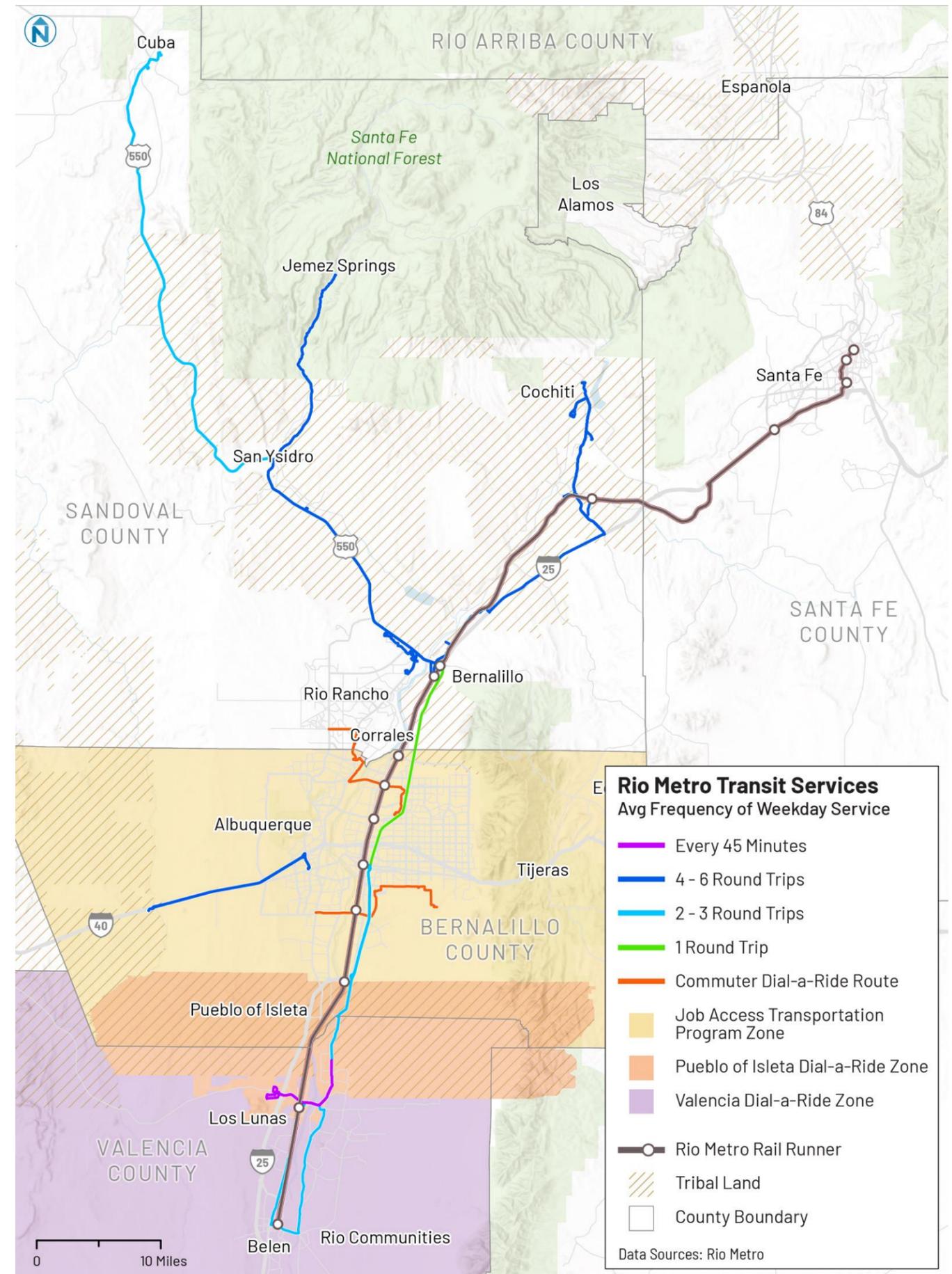
Overview

Rio Metro is somewhat unique as an organization because it is the only transit agency in New Mexico operated out of a Council of Governments (COG). It is also a complicated agency. The COG Executive Director is also the executive director for Rio Metro, as well as for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), the Economic Development office, and Workforce Connection of Central NM. The Mid-Region MPO is responsible for publishing the federally mandated long-range transportation plan, but it defers to the agencies for the portions that pertain to transit; the MPO does not have a transit planner on staff.

Service

When Rio Metro was established in 2005, it assumed responsibility for existing transportation services operating in its service area. In part because services originated as county or municipal based service, they were not designed to operate as a cohesive network. The services have largely remained unchanged and include a combination of fixed route bus and dial-a-ride service.

All services are limited with each bus route operating between one and eight round trips per day on weekdays. Two fixed routes require a reservation at least a day before. The dial-a-ride services offer curb-to-curb services for connections within and between cities; in some cases, connections to Albuquerque are available for medical services. Service levels reflect the region's population density, development patterns and availability of funding.

Rio Metro Transit Services
Avg Frequency of Weekday Service

— Every 45 Minutes
— 4 – 6 Round Trips
— 2 – 3 Round Trips
— 1 Round Trip
— Commuter Dial-a-Ride Route
▨ Job Access Transportation Program Zone
▨ Pueblo of Isleta Dial-a-Ride Zone
▨ Valencia Dial-a-Ride Zone
—○— Rio Metro Rail Runner
▨ Tribal Land
☐ County Boundary

Data Sources: Rio Metro

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

Funding

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. Rail Runner represents a significant share of Rio Metro's budget.

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.

The mix of dedicated revenues means that merging agencies would not provide any opportunities to spend funds differently.
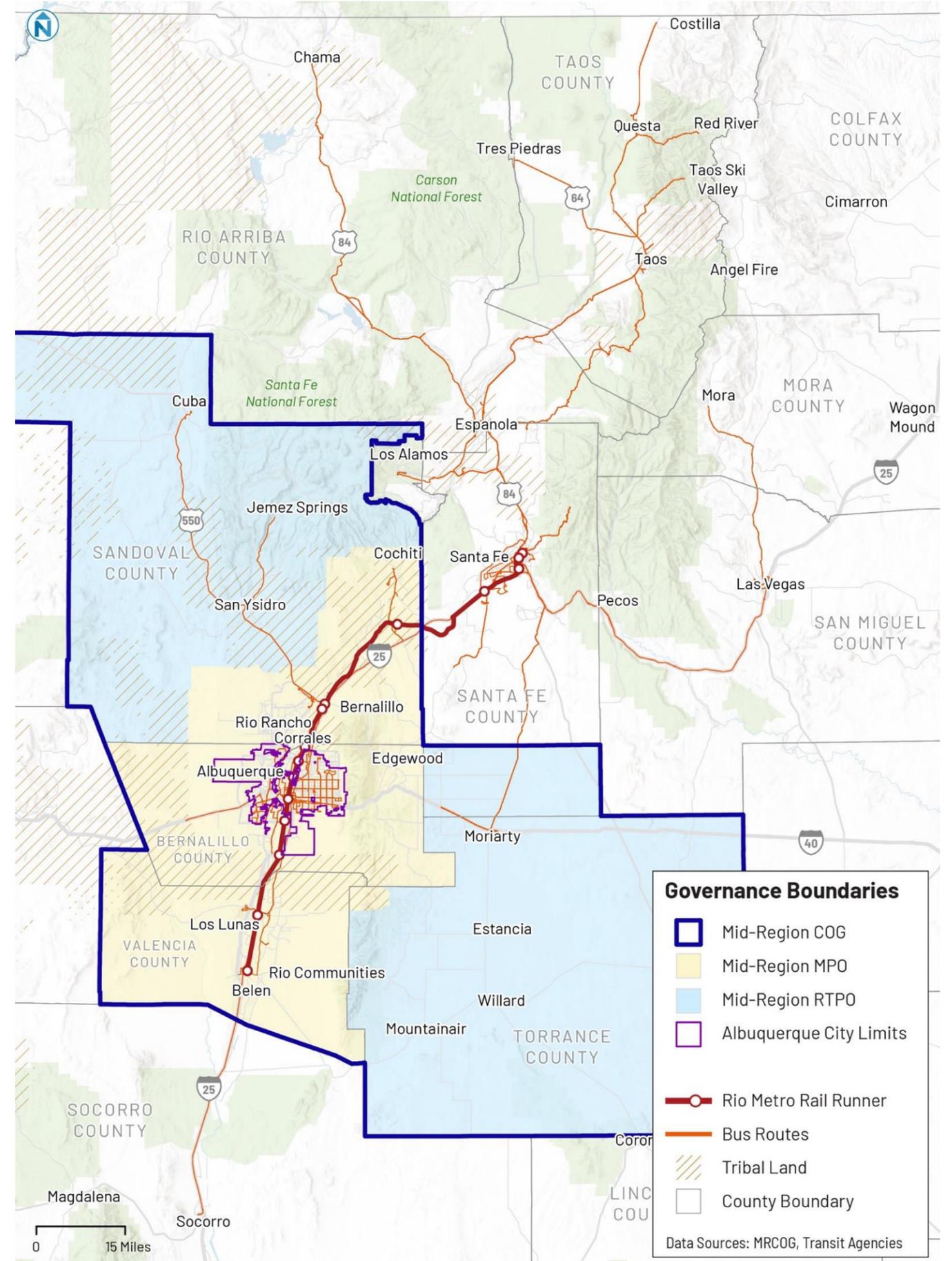
Rio Metro Operation Funding
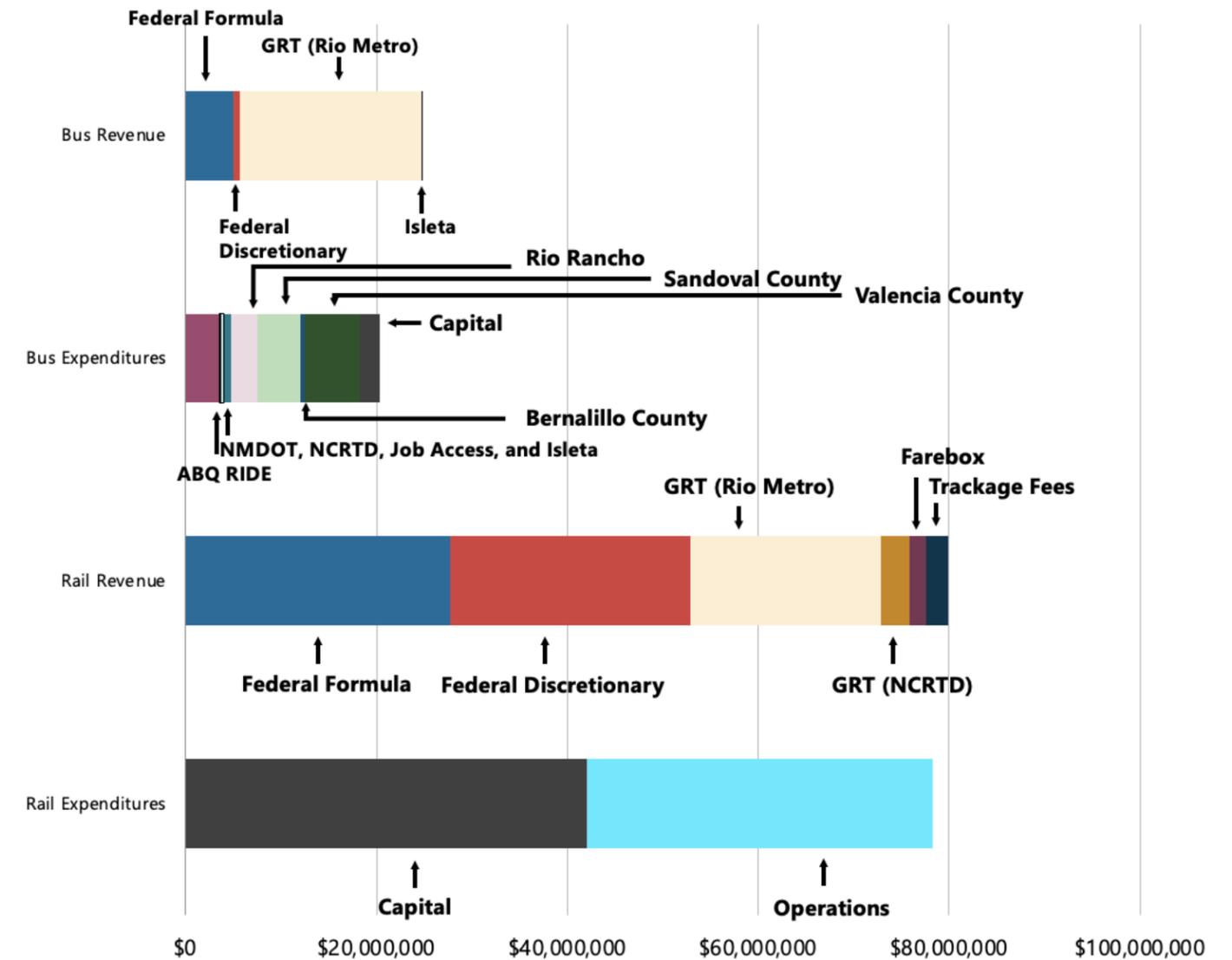
Data Sources: National Transit Database 2023, Rio Metro budget 2025. Revenue and expenditure totals are different because of different years and because the two sources handle administrative costs differently but are representative.

Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE both share some functions with each other and other agencies. There is no agency clearly responsible for creating a regional transit vision.

In terms of service management and operations, ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro both directly operate some services/functions, contract out for some services, and collaborate on others. ABQ RIDE relies on other city departments and services for many aspects of service delivery, including functions like payroll, human resources, security, procurement, etc.

The two agencies also collaborate on some functions, formally and informally. Rio Metro and the City of Albuquerque have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for some functions, like payroll and pension management. ABQ RIDE maintains some Rio Metro vehicles at the Ken Sanchez Center, with Rio Metro funding one mechanic at the facility. Informally, staff move between agencies. Currently, many of Rio Metro's original staff were previously City of Albuquerque employees.

Transit planning, including developing the regional vision, is both a shared function and one that is currently not being done by either agency. 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.

Governance Boundaries

Mid-Region COG
Mid-Region MPO
Mid-Region RTPO
Albuquerque City Limits

Rio Metro Rail Runner
Bus Routes
Tribal Land
County Boundary

Data Sources: MRCOG, Transit Agencies

Today, ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro are separate agencies with some shared service area. City of Albuquerque leadership are members of the Rio Metro board.

Under the current structure, ABQ RIDE operates as a department under the City of Albuquerque while Rio Metro RTD shares an Executive Director with MRCOG. While there is overlap in service area, there is currently limited capacity for coordination surrounding regional planning, passenger information, and marketing. Operations of all service are also separate, though some Rio Metro services have support from ABQ RIDE via vehicle maintenance, and Rio Metro provides some funding for ABQ RIDE.

City of Albuquerque		Rio Metro Regional Transit District	MRCOG/MPO
City Council		Rio Metro Board	COG Board
Mayor		*Executive Director*	
Other Departments	**ABQ RIDE** Director	Administrative Support Staff (from COG staff)	
Administrative Support Staff (City supports all departments)		Bus Operations *ABQ RIDE/Village of Los Lunas*	
	Bus Operations	Bus Operations *Sandoval (Contracted to AAA)*	
	Paratransit Operations	Bus Operations *Bernalillo County*	
	Microtransit	Dial-a-Ride Demand Response *Rio Rancho/Corales supported by ABQ RIDE*	
	Passenger Information/ Marketing	Dial-a-Ride Demand Response *Pueblo Isleta and Valencia*	
	Transit Service/Network Planning and Grants	Job Access Demand *Only Bernalillo County*	
		Passenger Information/Marketing	
		Transit Service/Network Planning and Grants	
		Rail Operations (contracted out)	

Some issues facing the agencies are more pressing and challenging than others.

Rio Metro Challenges

- Rio Metro Board members have a wide range of responsibilities and sit on many boards. Likewise, Rio Metro's Executive Director leads and reports to many boards.

- Rio Metro's local and inter-community transit services have not been evaluated or substantially changed since 2005.

- Rio Metro has a dedicated funding source but could not make major service improvements like increasing speed and frequency of Rail Runner without increased funding.

ABQ RIDE Challenges

- ABQ RIDE is operating 60% of pre-pandemic service due to challenges in hiring and retaining operators and mechanics.
  - This is due to a variety of factors including union contracts across city departments, pay and hours not matching effort and talent, and competing for City Council attention with other departments.
  - Without staff, ABQ RIDE is challenged to implement and maintain its ABQ RIDE Forward Network; any aspirational network improvements are out of reach if these factors don't change.

- ABQ RIDE lacks a dedicated funding source and competes with other City departments for funding and attention.
  - A great deal of effort is put in annually to secure budget.

Regional Challenges

- There is a lack of political will, regional vision, and transit-oriented leadership regionally as no agency is clearly responsible for creating the regional transit vision
  - Leadership at both the City of Albuquerque and Rio Metro are balancing many priorities. As a result, transit does not have sustained attention from policy makers.
  - Transit service development is also hampered by limited planning staff with many responsibilities at both agencies.
  - The lack of dedicated planning resources at the MPO means no one is evaluating transit demand or creating a holistic regional vision.
  - After a big push for transit 10-15 years ago in the region, the political appetite for transit has reduced.

Peer transit agencies across the country have considered the costs and benefits of consolidation and chose a variety of governance structures that addressed their specific needs.

This review presents best practices and lessons learned by other transit operators in the United States. These lessons have been considered throughout 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 services operate differently from fixed-route service.

The peers are:

- Valley Metro (Phoenix, AZ)

- Greater Portland Metro (Portland Area, ME)

- rabbittransit (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)

Key Takeaways

- Transit governance changes are usually undertaken to solve specific issues, often the desire to raise more funding for transit. Given this, governance structures are often designed around the needs that prompted the change. Another reason for changing governance is a perception of efficiency, achieved through economics of scale.

- Transit agency consolidation results in the most benefit when there is overlapping and duplicative transit service.

- Consolidation is not a simple task. This is especially true for agencies that merge union and labor contracts, adopt shared technology and other systems, as well as agency leadership and staff.

- 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.

- Some regions' paratransit is 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of studying the current challenges and potential benefits of consolidating ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro has resulted in four primary recommendations.

Overview

This study suggests primary recommendations that address the needs of the agencies and work to address the specific issues of each individual agency and the overall region. While full consolidation of the two agencies is not recommended in the short term, the recommendations reflect initial steps that could make future consolidation possible. In particular, setting up shared demand response services will create the conditions for continued close coordination between ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro.

The recommendations are also designed to strengthen transit services across the region by working towards a more unified regional network; coordinating demand response services will eliminate barriers for riders transferring between services or using more than one service. As ABQ RIDE is able to implement its ABQ RIDE Forward network, riders will benefit from better, more reliable service. Service improvements and increased ridership are often key to building political support for transit. This support can help both agencies obtain more stable/dedicated funding.

ABQ RIDE PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION
Restructure ABQ RIDE's relationship to the City.

Giving ABQ RIDE greater autonomy within the City of Albuquerque could help it solve many of its major challenges by allowing it to have increased control over hiring/staffing, grants, and procurement to more closely align with its needs as a transit agency and as a recipient of Federal Transit Administration funding. An alternative, if that first approach meets obstacles, is to become an independent agency with close City coordination and long-term funding.

RIO METRO PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS
Hire a General Manager for Rio Metro.

A General Manager for rail and bus will guide network planning, inter-agency coordination, and regional transit strategy.

Form a standing committee within the Rio Metro board and add transit riders as non-voting board members.

The standing committee within the Rio Metro board and the new board members will work closely with the General Manger to provide input on regional vision.

JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS
Create a modern, integrated regional network of demand response services.

An easy-to-use demand response system will enhance accessibility in the region, strengthening the services and helping the region's most vulnerable residents. Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE jointly embark on this process.

Support the formalization of regional network planning and passenger information, and hire new transit planners, including one at the MPO.

Additional planning capacity will make service more useful and connected by evaluating and matching regional services with demand and provide clear passenger information, making service more useful and connected. Rio Metro takes initial steps in this process through service evaluation.

The final recommendations were developed through a stakeholder-involved effort of framing goals, identifying evaluation criteria, and refining governance scenarios.

Recommendations reflect the technical analysis conducted as part of this study (existing conditions analysis and peer review) as well as extensive stakeholder input from both agencies and their regional partners. They also evolved through an iterative process where stakeholders collaborated to develop, evaluate, and narrow multiple governance scenarios, focusing solutions on options that were most closely aligned with the region's challenges.

The potential scenarios each considered a different way to organize ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro, ranging from the status quo to full consolidation into a single agency. The unique scenarios between the two extremes were tailored specifically to respond to the challenges and benefits of the current governance model. Each scenario was evaluated based on criteria categorized by the six project goals. The cost-benefit evaluation of each governance scenario was presented to stakeholders for feedback and discussion prior to moving forward with the preferred scenario.

Throughout the project, workshops were held with ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro representatives in addition to representatives from NMDOT, the City of Albuquerque, the City of Belen, Bernalillo County, and the Town of Bernalillo at each major phase. Subject Matter Expert interviews were held with staff at ABQ RIDE, Rio Metro, NMDOT, City of Rio Rancho, City of Albuquerque, the Mid-Region Council of Governments MPO, the Albuquerque Housing Authority, and union leaders for the drivers and mechanics, supervisors, and dispatch call center.

Stakeholders identified six primary goals to guide potential governance changes:

1. **Service**: **Provide a useful, reliable, and connected regional transit service for people of all abilities**

2. **Staffing**: **Hire and retain the staff needed to operate service**

3. **Funding**: **Create sustainable sufficient funding streams**

4. **Accountability and transparency**: **Have an accountable and transparent process internally and to the public**

5. **Efficiency: Prioritize long term planning to grow transit service to meet current and future needs**

6. **Level of Effort: Use public tax dollars efficiently to provide the most benefit to the public**

Compared to full consolidation, these steps produce many of the same benefits with less disruption to existing operations. They also maintain the primary benefits of independent agencies.

Overview of recommendation:

- Restructure ABQ RIDE's relationship to the City.
    - Two options: Gain autonomy within the City or become an independent agency
- Hire a General Manager for Rio Metro.
- Form a standing committee within the Rio Metro board and add transit-reliant board members.
- Evaluate existing Rio Metro demand response services and make changes to simplify and address demand.
- Create clear passenger information for demand response and fixed-route services.
- Hire additional planners at Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE and hire transit planner at the MPO.

These recommendations have many benefits:

- Address needs in a way that is more politically acceptable and financially efficient.
- Expand usability from the spine supported by Rail Runner.
- Adapt to changing conditions more easily.
- Generate renewed regional political desire for transit service with increased knowledge, better service, and more involvement.
- Increase community trust and knowledge of transit networks.
- Grow political will and potential for increased funding.

The recommended changes were evaluated in relationship to the current governance structure (the "status quo") and fully consolidating the two agencies.

Each alternative was evaluated according to if the scenario would make achieving the six goals more or less difficult. While any governance change require significant effort, changes in governance can make it much easier for both agencies to meet their goals. The evaluation process recognized that while all goals are achievable in the current governance landscape, changes can make a goal easier or harder to achieve. Each goal was paired with a set of criteria that the agency is currently working toward, and each criteria was evaluated for how much easier it could be to address each item relative to today's governance conditions.

In these measurements, the governance changes produced by the study's recommendations create leadership and structural conditions that make it easier for each agency to reach their goals than today. Full consolidation of the agencies could have similar benefits with additional leadership structure and funding stability, but it would have many drawbacks including the extremely high level of effort and loss of existing efficiencies, especially the relationship between ABQ RIDE and the City. While the recommended changes will require staff energy and time, they are intended to solve for key challenges without creating unneeded changes.

ABQ RIDE PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION

Restructure ABQ RIDE's relationship to the City.

Current Challenge: The city's administrative structures are not always well aligned with the needs of a transit agency. This makes it difficult for ABQ RIDE to manage and operate transit services efficiently.

- ABQ RIDE has many barriers under the City of Albuquerque to be able to operate as a successful transit system and is currently facing challenges that are independent from Rio Metro.
- 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. ABQ RIDE is currently operating 60% of pre-pandemic service due to staffing shortages.
- ABQ RIDE is just one of the many City departments competing for time on the City Council agenda.
- Security is an issue in Albuquerque for riders at stops, riders on board, operators, and maintenance personnel.

ABQ RIDE is a large department within the City of Albuquerque that uses multiple full-time staff time from other City departments. ABQ RIDE's current structure in relation to other City of Albuquerque departments does have benefits, but it also limits its ability to sustainably address its needs. ABQ RIDE employees lack job classifications and compensation that meet the needs specifically required for transit agency employees, particularly with those who work in operations and maintenance. Its position as a city department makes its funding allocation yearly, and while it is relatively stable, it does not provide a clear path for the growth of transit services and is dependent on the composition of the mayor and city council. This environment does not stop ABQ RIDE from making short-term improvements to its service, security, and operational issues, but it also does not facilitate long-term sustainable solutions.

Recommendation: One option for ABQ RIDE to make it easier to solve its challenges is to increase its autonomy within the City of Albuquerque's administrative structure.

Gain autonomy within the City: Within the structure of the City of Albuquerque, major changes to existing budgeting processes, union contracts, and attention from City leadership will address some of ABQ RIDE's most pressing needs. ABQ RIDE needs longer budgetary cycles than the typical yearly City budget process, due to the nature of running transit service, and could reach an agreement that could provide more predictability and stability. Determining the GRT percentage is also critical to ABQ RIDE's fiscal planning. Additionally, the City can work with the operators and mechanics unions to create new levels for the transit-specific union members that compensate appropriately.

The city already has transit and paratransit committees. Those committees can be leveraged to bring transit-related agenda items and recommendations to city council. Existing union agreements can be amended to properly compensate transit-related employees and aid in retention. Administrative channels can be reorganized to more efficiently procure and contract work. The existing Transit Director can sit on the Rio Metro Board to more easily align local and regional scales. **ABQ RIDE continues efforts to address immediate staffing shortage.**

Key Benefit: Quick wins
ABQ RIDE could solve short-term issues and needs by making changes without completely separating from City of Albuquerque. These changes would address budget needs, employment structure, and increased representation among city and regional leadership. These changes provide immediate assistance in addressing needs and can also be the first step in laying the groundwork for ABQ RIDE to become an independent agency or consolidate with Rio Metro in the future.

Restructure ABQ RIDE's relationship to the City.

Current Challenge: The city's administrative structures are not always well aligned with the needs of a transit agency. This makes it difficult for ABQ RIDE to manage and operate transit services efficiently.

- ABQ RIDE has many barriers under the City of Albuquerque to be able to operate as a successful transit system and is currently facing challenges that are independent from Rio Metro.
- 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. ABQ RIDE is currently operating 60% of pre-pandemic service due to staffing shortages.
- ABQ RIDE is just one of the many City departments competing for time on the City Council agenda.
- Security is an issue in Albuquerque for riders at stops, riders on board, operators, and maintenance personnel.

ABQ RIDE is a large department within the City of Albuquerque that uses multiple full-time staff time from other City departments. ABQ RIDE's current structure in relation to other City of Albuquerque departments does have benefits, but it also limits its ability to sustainably address its needs. ABQ RIDE employees lack job classifications and compensation that meet the needs specifically required for transit agency employees, particularly with those who work in operations and maintenance. Its position as a city department makes its funding allocation yearly, and while it is relatively stable, it does not provide a clear path for the growth of transit services and is dependent on the composition of the mayor and city council. This environment does not stop ABQ RIDE from making short-term improvements to its service, security, and operational issues, but it also does not facilitate long-term sustainable solutions.

Recommendation: The second option for ABQ RIDE is to become an independent organization with close City coordination and long-term funding.

Become an independent agency: If gaining more autonomy from the City of Albuquerque does not yield enough change for ABQ RIDE to overcome current obstacles, this study recommends that ABQ RIDE become its own agency. As an independent agency, ABQ RIDE could structure itself to serve its market and riders, potentially led by a Chief Executive / General Manager, an ABQ RIDE Board, and dedicated funding sources with necessary support departments. Dedicated, long-term funding agreements with the City would support the agency, but there are limitations to the solidity of that agreement, given changes in City funding. Another option would be for ABQ RIDE to go out for a new GRT that would fund transit specifically. The process of separating would be challenging, but once independent, ABQ RIDE would have the stability and flexibility needed to address existing and future conditions.

ABQ RIDE currently works with the City on many shared initiatives, and a major tradeoff of becoming an independent agency would be the effort to maintain those functions. Setting up a new agency would also require a high level of effort from ABQ RIDE staff, although less than full consolidation.

ABQ RIDE continues efforts to address immediate staffing shortage.

Key Benefit: Staffing
While staffing shortages can be solved with short-term hiring solutions, a sustainable model of labor growth and retention requires an employment structure that creates appropriate union tiers and pay levels commiserate to the work required for bus operators and mechanics.

RIO METRO PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Hire a General Manager for Rio Metro.

Current Challenge: Rio Metro currently lacks dedicated transit leadership who can focus on service development and meeting the needs of riders.

Rio Metro Board members, many of which are councilmembers and mayors throughout the region, are leaders with a wide range of responsibilities and concerns and sit on many boards.

- Rio Metro's Executive Director reports to many boards with similar membership.

- Most board members do not have a background in transit service and lack education about transit and what transit can do for the region.

- Transit isn't a key focus in many of their roles. Transit isn't the biggest issue regionally right now.

- Without a transit-dedicated MPO planner, there is no one looking at transit demand and potential across the region holistically.

- Emphasis is on running service as-is, and there has not been an audit to determine if the services Rio Metro's inherited currently fit the region's needs.

Recommendation: A General Manager for rail and bus will guide network planning and inter-agency coordination.

Hire a General Manager: In response to the current organization, this study recommends hiring a Rio Metro General Manager who will focus solely on regional rail and bus needs and manage Rio Metro's day-to-day operations. This role will be distinct from the Executive Director and work closely with the leads for rail and bus in the agency. This position will build internal leadership capacity within Rio Metro, which could create the conditions for Rio Metro to move fully outside of the MRCOG joint staff and Executive Director in the future.

Key Benefit: Focus on Regional Vision and Operations
Since Rio Metro's service area includes the City of Albuquerque, the Rio Metro General Manager will be posed well to work with planners at both agencies to create, hone, and push forward regional transit plans. The General Manager will also be able to offer support and direction to the operations team at the agency, ensuring coordination and agency focus.

In the current organizational structure, the Rio Metro Board is composed of elected officials who represent the region and is overseen by an Executive Director. These board members and Executive Director hold many other responsibilities in addition to transportation and must balance their priorities and time to best meet their constituents' needs. This balancing can lead to the diluting of attention toward a regional transit vision. Rio Metro board meetings are used primarily to satisfy statuary, funding, or other requirements are often canceled due to overlap in regional board compositions and lack of clear urgent needs. Rio Metro's Executive Director is currently held by the same person who is the Executive Director of the region's council of governments (Mid-Region Council of Governments – MRCOG), which also oversees the region's MPO and Workforce Development Council.

RIO METRO PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Form a standing committee within the Rio Metro board and add transit riders as non-voting board members.

Current Challenge: Rio Metro currently lacks dedicated transit leadership who can focus on service development and meeting the needs of riders.

Rio Metro Board members, many of which are councilmembers and mayors throughout the region, are leaders with a wide range of responsibilities and concerns and sit on many boards.

- Rio Metro's Executive Director reports to many boards with similar membership.

- Most board members do not have a background in transit service and lack education about transit and what transit can do for the region.

- Transit isn't a key focus in many of their roles. Transit isn't the biggest issue regionally right now.

- Without a transit-dedicated MPO planner, there is no one looking at transit demand and potential across the region holistically.

- Emphasis is on running service as-is, and there has not been an audit to determine if the services Rio Metro's inherited currently fit the region's needs.

In the current organizational structure, the Rio Metro Board is composed of elected officials who represent the region and is overseen by an Executive Director. These board members and Executive Director hold many other responsibilities in addition to transportation and must balance their priorities and time to best meet their constituents' needs. This balancing can lead to the diluting of attention toward a regional transit vision. Rio Metro board meetings are used primarily to satisfy statuary, funding, or other requirements are often canceled due to overlap in regional board compositions and lack of clear urgent needs. Rio Metro's Executive Director is currently held by the same person who is the Executive Director of the region's council of governments (Mid-Region Council of Governments – MRCOG), which also oversees the region's MPO and Workforce Development Council.

Recommendation: The standing committee within the Rio Metro board and new board members will work closely with the General Manger to provide input on regional vision.

Form Standing Committee: Creating a standing committee within the Rio Metro board will provide a space where its members meet more often and have transit-focused education opportunities, which will also improve efficiency and be the best use of board members' time while building political will. This committee will require a change in the bylaws and be formed by the new General Manager and the Board Chair. Its composition will include at least four board members and could also include others who have a particularly vested interest in Rio Metro's services, such as employees of ABQ RIDE or Rio Metro, as well as transit and paratransit riders who can provide an on-the-ground perspective to the discussion and who consider transit a priority. The committee will report to the full board at every meeting, and RMRTD staff and time should be dedicated to this roll.

Add board members: Many transit agency boards are made up solely of elected officials, like the Rio Metro board, and this often results in a governing body that has little to no frequent transit riders. This study recommends that the Rio Metro board add at least one regular Rio Metro rider to the board as a non-voting member. If possible, add two or three riders, including at least one demand response and one bus rider. Transit planners or operators could also fill this roles if it is difficult to recruit current riders.

Key Benefit: Transit Advocacy
Similar to committees at other transit agencies, the standing committee would not hold independent decision-making authority. Rather, the General Manager and the committee will make recommendations that require board approval to be officially adopted and implemented. These changes do not fundamentally shift how Rio Metro transit decisions are made but instead create a dedicated space where regional vision planning can consistently take place and be prioritized among all of the other responsibilities of the board.

JOINT RECOMMENDATION

Create a modern, integrated regional network of demand response services.

Current challenge: Demand response services in the region are not cohesive and are difficult to understand and use.

- When Rio Metro inherited demand response services previously delivered by counties, these services were not holistically assessed for regional, inter-jurisdictional needs and demand patterns.
- Unlike fixed-route service, it is not possible for customers to transfer between separate demand response services.
- Rio Metro's demand response services vary by and within service areas and are difficult to understand and use.
- Eligibility doesn't transfer between different demand response and paratransit services in the region
- Rio Metro's demand response service does not have capacity to meet additional demand.

When Rio Metro was established, it assumed operations for county transportation services within its service area. The county services vary widely in how and where they operate and do not form a cohesive network. Rio Metro's 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 routes require day-prior reservations at minimum. Due to funding and the large service area, service is limited.

These service constraints make it difficult for those in less served areas to rely on public transportation for work or medical trips. Other than Road Runner service, navigating available services requires specific knowledge of schedules and service rules.

Recommendation: Consolidating demand response service delivery and simplifying customer-facing information can enhance accessibility in the region and help the region's most vulnerable residents.

Clarify passenger-facing information and eligibility rules: By consolidating and combining passenger information through a single access point (website, printed materials, and one phone number), customers will have a better understanding of services. This would include simplifying the Rio eligibility process.

Consolidate back-end operations: Merging Rio Metro's and ABQ RIDE's back-end administration would eliminate redundancies and facilitate better scheduling of demand response trips. This would involve establishing a single phone number for trip reservations and consolidating call taking, scheduling, and dispatching. Acquiring a single modern scheduling solution can also improve service efficiency. While initial steps will not include ABQ RIDE's ADA paratransit service, it could be folded under the shared umbrella in the future.

Consolidate service delivery: While more difficult to achieve, consolidating regional demand response services in the region are a key study recommendation. Achieving regional consolidation will require participation from all partners. This will require resolution of different labor rules, funding agreements, fare policy clarification, trip reimbursements, and cost allocation.

Key Benefit: Enhanced regional accessibility
By updating back-end operations and offering a streamlined passenger experience, ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro can both find efficiencies through economies of scale, better organize and distribute resources, and create a seamless eligibility process thus improving demand response service in the region.

Types of Demand Response Integration

There are many ways ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro can consolidate and integrate their various demand response services. The right approach between the two depends on each agency's operational constraints and what riders need. Generally, the three tiers below outline possible pathways for regional integration. They are not mutually exclusive – the two agencies could start with one tier and shift to another as conditions change.

Tier 1: Administration and Resource Integration

This type of demand response integration prioritizes passenger-facing information and service administration. This level of integration would not require significant staffing or operations changes. Achieving this integration would require creating consolidated online and print resources providing information on eligibility, service area, and trip-booking instructions. Once implemeted, Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE would begin consolidating eligibility processes.

Tier 2: Back-Office Consolidation

The second tier aims to consolidate reservations, scheduling, and dispatching. While ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro would continue to operate independently, consolidated reeservations, dispatch, and scheduling would assign trips to the appropriate provider. This approach would also include measures to handle reimbursements between providers. Consolidating back-office operations will lead to improved trip options and cost efficiency. ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro would need to decide where to house back-office operations and address the diffrerent workforce rules and fare policies.

Tier 3: Full Service Integration

Tier 3 is full service integration with either ABQ RIDE or Rio Metro assuming responsibiltiy for demand response services throughout the region. Existing funding would be consolidated. The consolidated agency would reconfigure demand response services in the region to ensure services are as simple and comprehensive as possible for a regional travel experience.

JOINT RECOMMENDATION

Simplify and strengthen regional transit services with dedicated transit planners directed to coordinate regional transit services and create simple, easy to understand passenger information.

Rio Metro doesn't have a comprehensive system map or passenger information hub for all of its services.

- Regional planning lacks holistic planning around demand patterns outside of Rail Runner service. Rio Metro has studied increasing Rail Runner service, but it does not have a network master plan. For example, 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.

- Rio Metro's mix of service models and method of communicating services makes it hard for riders to understand how to use multiple services. While services physically connect, passenger information isn't always clear.

- 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.

Rail Runner was developed as a regional service. Local services, however, were developed independent from one another. When services were consolidated under a single agency, there was not an effort to coordinate or integrate services. As a result, fixed-route bus, on-demand, and other public transportation programs were never designed to coordinate with one another as one comprehensive and complementary system and that design has not been revisited for audit or optimization. This resulted in a Rio Metro suite of services that do not currently meet regional demand patterns or provide a clear, simple, and legible system for passengers to navigate, and its governance makes adjusting the system to meet those standards more difficult to accomplish.

Recommendation: Use new staff resources to modernize and coordinate transit services, so service matches demand. Once services are optimized, develop clear passenger information so riders can access opportunities region-wide.

Hire additional planning capacity at Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE. Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE jointly support the MPO hiring a transit planner: This study recommends Rio Metro re-evaluate its current services to find opportunities to simplify and clarify service options to the public and adjust its network to meet current demand. This requires an MPO planner who can review the network by analyzing travel patterns, engaging with all Rio Metro communities for feedback and recommendations, and build a sustainable communication channel with ABQ RIDE to align services so they complement each other. This also requires decision-making stakeholders like the Rio Metro Board to properly reflect and represent the region's communities and jurisdictions. Formalizing the coordination rolls and activities for dedicated staff is critical to the success of this recommendation.

Provide comprehensive passenger information: Rio Metro has gaps in its communication to current and future riders. Planners should develop easier online trip planning tools and systemwide maps that make the variety of services and their qualifications or requirements clear.

Key Benefit: Representative Service
Rio Rancho stands out as an area with sufficient transit demand to warrant service, but that lacks the corresponding coverage. In places, it has similar population density and other key population and demographic factors that contribute to successful transit service as other areas within the region. Its current lack of service comes from limited political advocacy at the local level and on the Rio Metro Board. By examining ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro's governance and services through the lens of a cohesive regional vision, both agencies can strengthen the transportation network to properly represent the needs of the region and its various constituents.

Many challenges can be addressed by the City of Albuquerque providing ABQ RIDE more autonomy within the City and by Rio Metro hiring a General Manager.

This updated structure provides ABQ RIDE with more autonomy and Rio Metro with more transit-focused decision-making. For Rio Metro, the General Manager and new standing committee can focus on transit planning and projects. For ABQ RIDE, a separate administrative arm that solely works on transit can facilitate administrative functions like procurement. Regional demand operations becomes a shared function between ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro and further coordination in passenger information, marketing, planning, and grant applications promotes a single regional network.

City of Albuquerque	Rio Metro Regional Transit District	MRCOG/MPO
City Council	Rio Metro Board	COG Board
Mayor	*Executive Director*	
Other Departments / **ABQ RIDE** *Director*	*General Manager*	
Administrative Support Staff	Administrative Support Staff	
Transit-Specific Administrative Support Staff	Transit-Specific Administrative Support Staff	MPO Transit Planner
Passenger Information/Marketing		
Transit Service/Network Planning and Grants		
Bus Operations	Bus Operations • Maintenance is ABQ Ride and the Village of Los Lunas • Sandoval - Contracted to AAA	
Paratransit Operations		
Regional Demand Response Operations - One Agency to passengers • Each agency reimburses the other for service in the other's area • Shared staff, call center, software		
	Rail Operations (contracted out)	

Another option for ABQ RIDE is to provide service as an independent agency.

As an independent agency, ABQ RIDE can shape administrative functions, including deciding employment structure, in a way that best fits its needs. It would still maintain close coordination with City of Albuquerque, particularly when negotiating budget and resource allocation from other City departments. Rio Metro's governing structure and its coordination with ABQ RIDE remain the same as the option with ABQ RIDE remaining a municipal department.

City of Albuquerque	ABQ RIDE Transit Agency	Rio Metro Regional Transit District	MRCOG/MPO
City Council	ABQ RIDE Board	Rio Metro Board	COG Board
Mayor	*General Manager*	*Executive Director*	
Other Departments		*General Manager*	
Administrative Support Staff		Administrative Support Staff	
	Transit-Specific Administrative Support Staff	Transit-Specific Administrative Support Staff	MPO Transit Planner
	Passenger Information/Marketing		
	Transit Service/Network Planning and Grants		
	Regional Call Center		
	Bus Operations	Bus Operations *ABQ RIDE/Village of Los Lunas*	
	Paratransit Operations	Bus Operations *Sandoval (Contracted to AAA)*	
	Microtransit	Bus Operations *Bernalillo County*	
	Regional Demand Response Operations – One Agency to passengers • Each agency reimburses the other for service in the other's area • Shared staff, call center, software		
		Rail Operations (contracted out)	

RMRTD employees in equivalent positions should have the opportunity to join the unions representing the City Transit Department.

ABQ RIDE operates its bus and paratransit services in-house and has a fully unionized City Transit Department, represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). ATU Local 624 is the longstanding bargaining unit for ABQ Ride employees, responsible for negotiating agreements through the City.

Rio Metro relies on a mix of directly operated and contracted services, which results in a workforce that includes both unionized and non-unionized employees. Herzog's Rail Runner Express operations include union-represented engineers, conductors and ticket agents, represented by SMART-TD. Their agreement covers pay rates and other working conditions. In addition, ABQ RIDE's maintenance department, which is unionized, maintains some of Rio Metro's fleet.

All Aboard America operates most of Rio Metro's Commuter Bus service, and zTrip operates the Job Access services. Neither have union representation. Rio Metro could study operating more of the bus service in-house, which could lead to a greater consolidation.

To improve coordination of demand response services, this study recommends further integrating paratransit and demand response services. While this action would not require new unionization, it could encourage it. If ABQ RIDE were to operate all regional demand response service, city employees could be reassigned to provide service across RMRTD counties under an arrangement that preserves their existing union representation.

Finally, because a significant share of operations is contracted out, Rio Metro employs fewer in-house staff, with 30 non-operations and maintenance positions (vs. 58 for ABQ RIDE). Short of consolidation, it is unlikely these employees would be unionized in the future. This study is not recommending full consolidation of ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro. However, if consolidation were pursued, RMRTD employees in comparable roles would likely have the opportunity to join the unions that represent City Transit Department employees, and a new joint agency could negotiate the inclusion of those staff. Even without consolidation, Rio Metro employees could independently choose to unionize.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this study's recommendations will take multiple interdependent steps to realize the final governance model scenario.

This chapter covers implementation of the recommendations from a roadmap approach. This means that the execution of these steps to implementation will require further planning and refinement by ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro staff. The steps covered in this chapter are meant to be overviews that highlight the timeline for each recommendation and how they depend on the surrounding implementation steps.

The implementation of the recommendations will take significant effort and buy-in from ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro staff and leadership. However, there are more achievable parts to the recommendations that can be implemented prior to others. This phased approach to implementation will both build momentum to organizing the agencies around the final governance model while also making each subsequent step more accessible.

The implementation approach is divided into three phases:

Phase 1: Establish organizational infrastructure

Phase 1 focuses on the recommendations that set up the surrounding organizational framework that can then better facilitate the recommendations that will involve more effort to implement.

Phase 2: Build pathways to growth and improvements

After the initial organizational infrastructure is built, Phase 2 begins to implement the recommendations that can leverage that infrastructure to improve service, staffing, and funding for ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro.

Phase 3: Execute the vision

In Phase 3, the organizational structure and staffing are leading to the execution of the final vision of governance for the region. This involves the consolidation of elements to funding streams, service coverage, and operations between the two agencies that will produce the best outcome for the region,

An early implementation phase prioritizes a shared call center while demand response remains within each agency separately.

Phase 1: Establish organizational infrastructure

1 **2** **3**
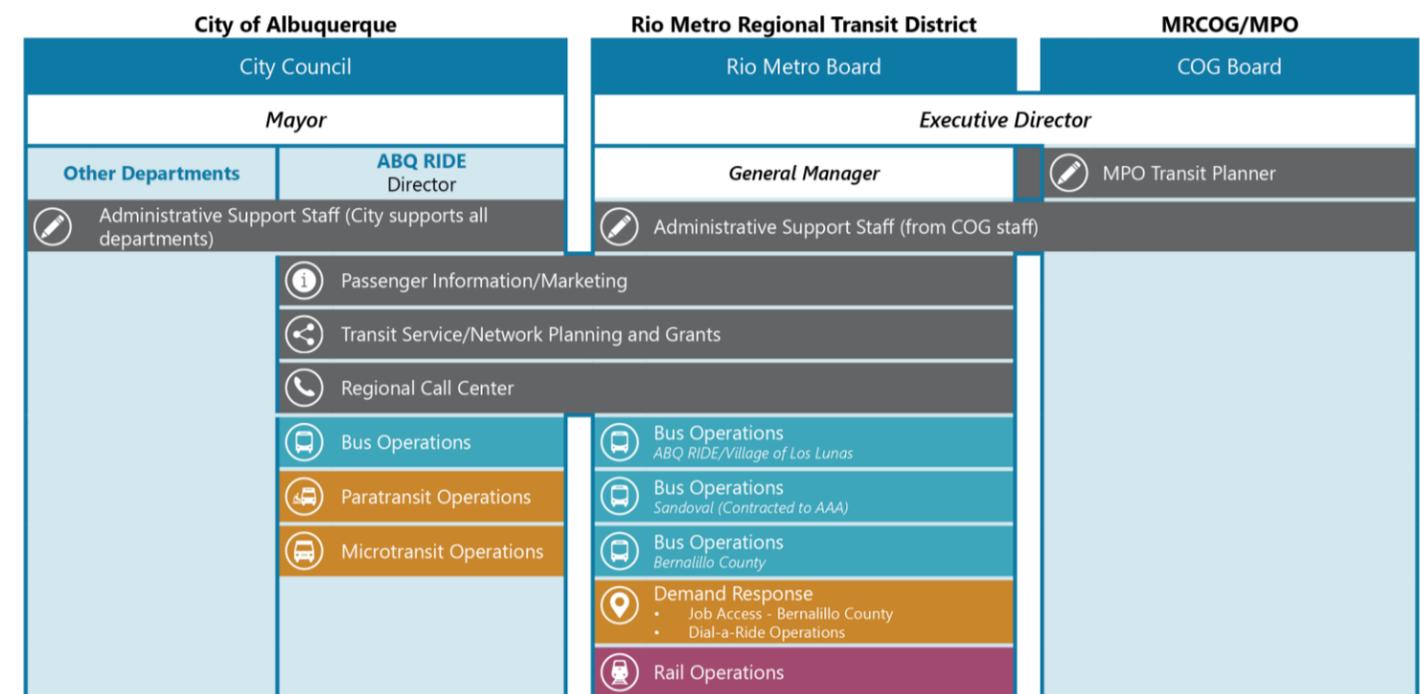
Rio Metro hires a General Manager.
The General Manager will relieve Rio Metro's current Executive Director who is responsible for managing multiple agencies (for both Rio Metro and MRCOG) and boards. The Rio Metro General Manager will oversee transit service development and delivery, as well as direct the agency towards a longer-term vision. Rio Metro's General Manager would report to the Executive Director.

Rio Metro board forms a standing committee.
The Board will create the standing committee, which will consist of at least four Rio Metro board members and grow to include at least two members who are operators or riders in addition to other interested and dedicated members. The committee will report to the full board at every meeting, and RMRTD staff / time should be dedicated to this roll.

ABQ RIDE prepares proposal for more autonomy from the city.
ABQ RIDE internally reviews and identifies a relationship with the City of Albuquerque that better fits its needs. The agency builds a proposal that includes new union levels that better fits its jobs and new streamlined procurement and administrative services.

The proposal also includes an evaluation of the agency's existing resources to identify its preparedness to separate from the city. This evaluation must consider the loss of support functions within the City and how to replace those.

ABQ RIDE continues efforts to address immediate staffing shortage.
ABQ RIDE has been in the process of hiring drivers and mechanics to address short-term staffing issues. The department continues this process through recruitment, training, and building hiring capacity within the department to progress towards implementing the ABQ RIDE Forward Network.

Phase 2: Build pathways to growth and improvements

Add planning capacity at Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE and support the hiring of a transit planner at the MPO.
Additional support for implementing and coordinating each organization's respective visions will facilitate better delivery of existing service while being able to prepare for service improvements.

ABQ RIDE begins to implement proposal.
ABQ RIDE presents its proposal to the City. The department and City review the agency's needs to determine whether the best solution is for ABQ RIDE to become its own agency or to adjust current structures to keep ABQ RIDE as a city department.

Rio Metro refines its on-demand services.
Rio Metro does a full audit of its existing on-demand services to evaluate their accessibility to passengers. This can include remodeling the method and approach to scheduling, adjusting routes and zones, and mapping out passenger information.

ABQ RIDE negotiates labor and union agreements.
No matter the positioning of ABQ RIDE as a City department or separate agency, it will require revised labor contracts and employment structures that have transit-specific operator and mechanic pay bands and can begin negotiations on those items.

ABQ RIDE prioritizes coordination with Rio Metro services.
This coordination between agencies can facilitate consistency and alignment when service planning and can improve the passenger experience. One of the first tasks of coordination could be setting up the foundation for a single user experience related to eligibility applications for paratransit and on-demand services.

Rio Metro adds transit riders as non-voting board members.
The Board, with recommendation from the General Manager, will add up to three additional board members that are transit planners, operators, or riders by changing the bylaws for the board. At least one of the added board members should be a demand response rider. These new members will likely be asked to participate in the standing committee, which will consist of at least four Rio Metro board members, including at least two members who are operators or riders.

Phase 3: Execute the vision

1 2 3

ABQ RIDE enters into agreements with the City.
Whether the City decides that ABQ RIDE becomes its own agency or stays as a City department, ABQ RIDE and the City can develop multi-year structure that secures more dedicated funding for service improvements. This funding will support the progress towards ABQ RIDE reaching its ABQ RIDE Forward Network.

Another agreement ABQ RIDE can negotiate with the City is to procure resources to continue to implement its Albuquerque Long-Range Transit Security Plan to improve safety and incentivize ridership across its network.

Rio Metro evaluates network and regional coverage/demand.
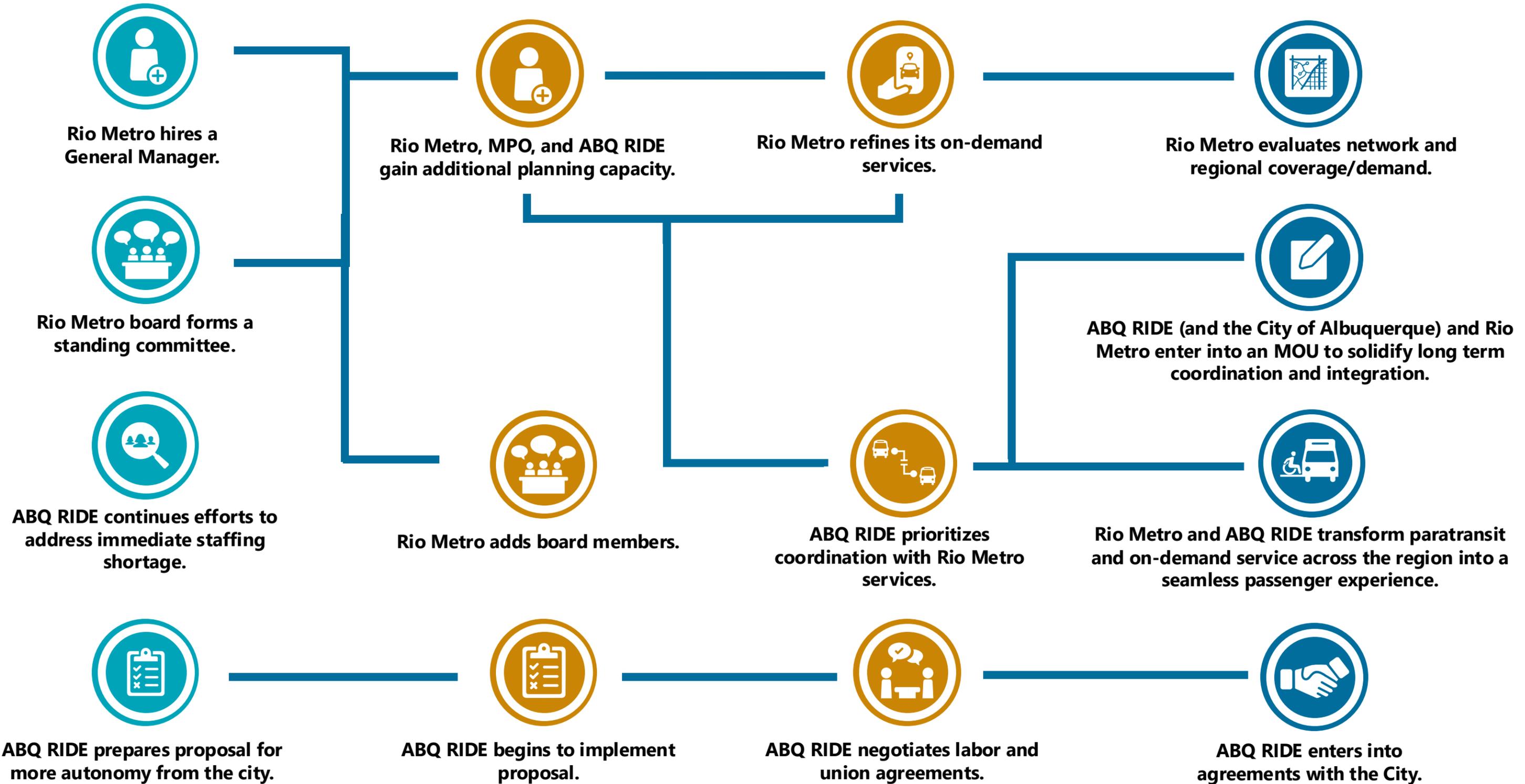Through the larger planning team and by leveraging the transit standing committee, Rio Metro uses the updated understanding of their system to evaluate its existing network and how it achieves regional coverage and meets transit demand. This includes a review of areas that currently have sufficient demand for transit but lack services, like Rio Rancho. Rio Metro then begins developing service changes to match the results of the evaluation, where necessary.

Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE transform paratransit and on-demand service across the region into a seamless passenger experience.
Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE coordinate on all demand response services, including those for older adults and people with disabilities, but also Job Access and microtransit. This may also lead to demand response service consolidation. Coordination and consolidation can happen through a multi-tiered process, as mentioned earlier in the study. This includes combining or consolidating call centers, communicating all services to passengers on one webpage with clear information about using both services, and coordinating the eligibility application process.

ABQ RIDE (and the City of Albuquerque) and Rio Metro enter into an MOU to solidify long term coordination and integration.
Once other steps have been taken, they are codified with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other similar document to ensure lasting implementation of the changes that affect both systems. This ensures that each agency is committed to the coordination steps long term and will outline any future integration that is not already in place.

The steps to implementation have interdependencies both within a phase and between phases. The process to move from phase one to phase three of implementation relies on previous steps getting done first.

Rio Metro hires a General Manager.

Rio Metro, MPO, and ABQ RIDE gain additional planning capacity.

Rio Metro refines its on-demand services.

Rio Metro evaluates network and regional coverage/demand.

Rio Metro board forms a standing committee.

ABQ RIDE (and the City of Albuquerque) and Rio Metro enter into an MOU to solidify long term coordination and integration.

ABQ RIDE continues efforts to address immediate staffing shortage.

Rio Metro adds board members.

ABQ RIDE prioritizes coordination with Rio Metro services.

Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE transform paratransit and on-demand service across the region into a seamless passenger experience.

ABQ RIDE prepares proposal for more autonomy from the city.

ABQ RIDE begins to implement proposal.

ABQ RIDE negotiates labor and union agreements.

ABQ RIDE enters into agreements with the City.

Phase 1   Phase 2   Phase 3

GOALS

Goals and Evaluation Overview

Existing conditions analysis, stakeholder engagement, and workshops with ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro all provided input in the identification of the region's key strengths and challenges. Working with the project stakeholders, six goals for improving transit service, operations, and governance in the region were then established to guide scenario development. The region's key strengths and challenges were transformed into criteria and grouped under goals for evaluating scenarios.

Proposed governance scenarios were developed to show how different organizational changes can accomplish the goals set for the project. Each scenario represents a different governance configuration and how agency decision-making bodies, operations, and administrative support relate to each other. Evaluating goals and their underlying criteria against these scenarios allows the strongest elements of each to be combined into the study's final recommendations.

Transit challenges in the region can be addressed under the current system, but other governance options may solve them more effectively. However, these options come with tradeoffs, such as added complexity or the time it takes to negotiate new agreements or coordinate across agencies. Our evaluation takes those tradeoffs into account under by providing a level of effort for each scenario.

The timeline below shows the process used to develop goals and create the evaluation criteria.

1 The project team analyzed existing conditions of the Rio Metro Regional Transit District to determine strengths and challenges.

2 Stakeholder interviews provided further insight into agency operation conditions and informed the strengths and challenges of the current governance structure.

3 The first workshop brought together the project team with ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro to identify priorities for the project.

4 Feedback from the workshop were reviewed and edited to produce six project goals.

5 Findings from all inputs were transformed into criteria for a successful governance model and grouped under the goals.

6 A scoring system between one and five was developed to evaluate each scenario using the criteria in each goal category.

Goals and Evaluation Criteria

The goal statements respond directly to the challenges and needs of the Rio Metro / ABQ RIDE systems and have informed the recommendations and implementation steps. The six project goals are interrelated and support each other. While providing transit service is the primary function of both agencies, the accompanying goals support the overall mission of providing the public with transportation options outside of driving.

SERVICE

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

This goal emphasizes the passenger-facing services that Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE provide. Providing safe routes that are useful and reliable to people is the primary goal of providing transit service, while strong internal planning and coordination help create a connected regional network.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network, realize items from the Rio Metro 2015 Vision Plan
- Serve Rio Rancho with bus service
- Have a more uniform and organized regional network
- Seamless demand response and non-fixed route service
- Provide clarity for riders
- Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security plan
- Implement zero emissions plans

STAFFING

Hire and retain the staff needed to operate service

The staffing goal is deeply tied to the service goal, and it is directly tied to some of the key challenges facing the region today. ABQ RIDE has yet to restore full pre-pandemic service due to challenges in hiring and retaining operators and mechanics.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Hire and retain operators and mechanics
- Have dedicated planning staff
- Have dedicated support/admin staff

Goals and Evaluation Criteria

FUNDING

Create sustainable sufficient funding streams

Both agencies have a mix of funding funding sources, including local, state, and federal funding opportunities. This goal includes having dedicated, predictable, and stable operating funds.

Evaluation Criteria:

– Build political will

– Have dedicated, steady funding

– Regional approach to grants

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Have an accountable and transparent process internally and to the public

The accountability goal focuses on having clear regional decision-making structures to make vision setting, long-term planning, and project prioritization legible to staff and the public.

Evaluation Criteria:

– Transit-focused internal leadership

– Transit-focused board members

EFFICIENCY

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

The efficiency of each organization hinges on clear and concise decision-making and efficient processes. The efficiency goal emphasizes the importance of internal capacity and coordination to provide service that meets the needs of the region.

Evaluation Criteria:

– Avoid duplicative full-time employees, facilities, and service

– Avoid duplicative software

– Avoid duplicative staff specializations

LEVEL OF EFFORT

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

Any organizational change requires a nonzero level of effort. This goal acknowledge this and supports making changes that help solve challenges within the agencies without over-complicating structural changes

Evaluation Criteria:

– Avoid needless disruption

– Minimize level of effort to implement

– Build political capital and public support

– Implement without a public vote, need for change in state law, or change to GRT if possible

SCENARIOS

Scenarios Overview

A major part of this project was the creation of different potential governance options, or scenarios. Each scenario includes discrete changes to the current governance model. While some elements of each scenario could be combined, the scenarios were designed to be distinct and complete to be evaluated independently to show the benefits and drawbacks of certain changes. The purpose of evaluating a range of scenarios prior to producing recommendations is to create a system to independently weigh the tradeoffs between different options and to consider the spectrum of changes that are possible.

The unique scenarios between the status quo and full consolidation of ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro are tailored specifically to respond to the issues and benefits we have learned about the current governance model. The status quo acts as the baseline and is compared to all the other scenarios to show how and to what degree those scenarios can improve upon the existing governance structure.

Funding changes were not a primary consideration in the scenario options. The addition of new GRT or funding allocation would be beneficial to providing additional service with any governance model. While some governance changes lend themselves more to a bid for new funding, those considerations were not a part of this scenario exercise.

Scenario Evaluation

Each scenario was evaluated for how well it meets the six goals using the evaluation criteria developed. Each criterion was given a score between 1 (easiest to implement) to 5 (most difficult to implement). Every scenarios that involved a change in governance structure were scored relative to the status quo scenario to measure that difference between the baseline and other organizational models.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

Each scenario also determined whether there is a need to change existing funding allocation and full-time employee counts for each agency. It is a budget-neutral analysis and only considers allocation changes, not overall funding changes.

Path to Developing and Evaluating Scenarios

The second stakeholder workshop produced many scenarios developed by agency staff.

The project team reviewed all the inputs and developed six final distinct scenarios, including status quo and full consolidation.

The six scenarios were evaluated based on goals through evaluation criteria to determine how easy each scenario's governance structure would address challenges across the region.

Scenarios Overview

Six scenarios were developed that address and build upon the current governance model. Each scenario shows different ways agencies could work together. For example, the Independent Agencies option adds more coordination, while the Regional Board option goes further by also combining paratransit services. Generally, each scenario incrementally advances integration between the two systems, however the scenario of Regional Demand Response could be implemented under any future state.

Status Quo

The Status Quo Scenario maintains all current organizational structures and was used to evaluate all other scenarios against.

Significant Coordination

The Significant Coordination Scenario integrates some ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro functions like passenger information and marketing, network planning, grant writing, and on-demand call center while keeping operations separate.

Regional Demand Response

The Regional Demand Response Scenario creates one-call/one-click passenger information for demand response services and works toward a shared brand for demand response services with consistent policies and shared operations.

Independent Agencies

The Independent Agencies Scenario creates a new transit agency outside of the City of Albuquerque and Rio Metro becomes fully independent from the Council of Governments.

Regional Board

The Regional Board Scenario creates a new regional board that has staff overseeing regional passenger information and marketing, network planning, grant writing, and on-demand service.

Full Consolidation

The Full Consolidation Scenario merges the two agencies fully under one, independent agency. In this scenario, a new regional board governs over the operations of all current Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE services.

Image from Workshop 2, where participants from many agencies created over a dozen different scenario options.

Status Quo

Overview: This scenario maintains all current organizational structures and was used to evaluate all other scenarios against.

This scenario includes no disruption to current organizational structures and subsequently does little to make it easier for the agencies to address their current challenges.

Benefits

- ABQ RIDE continues to share functions with and have easy access to other city departments

- Efficiency is currently high and remains high in all scenarios.

- ABQ RIDE is managed by transit-focused Director.

Tradeoffs

- ABQ RIDE struggles to retain operators. Rio Metro's workforce is more stable.

- ABQ RIDE's funding sources fluctuates. Rio Metro's funding is more stable.

- Rio Metro board meetings often get canceled, and Rio Metro's Executive Director is shared with MRCOG.

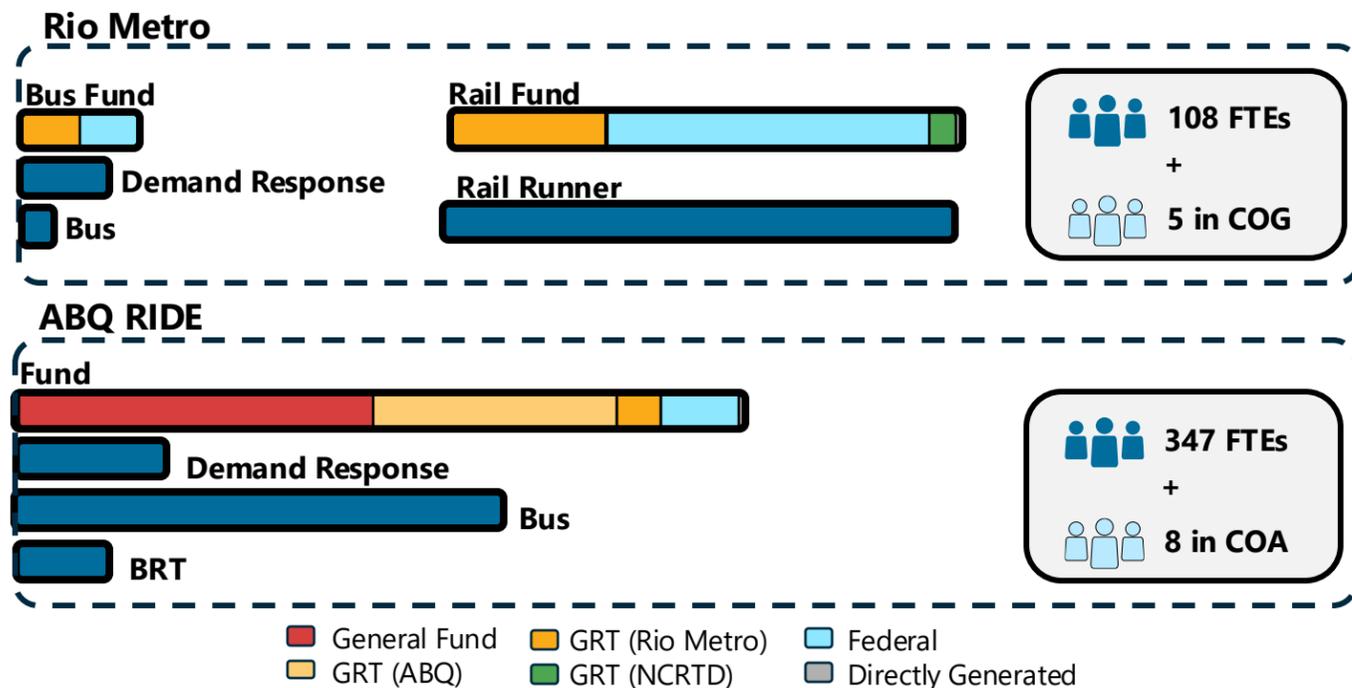- ABQ City Council has many focuses outside transit.
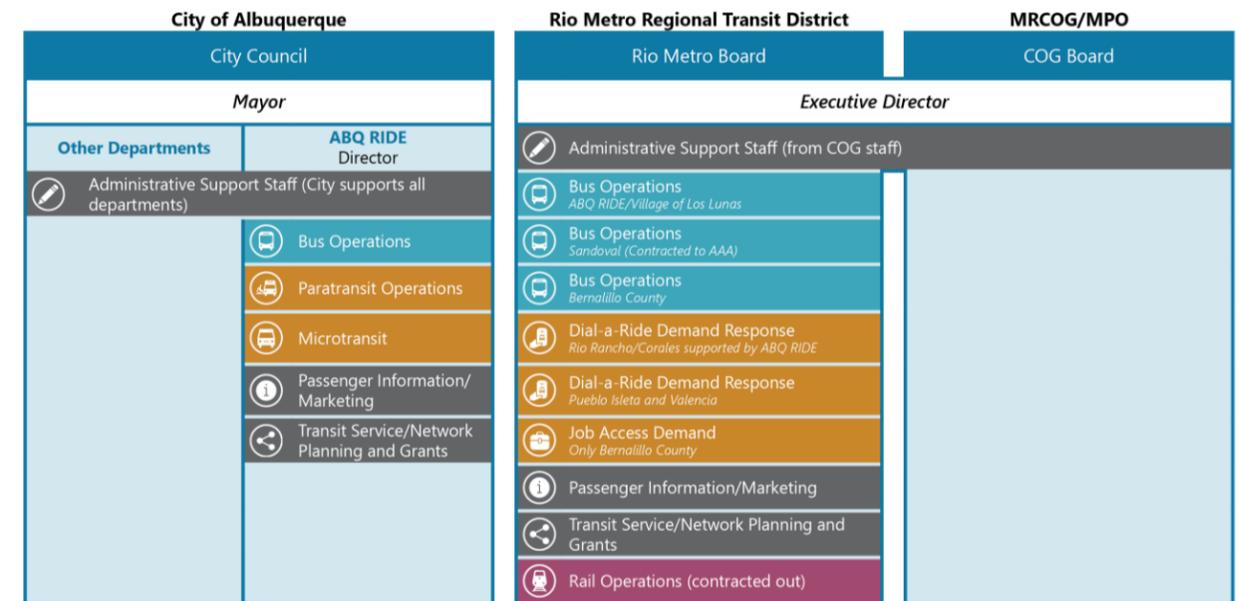
Status Quo

Evaluation Results

There are criteria that can be implemented easily with the Status Quo Scenario. Implementing the ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan, having dedicated planning staff, and avoiding duplicative employees, facilities, and service currently have low barriers to implementation. However, many criteria currently have very high barriers to implementation, especially those that are service-related.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

In the status quo, the City of Albuquerque allocates funds to ABQ RIDE through the General Fund and the city's Gross Receipts Tax (GRT). Rio Metro receives funding primarily from the regional GRT and federal funding. Most of ABQ RIDE's funding goes towards bus expenses, while Rio Metro's is mostly devoted to Rail Runner.

Rio Metro

Bus Fund
Rail Fund
Demand Response
Rail Runner
Bus

108 FTEs
+
5 in COG

ABQ RIDE

Fund
Demand Response
Bus
BRT

347 FTEs
+
8 in COA

- General Fund
- GRT (ABQ)
- GRT (Rio Metro)
- GRT (NCRTD)
- Federal
- Directly Generated

Evaluation Criteria	Score
Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network	
Realize items from the 2015 Vision Plan	
Serve Rio Rancho with bus service	
Make the regional network more uniform and organized	
Provide seamless paratransit services	
Provide seamless non-fixed route service	
Provide clarity for riders	
Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan	
Implement zero emissions plans – ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro	
Hire and retain operators and mechanics	
Have dedicated planning staff	
Have dedicated support/admin staff	
Build political will	
Have dedicated steady funding – ABQ RIDE	
Have dedicated steady funding – Rio Metro	
Approach regional grants	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – ABQ RIDE	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – Rio Metro	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – ABQ RIDE	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – Rio Metro/Regional	
Avoid duplicative FTEs, facilities, and service	
Avoid duplicative software	
Avoid duplicative staff specializations	
Avoid disruption	
Minimize level of effort to implement	
Build political capital and public support	
Implement without a change in state law	
Implement without a public vote (increase GRT)	

Status Quo

← Easier   Harder →

Significant Coordination

Overview: This scenario integrates some ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro functions like passenger information and marketing, network planning, grant writing, and on-demand call center while keeping operations separate.

This scenario prioritizes minimal disruption to current organizational structures while improving coordination for non-operational efforts among both agencies. Operations and funding remain the same as today (status quo). The consolidation is concentrated in planning and communication work, which includes a shared call center for dispatching and customer service and staff dedicated to shared passenger information, network planning, and grant writing. ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro can more easily align for long-term planning and resource allocation and could eventually rebrand to a single passenger-facing agency that remains structurally separate. This would simplify the rider experience while avoiding a large governance shift or operations changes. Day-to-day operations and budgets stay unchanged.

Benefits

- More planners and staff at ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro develop a cohesive and actionable regional vision and improve service connectivity between systems.

- Easier to pursue regional grants with more planners and shared grant writing. The federal government prioritizes coordinated approaches, and this scenario leverages shared resources to expand planning capacity.

- Passengers experience a better connected, more seamless system

- Minimal transition pains and disruption to existing systems

Tradeoffs

- No change to operational efficiency

- No change to agency organization or structures
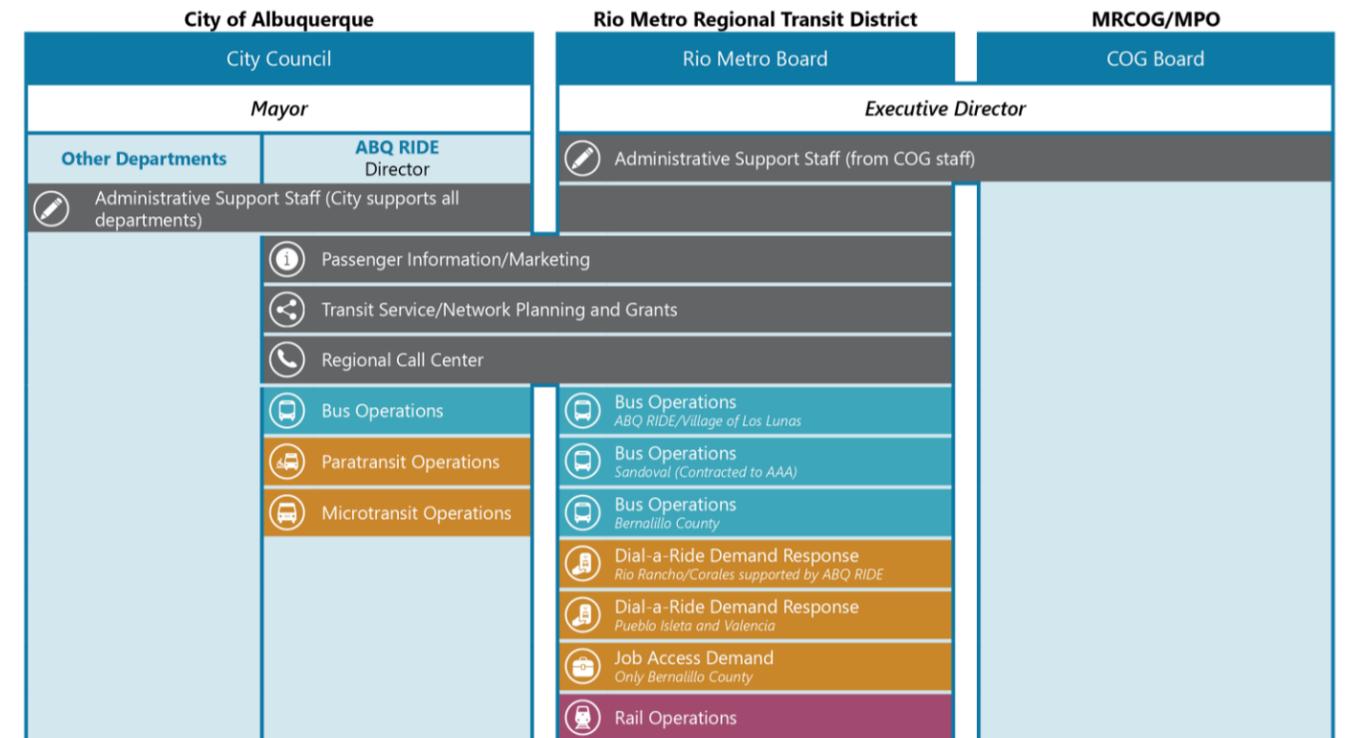
Case Study: Valley Metro (Phoenix Metropolitan Area, AZ)

- Valley Metro achieves regional transit coordination through a shared regional funding source and governance structure (regional transit board).

- The region coordinates 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 provider 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.

- This partial consolidation model balances efficient service delivery with local autonomy to create simple, easy to use transit services.
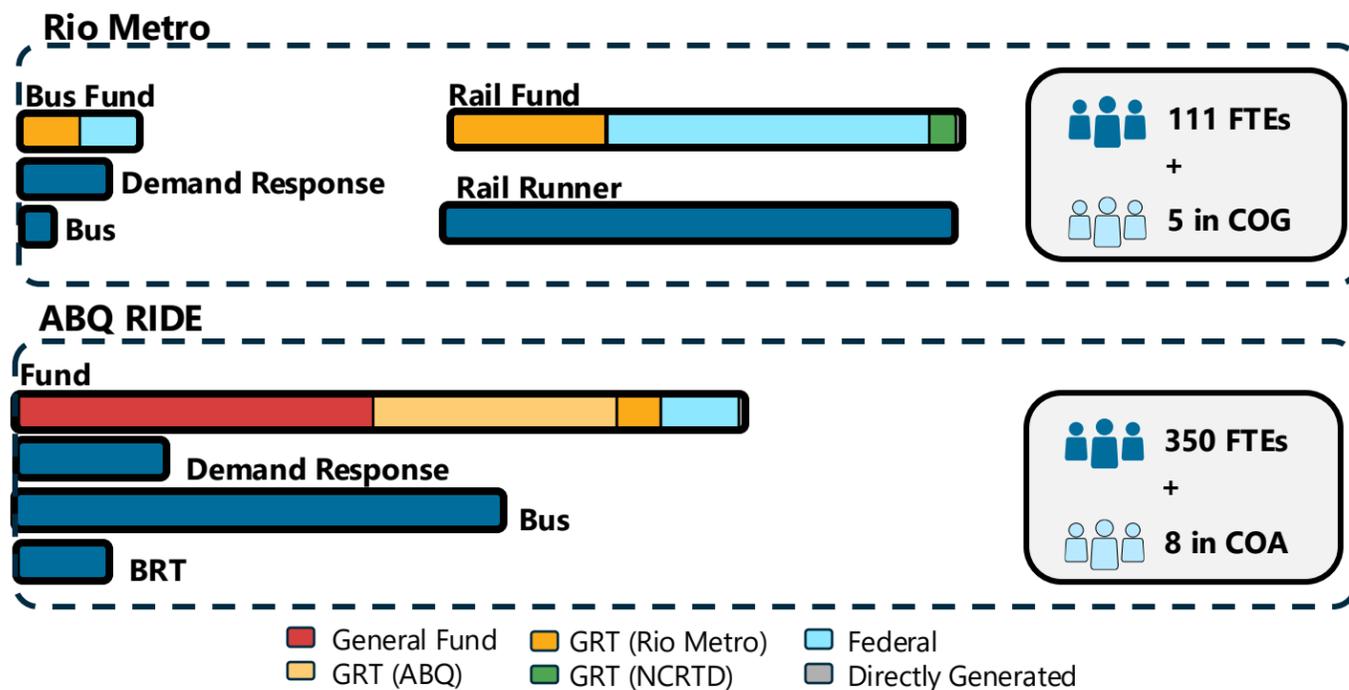
Significant Coordination

Evaluation Results

With this approach, improving transit service becomes easier because there are more planning staff to support long-term vision, integrate services and pursue additional funding. Overall, the result is better coordination between agencies, but the biggest benefit is that riders get a clearer picture of the transit system—it's presented as one connected regional network instead of separate services.

This option doesn't change how the agencies are funded and requires very little organizational restructuring or new laws.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

There are no changes to funding under this scenario. Both Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE add three FTEs each to better support regional planning and coordination efforts between the agencies.

Rio Metro

Bus Fund

Demand Response

Bus

Rail Fund

Rail Runner

111 FTEs
+
5 in COG

ABQ RIDE

Fund

Demand Response

Bus

BRT

350 FTEs
+
8 in COA

Legend:
- General Fund
- GRT (ABQ)
- GRT (Rio Metro)
- GRT (NCRTD)
- Federal
- Directly Generated

Evaluation Criteria	Score
Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network	
Realize items from the 2015 Vision Plan	
Serve Rio Rancho with bus service	
Make the regional network more uniform and organized	
Provide seamless paratransit services	
Provide seamless non-fixed route service	
Provide clarity for riders	
Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan	
Implement zero emissions plans – ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro	
Hire and retain operators and mechanics	
Have dedicated planning staff	
Have dedicated support/admin staff	
Build political will	
Have dedicated steady funding – ABQ RIDE	
Have dedicated steady funding – Rio Metro	
Approach regional grants	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – ABQ RIDE	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – Rio Metro	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – ABQ RIDE	
Prioritize transit-focused board members –Rio Metro/Regional	
Avoid duplicative FTEs, facilities, and service	
Avoid duplicative software	
Avoid duplicative staff specializations	
Avoid disruption	
Minimize level of effort to implement	
Build political capital and public support	
Implement without a change in state law	
Implement without a public vote (increase GRT)	

Status Quo   Significant Coordination   ← Easier   Harder →

Regional Demand Response

Overview: This scenario combines the agencies' demand response services into one system with unified branding, policies, and operations. Riders would have a single point of contact for all information and booking (one-call/one-click).

Under this approach, both agencies' demand response services would operate as one service with a single unified service, with one brand, one qualifications process, one call center, and one pool of vehicles. A major change will be consistent policies across boundary lines for eligibility, rider guide, booking platforms, and scheduling. ADA paratransit would remain separate from other demand response services (like curb-to-curb and Job Access), but it could share the same dispatch system.

This scenario focuses only on demand response operations. Regular bus routes, staff structure, payroll, vehicle maintenance, funding, and governance would all stay the same.

Benefits

- Simplifies service for riders

- Shared Operations - ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro share staff and dispatching software

- Coordinates paratransit and on-demand schedule and dispatch systems

- Minimal disruption (but still advances coordination)

Tradeoffs

- Requires a significant level of ongoing coordination for both ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro to maintain a consistent customer experience
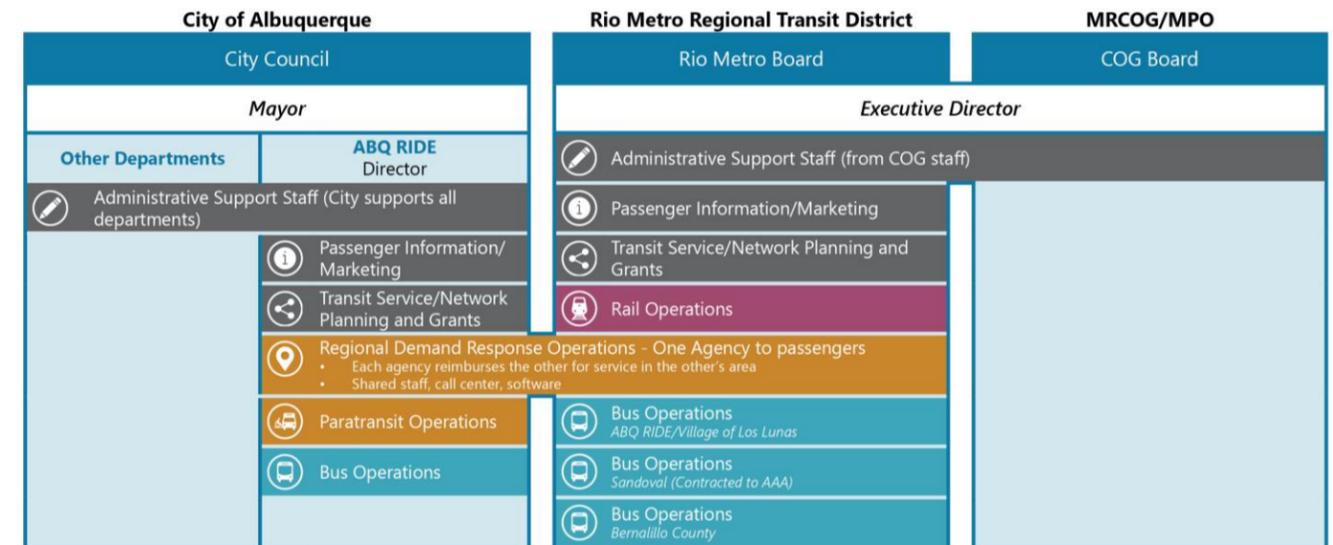
Case Study: Norwalk Transit District (Norwalk, CT)

- Norwalk Transit District (NTD) provides regional paratransit services outside of its fixed route service area.

- NTD paratransit services are split into five service areas.

- This paratransit service model consolidates 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.
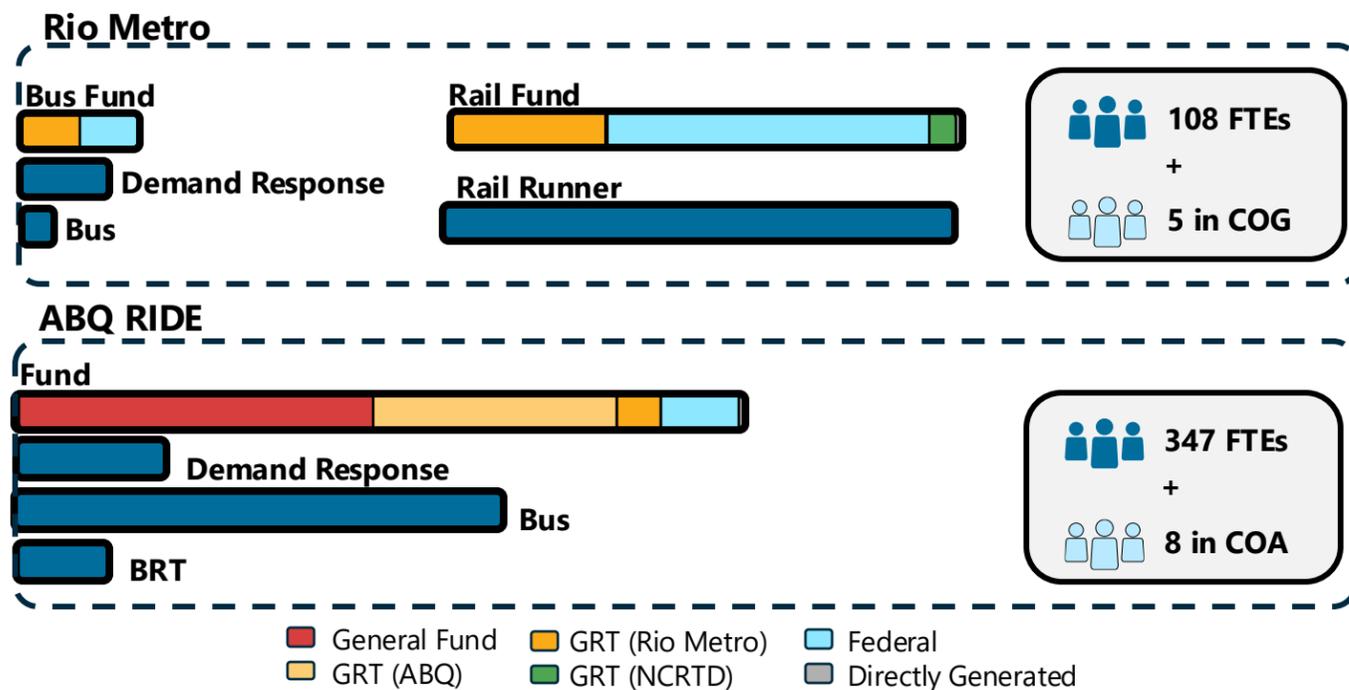
Regional Demand Response

Evaluation Results

This approach makes demand response services much easier to use, especially for riders who need to qualify for the service. With one application process and one source of information, it's simpler for people to access and use these services across the region.

For ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro, combining demand response services could potentially save money by sharing technology and resources to improve efficiency. This change could serve as a trial run for future collaboration between the agencies, and it would cause the least disruption to how they're currently governed.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

There are no changes to funding or employment counts under this scenario.

Rio Metro

Bus Fund
Demand Response
Bus

Rail Fund
Rail Runner

108 FTEs
+
5 in COG

ABQ RIDE

Fund
Demand Response
Bus
BRT

347 FTEs
+
8 in COA

General Fund   GRT (Rio Metro)   Federal
GRT (ABQ)   GRT (NCRTD)   Directly Generated

| Evaluation Criteria	Score
Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network	▣▣▣▢
Realize items from the 2015 Vision Plan	▣▣▣▢
Serve Rio Rancho with bus service	▣▣▣▣
Make the regional network more uniform and organized	▣▣▢▢
Provide seamless paratransit services	▣▨▨▨
Provide seamless non-fixed route service	▣▣▨▢
Provide clarity for riders	▣▣▨▢
Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan	▣▢▢▢
Implement zero emissions plans – ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro	▣▣▣▢
Hire and retain operators and mechanics	▣▣▣▣
Have dedicated planning staff	▣▢▢▢
Have dedicated support/admin staff	▣▣▣▣
Build political will	▣▢▢▢
Have dedicated steady funding – ABQ RIDE	▣▣▣▣
Have dedicated steady funding – Rio Metro	▣▢▢▢
Approach regional grants	▣▣▢▢
Build transit-focused internal leadership – ABQ RIDE	▣▣▢▢
Build transit-focused internal leadership – Rio Metro	▣▣▣▢
Prioritize transit-focused board members – ABQ RIDE	▣▣▣▢
Prioritize transit-focused board members –Rio Metro/Regional	▣▣▣▢
Avoid duplicative FTEs, facilities, and service	▣▢▢▢
Avoid duplicative software	▣▨▢▢
Avoid duplicative staff specializations	▣▢▢▢
Avoid disruption	▨▣▢▢
Minimize level of effort to implement	▨▣▢▢
Build political capital and public support	▨▣▢▢
Implement without a change in state law	▣▢▢▢
Implement without a public vote (increase GRT)	▣▢▢▢

Status Quo ▨   Regional Demand Response ■   ← Easier Harder →

Independent Agencies

Overview: This scenario creates a new transit agency outside of the City of Albuquerque and Rio Metro becomes fully independent from the Council of Governments.

The Independent Agencies Scenario creates more autonomy for both ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro, although it is a much bigger change for ABQ RIDE. ABQ RIDE becomes its own independent city agency, not dissimilar to a water or electric utility or the housing authority. Unlike those authorities, it would have long term funding agreements with the City for a dedicated portion of GRT and the Mayor/City Council would appoint a large share of its board members. ABQ RIDE would have its own General Manager, governing board, dedicated funding sources, some dedicated support departments (some remain shared with City through MOUs), and union agreements specific to transit operations and maintenance.

Rio Metro becomes independent from the COG, with its own director and staff.
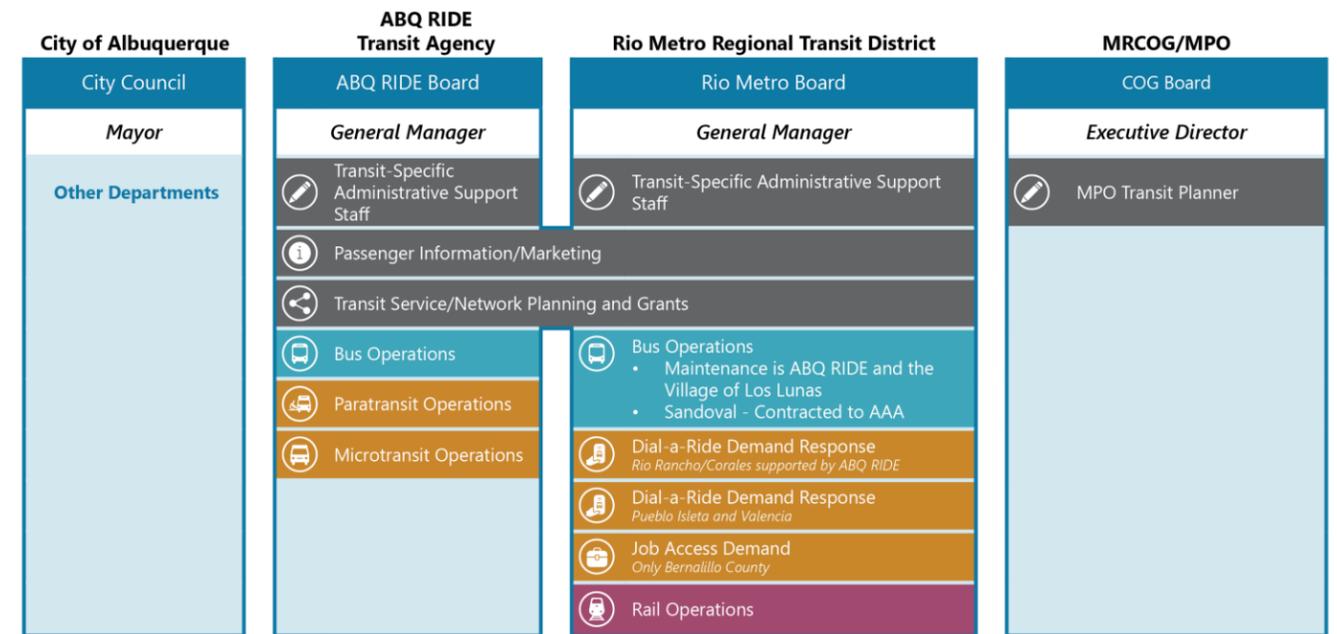
Benefits

- ABQ RIDE has more control/autonomy over service planning. Improved opportunity to implement Recovery Network

- Transit-focused leadership and Boards

- Much easier for ABQ RIDE to hire and retain operators and mechanics, addressing vacant positions, subject to new union agreements

Tradeoffs

- ABQ RIDE may require a new law and public vote to separate from the city

- Existing efficiencies between ABQ RIDE and City of Albuquerque could be lost by the agency gaining independence

- High disruption to transition to this scenario, particularly for ABQ RIDE. This approach gives both agencies more independence, but it's a bigger change for ABQ RIDE.

City of Albuquerque	ABQ RIDE Transit Agency	Rio Metro Regional Transit District	MRCOG/MPO
City Council	ABQ RIDE Board	Rio Metro Board	COG Board
Mayor	*General Manager*	*General Manager*	*Executive Director*
Other Departments	Transit-Specific Administrative Support Staff	Transit-Specific Administrative Support Staff	MPO Transit Planner
	Passenger Information/Marketing		
	Transit Service/Network Planning and Grants		
	Bus Operations	Bus Operations • Maintenance is ABQ RIDE and the Village of Los Lunas • Sandoval - Contracted to AAA	
	Paratransit Operations	Dial-a-Ride Demand Response *Rio Rancho/Corales supported by ABQ RIDE*	
	Microtransit Operations	Dial-a-Ride Demand Response *Pueblo Isleta and Valencia*	
		Job Access Demand *Only Bernalillo County*	
		Rail Operations	

Case Study: 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 the approval of two state senate bills currently undergoing review, one of which identifies a dedicated funding source for the new independent agency. It presents the importance of the logistics involved in creating a transit agency and how the political arena will dictate the transition process for governance, operations, and funding.
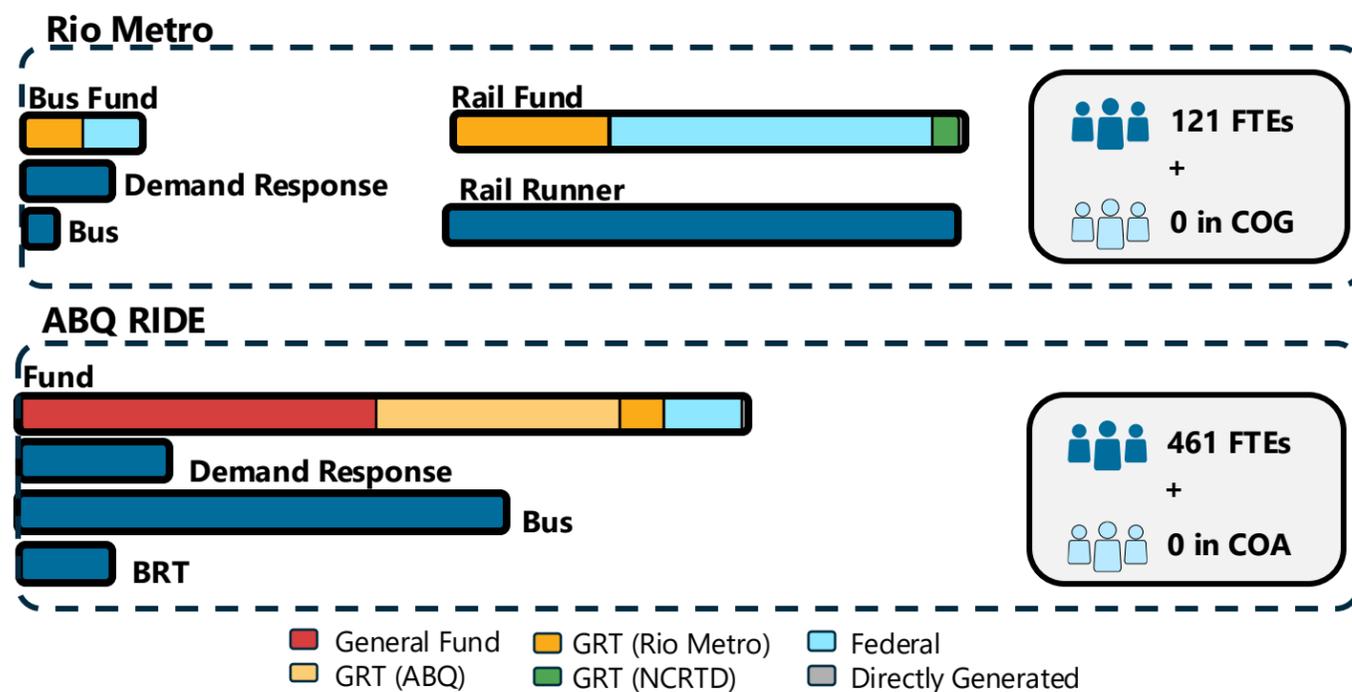
Independent Agencies

Evaluation Results

With this approach, both agencies have more freedom to adjust their staffing and governance to be more responsive to community needs). Riders would benefit from more organization capacity to focus specifically on transit needs. While funding would require negotiation, it could ultimately be more stable and predictable through multi-year agreements.

However, this scenario requires major changes to current structures. It would involve reassigning roles, creating legal agreements with the City of Albuquerque and possibly other entities, and may require new state legislation to fully authorize.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

Under this scenario, the City is still the primary funder of ABQ RIDE. Local funding allocation is determined on multi-year cycles instead of through the city's annual budgeting process. Employment also shifts significantly. Planning and complementary roles all work through Rio Metro and ABQ RIDE, separating from the COG and City of Albuquerque, respectively.

Rio Metro

Bus Fund
Demand Response
Bus
Rail Fund
Rail Runner

121 FTEs + 0 in COG

ABQ RIDE

Fund
Demand Response
Bus
BRT

461 FTEs + 0 in COA

General Fund   GRT (Rio Metro)   Federal
GRT (ABQ)   GRT (NCRTD)   Directly Generated

Evaluation Criteria	Score
Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network	
Realize items from the 2015 Vision Plan	
Serve Rio Rancho with bus service	
Make the regional network more uniform and organized	
Provide seamless paratransit services	
Provide seamless non-fixed route service	
Provide clarity for riders	
Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan	
Implement zero emissions plans – ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro	
Hire and retain operators and mechanics	
Have dedicated planning staff	
Have dedicated support/admin staff	
Build political will	
Have dedicated steady funding – ABQ RIDE	
Have dedicated steady funding – Rio Metro	
Approach regional grants	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – ABQ RIDE	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – Rio Metro	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – ABQ RIDE	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – Rio Metro/Regional	
Avoid duplicative FTEs, facilities, and service	
Avoid duplicative software	
Avoid duplicative staff specializations	
Avoid disruption	
Minimize level of effort to implement	
Build political capital and public support	
Implement without a change in state law	
Implement without a public vote (increase GRT)	

Status Quo   Independent Agencies   Easier   Harder

Regional Board

Overview: This scenario creates a new regional board that has staff overseeing regional passenger information and marketing, network planning, grant writing, and on-demand service.

This approach combines elements of the "Independent Agencies" scenario with a new regional board. The board would handle the big-picture vision and funding, while ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro would continue operating day-to-day services.

Setting up this new regional board would likely be part of a larger effort that would also include increased GRT funding for transit in the region. This board would allocate that funding. Increased funding with a regional mechanism to distribute the funding contribute to the betterment of the internal functioning and passenger experience and usability. The staff working for the board serve both agencies with support administration, passenger information services, high-level network planning, and grant writing. This scenario also includes operating demand response services as a single unified service.

Benefits

- Better connected regional fixed-route, on-demand and paratransit services
- If additional funding is approved, capacity is increased for better transit service
- Centralized grant applications contribute to increased overall funding
- Regional transit board administers funding and oversee regional planning decisions

Tradeoffs

- ABQ RIDE may require a new law and public vote to separate from the city
- Existing efficiencies between ABQ RIDE and City of Albuquerque could be lost by the agency gaining independence
- High disruption to transition to this scenario, particularly for ABQ RIDE
- Would likely require additional GRT either increasing the current tax rate or adding a new tax for shared staff
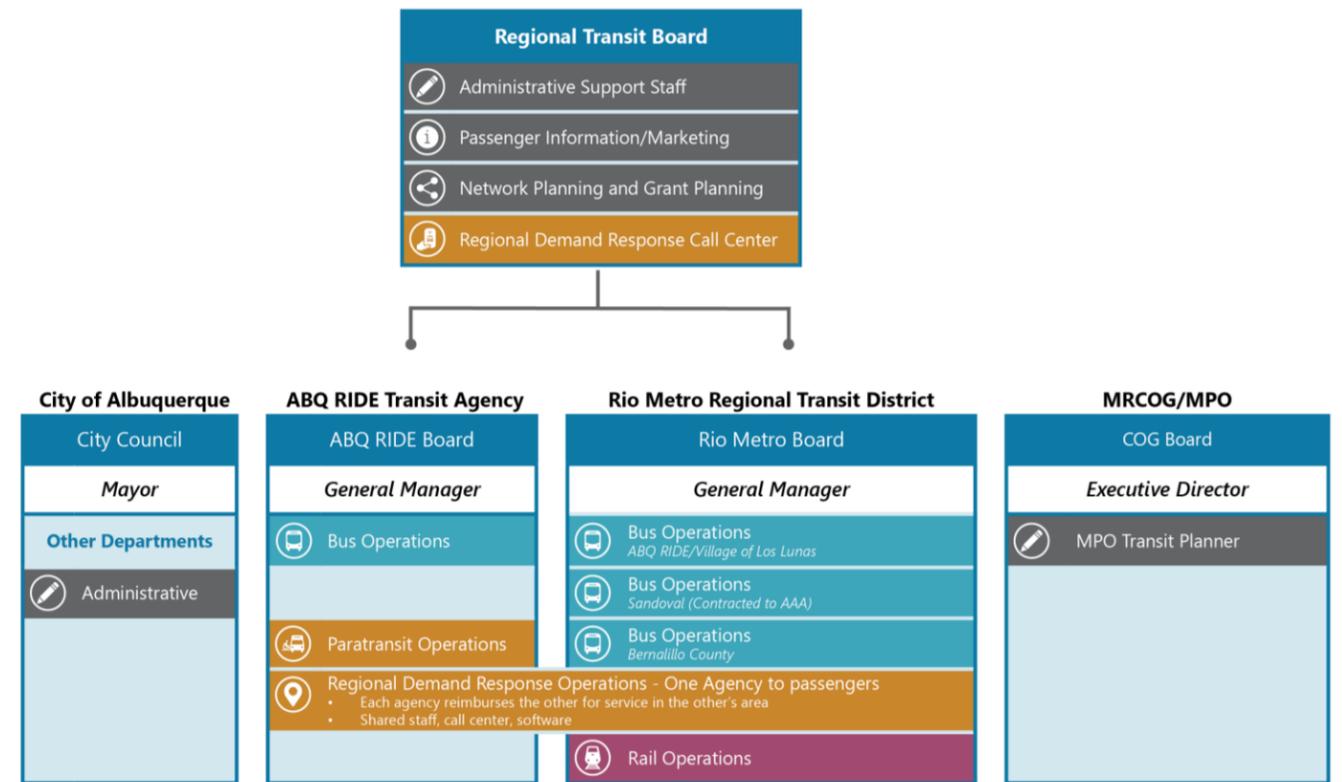
Case Study: Regional Transportation Authority (Chicagoland, IL)

- 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.
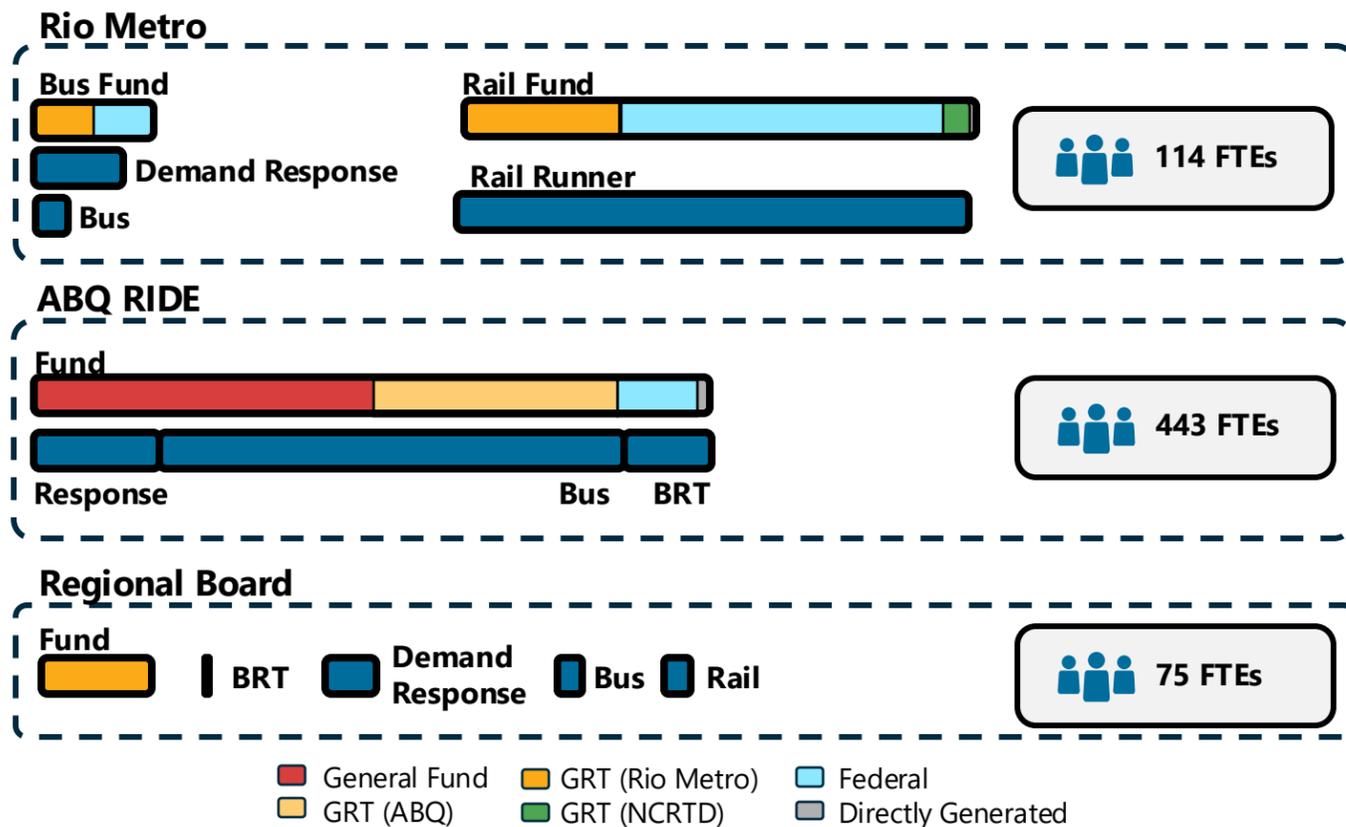
Regional Board

Evaluation Results

This approach offers the biggest benefits—more service, better staffing and retention, improved governance, and more expanded funding. However, it's also the most difficult to implement outside of full consolidation. It would require new legislation, legal agreements to create independent agencies, and establishing a new board and organizational structure for one or both agencies.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

Some funding and some FTEs are shifted to the Regional Board, which could also be covered by additional GRT funding. ABQ RIDE's primary funding would be allocated by Albuquerque's City Council.

Rio Metro

Bus Fund
Rail Fund
Demand Response
Bus
Rail Runner

114 FTEs

ABQ RIDE

Fund
Response
Bus
BRT

443 FTEs

Regional Board

Fund
BRT
Demand Response
Bus
Rail

75 FTEs

Legend:
- General Fund
- GRT (ABQ)
- GRT (Rio Metro)
- GRT (NCRTD)
- Federal
- Directly Generated

Evaluation Criteria	Score
Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network	
Realize items from the 2015 Vision Plan	
Serve Rio Rancho with bus service	
Make the regional network more uniform and organized	
Provide seamless paratransit services	
Provide seamless non-fixed route service	
Provide clarity for riders	
Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan	
Implement zero emissions plans – ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro	
Hire and retain operators and mechanics	
Have dedicated planning staff	
Have dedicated support/admin staff	
Build political will	
Have dedicated steady funding – ABQ RIDE	
Have dedicated steady funding – Rio Metro	
Approach regional grants	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – ABQ RIDE	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – Rio Metro	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – ABQ RIDE	
Prioritize transit-focused board members –Rio Metro/Regional	
Avoid duplicative FTEs, facilities, and service	
Avoid duplicative software	
Avoid duplicative staff specializations	
Avoid disruption	
Minimize level of effort to implement	
Build political capital and public support	
Implement without a change in state law	
Implement without a public vote (increase GRT)	

Status Quo
Regional Board

◄ Easier   Harder ►

Full Consolidation

Overview: This scenario fully merges ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro into one independent regional agency governed by a single board.

Under full consolidation, one agency would operate all current services from both ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro. All administrative functions, staff, and payroll would be combined under one organization.
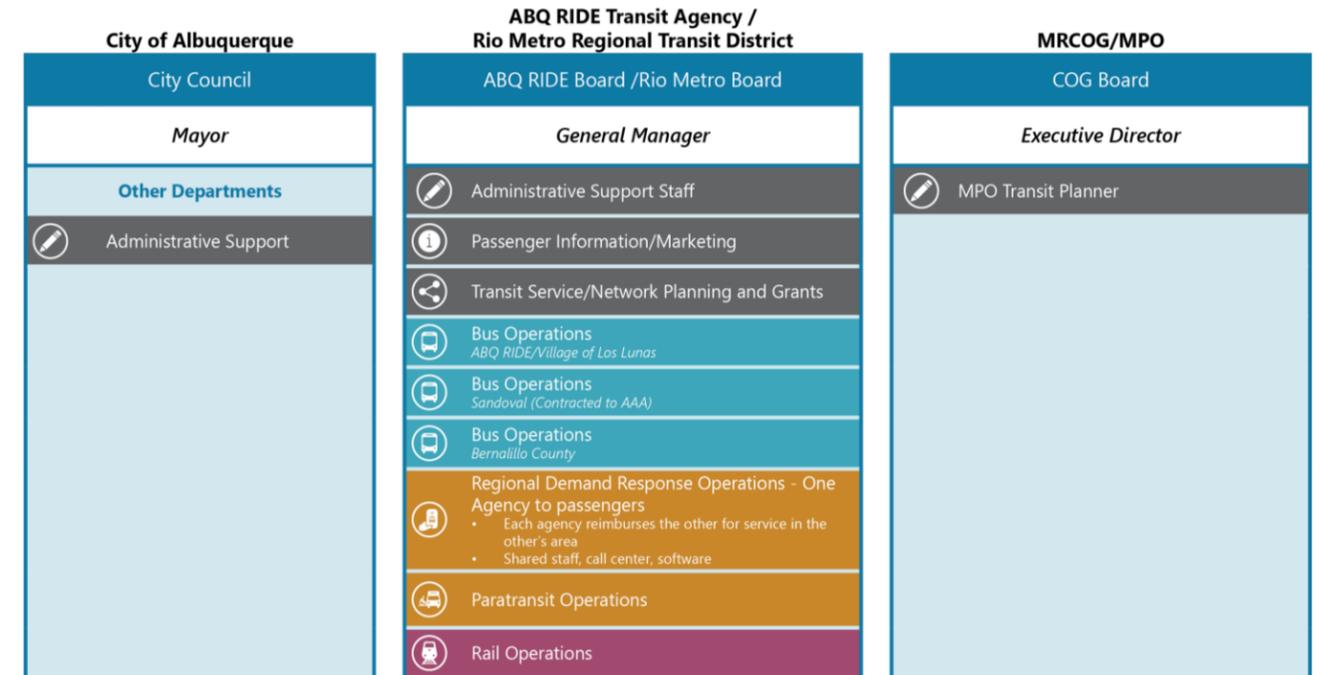
All administrative functions would be under the fully merged agency a single staff and payroll. Current funding streams would continue, like the City's current contributions to ABQ RIDE, through multi-year agreements. Rail Runner would operate under the new merged agency but maintains funding an operations agreements with NMDOT and NCRTD. Labor agreements would need to be renegotiated under the new agency.

Benefits

- The region has one connected, seamless transit network, and shared infrastructure and facilities use combined resources to upgrade and plan operations

- One board dedicated to transit services regionally with agency to build political will and potential for new GRT funding

- Consolidated demand response dispatch and operations better allocate and organize available staff and vehicles

Tradeoffs

- Very high disruption to transition to this scenario for both agencies

- Complete staff and system overhaul

- Existing efficiencies between ABQ RIDE and City of Albuquerque could be lost by the agency merging with Rio Metro

- Would require additional GRT either increasing the current tax rate or adding a new tax

City of Albuquerque
- City Council
- *Mayor*
- **Other Departments**
- Administrative Support

ABQ RIDE Transit Agency / Rio Metro Regional Transit District
- ABQ RIDE Board /Rio Metro Board
- *General Manager*
- Administrative Support Staff
- Passenger Information/Marketing
- Transit Service/Network Planning and Grants
- Bus Operations *ABQ RIDE/Village of Los Lunas*
- Bus Operations *Sandoval (Contracted to AAA)*
- Bus Operations *Bernalillo County*
- Regional Demand Response Operations - One Agency to passengers
  - Each agency reimburses the other for service in the other's area
  - Shared staff, call center, software
- Paratransit Operations
- Rail Operations

MRCOG/MPO
- COG Board
- *Executive Director*
- MPO Transit Planner

Case Study: Greater Portland Metro (Portland, ME)

- South Portland Bus Service 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.

- While this case study provides an example of a local provider merging with a regional provider, Greater Portland Transit District was a larger operation than the local service, unlike the case with ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro. Still, this consolidation was meant to redistribute organizational structure to improve service management and better connect interconnected service areas.
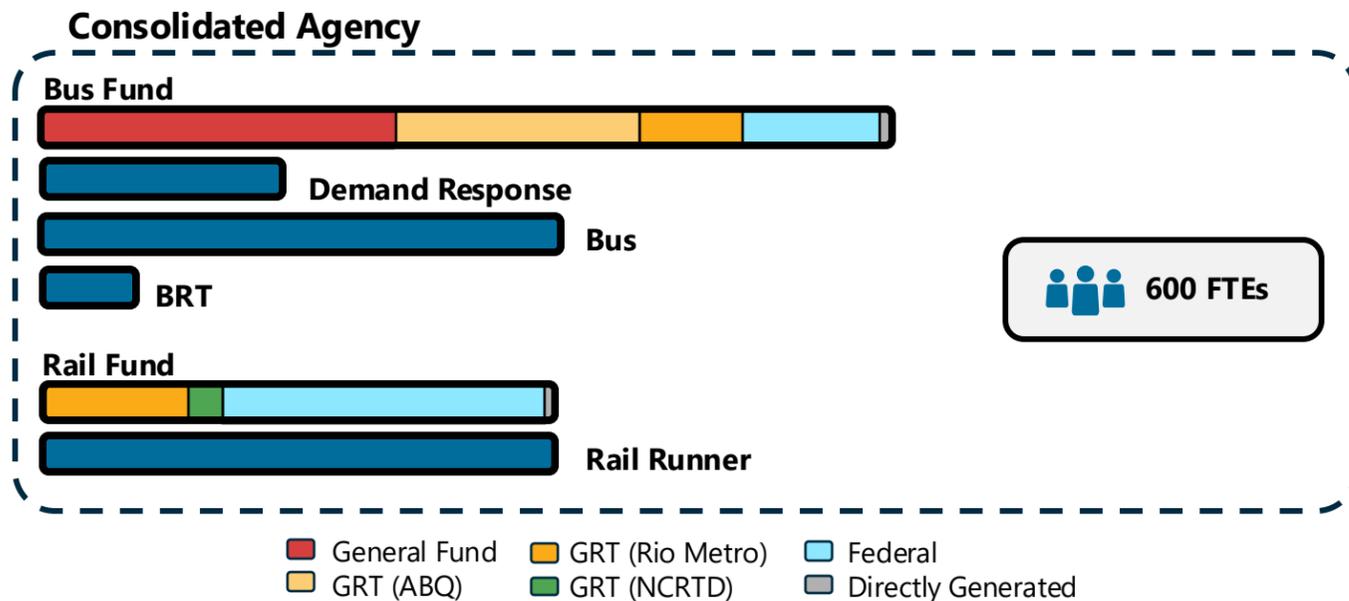
Full Consolidation

Evaluation Results

Like the Regional Board scenario, Full Consolidation offers the greatest benefits to better implement more service, hire and retain staff, improve governance of transit in the region, and consolidate and optimize funding streams and grant writing. It also provides some efficiency goals.

This scenario comes with a significant effort to implement. It would involve either creating a new agency or completely merging one agency into the other. While it may not require a law, since it would essentially replace Rio Metro as the regional agency, the labor and capital changes would have high costs. A key drawback is that fully consolidating does not provide benefits that can't be achieved by separate agencies with a Regional Board.

Funding and Full Time Employees (FTEs)

While funding sources would be consolidated, the total amount per mode would not shift considerably.

Consolidated Agency

Bus Fund

Demand Response

Bus

BRT

Rail Fund

Rail Runner

600 FTEs

- General Fund
- GRT (ABQ)
- GRT (Rio Metro)
- GRT (NCRTD)
- Federal
- Directly Generated

Evaluation Criteria	Score
Implement the ABQ RIDE Full Recovery Network	
Realize items from the 2015 Vision Plan	
Serve Rio Rancho with bus service	
Make the regional network more uniform and organized	
Provide seamless paratransit services	
Provide seamless non-fixed route service	
Provide clarity for riders	
Implement ABQ RIDE Safety and Security Plan	
Implement zero emissions plans – ABQ RIDE and Rio Metro	
Hire and retain operators and mechanics	
Have dedicated planning staff	
Have dedicated support/admin staff	
Build political will	
Have dedicated steady funding – ABQ RIDE	
Have dedicated steady funding – Rio Metro	
Approach regional grants	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – ABQ RIDE	
Build transit-focused internal leadership – Rio Metro	
Prioritize transit-focused board members – ABQ RIDE	
Prioritize transit-focused board members –Rio Metro/Regional	
Avoid duplicative FTEs, facilities, and service	
Avoid duplicative software	
Avoid duplicative staff specializations	
Avoid disruption	
Minimize level of effort to implement	
Build political capital and public support	
Implement without a change in state law	
Implement without a public vote (increase GRT)	

Status Quo   Full Consolidation   Easier Harder

54

APPENDIX: EXISTING CONDITIONS AND PEER REVIEW

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.**
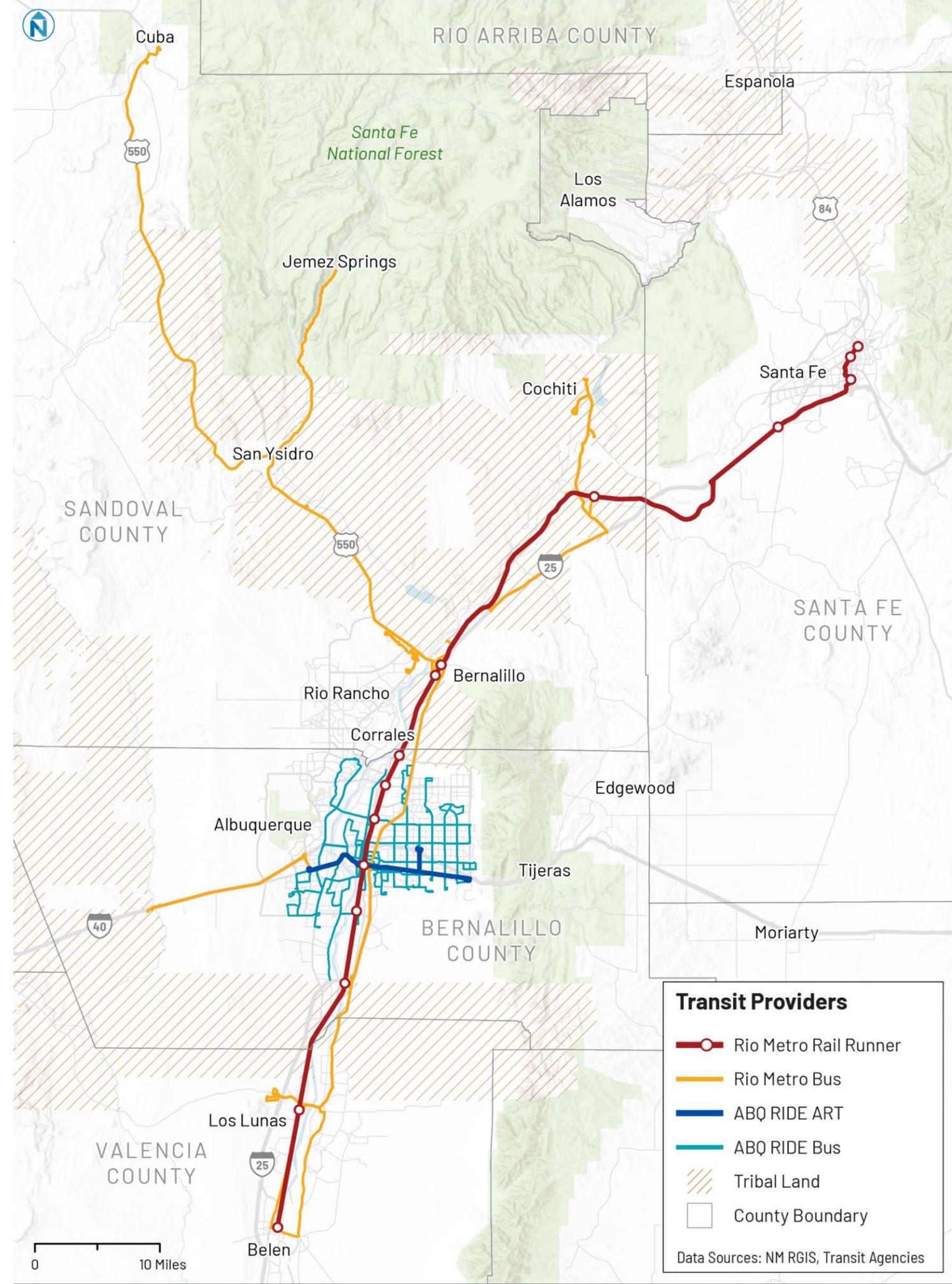
Rio Metro Service Area Population

- Albuquerque
- Rest of Bernalillo County
- Sandoval County
- Valencia County

9%
17%
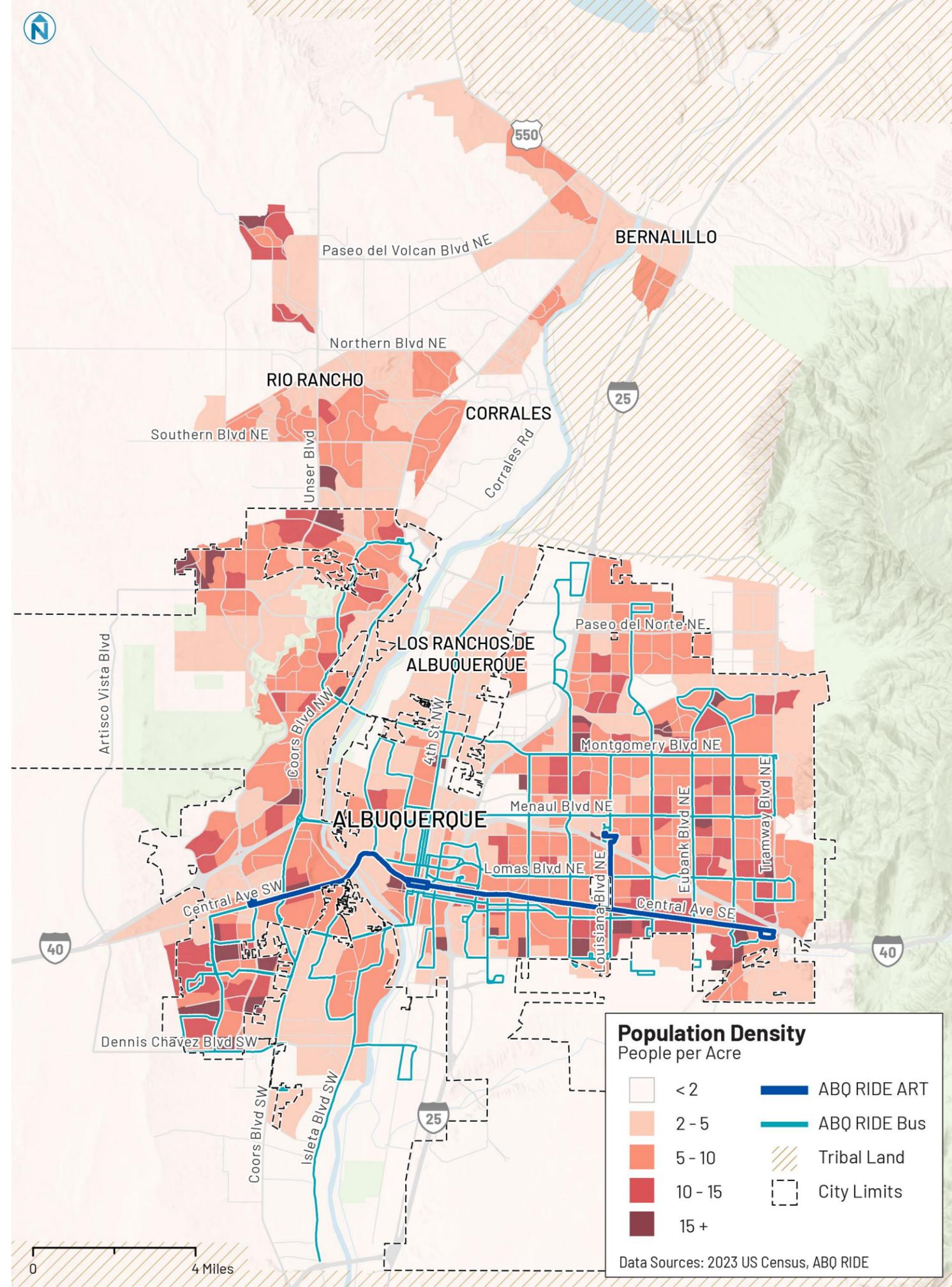12%
62%
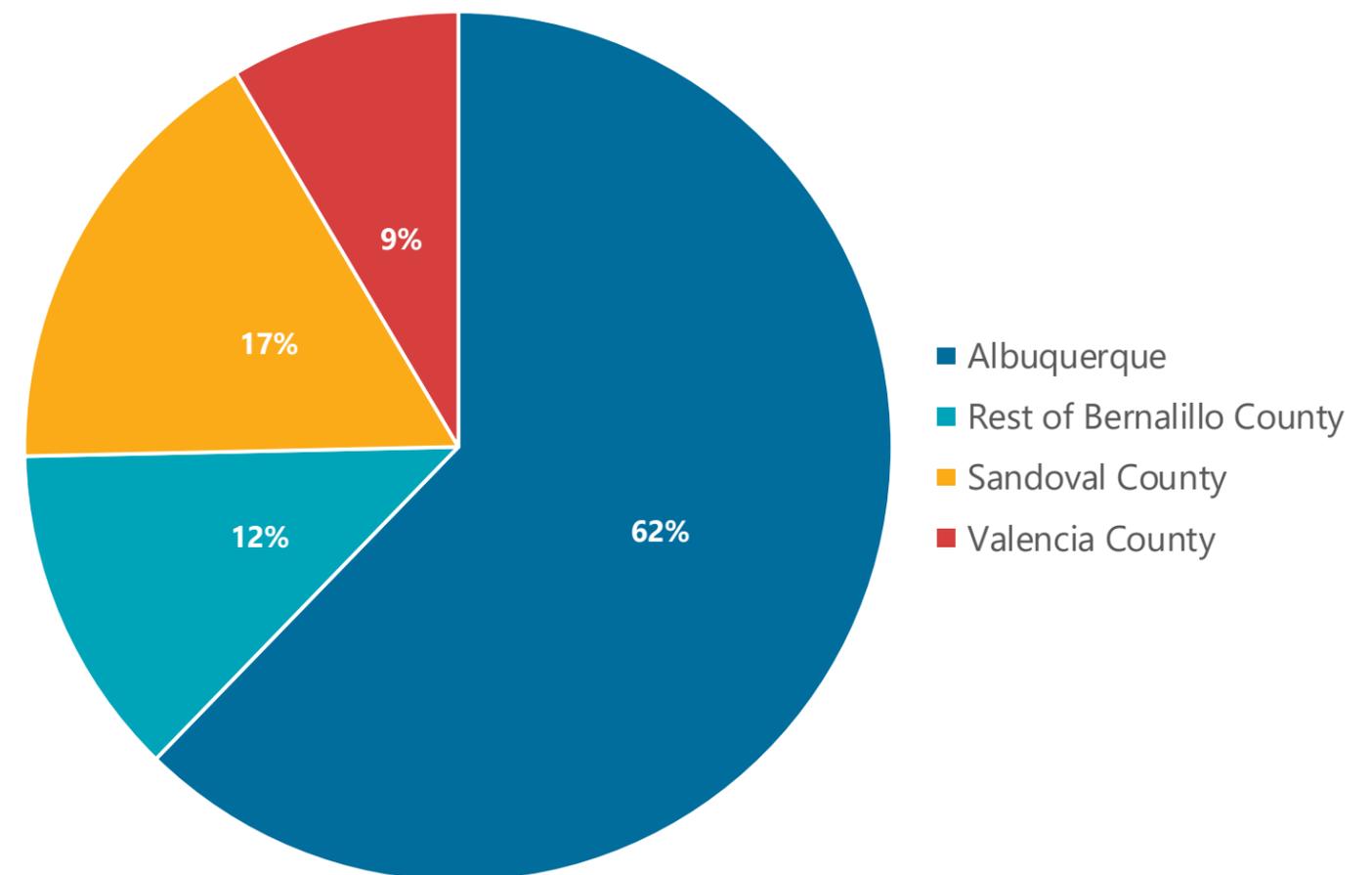
Data Source: 2023 US Census

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, Alvardo Transportation Center is a convenient transfer hub, and ABQ RIDE buses also connect to Rail Runner at Montaño.

- 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.**

Transit Providers

— Rio Metro Rail Runner
— Rio Metro Bus
— ABQ RIDE ART
— ABQ RIDE Bus
⫽ Tribal Land
▢ County Boundary

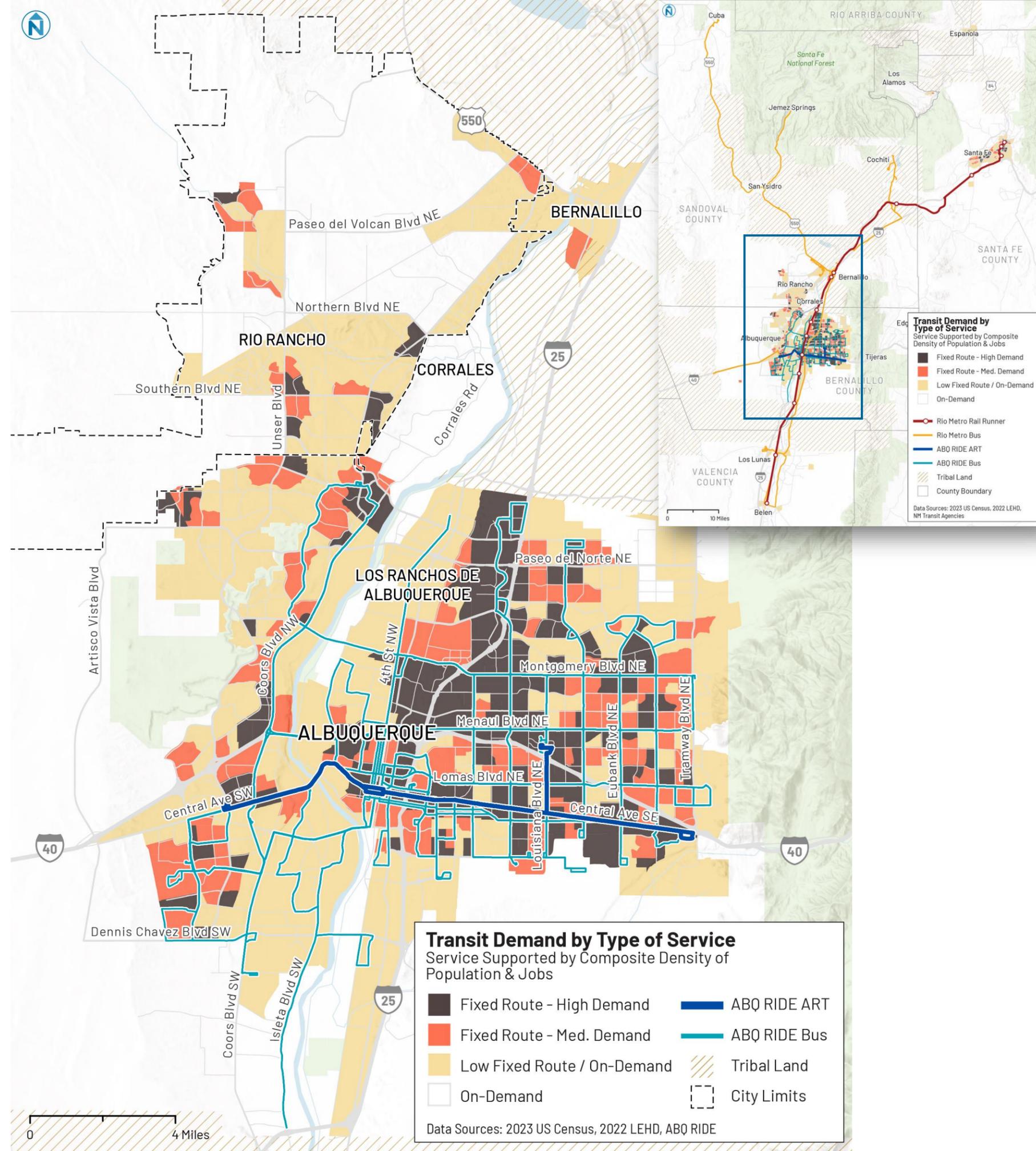Data Sources: NM RGIS, Transit Agencies

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.**

Population Density
People per Acre

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

- ABQ RIDE ART
- ABQ RIDE Bus
- Tribal Land
- City Limits

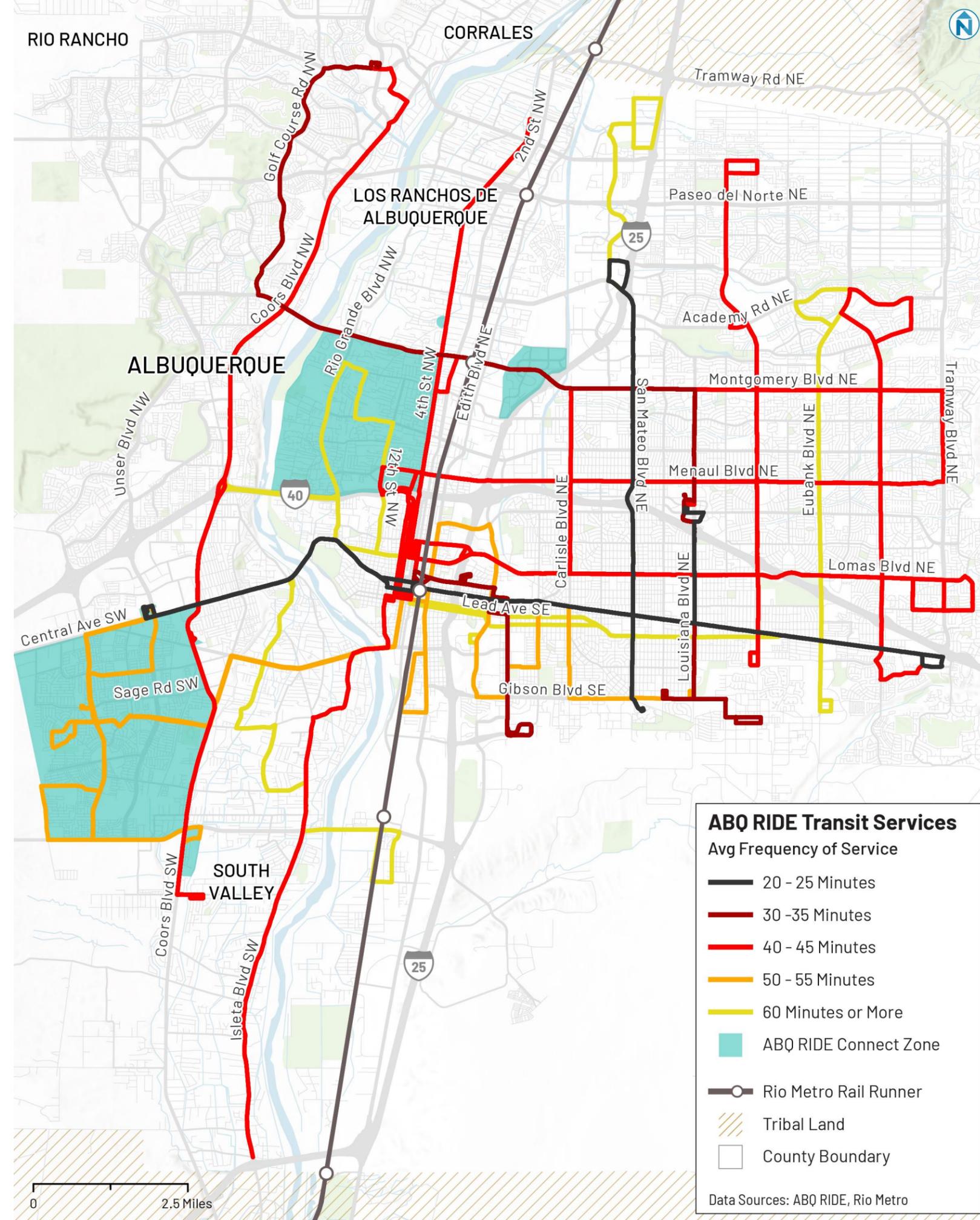Data Sources: 2023 US Census, ABQ RIDE

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.**

Transit Demand by Type of Service
Service Supported by Composite Density of Population & Jobs

- Fixed Route - High Demand
- Fixed Route - Med. Demand
- Low Fixed Route / On-Demand
- On-Demand
- ABQ RIDE ART
- ABQ RIDE Bus
- Tribal Land
- City Limits

Data Sources: 2023 US Census, 2022 LEHD, ABQ RIDE

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.

ABQ RIDE Transit Services
Avg Frequency of Service

▬	20 – 25 Minutes
▬	30 –35 Minutes
▬	40 – 45 Minutes
▬	50 – 55 Minutes
▬	60 Minutes or More
▮	ABQ RIDE Connect Zone
—◯—	Rio Metro Rail Runner
▨	Tribal Land
☐	County Boundary

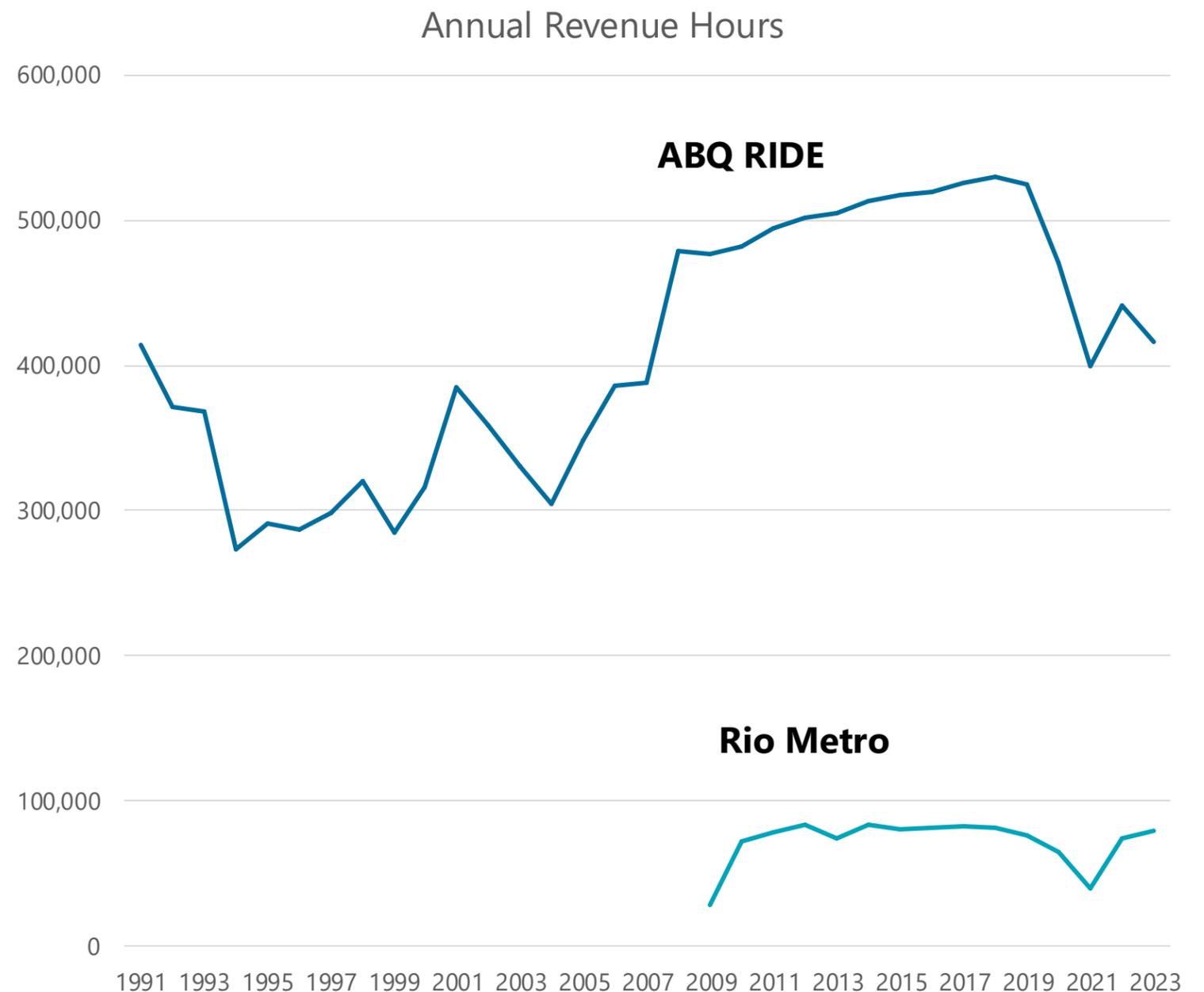Data Sources: ABQ RIDE, Rio Metro

0   2.5 Miles

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.
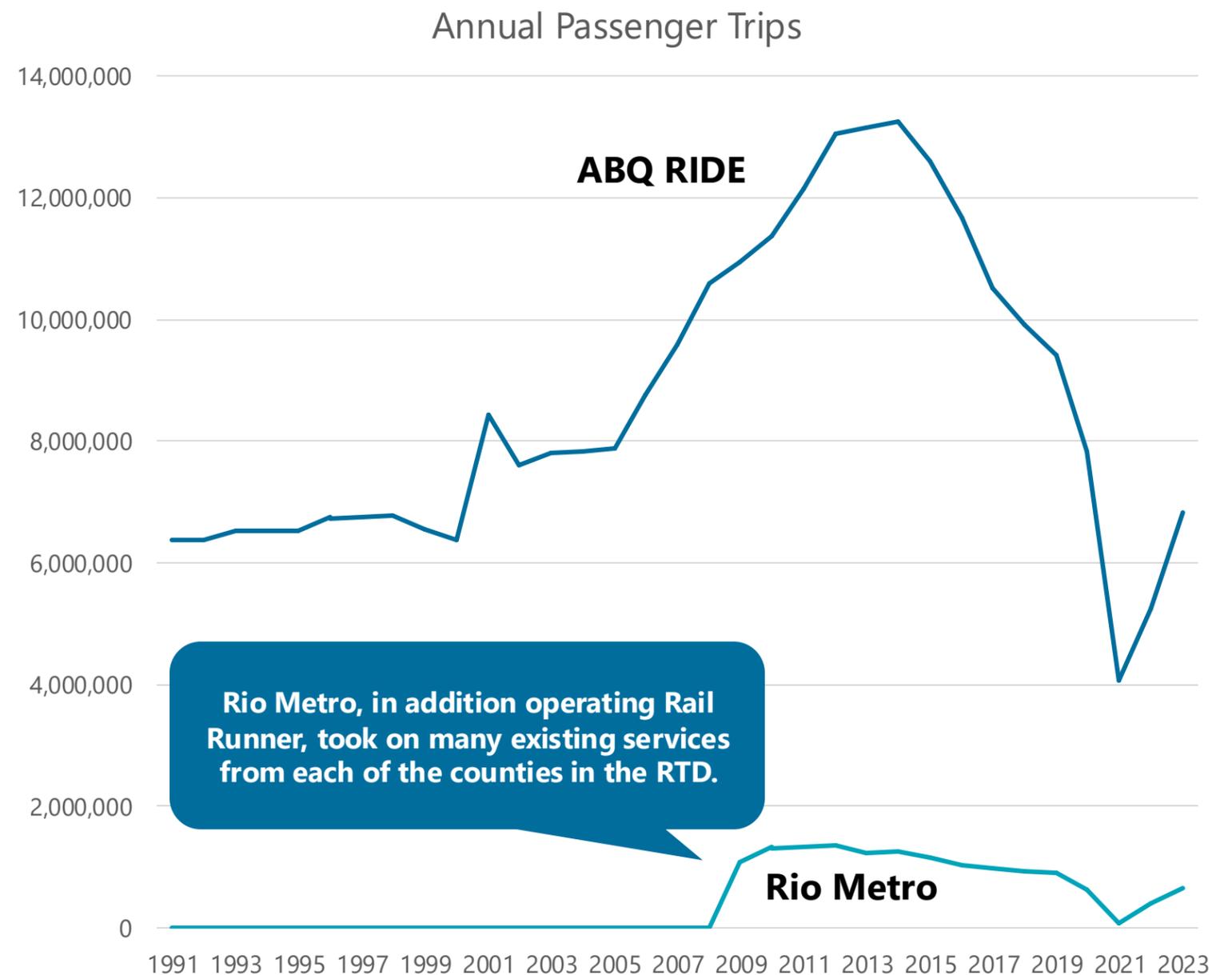
- Rio Metro cut some service at the onset of the pandemic but fully restored service by 2023.

- 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.

Annual Revenue Hours

ABQ RIDE

Rio Metro
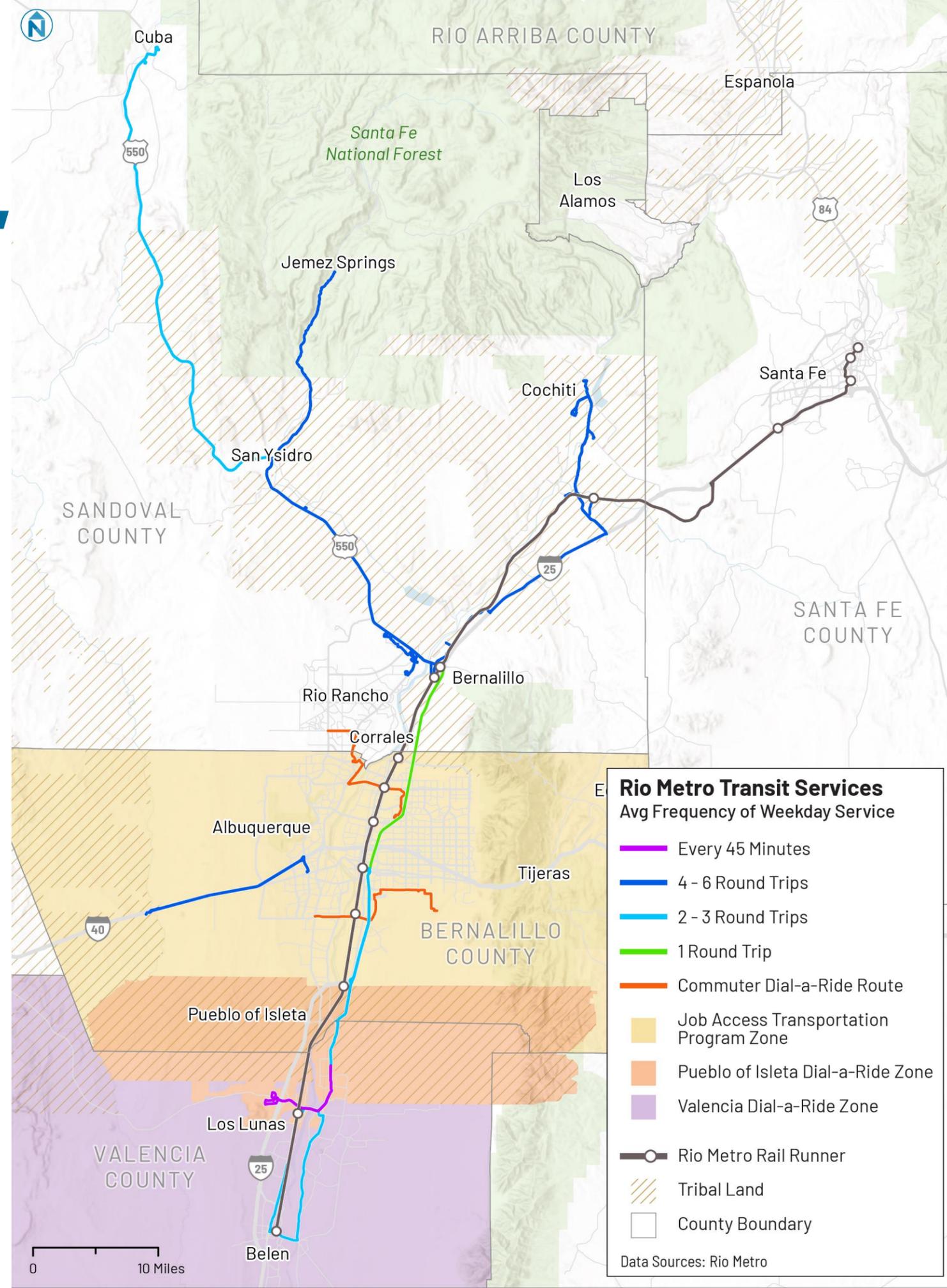
Data Source: NTD 1991-2023

9

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.

Annual Passenger Trips

ABQ RIDE

Rio Metro, in addition operating Rail Runner, took on many existing services from each of the counties in the RTD.

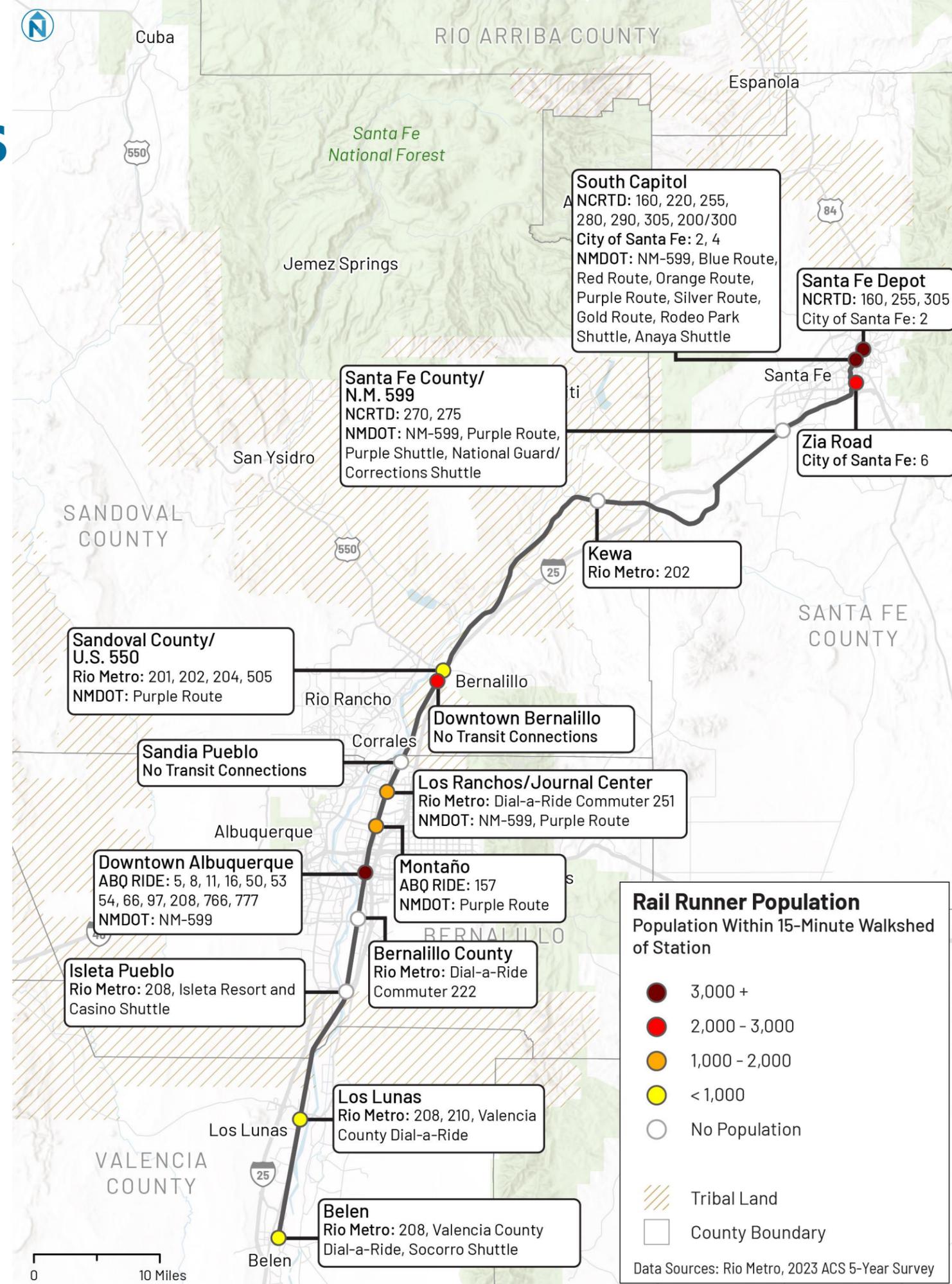**Rio Metro**

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.**

11

Rio Metro Transit Services
Avg Frequency of Weekday Service

- Every 45 Minutes
- 4 - 6 Round Trips
- 2 - 3 Round Trips
- 1 Round Trip
- Commuter Dial-a-Ride Route
- Job Access Transportation Program Zone
- Pueblo of Isleta Dial-a-Ride Zone
- Valencia Dial-a-Ride Zone
- Rio Metro Rail Runner
- Tribal Land
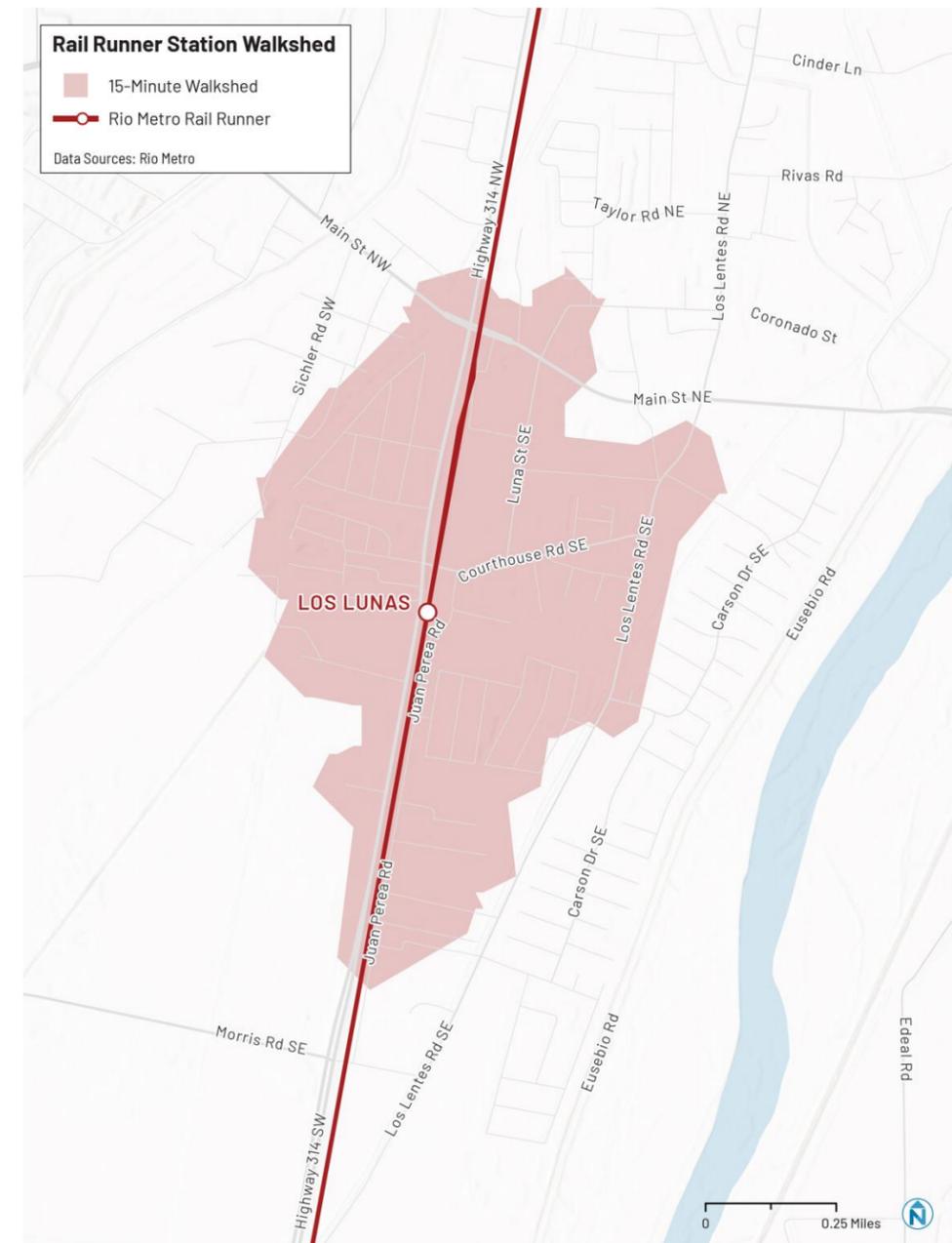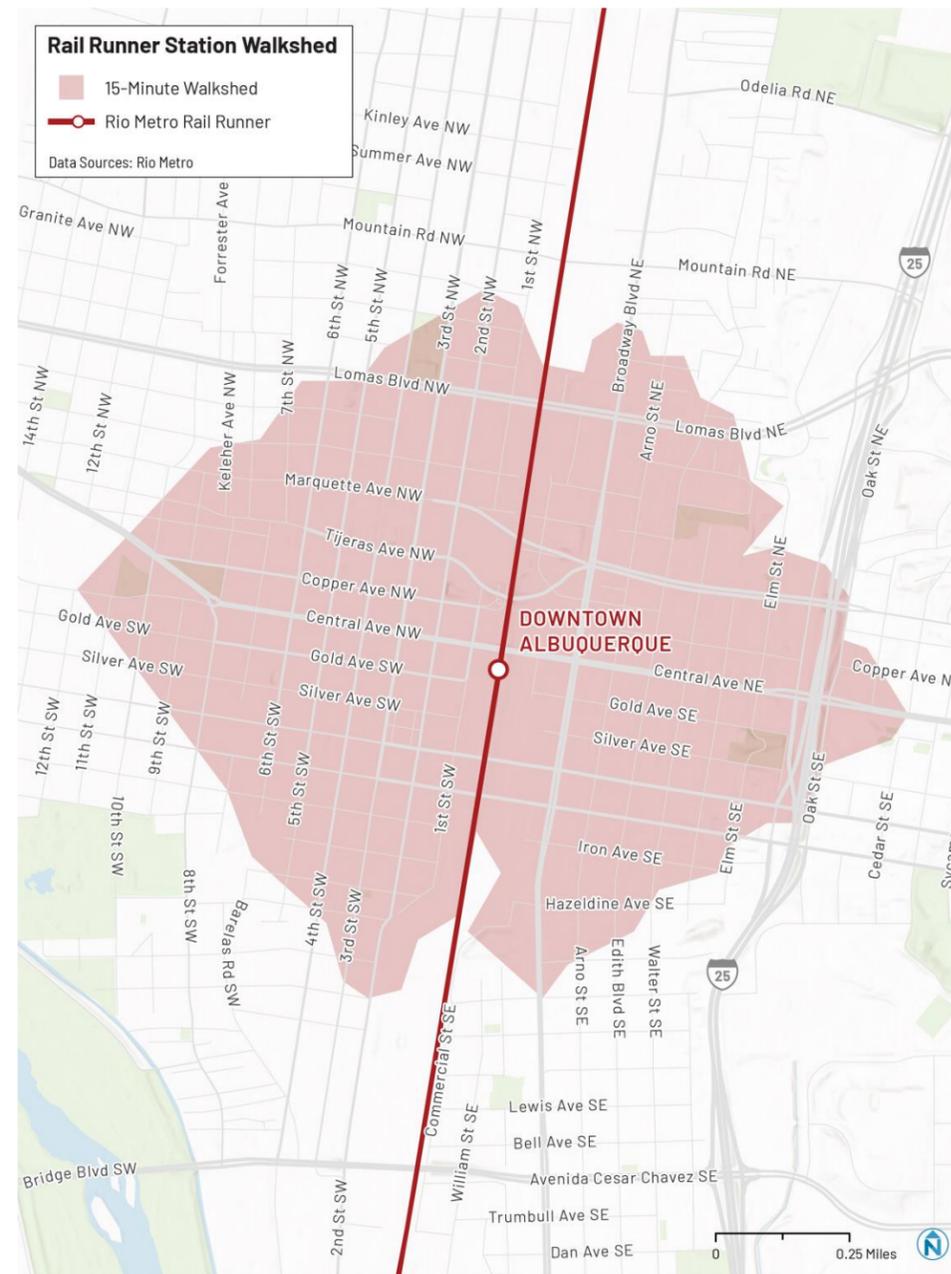- County Boundary

Data Sources: Rio Metro

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.**

South Capitol
NCRTD: 160, 220, 255, 280, 290, 305, 200/300
City of Santa Fe: 2, 4
NMDOT: NM-599, Blue Route, Red Route, Orange Route, Purple Route, Silver Route, Gold Route, Rodeo Park Shuttle, Anaya Shuttle

Santa Fe Depot
NCRTD: 160, 255, 305
City of Santa Fe: 2

Santa Fe County/ N.M. 599
NCRTD: 270, 275
NMDOT: NM-599, Purple Route, Purple Shuttle, National Guard/ Corrections Shuttle

Zia Road
City of Santa Fe: 6

Kewa
Rio Metro: 202

Sandoval County/ U.S. 550
Rio Metro: 201, 202, 204, 505
NMDOT: Purple Route

Downtown Bernalillo
No Transit Connections

Sandia Pueblo
No Transit Connections

Los Ranchos/Journal Center
Rio Metro: Dial-a-Ride Commuter 251
NMDOT: NM-599, Purple Route

Downtown Albuquerque
ABQ RIDE: 5, 8, 11, 16, 50, 53 54, 66, 97, 208, 766, 777
NMDOT: NM-599

Montaño
ABQ RIDE: 157
NMDOT: Purple Route

Isleta Pueblo
Rio Metro: 208, Isleta Resort and Casino Shuttle

Bernalillo County
Rio Metro: Dial-a-Ride Commuter 222

Los Lunas
Rio Metro: 208, 210, Valencia County Dial-a-Ride

Belen
Rio Metro: 208, Valencia County Dial-a-Ride, Socorro Shuttle

Rail Runner Population
Population Within 15-Minute Walkshed of Station

- 3,000 +
- 2,000 - 3,000
- 1,000 - 2,000
- < 1,000
- No Population

Tribal Land
County Boundary

Data Sources: Rio Metro, 2023 ACS 5-Year Survey

Walkability around Rail Runner stations varies drastically.
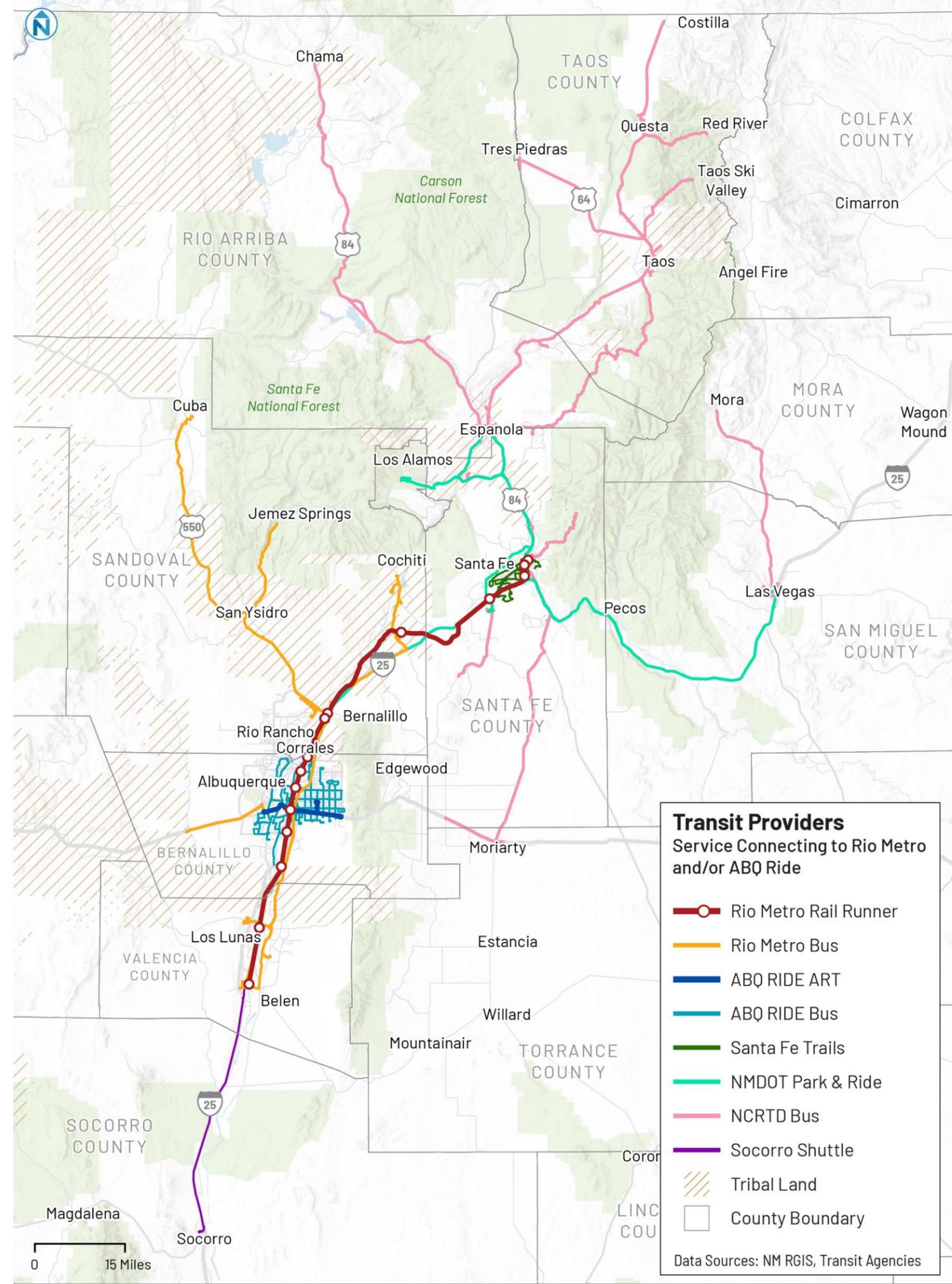
- Most stations serve residents within a 15-minute walkshed or allow communities in surrounding areas to connect to the rest of New Mexico through local transit service to the Rail Runner.

- 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.

Rail Runner Station Walkshed
15-Minute Walkshed
Rio Metro Rail Runner
Data Sources: Rio Metro

DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE

Rail Runner Station Walkshed
15-Minute Walkshed
Rio Metro Rail Runner
Data Sources: Rio Metro

LOS LUNAS

Rio Metro overlaps with five other transit agencies, all of which have planned for transfers to Rio Metro service.
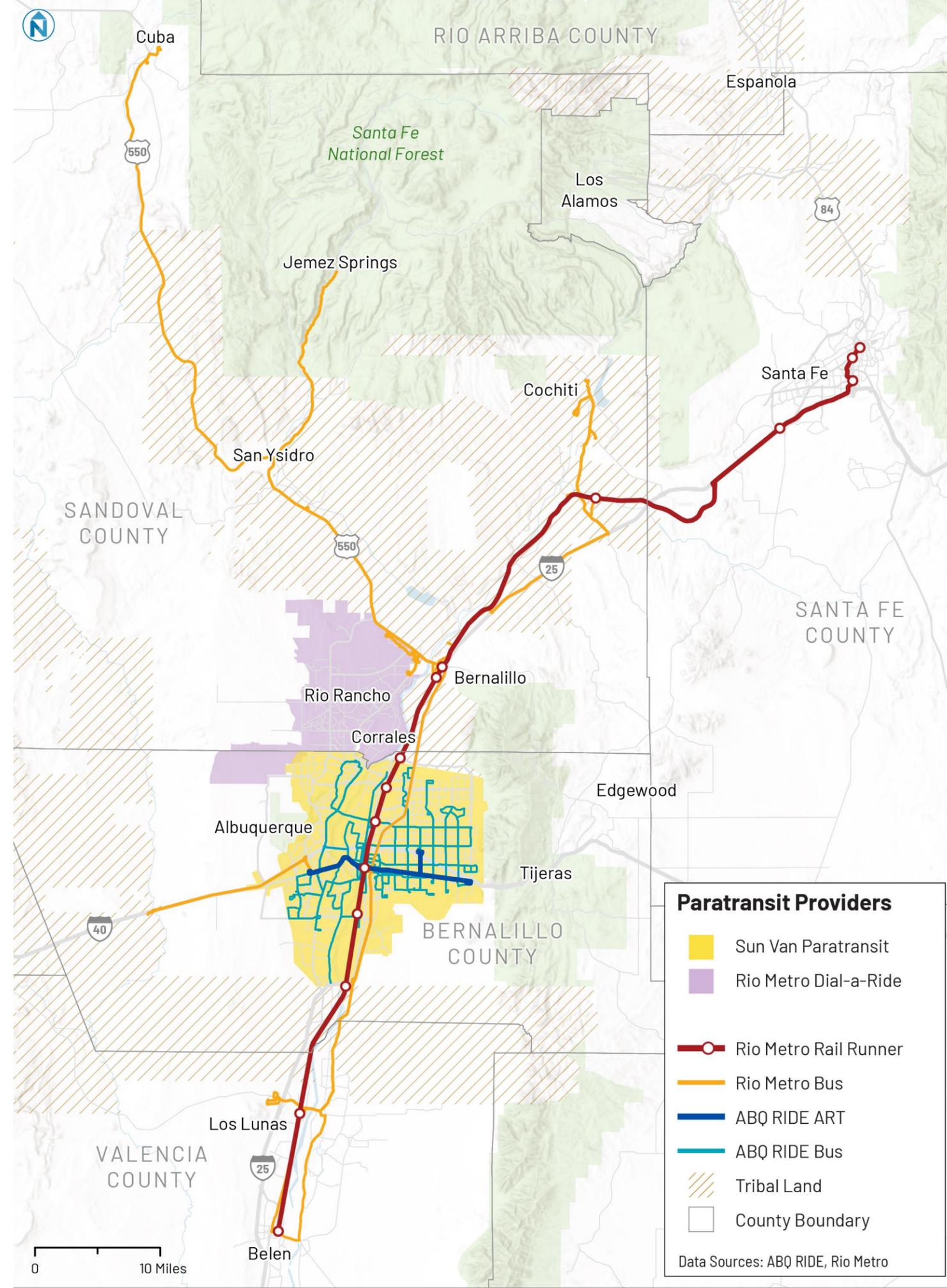
There are several major transfer hubs that connect other transit agencies to Rio Metro service.

- 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.

Transit Providers
Service Connecting to Rio Metro and/or ABQ Ride

- Rio Metro Rail Runner
- Rio Metro Bus
- ABQ RIDE ART
- ABQ RIDE Bus
- Santa Fe Trails
- NMDOT Park & Ride
- NCRTD Bus
- Socorro Shuttle
- Tribal Land
- County Boundary

Data Sources: NM RGIS, Transit Agencies

14

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 demand response service has both duplication of back of house infrastructure and disconnected service for passengers.**

Paratransit Providers

- Sun Van Paratransit (yellow)
- Rio Metro Dial-a-Ride (purple)
- Rio Metro Rail Runner (red line)
- Rio Metro Bus (orange line)
- ABQ RIDE ART (dark blue line)
- ABQ RIDE Bus (teal line)
- Tribal Land (hatched)
- County Boundary

Data Sources: ABQ RIDE, Rio Metro

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.

Percentage of ABQ RIDE Vacant Positions by Position Type

Legend: ■ Filled or Partially Filled ▨ Vacant

Data Source: ABQ RIDE 2025

20
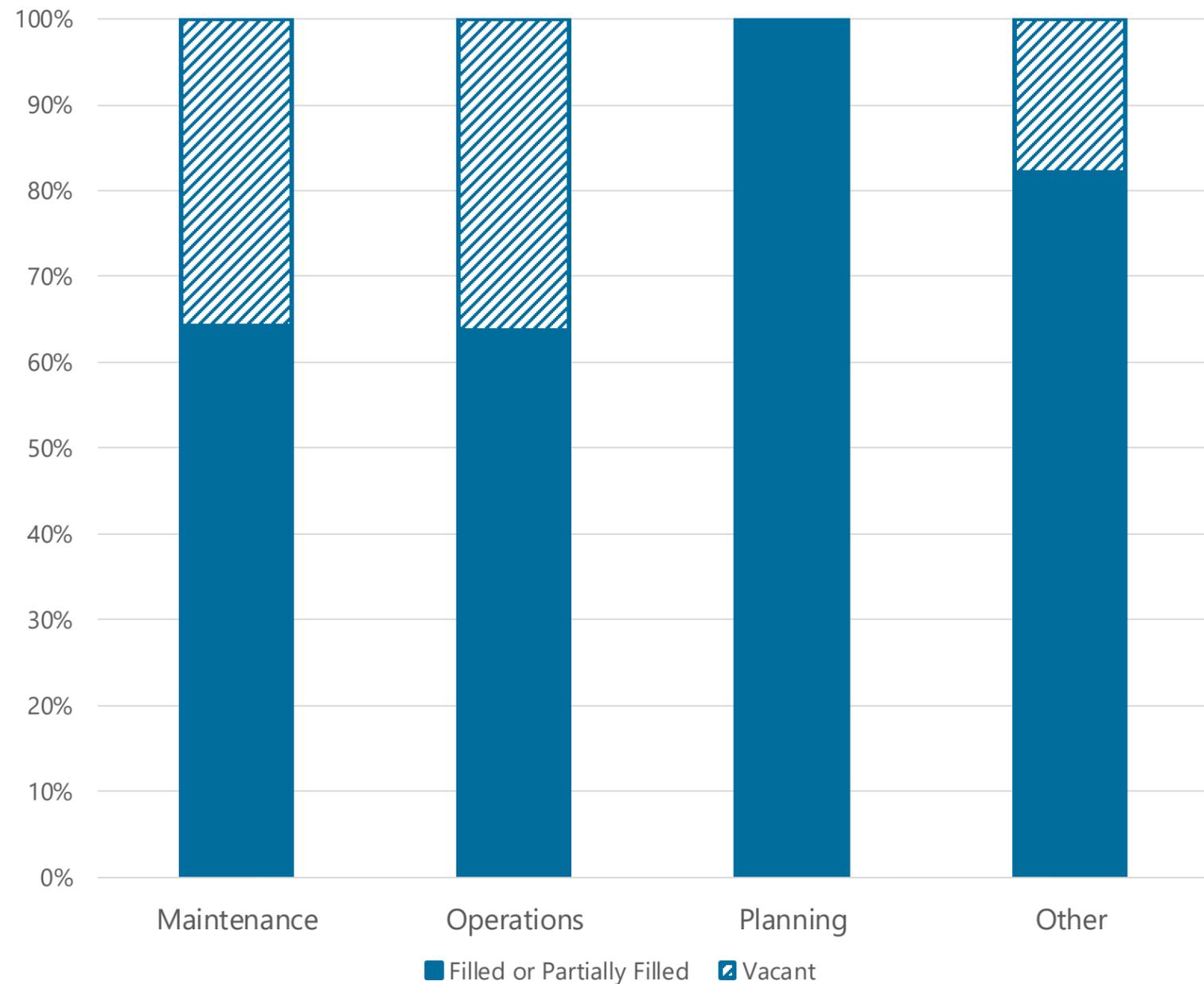
Transit vehicle maintenance workers are classified with all other vehicle maintenance workers at the City.

- 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.
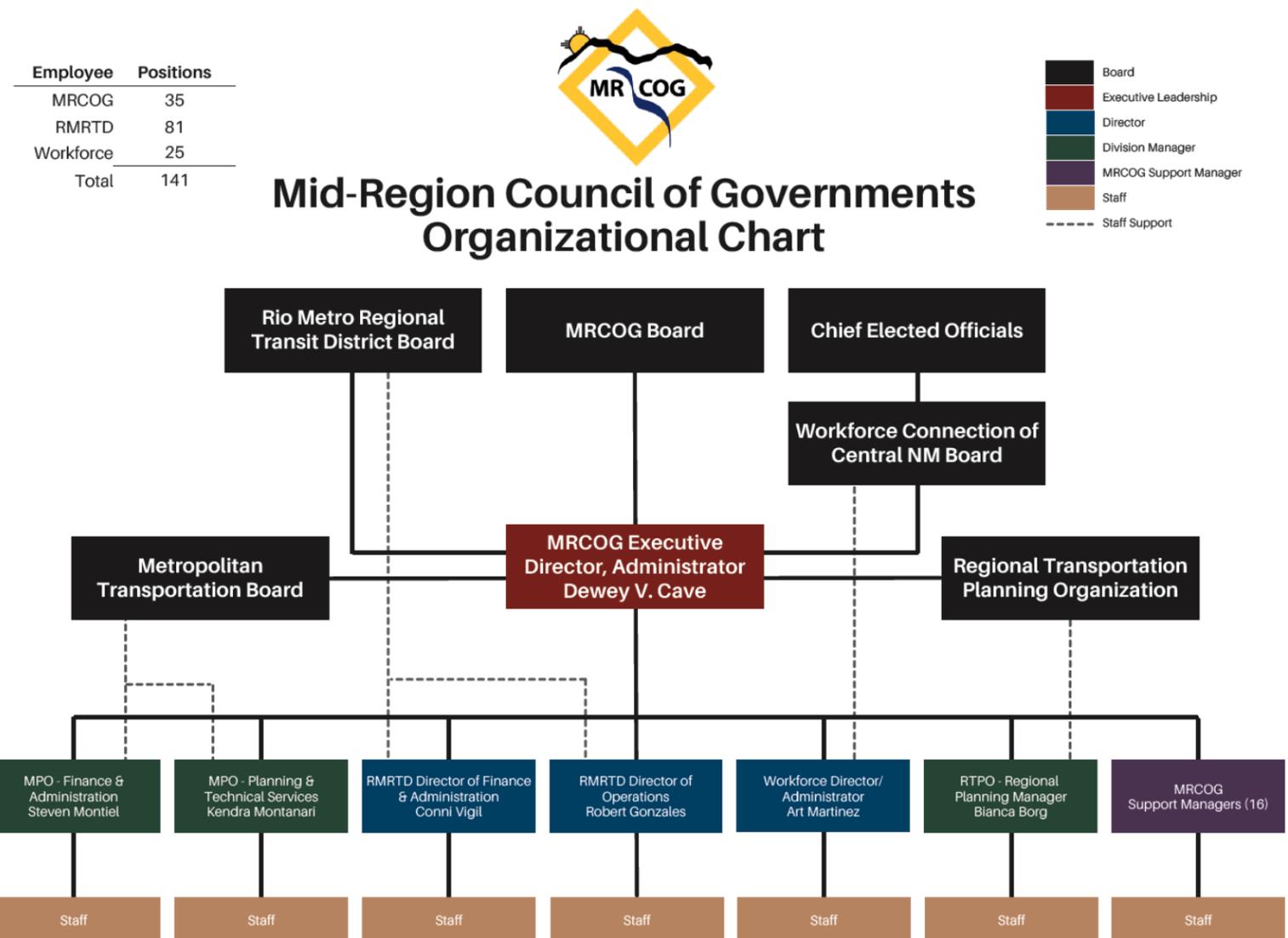
- ABQ RIDE essentially has full in-house ability to do everything except build a new bus. This includes engine rebuilding, painting, and fixing both electric and combustion engines, which many large transit agencies in the United States cannot.

- 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.**
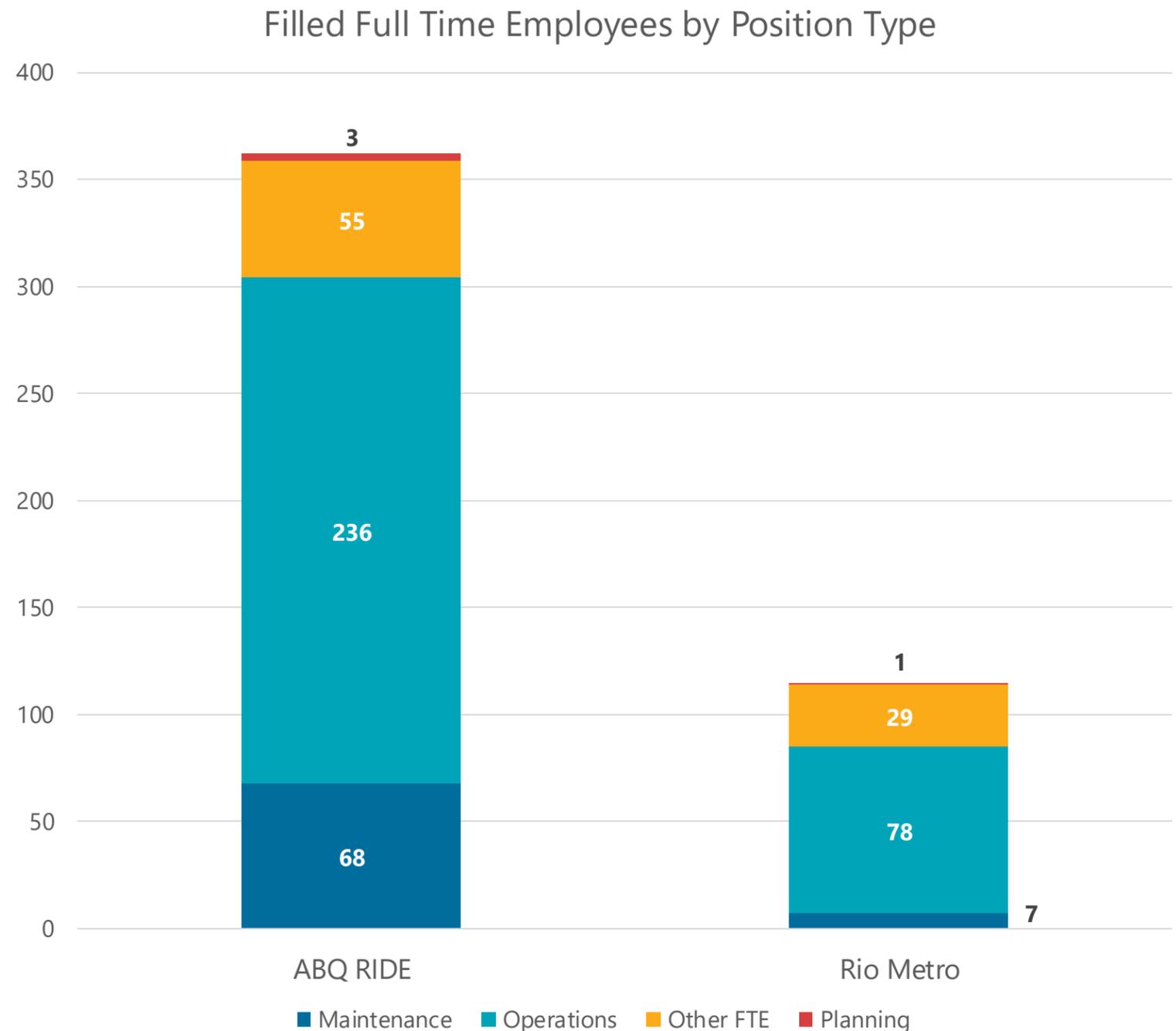

ABQ RIDE maintenance facility

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.

Employee	Positions
MRCOG	35
RMRTD	81
Workforce	25
Total	141

Mid-Region Council of Governments Organizational Chart

Legend:
- Board
- Executive Leadership
- Director
- Division Manager
- MRCOG Support Manager
- Staff
- Staff Support

Rio Metro Regional Transit District Board

MRCOG Board

Chief Elected Officials

Workforce Connection of Central NM Board

MRCOG Executive Director, Administrator Dewey V. Cave

Metropolitan Transportation Board

Regional Transportation Planning Organization

MPO · Finance & Administration Steven Montiel

MPO · Planning & Technical Services Kendra Montanari

RMRTD Director of Finance & Administration Conni Vigil

RMRTD Director of Operations Robert Gonzales

Workforce Director/ Administrator Art Martinez

RTPO · Regional Planning Manager Bianca Borg

MRCOG Support Managers (16)

Staff | Staff | Staff | Staff | Staff | Staff | Staff

23

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.**

Filled Full Time Employees by Position Type

Legend: Maintenance, Operations, Other FTE, Planning

ABQ RIDE: Maintenance 68, Operations 236, Other FTE 55, Planning 3
Rio Metro: Maintenance 7, Operations 78, Other FTE 29, Planning 1

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
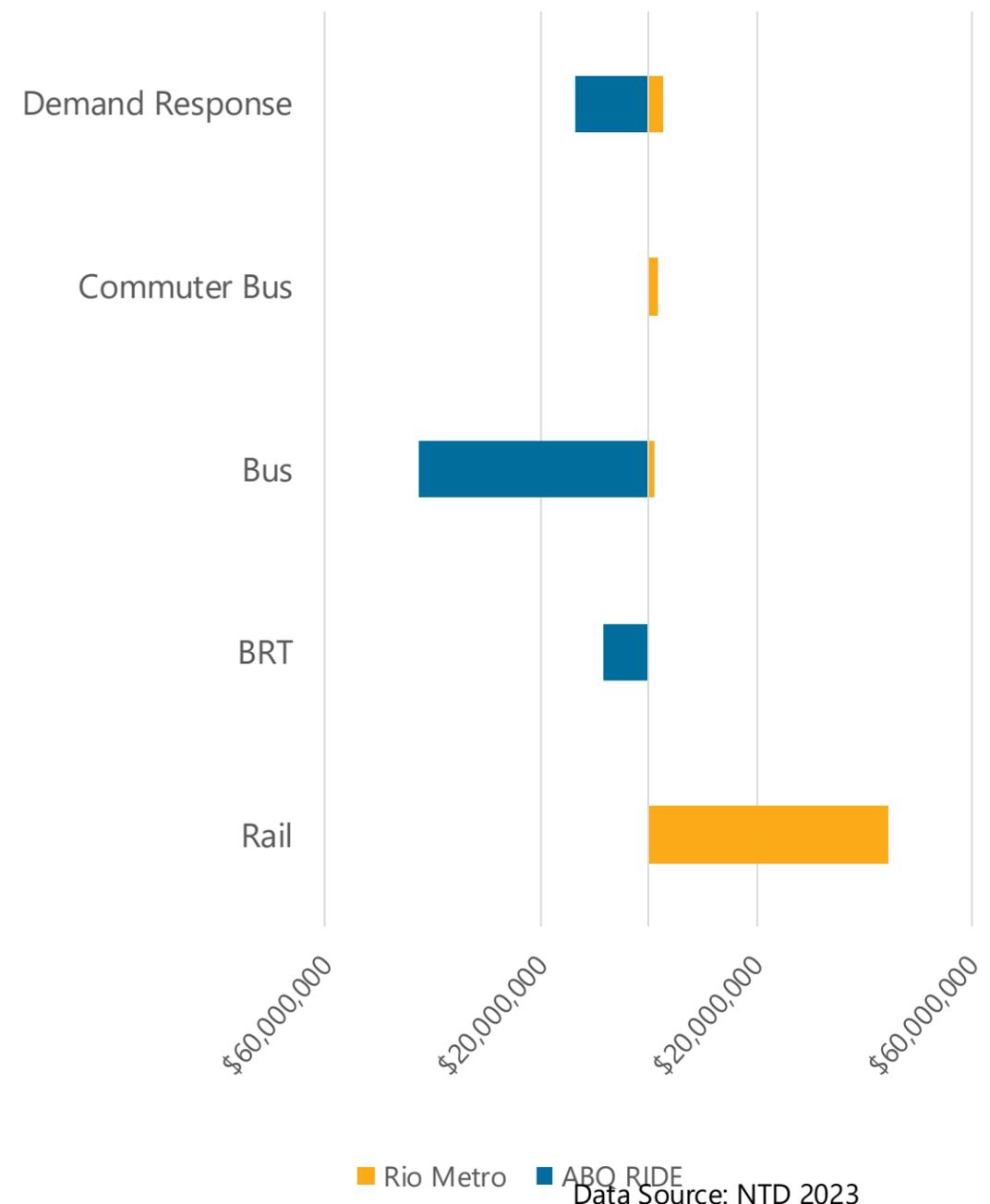
ABQ Ride and Rio Metro Vehicles in Max Service
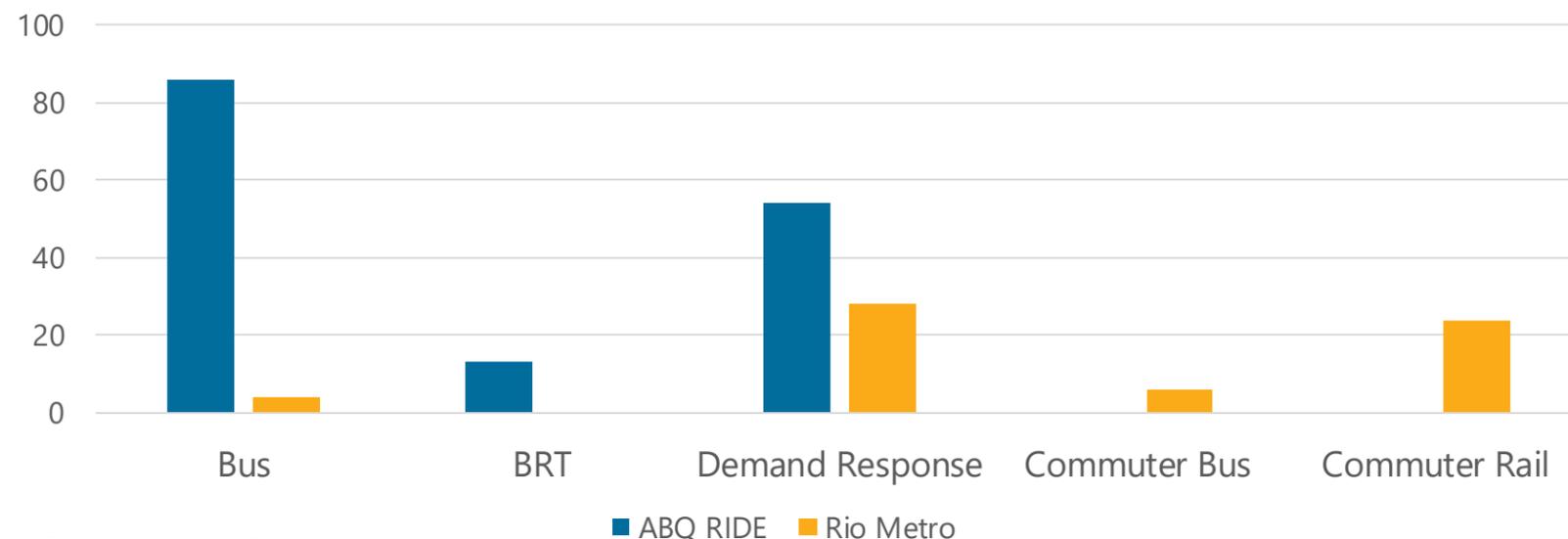
Data Source: NTD 2023

Data Source: NTD 2023

26

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.

ABQ RIDE Funding

Chart showing Revenue and Expenditures. Revenue bar (~$61,000,000) composed of General Fund, Transportation Infrastructure Tax, Rio Metro, Federal Grants/Other, and Advertising. Expenditures bar (~$65,000,000) composed of BRT, Bus, and Demand Response.

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.

27
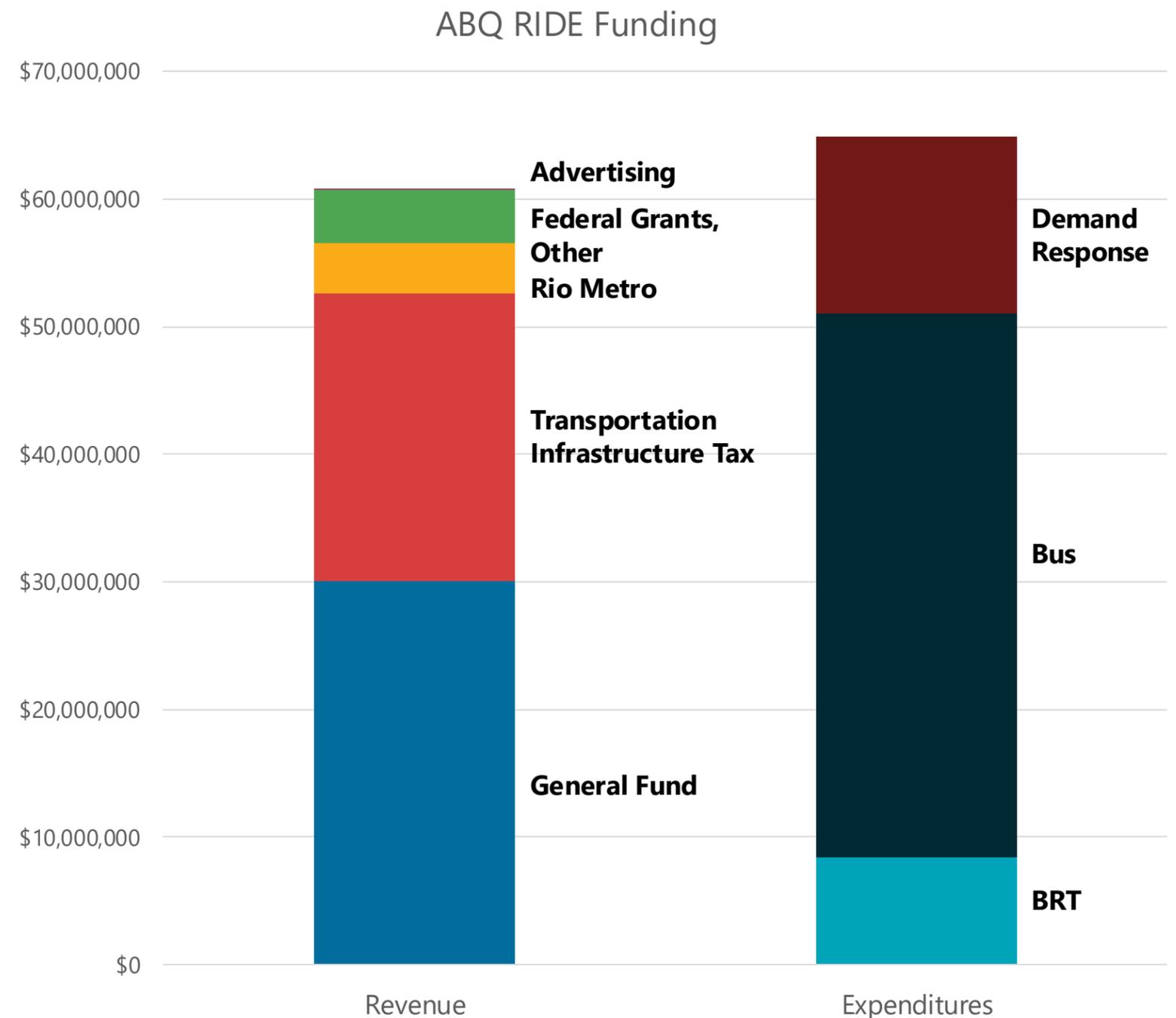
Rio Metro has a complex mix of local and federal funding tied to specific rural and urban operations.

- 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.**
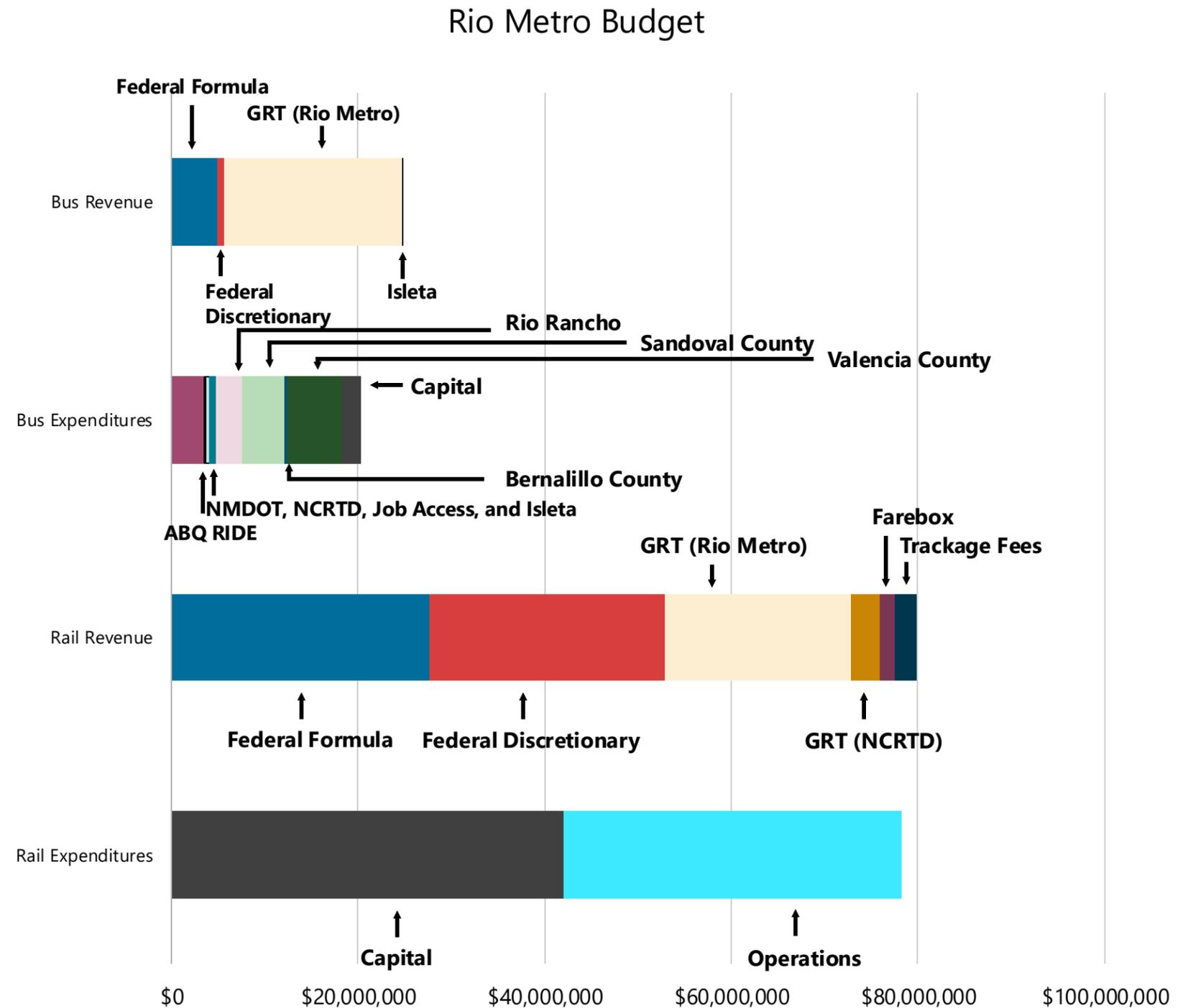
Rio Metro Budget

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.
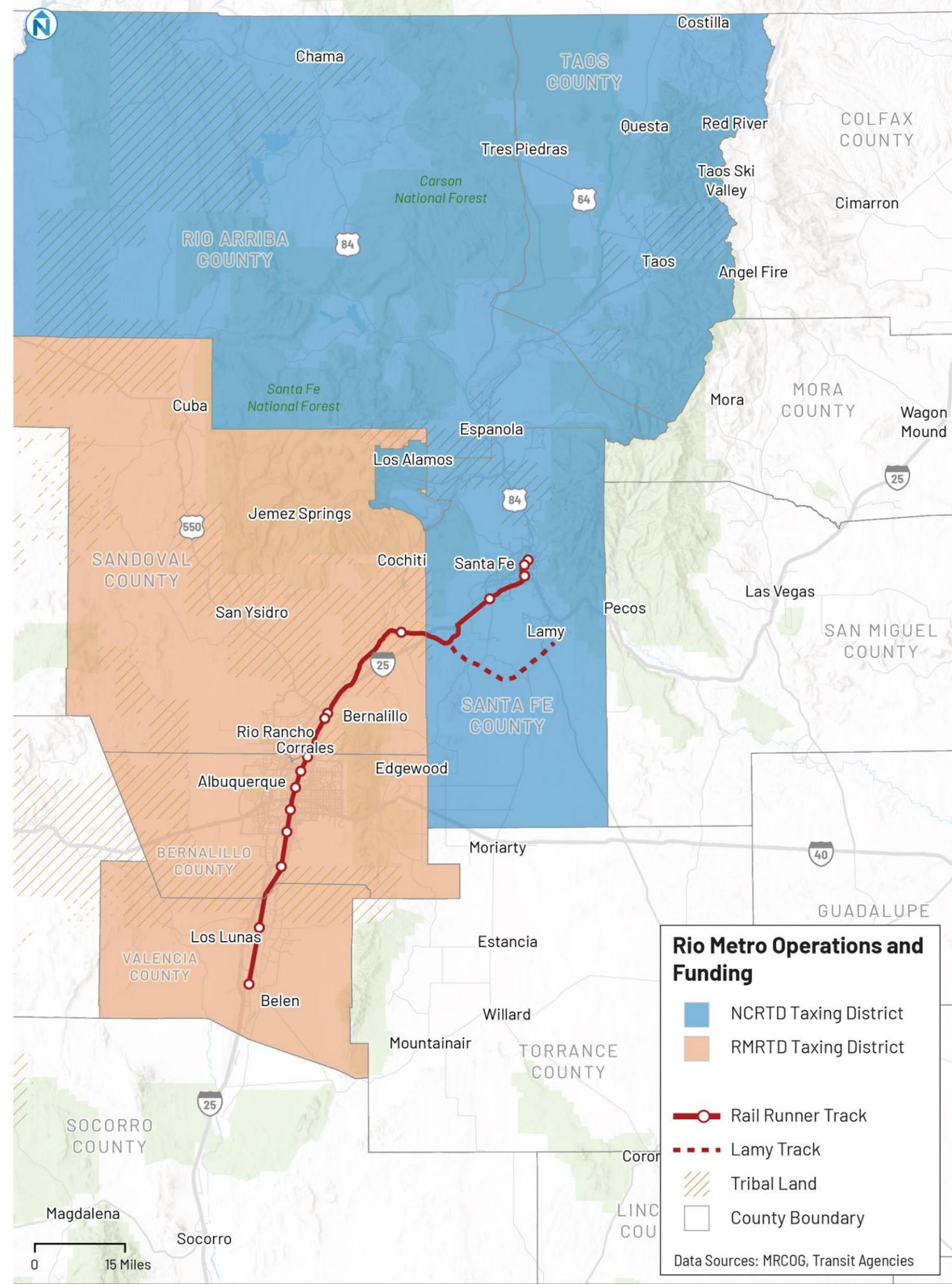

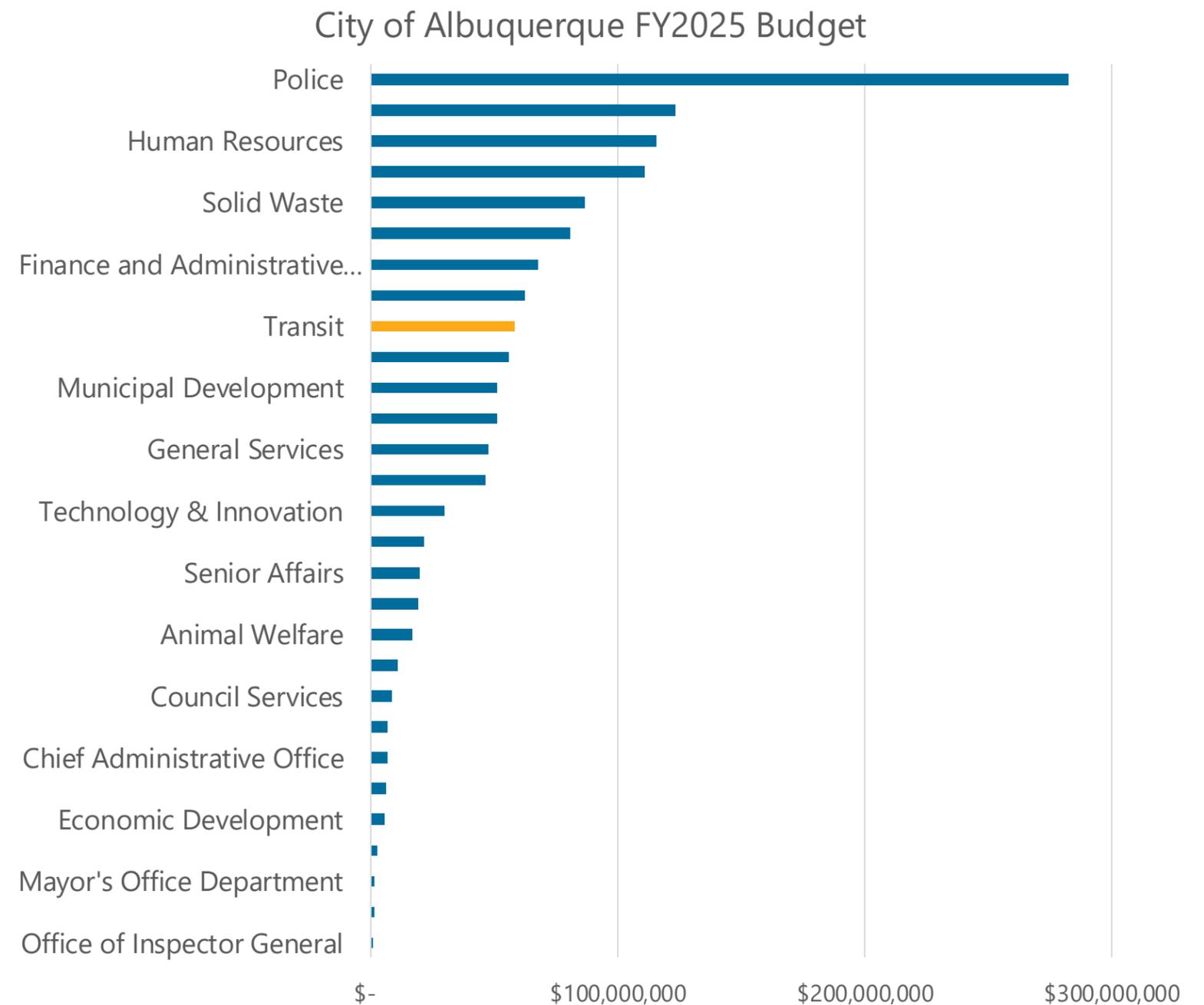South Capital Transportation Center

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.**

Rio Metro Operations and Funding

- NCRTD Taxing District
- RMRTD Taxing District
- Rail Runner Track
- Lamy Track
- Tribal Land
- County Boundary

Data Sources: MRCOG, Transit Agencies

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.**
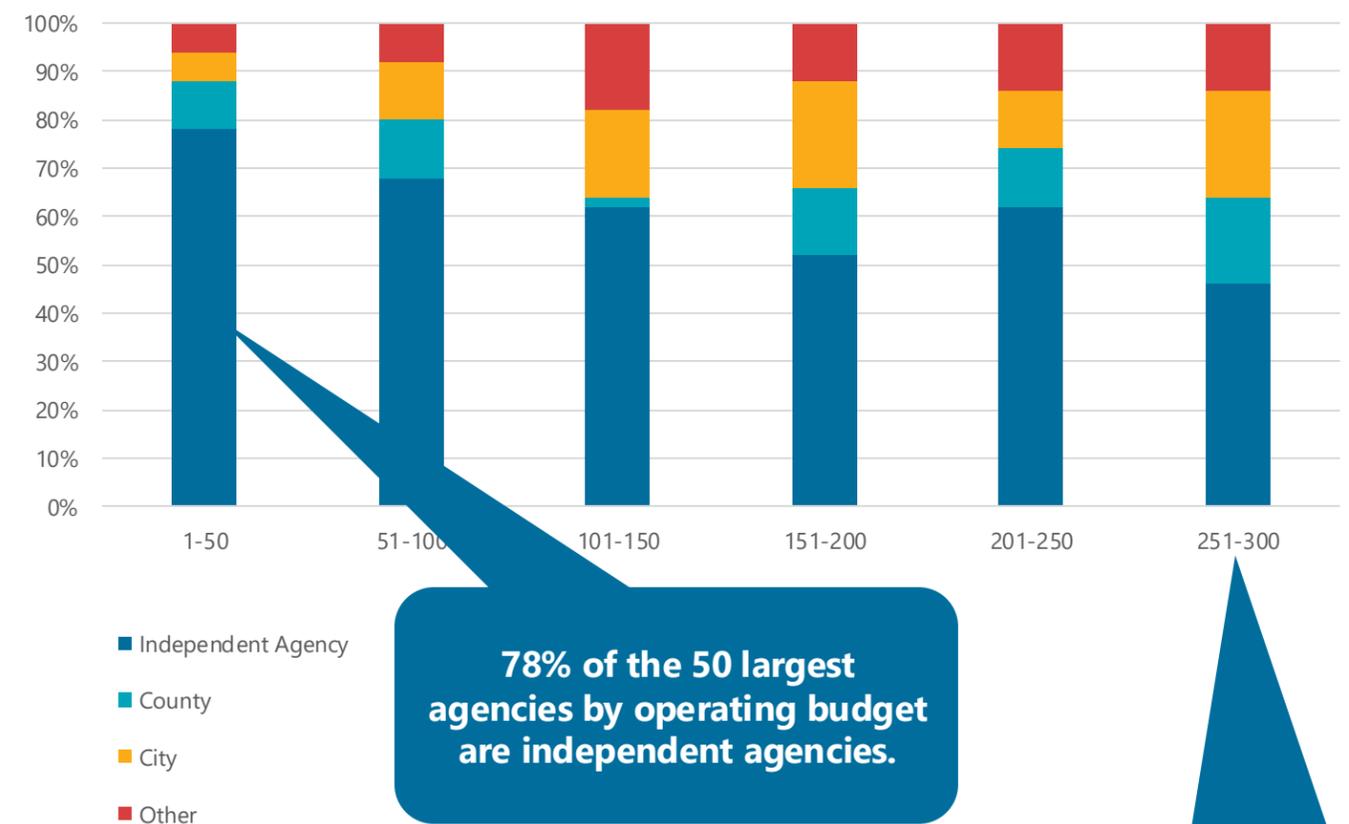

City of Albuquerque FY2025 Budget

Police
Human Resources
Solid Waste
Finance and Administrative...
Transit
Municipal Development
General Services
Technology & Innovation
Senior Affairs
Animal Welfare
Council Services
Chief Administrative Office
Economic Development
Mayor's Office Department
Office of Inspector General

$- $100,000,000 $200,000,000 $300,000,000

Data Source: City of Albuquerque 2025

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

- Of the 100 largest transit operators in the United States, 2/3 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.

- Many 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 15% of the top 300 agencies that are city-run; it is the 107th largest agency and only 9 larger agencies are city-run. 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.**

Governance structure of top 300 US transit agencies ranked by operating budget

Legend:
- Independent Agency
- County
- City
- Other

78% of the 50 largest agencies by operating budget are independent agencies.

15% of the largest 300 agencies are City departments. 61% are independent agencies.

Data Source: FTA National Transit Database 2023

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.
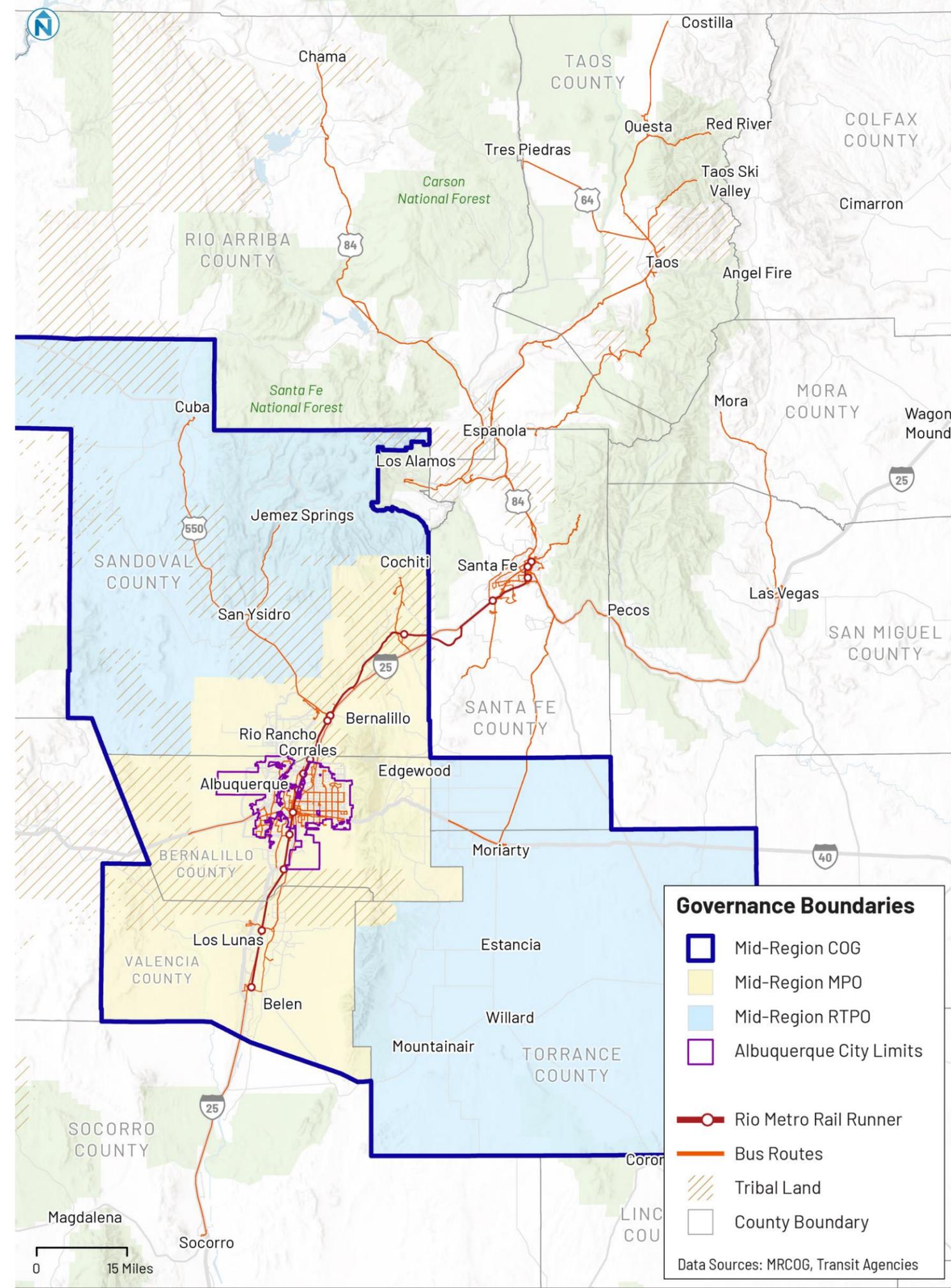

Alvarado Transportation Center

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.**

Governance Boundaries
- Mid-Region COG
- Mid-Region MPO
- Mid-Region RTPO
- Albuquerque City Limits
- Rio Metro Rail Runner
- Bus Routes
- Tribal Land
- County Boundary

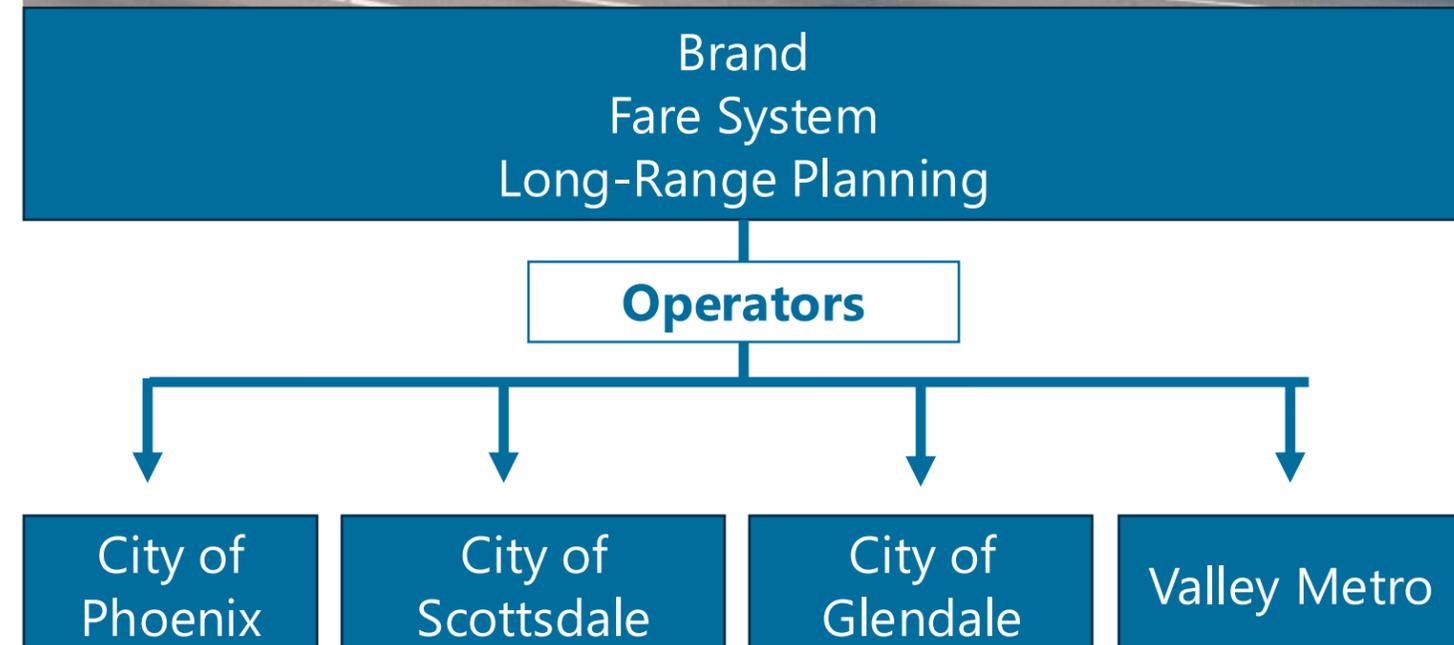Data Sources: MRCOG, Transit Agencies

PEER REVIEW

Peer Review Introduction

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 were 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)

- rabbittransit (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 provider 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.

Brand
Fare System
Long-Range Planning

Operators

City of Phoenix | City of Scottsdale | City of Glendale | Valley Metro

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 provides 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.

GREATER PORTLAND

metro

City of **South Portland** Bus Service

Regional Coordination
Guiding Policy
Acting independently but adhering to established regional policies and/or standards

Regional Partnerships
Acting Jointly
Working together on selected functions

Regional Delivery
Integration
Coordinated delivery of service or administration function by interlocal agreement, MOU, contract, etc.

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 Susequehanna 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 ¾ 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 ½ 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). CTSAs 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.

access

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.

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.

FILED SENATE
Mar 25, 2025
S.B. 584
PRINCIPAL CLERK

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

S

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
15   established for purposes of public transportation. The systems may include
16   one or more of the following: structures, improvements, buildings, equipment,
17   vehicle parking or passenger transfer facilities, railroads and railroad
18   rights-of-way, rights-of-way, bus services, shared-ride services,
19   high-occupancy vehicle facilities, car-pool and vanpool programs, voucher
20   programs, telecommunications and information systems, integrated fare
21   systems, and the interconnected bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that
22   supports public transportation, bus lanes, and busways. The term includes
23   tunnels and other infrastructure designed to rapidly transport people, freight,
24   or vehicles through automated means. The term does not include, however,
25   streets, roads, or highways except to the extent they are dedicated to public
26   transportation vehicles or to the extent they are necessary for access to vehicle
27   parking or passenger transfer facilities.
28   (4)   Transportation authority. – For the purposes of Part 2 of this Article, a
29   metropolitan public transportation authority created pursuant to Article 34 of
30   Chapter 160A of the General Statutes. For the purposes of Parts 3 and 4 of
31   this Article, a regional public transportation authority created pursuant to
32   Article 26 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes; and for the purposes of
33   Parts 3 and 5 of this Article, a regional transportation authority created
34   pursuant to Article 27 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes."
35   SECTION 2.2. Reserved.
36   SECTION 2.3. G.S. 105-507.3(b) reads as rewritten:

DRS15200-MCXF-100

Key Takeaways

- Transit governance changes are usually undertaken to solve a specific issues. Agencies can address their challenges most effectively if their form of governance matches those needs. Another reason for governance change is if it creates economics of scale or enables a new funding source.

- 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.

- Some regions' paratransit is 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.