



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Mid-Region Council of Governments

Serving the counties of Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, Valencia, and Southern Santa Fe

A Word of Welcome

From Executive Director Dewey V. Cave

Despite the unpredictable nature of growth and the economy, I am grateful to report that the Mid-Region Council of Governments has sustained its regional focus enabling us to further our mission of collaboration in exciting ways over the past year. The reality is that strong communities are crucial to the health and vitality of any region, and that's why we remain wholly committed to advancing our core COG programs.



Whether it's Rio Metro, Transportation, Workforce, or Economic Development, we continue to see positive results due in large part, I believe, to the guidance of our expert staff and their dedication to embracing challenges and identifying solutions for both our rural and urban areas.

You can read all about these accomplishments in the ensuing pages of the report, but allow me to touch on a few of the highlights, if you will:

One of those resulted from the 2024 NM Legislative session, as lawmakers passes an initiative to have the seven regional councils of government across the state manage a two-year appropriation called the Government Results and Opportunity Program Fund or "GRO Fund", which replaces the previous "junior bill. This is no small effort as our own MRCOG is now committed to managing 63 appropriations totaling nearly \$12 million.

Another \$4.3 million came into the region from the US Economic Development Administration in the form of two separate grant awards for Sandoval and Valencia Counties, both of which had seen severe wildfires devastate their respective areas in 2022. These EDA funds will help with construction of a major wastewater infrastructure project in the Village of Jemez Springs, as well as support construction of an operations and economic development building to help

bolster the local economy at the Whitfield Wildlife Refuge in Belen.

I am particularly proud of the recently adopted Regional Transportation Safety Action Plan (RTSAP), which includes, among other things, a toolbox of proven safety strategies for member agencies to use when implementing their own projects or applying for grant funds. This is especially important as New Mexico was once again named the worst state in the nation for pedestrian fatalities, a distinction we are hoping the RTSAP can address and help eliminate.

From transportation safety to safe travel, this past year Rio Metro made some important upgrades to the Rail Runner system. One of those was the installation of Centralized Traffic Control or "CTC," a system that allows increased train speeds, reduced delays, and more scheduling flexibility. Rio Metro also completed a new Alameda siding project, which allows for all trains traveling through the corridor in Albuquerque's North Valley to pass each other in opposite directions, thus reducing passenger delays.

Another Rio Metro highpoint happened in April 2024 as federal, state, and local leaders gathered in Los Lunas to celebrate the Grand Opening of the Valencia County Transit Facility, an 8,600 square foot LEED-certified administration building, with a dispatch center, training room and a large adjoining

parking area for Rio Metro's fleet of buses. This facility truly represents a regional approach to providing public transportation to the residents of Valencia County—especially with the tremendous growth and several major companies that have made the area their home.

The Workforce Connection of Central NM has once again over-delivered when it comes to providing programs to support both employers and jobseekers through classroom, virtual, and various work-and-learn curricula. Coupled with the new Business Services Connector designed to transform how businesses interact with services, and you get a pivotal online portal that streamlines processes and enhances collaboration among our workforce systems and partners.

So, there is much to be proud of as we look toward what the next year will bring. I am encouraged by the strength of our region, and to be working with those who share a cohesive and collective vision for the future of our region.

Sincerely,

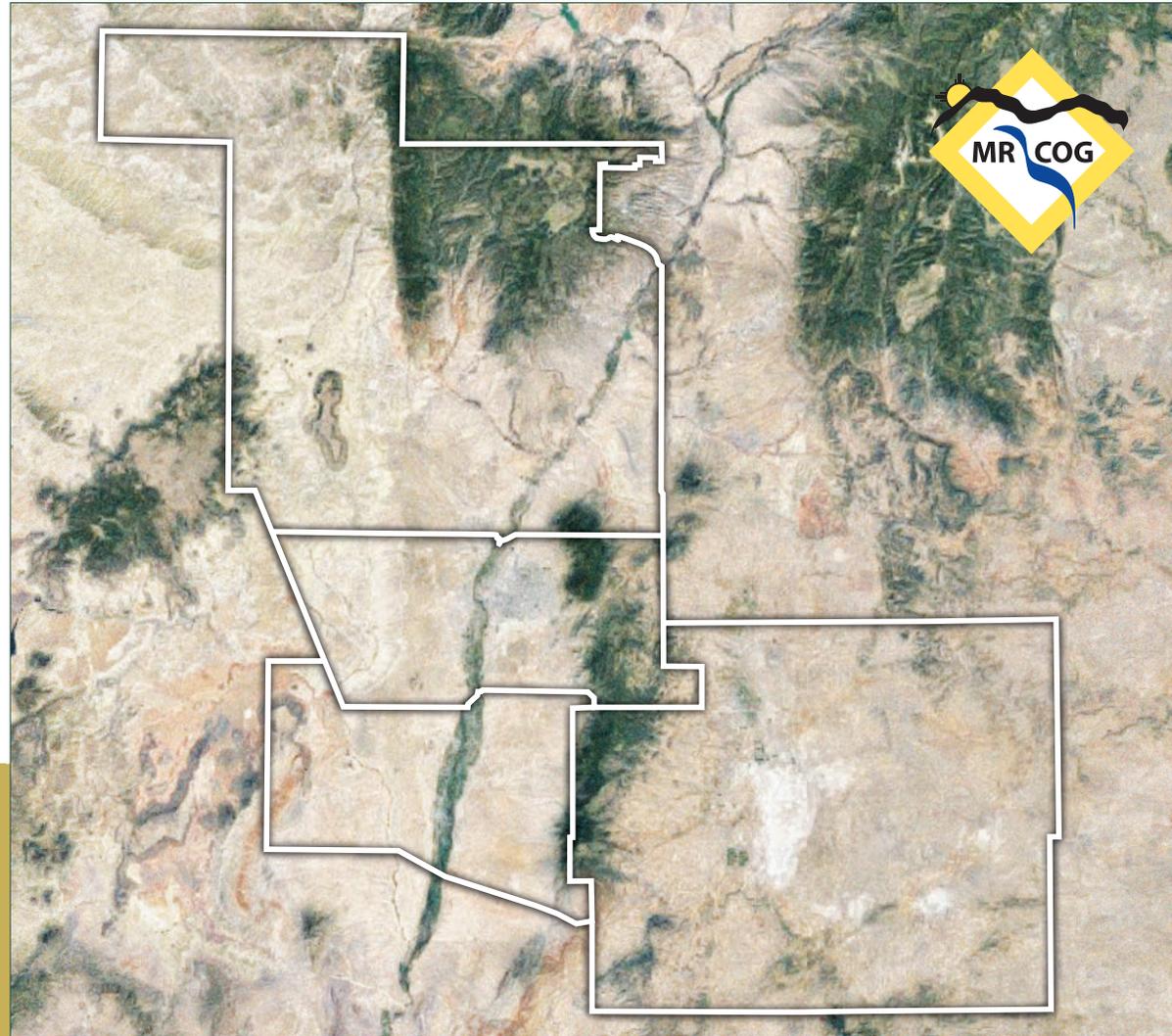
Dewey V. Cave, MRCOG/RMRTD Executive Director

The Mid-Region Council of Governments / **MRCOG**

The Mid-Region Council of Governments provides planning services for the counties of Bernalillo, Valencia, Torrance, Sandoval, and southern Santa Fe in the areas of transportation, agriculture, workforce development, land-use, water, and economic development.

MRCOG serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area and is responsible for identifying transportation planning priorities and programming federal transportation funds throughout the region. The Regional Transportation Planning Organization offers similar services to MRCOG's rural areas. And all local governments in the region are offered professional training and planning assistance through the Regional Planning Program.

MRCOG is the administrative entity for the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico, providing resources for people seeking career opportunities, and for employers in search of skilled workers. MRCOG also serves as the administrative entity for the Rio Metro Regional Transit District. Rio Metro is the primary regional transit provider for Bernalillo, Sandoval and Valencia counties, offering transit service between municipalities and across county lines. The RTD manages the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter rail and operates select bus routes in three counties.



A Word From Outgoing MRCOG Board Chair Barbara Baca

As I reflect on my term as MRCOG Chair, what resonates with me most is the strength and diversity our region represents—and moreover, the willingness of our regional partners to work collaboratively to get things done for those we serve—especially those in our smaller communities. Even in the face of challenging economic times and identifying appropriate federal dollars, this organization continually seeks (and finds!) new pathways to ensure our limited resources are expended consciously.

I am proud to have been a part of the important role that the Mid-Region Council of Governments plays in supporting its members and their communities. I am equally grateful to the expert MRCOG staff and its Executive Director, as I am indebted for all I have learned and admire the positive impact their work has on our region.

It has been an honor to serve as your board chair the past two years. I offer my best wishes to Mayor Gregg Hull as he assumes the chair, and I look forward to continued success for all our communities under his leadership.



Barbara Baca



About Incoming MRCOG Board Chair Greggory Hull

Greggory D. Hull has called New Mexico home for more than 35 years, with many of those years spent raising his family in Rio Rancho. He and his wife Carrie have five children and eight grandchildren.

As Mayor of the City of Rio Rancho, his key objectives include creating and fostering economic development, improving public infrastructure, strengthening local government finances, and enhancing quality of life so that Rio Rancho remains a nationally ranked best place to live. He is a former president and CEO of two businesses.

In addition to serving on the Board of Directors for the Mid-Region Council of Governments, Mayor Hull also serves on the Board of the New Mexico Workforce Connection (Central Region), Chairman of the New Mexico Mayor's Caucus (affiliated with the New Mexico Municipal League), and is the current New Mexico Municipal League President-Elect.

As incoming MRCOG Board Chair, Mayor Hull plans to focus on strengthening regional partnerships and working toward a unified approach to transportation needs for central New Mexico.



A Regional Growth Outlook

A Look at Population and Employment

Population and employment growth are highly interrelated. When new jobs locate within the region, or when existing businesses expand, new workers and their families move into the area, and existing workers may gain the financial stability they need to grow their families. This article provides an overview of population trends in the region and provides some economic opportunities on the horizon that could influence growth expectations for the future.

Population

The MRCOG region has gained approximately 4,600 people since 2020, with an average annual growth rate of under 0.5 percent each year. Growth is distributed unevenly throughout the region with Sandoval County seeing the largest population gain and Bernalillo County declining slightly.

The MRCOG region contains both the fastest growing municipality in the state—Los Lunas at 10 percent, as well as the city with the largest numeric growth, Rio

Rancho at +6,227—since 2020. The largest city in the region and state, the City of Albuquerque, lost 4,614 people over the same period.

While the region has historically seen robust growth, there has been a slowdown in recent years, precipitated by the Great Recession and punctuated by the global pandemic. Over the past decade, the region has experienced declining births and increased deaths, which is consistent with national trends. Migration also slowed over the past decade, although it appears to be picking back up.

While Sandoval County has attracted most domestic migration to the state, Bernalillo County leads in international migration (followed by other urban counties, Dona Ana and Santa Fe). Both domestic and international migration are key components of growth in the region: without migration, the regional population would be in decline.



New home construction on Albuquerque's West Side

Population Change in the MRCOG Region, 2020 - 2023

	2020	2023	Change	%
MRCOG Region	927,928	932,610	+4,682	+0.5%
Bernalillo County	676,853	671,586	-5,267	-0.8%
Sandoval County	149,290	155,936	+6,646	+4.5%
Torrance County	15,062	15,633	+571	+3.8%
Valencia County	76,374	79,141	+2,767	+3.6%
S. Santa Fe County	10,349	10,314	-35	-0.3%
New Mexico	2,118,488	2,114,371	-4,117	-0.2%

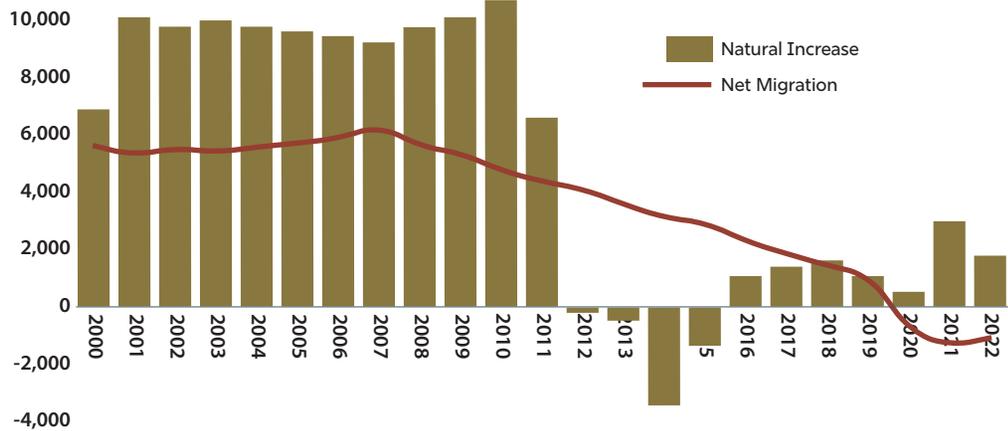
Source: US Census Decennial Census, Population Estimates

Natural Increase and Net Migration, MRCOG Region, 2020 - 2023

	Natural Change			Migration		
	Net Change	Births	Deaths	Total	Int'l	Domestic
MRCOG Region	-2,819	28,393	31,212	8,311	5,587	2,724
Bernalillo County	-1,867	20,954	22,821	-3,265	4,859	-8,124
Sandoval County	-495	4,241	4,736	7,598	380	7,218
Torrance County	-233	497	730	828	9	819
Valencia County	-224	2,701	2,925	3,150	339	2,811
New Mexico	-9,338	68,639	77,977	5,810	11,898	-6,088

Source: US Census Decennial Census, Population Estimates

Population Change in the Albuquerque Metro Area: Natural Increase and Net Migration, 2000 - 2022



Source: US Census Decennial Census, Population Estimates, NM Dept. of Health Vital Statistics

The most recent population projections by the University of New Mexico’s Geospatial Population Studies group show the four counties of central New Mexico (Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia) growing by just 28,000 people between 2020 and 2040 (3.1 percent). By comparison, the same four counties grew by a combined 186,000 in the 20 years between 2000 and 2020. These recent projections highlight expected changes based on the most recent data.



Amazon Fulfillment Center in Albuquerque

Future growth could look different based on external influences such as policy decisions or economic activity that could impact migration specifically.

Employment

Following the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, the region lost approximately 25,000 jobs. However, by 2022, employment had rebounded to exceed pre-pandemic figures. As of April 2024, there were 419,700 non-agricultural jobs* in the Albuquerque MSA** and the unemployment rate was 3.1 percent.

Employment levels in major sectors before and after the pandemic show that Government continues to be the largest industry sector, followed by Education and Health services, and Professional and Business services. However, since 2019, the largest increase in employment was in Transportation and Warehousing, which gained 4,000 jobs for a 39 percent increase. See graph on next page.

This growth is caused by the rise of consumer demand for fast and reliable shipping, a trend that



Saia LTL Freight Company in Albuquerque

was accelerated by the pandemic. Transportation support activities for aviation, rail, and freight fall within this category, as well as facilities that store goods in route to their final destination. This is an industry for growth in the region; the most visible examples of this are the recent Amazon facilities located in the City of Albuquerque and the Village of Los Lunas.

*NMDWS Labor Market Review, April 2024, not seasonally adjusted
 **The Albuquerque Metropolitan Statistical Area encompasses Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia Counties.

The Horizon

The demographic forces that underlie population change paint a picture of slow growth, however, demographers agree that a significant departure from recent migration trends could shift our trajectory. The evolving economic picture could inspire another story indeed. A simple glance around the region provides the seeds for new job growth which could hasten migration and form the basis for an alternative growth scenario. Some regional highlights include:

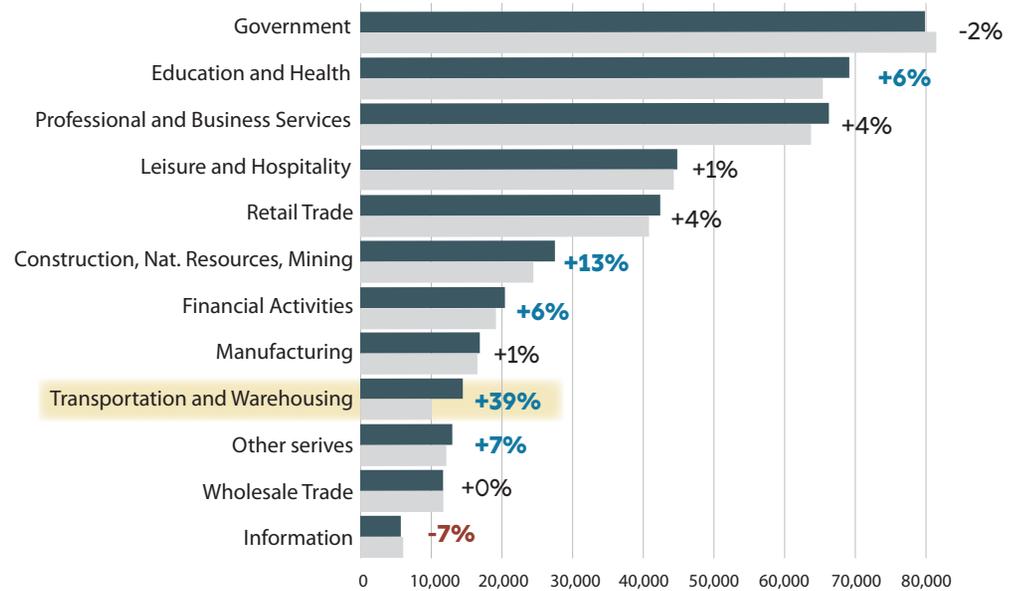
- Bernalillo County is planning for the I-40 Tradeport Corridor, a regional multi-hub accelerator for improved goods storage and movement, streamlined coast-to-coast cargo flows, and clean energy infrastructure. This project forwards the regional growth in transportation logistics and has the potential to elevate New Mexico's role as a critical link in the national economy.
- At Double Eagle II Airport, there are plans to build Mesa Film Studios as well as a new general aviation terminal and increased private hangar space. Investment in airport infrastructure is consistent with existing growth in the transportation sector.



Below: "The Neighborhood" Senior Living Apartments in Rio Rancho. To the Right: Recently completed multi-family homes in Rio Rancho.



Employment by Industry, Albuquerque Metro Area, 2019 and 2023



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics and NMDWS Current Employment Statistics



- Rio Rancho continues to have fast-paced housing development, not just in traditional single-family homes, but also with multi-family and built-to-rent units to accommodate a growing demand for workforce housing. There is a surge in new commercial development throughout the City.

- Sandoval County is seeing renewed investment at Intel's Rio Rancho campus, which gained nearly 600 employees in 2023 when it opened its new fabrication facility for manufacturing advanced semiconductor packaging technologies.



Recent Intel expansion in Rio Rancho. Photo courtesy of Intel Corp.

- Economic activity in southeast Albuquerque includes the Max Q development which is bringing utilities and infrastructure to its 70-acre mixed use campus to attract thousands of new jobs over the coming years. “MaxQ@Kirtland allows companies to build custom offices and facilities that are uniquely positioned for partnership with government customers and others advancing next-generation space exploration and development.”



- Mesa del Sol is the location of newly expanded Netflix film studios, which has directly invested \$575 million into productions at its 108-acre facility creating 4,000 supporting jobs over the past four years. Mesa del Sol is also the planned location for Maxeon Solar Technologies’ new solar cell manufacturing facility, which is expected to create up to 1,800 jobs.



Rendering of Maxeon Solar at Mesa del Sol



- In the Village of Los Lunas there are plans for a new 80,000 square foot hospital and auxiliary support buildings. In addition, the newly constructed Amazon distribution center opened with 600 employees. Los Lunas is also gearing up to break ground on a second east/west corridor south of New Mexico 6, including an interchange and river crossing, worth \$155 million.



El Cabo Wind Farm in Torrance County

- In Torrance County, the construction of El Cabo Wind Farm occupies 60,000 acres of rural land to operate one of the largest clean energy projects in the nation. The developer, Pattern, has invested billions into the New Mexico economy and has plans for more.

Revitalization Efforts

These highlights represent just a handful of prospective economic generators in the region. While they tend to capture news headlines, there is a bevy of important investments aimed at elevating our quality of life. These include projects that catalyze revitalization, adaptive reuse, safety planning, improved trails and bikeways, carbon reduction programs (and more!), all which serve to make our communities stronger. New Multigenerational Centers, metropolitan redevelopment initiatives, new and expanded hospital facilities, preservation of open space for recreation, just to name a few, represent reinvestment in our existing communities. We can only support growth if we preserve and maintain our existing assets.

While the picture of regional growth will shift over time, one thing is certain; regional collaboration and planning will ensure that we arrive at a bright future together.



Facilitating Economic Expansion

WCCNM Hosts Employee Recruitment Events for Intel, Arcosa, and others

In 2021, Intel announced a \$3.5 billion expansion in New Mexico to advance semiconductor packaging technologies at its Rio Rancho site. Recently, the company secured \$8.5 billion in direct funding and \$11 billion in federal loans to further modernize its 218-acre campus. This significant investment is set to generate over 700 high-tech Intel jobs, 1,000 construction jobs, and support 3,500 additional jobs statewide. As part of its workforce development, Intel plans to train 200 employees, each earning an average wage of \$47.50. The funding has also enabled the creation of over 200 new positions, broadening the candidate pool to various educational backgrounds. With WCCNM’s assistance Intel was able to fill to 200 vacancies with expedience and move forward with a highly qualified workforce

Intel Hiring Event

This promising development attracted more than 1,000 job seekers to a WCCNM co-sponsored major hiring events at the Rio Rancho Event Center. These events helped Intel acquire a significant amount of workforce to support these expansion efforts. Supported by the CHIPS and Science Act, Intel’s hiring initiative aims to recruit hundreds of skilled engineers and offers substantial growth opportunities in semiconductor manufacturing. The event underscored Intel’s commitment to local economic growth and workforce expansion.



Arcosa Wind Towers New Production Facility

In March 2023, Arcosa Inc. announced plans to open a new production facility in Belen, set to begin operations by mid-2024. This facility is expected to employ 250 people. Arcosa Wind Towers, a Dallas-based wind-turbine manufacturer, will train 86 of these employees, offering an average wage of \$23.80. A hiring event for Arcosa attracted over 100 job seekers.

Employer Recruiting Events

Employer recruiting events are ongoing. We actively participate in partner community events and perform

outreach activities, working closely with the City of Albuquerque, the Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS), local businesses and associations, employers, and engaging new companies entering the region. Our strategy includes inviting these entities to our facility to showcase the comprehensive business services the workforce system offers. WCCNM-sponsored hiring events offer unique opportunities for employers to expand their recruiting efforts which may include access to the public workforce system, significant outreach activities that include social media and announcements via the WCCNM’s website, onsite interviewing and full access to the NM Workforce Connection office resources and partner networks.

Making the Match

At the Workforce Connection, Career Consultants collaborate closely with Business Consultants to facilitate direct connections between qualified candidates and employers. This approach enables candidates to participate in on-the-spot pre-screening or schedule interviews at company sites. These methods not only streamline the hiring process for employers but also maximizes the potential for job placements.

USDOL Grant: CHANCES

The WCCNM has actively pursued workforce related grant opportunities. The \$2 million CHANCES grant was awarded to address the workforce needs of folks getting released from correctional facilities.

Services for the CHANCES program officially started in 2023 at the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Detention Center and the Central New Mexico Correctional Facility. Since that time, services have been expanded to three additional state correctional facilities: Guadalupe County Correctional in Santa Rosa, NM; Western New Mexico Correctional in Grants, New Mexico; and Springer Correctional Center in Springer, New Mexico.

The CHANCES program has received 106 referrals that has resulted in 90 enrollments. Trainings provided included the Online Workforce Readiness (OWR) curriculum that covers resume writing, cover letters, interviewing, career portfolios, barriers to employment, budget management, education and work, and development of a Transition Plan that addresses all anticipated post-release barriers.

Post-release services focused on co-enrollment with WIOA programs, entry into employment or occupational training and implementation of all support services needed. The program has developed several community and agency partnerships for support services and has provided funds for clothing, emergency rent, utility costs, hygiene products, medical needs, physicals and drug tests for employment, as well as stipends for training and incentives.

Participants have accessed training for CDL licenses, digital coding and solar panel installation. The program has experienced retention challenges, but the recidivism rate has remained under 10 percent.



USDOL Grant: H-1B Pathways to Infrastructure Jobs

This grant was awarded to WCCNM in September 2023 and will conclude in September 2028.

The grant will allow us to invest in public-private partnerships to develop, implement, and scale training programs in H-1B industries and occupations critical to meeting the goals of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). Industries and occupations covered include advanced manufacturing; information technology; and professional, scientific, and technical services occupations that support renewable energy, transportation, and broadband infrastructure sectors. Also included are jobs in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors; broadband expansion and smart city grids; and electrical, industrial, and civil engineers and technicians who facilitate the design, construction, modernization, and maintenance infrastructure.

The WCCNM expects to serve over 250 participants over the 5-year period, with most participants being enrolled through co-enrollments with WIOA. We are planning and partnering with New Mexico Chamber of Commerce, the State's Energy Minerals and Natural Resource Department, the Energy Conservation Management Division, Regional Development Corporation, and New Mexico Department of Transportation, Bernalillo County Fleet Service and Sustainability Division.

Staff have had preliminary conversations with Maxeon about their future employment needs. This collaboration will further explore sector strategy development. Staff are actively doing research and identifying jobs in each H-1B sector.

Work and Learn

Apprenticeship, Internships and Transitional Jobs

The WCCNM provides a combination of services that enable a “work and learn” environment. From registered apprenticeships requiring closely-monitored work and training, to internships with a structured training plan and work experiences that enable students to learn hands-on, from someone in their prospective industry. Work-based learning opportunities provide essential first-hand engagement with the workplace for those who want to learn new skills but need to earn a living while doing so. More importantly, a strong training and development program can have numerous short- and long-term benefits, like increasing employee engagement and retention rates, encouraging innovative thinking, mitigating risks, and giving the organization a competitive edge.

Adult Programs

To date in the current program year, the Central Region Service Provider has enrolled 478 new Adult and Dislocated Worker Job Seekers into classroom training, and 275 into work-based learning opportunities that include on-the-job training, internships, and apprenticeships.

Youth Program

In PY 23, the WIOA Youth Program has placed 109 youth and young adults into paid work experiences and/or internships providing valuable experience in over 60 different occupations including automotive technician, office administration, home health aid, marketing, retail, computer technology, landscaping, dental assistant, veterinary assistant, welding, construction, electrical wiring, sheet metal, emergency medical technician, and many more. Close to 60% of these placements lead to sustained employment opportunities.

In Program Year 2023, a greater focus was placed on the Youth Program’s efforts to support trade industries. The Youth program worked with the DWS Apprenticeship Program to provide the region’s first

Youth Apprenticeship Week. Program staff, youth and partners were provided information in various apprenticeship opportunities in the Region and hosted apprenticeship programs at the workforce center including the Fire Sprinkler Associations Apprenticeship Program.

The WIOA Youth Program also collaborated with the DWS Apprenticeship Program to co-enroll participants working towards full apprenticeship credentials in Fire and Rescue and Emergency Medical Technicians. Several presentations and meetings were held throughout the year to various apprenticeship programs from local unions in the construction, Film, and Information Technology fields, and partnership continue with Associated Builders and Contractors providing direct access to apprenticeship programs and employers. The WIOA Youth program continues to strive in the growth of pre-apprentice and apprenticeship opportunities for youth and young adults.

Success Story

In September 2023, Charlize visited the Workforce office in Valencia County and met with WIOA Youth

Program staff seeking assistance with employment.

Charlize is a senior at Los Lunas High School with a learning disability. Upon intake Charlize shared that she has been taking welding classes, and was interested in work experience in welding.

Charlize completed 5 hours of tutoring and the pre-employment BEST training. She showed she was driven, determined and ready to take on the task at hand in a field mostly driven by men and did not sway her choice in worksites choosing Sisneros Bros. MFG.

The interview and a tour were conducted, and the site offered to host and train Charlize. She began work experience on October 23, 2023, and received stellar evaluations and showed responsibility, maturity, and the eagerness to learn along with an above-board work ethic.

This work experience placement has been a very positive and fruitful endeavor and she was offered a position with the establishment and accepted. As part of the team, Charlize was offered schooling and certifications paid by the Sisneros Bros.

Workforce Connection Reaches Out

Technology, Social Media Marketing, and Outreach

WCCNM Outreach and Marketing has focused on implementing new digital technology tools to increase the number of small business owners and employers that learn about and request our services. In addition, we are using technology to increase enrollment in our career services, attendance at hiring events, and participation in the variety of partner programs we offer job seekers.

Social Media Marketing: A robust social media marketing strategy which focuses on consistent and frequent posting across 6 channels (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn) combined with an investment in educational video production services, has increased our visibility and made our services more accessible for job seekers and businesses in the New Mexico Central Region.

Digital Guide For Businesses

As part of our outreach to engage local business, we created a free digital guide for employers called "Successful Social Media Marketing Strategies." This comprehensive digital resource was shared with businesses at the Workforce Development Conference in October of 2023.

Chambers of Commerce Digital Tools

We increased outreach by joining five Central Region's Chambers of Commerce to leverage their online marketing tools and attend business networking events.

The Business Services Connector

In July 2023, we completed the development phase of the Business Services Connector, a tool designed to transform how businesses interact with workforce services in Central New Mexico. Our goal was to

create a streamlined, efficient process that not only simplifies submission of requests but also promotes enhanced communication and collaboration among our workforce partners, and the business community.

March 2024 saw focused training sessions for new and existing staff, ensuring all team members were well-versed in using the platform effectively. April 1st was the official launch date to the public which included radio spots, a press releases, several informational videos, and social media marketing posts on 6 channels. Data collected shows that use of this online tool is increasing each month and is effective in matching business owners with specific services.

As of now, the Business Services Connector hosts 111 active business accounts, demonstrating the successful uptake of the tool within the business community. Moving forward, we are committed to continuously enhancing the platform by integrating advanced features to improve user experience and expanding our services to cover more industry sectors.

Overall Online Digital Strategies

To build overall awareness of WCCNM events, programs, and workshops, new digital promotion strategies have been incorporated. These include radio spots, secure online forms, QR codes, social media scheduling tools, video production platforms, online

Chamber marketing tools, email marketing tools, online calendars, and the methodical improvement and the online distribution of printed marketing materials for our partners through our Intranet.

Virtual Informational Sessions for Business Owners

The WCCNM organized weekly virtual Informational Sessions with business owners in order to build a partnership with them and introduce them to our business services. These virtual sessions include key partners that offer workforce development strategies and give an overview of customized services and trainings available to them. As a result, we have successfully assisted companies with Virtual Hiring Events, which include online registration, online employee screenings, and interviews.

Investment in Technology Platform - Increased Data Collection Security and Privacy Incorporating Secure Online Forms using Formsite

Improving Accessibility and ADA Compliance on our website

In the third quarter, we partnered with Real Time Technology Solutions to upgrade our online presence and functionality of our website with improved accessibility.

EDA Awards Investments

Communities hard hit by Wildfires to Receive Assistance



Last year, the U.S. Economic Development Administration announced Congress was releasing \$483 million in additional Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program funds under the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act to support long-term economic recovery and resiliency in regions impacted by natural disasters. In the central region, that meant that communities in Sandoval County and Valencia County could apply, since both counties had suffered severe wildfires in 2022.

Village of Jemez Springs

Earlier this year, the Village of Jemez Springs received a \$2.2 million grant award to improve wastewater infrastructure to support local businesses. The project will be matched with \$561,295 in local funds and is expected to create and retain nearly 240 jobs. The improvements will help the area increase capacity for businesses after the devastating wildfires. The project will also help support fire suppression efforts in the wake of future fire events. Once completed, the project will lay the groundwork for long-term economic vitality throughout the region.

Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District

Similarly, the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District received a \$2.1 million dollar grant award to construct new buildings and infrastructure devastated by the Big Hole Fire of 2022 which consumed 900 acres of cottonwood forest and bosque—much of it conservation land that was home to rare and endangered communities of native grasslands, towering cottonwoods, and wetlands that provide habitat for wildlife including elk, wild turkeys, and migrating birds—all of which have been drawing increasing numbers of ecotourists.

This project will also reduce the potential devastation of future climate disasters and decrease the time it takes to recover from climate disasters.

Pueblos of Santo Domingo and Jemez

Two of our pueblo partners in the region also received federal Disaster Relief funds:

- The Pueblo of Jemez received a \$3 million grant award for irrigation infrastructure improvements on Tribal land. This grant will expand water supplies for the local farming community and food vendors following a series of monsoons and wildfires in the region.
- The Pueblo of Santo Domingo received \$210,000 to fund a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) focused on Economic Resilience.

“President Biden’s Investing in America agenda is a commitment to ensuring communities in New Mexico and across the country have the resources needed to grow strong, resilient regional economies,” said Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. “These EDA investments will grow economic opportunity for New Mexicans by creating jobs and improving infrastructure in communities across the state.”

EDA grants are awarded through a competitive process based upon the application’s merit, eligibility, and the availability of funds.



Village of Jemez Springs Wastewater Treatment Plant

Bringing Investment to the Mid-Region

Capacity Grant and Government Results & Opportunity Program Fund



The Mid-Region Regional Planning Program (RPP) provides planning assistance, technical services, and capacity building to the entire MRCOG region with a focus on rural communities. The RPP acts as an extension of local government staff, emphasizing regional collaboration and long-range planning. Some of the technical assistance the RPP provides includes helping secure and administer investments for the communities in the Mid-Region.

Capacity Grant

The Mid-Region Regional Planning Program (RPP) was awarded a \$200,000 Capacity Grant from the New Mexico Department of Finance Administration (DFA) in July of 2023. This is the second time the RPP has received this award. This award is designed to provide grant research, writing, and management assistance to local and tribal governments.

The RPP used this award to develop an on-call list of grant professionals with expertise in a wide variety of grant programs. Assistance to the rural and tribal areas in the Mid-Region was prioritized, as these areas typically have less staffing capacity to dedicate to grant activities. It can often be extremely time-intensive for communities to identify funding sources and complete grant applications for their priority projects. The RPP used the newly developed on-call list to pair grant writers with the rural and tribal governments in our region to provide them with staff who could take on the majority of the work to acquire the funding they desired. The contracted grant writers brought a high level of expertise to help the local and tribal governments make their applications more competitive and have a higher chance of being funded.

The RPP used the \$200,000 award by the NMDFA to assist eight entities. This included five grant research projects and eight grant writing projects. For the grant research projects, the contracted grant writers worked closely with an entity to locate potential funding sources for their priority projects. They developed a plan for applying for funding in the future. The grant writing assistance included the completion of applications for both state and federal funding programs, with a total ask of over \$14 million. The applications included projects for workforce development, fire and emergency response, broadband, cybersecurity, and other infrastructure.

The RPP will seek this funding in the future so that we can continue to offer this much-needed assistance to the communities in the Mid-Region and bring investment into the state.

Government Results and Opportunity Program Fund (GRO Fund)

At the 2024 legislative session, the legislature approved the Government Results and Opportunity Program Fund (GRO Fund). This fund replaces the spending bill previously referred to as the “junior

bill.” The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee recommended a new process this year to increase the transparency, evaluation, and accountability for state spending that many legislators felt was lacking in previous year’s junior bills.

Unlike the junior bill money (which was a one-year appropriation), the GRO Fund is a two-year appropriation with the specific intent to bolster local capacity by funding operational costs and programmatic resources for a variety of programs in the state. Every Senate member was allocated up to \$800,000, with a minimum of \$200,000 per appropriation. Similarly, each House member had access to a total of \$480,000, with a minimum appropriation of \$160,000.

The biggest change from the previous year’s funding is that the seven regional councils of government have been asked to manage these appropriations to ensure that the state money is handled appropriately and within the confines of state and federal law. The Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) committed to managing 63 appropriations totaling \$11,680,000.

Project Development

RTPO Assists Tribal and Local Public Agencies Apply for Project Funding



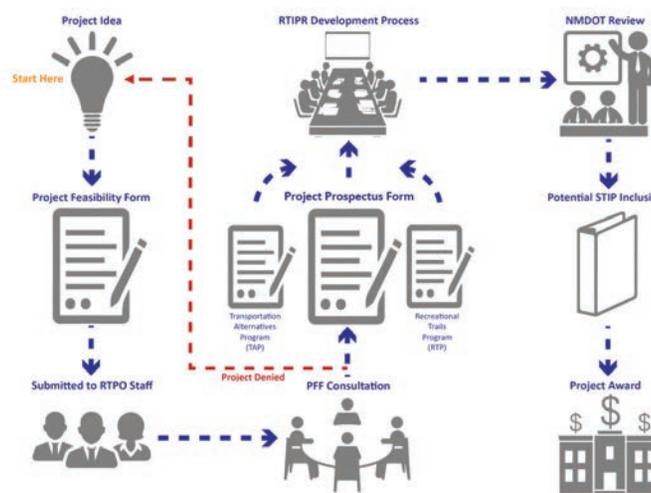
Project Development is one of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization’s core responsibilities. The RTPO works directly with tribal and local public agencies in the development of transportation projects, assisting with funding applications, and serving as a liaison between these agencies and the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT). As projects advance through this process, they are added to the Regional Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPR), which is a prioritized list of projects that is developed on a regular basis for potential inclusion into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). For projects that haven’t received funding yet, inclusion in the RTIPR and STIP can increase the likelihood of future funding.

During the past two years, the RTPO assisted tribal and local public agencies with a total of 29 transportation projects; helping communities in the region apply for approximately \$23 million in project funding. The Transportation Project Fund (TPF) is the primary funding source sought for these projects.

The TPF is administered by the NMDOT. Eligible projects include environmental and other studies, planning, design, construction, and acquisition of rights of way necessary for the development of transportation infrastructure, which includes highways, streets, roadways, bridges, crossing structures, parking facilities, and all areas for vehicular, transit, bicycle or pedestrian travel, ingress, egress, and parking.

The TPF requires a five percent Local Entity Match. However, local entities can apply for a Match Waiver if they can demonstrate financial hardship. The wide range of eligible projects and the fund’s low local matching requirements make the TPF a desirable funding source for tribal and local public agencies throughout the region.

While the TPF is a valuable funding source for entities in the region, the RTPO can assist entities in applying for any funding source that their transportation projects are eligible for, including (but not limited to) the Transportation Alternatives and Recreational Trails Programs, Carbon Reduction Program, Local Government Road Funds, and the NMDOT Highway Safety Improvement Program.



Below: A section of the Regional Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPR)

TITLE	LEAD ENTITY	PROJECT LOCATION	COUNTY	DESCRIPTION	(Miles)	Funding Source	PROJECT TOTAL	STATE - 95%	LOCAL - 5%
W. Alan Ayers, Walker, 9th St.	Town of Estancia	Various Roads, Town of Estancia	Torrance	Microsurfacing existing roads within the Town of Estancia. Mobilization	2.1	TPF	92438.12	87816.214	4621.906
Horton Road Improvements	Town of Edgewood	Horton Road, Town of Edgewood	Santa Fe	This project consists of planning, design, drainage improvements, const	2.99	TPF	950000	902500	47500
Loring Avenue Street and Drainage Improvements	Town of Estancia	Loring Avenue Street and Drainage, Town of Estancia	Torrance	This project consists of planning, design, drainage improvements, const	0.19	TPF	500000	475000	25000
Loring Avenue Street and Drainage Improvements	Town of Estancia	Loring Avenue Street and Drainage, Town of Estancia	Torrance	Planning, design, drainage improvements, pavement rehabilitation impr	0.25	TPF	500000	475000	25000
Roosevelt Ave Street/Road Improvements	Town of Mountainair	Roosevelt Ave Street/Road, Town of Mountainair	Torrance	Installation of all weather pavement surface on Roosevelt Avenue fro	0.3	TPF	617700	586815	30885
Pinon Street Improvements	Town of Mountainair	Pinon Street, Town of Mountainair	Torrance	Installation of all weather pavement surface on Roosevelt Avenue fro	0.72	TPF	1302300	1237185	65115
Cedardale Ave Road/Street Improvements	Town of Mountainair	Cedardale Ave Road/Street, Town of Mountainair	Torrance	Installation of all weather pavement surface on Cedardale Avenue fro	0.59	TPF	1437800	1365910	71890



20 Years of Collecting Orthophotography

MRCOG began coordinating the collection of digital aerial imagery for member agencies on an ad-hoc basis in 1996 and has been collecting orthophotography on a regular, biennial schedule since 2004. So, this year technically marks the 20th anniversary of the regional orthophotography project!

Orthophotography is digital aerial photography that has been “orthorectified” or geometrically corrected for distortions caused by the curvature of the earth and vertical displacement of the plane carrying the camera. A highly precise global-position system (GPS) device records the three-dimensional position of the camera at the time each image is captured, and many overlapping images are processed to be digitally flattened and seamlessly stitched together. The resulting images appear to have been taken from directly above and show objects at their true scale and geographic position so that measurements of distances, angles and areas can be taken directly from them in a geographic information system (GIS).

Imagery acquisition flights are typically undertaken in early to mid-March when trees are still bare of leaves to capture the most unimpeded view of the ground from above. All the imagery for this year’s project has been captured and is currently in the orthorectification and accuracy validation process. We expect the finalized images to be delivered sometime in November. This data is made freely available upon request as a service to the public.

Ortho-imagery is commonly used in GIS software as a “map accurate” background image useful in creating precise maps and models of the terrain. The orthophotos we collect are widely used by our member governments for planning and in resource management applications. Common uses include monitoring changes in land cover over time, such as vegetation types, urban development patterns, and the meander of rivers and their floodplains.

The coverage areas acquired have expanded or contracted and shifted over time depending on the available funding and the interest areas of the multiple member agencies whose financial contributions to the project have made it possible all these years. Next year, planning for the 2026 imagery collection effort will start. New developments in technology such as the increasing accuracy of satellite imagery are providing exciting potential directions for the program to take in the future.

Above right: Plane used to collect MRCOG’s Orthophotography. Above left: Orthophotograph of Downtown Albuquerque. Left: Orthophotograph of UNM Area.



Transportation and Technology

The New Era of Smart Transportation

The operation and safety of the transportation system has benefited greatly from technological advances, ever since the installation of the very first traffic signal in the late 19th Century. Today, transportation planners look to technology to create a safe transportation system that provides optimal mobility. And that technology does not just involve signals and roadway infrastructure anymore. It also includes the continuous, real-time interactions among sensors and computers inside of vehicles, the one way and two-way communications taking place with the infrastructure itself, as well as communications among drivers, via drivers' mobile devices. This is referred to as the era of "Smart Transportation."

Smart Transportation

Included under this header are the multitude of sensors and communications that allow for improved driver "situational awareness": GPS signals from real-time travel-app information help to determine the best route to take to avoid congestion, combine with sensors built into modern cars that detect and alert to surrounding environmental conditions. These mobile data collection platforms are critical to the improved safety and flow of the transportation system.



Crucial to the success of Smart Transportation are the local public agencies responsible for operating and maintaining traffic signals, sensors, and communications with centralized traffic management centers. The agencies need to make sure to keep up to date with the latest technologies in order to match the advances made by car manufacturers. The need for dedicated resources to accomplish this is higher than ever. If we can continue to modernize our roadway infrastructure with these technologies, we can ensure a robust, safe, and resilient transportation system.

MRMPO plays an essential role in helping to prioritize the funding and programming of necessary advanced technologies as part of the local transportation planning process.

Connected and Automated Vehicles

Connected and Automated Vehicles are vehicles that include smart sensors, visual displays, and onboard communication units. These rely on ultrasonic, radar, and camera technologies to help vehicles see and analyze their surroundings in order to help drivers make decisions while driving. They include:

- Lane departure warnings/assist
- Icy road conditions
- Collision warning

Waymo Autonomous Vehicle System



- Intersection Movement Assist
- Advanced driver assist systems

Some types of travel—urban taxi services, highway freight operations, and limited deployments in current vehicles—already rely on these technologies.

Another piece of the Smart Transportation System is the communication that takes place between vehicles and the roadway infrastructure itself. Elements of this cell/G5-based network include Smart Parking, Smart Work Zone Communications, Red Light Violation Cameras, and Smart Traffic Lights, which alert drivers to signal changes, sense when pedestrians are in a crosswalk, and alert to other vehicles entering intersections on red.



Above: monitoring traffic conditions in the Albuquerque Metro Area at the AMPA Regional Traffic Management Center

Transportation Management Centers

Transportation Management Centers (TMCs) are the hubs which bring all this together. Outfitted with communications technologies and staffed by agency professionals, they operate as the focal point of data collection for roadway conditions and operations. Traffic and congestion information is collected and synthesized in “real time” in the form of messages or alerts to the traveling public.

The information used by TMC operators consists of:

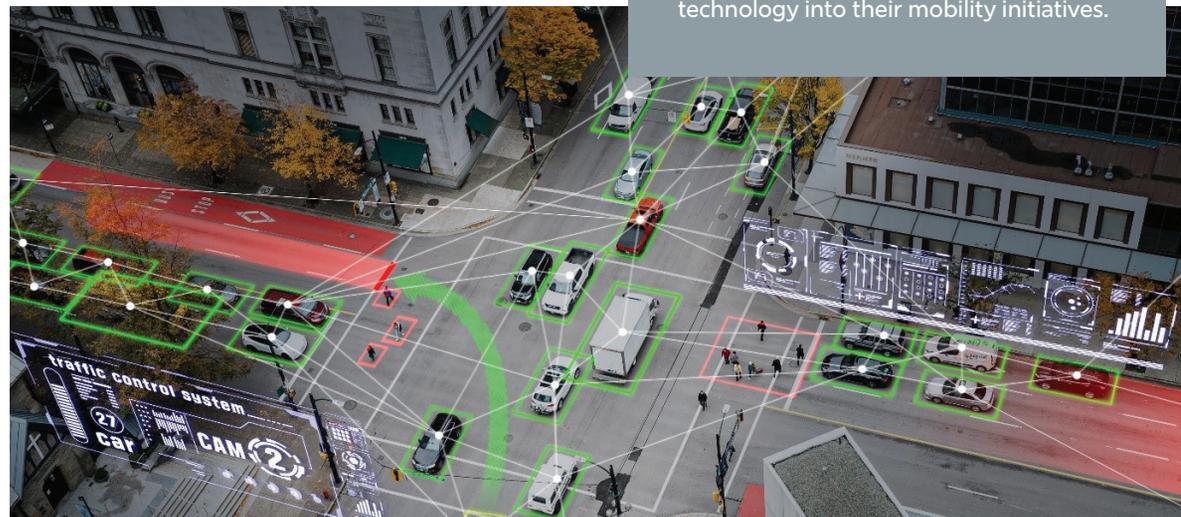
- Data feeds from sensor devices in the field, including volumes, weather conditions, etc.
- Mobile-sourced data with speeds and associated roadway conditions data like crashes or congestion causing hazardous events
- Video feeds from CCTV cameras placed on the roadway

TMC operators use this data to monitor roadway conditions and alert the proper authorities and approaching drivers (via dynamic message signs, app, or website) about problem areas, thus reducing crashes and saving drivers time, money, and fuel.

Representatives of law enforcement, fire and emergency management services, and local transit agencies are often also located at TMCs to improve multi-agency response. In the AMPA, we have the Regional Traffic Management Center (RTMC), a

central facility currently staffed by NMDOT, the City of Albuquerque, and local emergency responders. There are plans to include all AMPA transportation agencies in later phases.

This one location monitors traffic signals, identifies hot spots or crashes, and allows for proactive deployment of traffic management strategies to reduce congestion and coordinate state and local agencies during emergencies, special events, daily stop-and-go traffic. RTMCs truly serve as “mission control” for integrated traffic operations!



“Getting ready for AVs? 93% of US municipalities say yes”
ITS International, June 28, 2024

Key findings from research by Verra Mobility Corporation, conducted by Wakefield Research:

Autonomous vehicles are coming: most US municipalities (93%) think they will need to be ready for driverless AVs on their streets in the next five years.

55% of municipal tech leaders have “reducing road safety incidents” as a top three priority for tech-based solutions.

43% report their jurisdiction has deprioritized support for EV infrastructure because consumer demand for the technology hasn’t kept up with predictions.

81% anticipate some systems will need to be updated before they’re ready to incorporate connected vehicles technology into their mobility initiatives.

Transitions 2045

Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update



The Albuquerque metro area’s long range transportation plan is updated every five years, and MPO staff are currently working on the plan update. The plan, which is called the Transitions 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), officially kicked off with the public and agency stakeholders in the fall of 2023. It will go before the Metropolitan Transportation Board for adoption in April 2025.

“Transitions” was selected as the title for this plan update because it reflects the dramatically changing, post-Covid world we’re living in, which includes aspects such as a slowing rate of growth in the region, different travel behaviors caused by more people working from home as well as other factors, a greater awareness of the need for equity in transportation, a deepening housing affordability crisis, and escalating transportation project costs. Other issues being considered in the plan are preparing for rapidly-evolving technologies in the transportation sector and the critical need for safer transportation conditions, especially for pedestrians. These issues and more are being looked at in the Transitions 2045 MTP.

As always, MRMPO is working closely with agency partners in the region. Much work is done through MPO committees, including the Land Use and Integration, Active Transportation, Intelligent Transportation, and Congestion Management Process Committees. Member agency staff actively participate in these committees, providing valuable input and putting regional collaboration into practice. MRMPO also works with Tribal governments, environmental stakeholders, community organizations, and the general public. All the different perspectives truly help enrich and strengthen the plan.

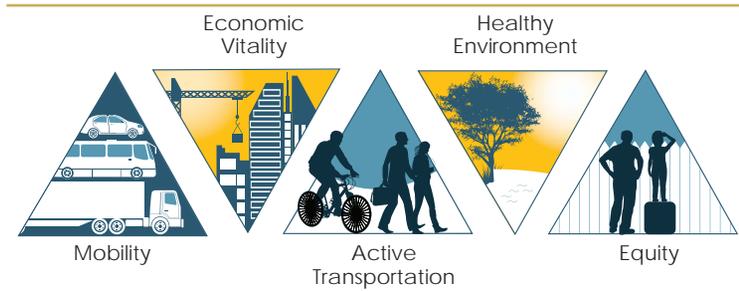
The Transitions 2045 MTP will be a performance-based plan, meaning Federal performance measures will be integrated and will influence the plan.

Four of the Transitions 2024 MTP goals (see graphic to the left) are carried over from the previous MTP: Mobility, Economic Vitality, and Healthy Environment; and one has been added for this MTP: Equity. The Equity goal has been added to help improve safe and reliable transportation systems in traditionally underserved communities.



In addition to the added goal, safety has been incorporated into the objectives of the goals as a way of elevating the importance of safety in the regional planning framework.

Public outreach approaches undertaken by MPO staff continue to emphasize going to where people are to hear from them, and hearing from those who have been underserved by the transportation system is a priority. MRMPO is also focusing on building strong working relationships with community organizations that represent those populations and varied interests. Feedback will be considered and integrated into the plan whenever possible. New software programs for public outreach have been used for this MTP. The programs include an interactive survey platform and project web page. The tools are being used to help offer additional ways for the public to weigh in on the plan. In addition, an updated MTP video was produced and can be viewed online.





MRMPO'S Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts Program

MRMPO recently concluded work on a study that looks at how to grow its bicycle and pedestrian counts program in the region to gain a better understanding of non-motorized travel in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area.

The study began in November 2022 and wrapped up in May 2024. MRMPO worked with a consultant team as well as a Stakeholders Committee comprised of local agency staff on the project. The study included an examination of existing conditions, program recommendations, and a methodology MRMPO can use to estimate bicycle and pedestrian trips across the region, even in places without bicycle and pedestrian counting equipment.

MRMPO will use the findings of the study to inform the development of an expanded bicycle and pedestrian counts program led by MRMPO and with the continued collaboration of local agencies. The installation of new permanent counters will begin in 2024/2025 and will significantly increase the amount of bicycle and pedestrian data collected in the region for the purpose of better supporting local bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts.

25 Busiest Intersections in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area

MRCOG collects traffic counts at all major roads in Bernalillo, Valencia, Torrance, Sandoval, and southern Santa Fe counties. The resulting traffic data is used to support local, state, and federal transportation planning activities, and to produce annual Traffic Flow Maps as well as a listing of the area's 25 Busiest Intersections. Below is the most recent listing, based on 2023 data.

1. Montgomery Blvd. & San Mateo Blvd.
2. Montgomery Blvd. & Wyoming Blvd.
3. Paseo Del Norte & Pan American East
4. Paseo Del Norte & San Pedro Dr.
5. Ellison Dr. & Coors Blvd. Bypass
6. Paseo Del Norte & Wyoming Blvd.
7. Irving Blvd. & Coors Blvd.
8. I-40 S. Ramps & Eubank Blvd.
9. Montaño & Coors Blvd.
10. Montgomery Blvd. & Pan American East
11. Montaño & Pan American West
12. Quail Rd. & Coors Blvd.
13. Osuna Rd. & San Mateo Blvd.
14. Academy Rd. & Wyoming Blvd.
15. Westside Blvd. & N.M. 528
16. Montgomery Blvd. & Eubank Blvd.
17. Coors Blvd. Bypass & Coors Blvd.
18. Menaul Blvd. & Wyoming Blvd.
19. I-40 Ramps & Louisiana Blvd.
20. San Mateo Blvd. & Pan American East
21. Paseo Del Norte & Louisiana Blvd.
22. Southern Blvd. & N.M. 528
23. Central Ave. & Eubank Blvd.
24. Lomas Blvd. & Eubank Blvd.
25. Menaul Blvd. & San Mateo Blvd.

Regional Transportation Safety Action Plan

Update Finalized and Officially Adopted

MRCOG adopted the 2024 Regional Transportation Safety Action Plan (RTSAP) in August, 2024. The plan is critically important as New Mexico remains the worst state for fatalities according to Dangerous by Design (Smart Growth America, 2024). New Mexico is the most dangerous state in the nation for pedestrians, and Albuquerque is the nation’s second most dangerous metropolitan area for pedestrians.

The RTSAP reveals many concerning trends over the five-year period from 2017 through 2021. Most notably, while total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) went down in 2020 and 2021, the fatality rate went up. It’s not clear why the post pandemic period saw a spike in fatal crashes, but this trend will continue to be explored and addressed.

Thirty percent of the traffic fatalities involved pedestrians, even though pedestrian involved crashes only account for two percent of overall crashes. Motorcyclist crashes showed similar outcomes: they accounted for only two percent of overall crashes, but 18 percent of total fatalities. This demonstrates



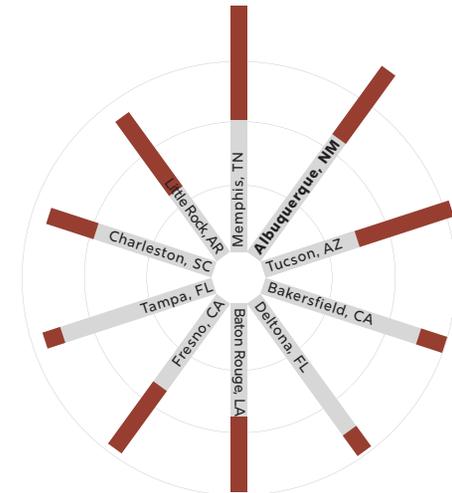
Single Car Rollover Crash in Albuquerque (Courtesy of KRQE 13)

RTSAP

the outsized impacts of traffic fatalities on our most vulnerable road users.

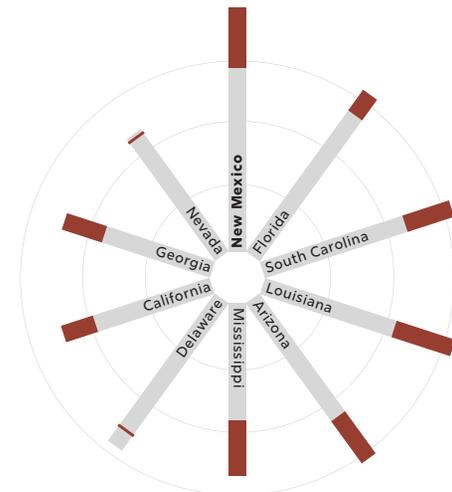
Additionally, single vehicle fatal crashes (crashes not involving other vehicles or pedestrians) have been on the rise—attributed to events such as rollovers and collisions with objects along roadways. These types of crashes were most prominent in small urban and rural areas. Excessive speeding was often a relevant factor in these cases.

Safety is an especially large concern in areas with low-income residents and/or persons of color. Crashes were highest in the region’s most traditionally underserved communities, as determined by the MRCOG Vulnerability Index. These locations often have higher rates of walking and biking that put people at risk along roadways. Tribal communities also saw a disproportionate share of crash fatalities and serious injuries. To ensure these areas a properly represented, equity has been a focus in the crash analysis as well as the outreach process.



Pedestrian Deaths per 100,000: Top Ten US Metro Areas

Legend:
 Light Grey: Average Fatality Rate 2013-2017
 Dark Red: Average Fatality Rate 2018-2022

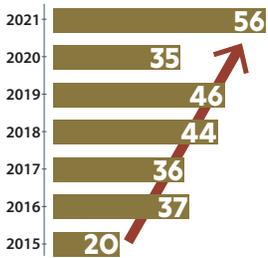


Pedestrian Deaths per 100,000 : Top Ten US States

Legend:
 Light Grey: Average Fatality Rate 2013-2017
 Dark Red: Average Fatality Rate 2018-2022

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Reporting System, 2024

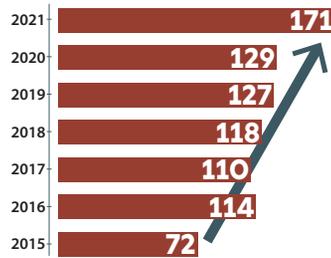
Number of Pedestrian Fatalities
MRCOG Region
2015-2021



180% increase in pedestrian fatalities

Total fatalities increased by 122% during the same time span.

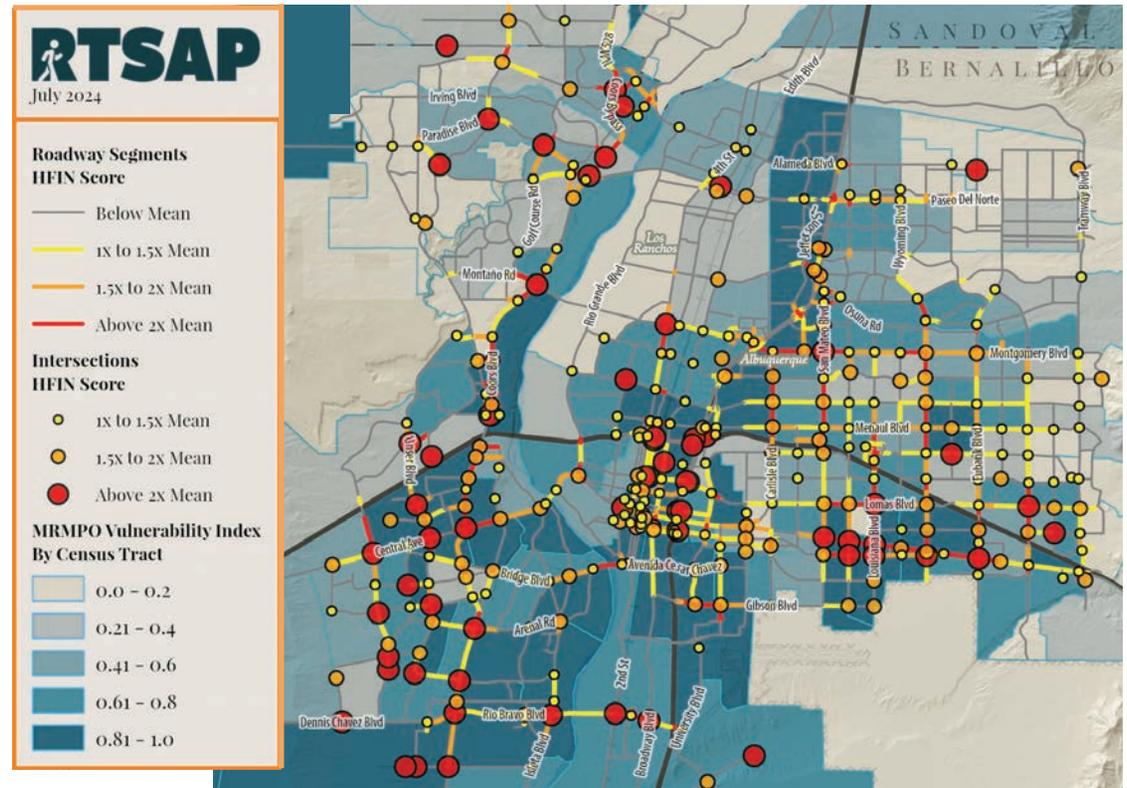
Number of Fatal Crashes
MRCOG Region
2015-2021



138% increase in fatal crashes

Total VMT increased by only 5% during the same time span.

High Fatal and Injury Network for All Modes, 2017-2021



MRCOG conducted extensive outreach with many communities and agencies throughout the region in the fall of 2023. These outreach initiatives included an online survey, focus groups, events, and site visits. This process allows the public to highlight their safety concerns and in turn, MRCOG and our partner agencies can use the information to custom tailor solutions to each area of concern. This also provides a better idea of overall transportation safety concerns affecting the entire region.

One of the most important aspects of the RTSAP is that it can help agencies obtain grant funds through the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program. This is especially important for smaller rural and agencies and Tribal governments that may not have the staff or time to develop their own required qualifying safety plan. The plan includes a prioritized project list as well as a toolbox of proven safety strategies for member agencies to reference when considering implementing safety projects.

MRCOG would like to thank all those who participated on the Technical Team and Steering Committee as well as in focus groups, the film screening, site visits, surveys, and more. MRCOG is committed to improving safety in our region and has set a target for zero fatalities. Through multi-agency initiatives and collaborative efforts, we can attain this goal and make our region's streets safer for all!

MRMPO's Vulnerability Index is a tool to help policymakers understand where to focus their resources to best support those in need. It uses a combination of nineteen Census demographic factors, including poverty, age, disability, and access to transportation to identify areas with populations who might be more vulnerable to things like wildfire, flooding, or even pandemics. A higher score on the MRMPO Vulnerability Index means a higher level of potential vulnerability or need.



Rail Runner Corridor Upgrades

Alameda Siding, CTC, Wi-Fi on the Trains, Valencia County Transit Center

Alameda Siding

Rio Metro completed three significant Rail Runner capital projects in FY2024. The Alameda Siding is a new 2,000-foot passing opportunity for Rail Runner, Amtrak, and BNSF trains in Albuquerque's North Valley – which previously had no passing opportunities for a 14-mile stretch of single track. The siding will reduce delays to passengers when trains traveling in opposite directions—often on-schedule Rail Runner trains and late Amtrak trains—meet on this stretch.

Centralized Traffic Control

Rio Metro also installed Centralized Traffic Control (CTC)—a system that allows dispatchers to control



train movements using signals and switches—on a 4.7-mile stretch of double track in Downtown Albuquerque. CTC now enables speeds up to 60mph, reduces delays, and allows for increased scheduling flexibility.

Wi-Fi Service

Finally, Rio Metro officially rolled out Wi-Fi service to its Rail Runner passengers in November 2023. The Wi-Fi system utilizes Starlink's satellite-based internet, which provides exceptional coverage through the remote and rugged terrain that the Rail Runner traverses. Passengers are pleased with reliable connections and high speeds at no costs.

The completion of these three projects marks the first major efforts to upgrade the Rail Runner corridor since all capital projects were effectively paused for Rio Metro's \$65-million implementation of PTC.

Valencia County Transit Facility

On April 9, 2024, federal, state, and local leaders joined Rio Metro and members of the community to celebrate the grand opening of the Valencia County Transit Facility (VCTF) in Los Lunas. Conveniently located near the intersection of NM 6 and NM 47, the VCTF is the new home of Rio Metro's dial-a-ride and fixed route bus services in Valencia County. The facility features an 8,600 square foot, LEED-certified administration building with a dispatch center, training room and 54-panel solar array. The building is also adjoined by a parking area for Rio Metro's fleet.

Previously, Rio Metro leased office and fleet parking space its fleet from the Village of Los Lunas. Today, Rio Metro's staff and vehicles are more efficiently collocated at the VCTF, and the Village can reclaim these previously leased spaces to better serve its growing community.



Safety Messaging Throughout the Year

At Rio Metro, safety is a way of life. Throughout the year, we spread our safety message through a multitude of engaging campaigns. Here’s a look at some of our safety campaigns over the past year:

Rail Safety Week: held in September, 2023, this campaign focused on how to reduce injuries and fatalities at rail stations and crossings, as well as preventing trespassing on or near railroad tracks. We used a combination of print ads, posters at Rail Runner stations, digital ads on the train and station monitors, website banner ads, news story, community outreach, social media, and a video announcement.

Pedestrian Safety Month: throughout the month of October, Rio Metro shared weekly safety tips for pedestrians and drivers via social media, the Rio Metro website, and on train and Rail Runner station monitors. We collaborated with MRCOG’s Transportation Planning Department on this campaign.

Operation Safe Driver Week in July: a safe-driving awareness campaign aimed at passenger and commercial motor vehicle drivers. In 2023, we featured a series of tips from five of our bus operators, which were showcased on the website, Rail Runner train and station monitors, social media, and print ads.

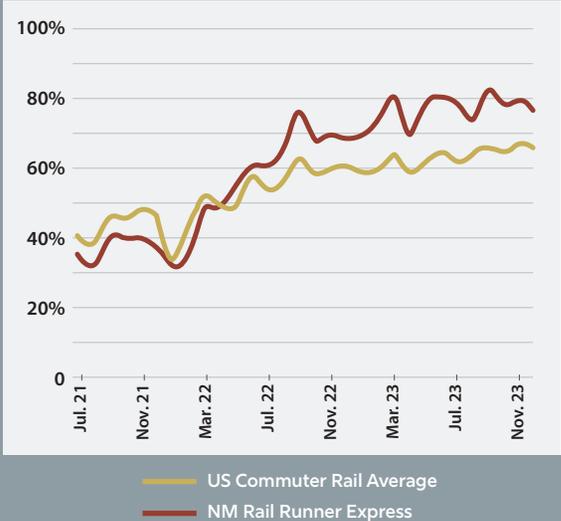
Year-Round Messaging: bus and rail safety messages on social media for #TransitSafetyThursday and monthly safety tips published in our electronic newsletter. Safety materials, such as our Rail Safety activity book, are handed out at outreach events, and a staff member gives rail safety presentations to groups at schools and libraries.

Ridership Recovery

Rio Metro continues to see strong ridership recovery since the COVID pandemic. As Rio Metro approached the end of FY2024, Rail Runner ridership had risen to 80 percent of pre-pandemic levels (FY2019), outpacing the national commuter rail average as well as similarly sized commuter railroads that Rio Metro considers its peers. Rio Metro’s bus and dial-a-ride services in Sandoval and Valencia Counties are also operating between 80 percent and 110 percent of pre-COVID levels.

The Rail Runner’s recovery has particularly benefited from the permanent addition of three weekday, five Saturday trains and two Sunday trains in FY2023, as well as Rio Metro halving the cost of a monthly pass. Also, bus and dial-a-ride services remain fare free in line with Rio Metro’s partners ABQ RIDE and the North Central Regional Transit District.

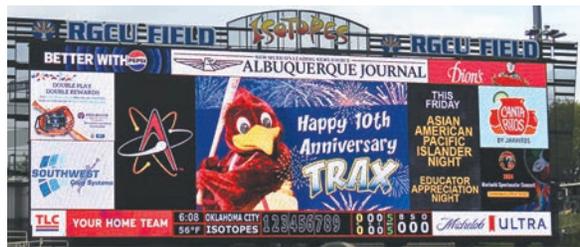
Commuter Rail Ridership (as a percentage of FY2019 Ridership)



Rio Metro Marketing

Increasing Our Presence in the Community

Over the past two years, the Rio Metro marketing department has been included in many community events. Our outreach covered senior centers, veterans, wellness fairs, trade shows and expos, just to name a few. Partnerships start with building relationships, and we are so proud of the ones we have sustained for many years. These unique collaborations have given both the organization and Rio Metro the opportunity to broaden their reach and provide exposure to a diversified audience. As we continue to build new partnerships, our ties strengthen within the local community, making transportation, not just an integral part of these events, but a way to connect.



Trax is 10!

Trax, the Rail Runner’s mascot, celebrated his 10th Anniversary at an Albuquerque Isotopes game where he got his start that many years ago. He also helped demonstrate at safety presentations, made several appearances at elementary schools, and helped kick off running and biking events.

Santa Fe National Cemetery

The Santa Fe National Cemetery Visitation Program kicked off its second year in Spring with three trips averaging 45 participants per trip. The continued success is due to the partnership with the City of Albuquerque’s Department of Senior Affairs, the City of Santa Fe’s Senior Services Division, the Santa Fe National Cemetery, and Daniels Family Funeral Services.

Seniors

Senior group trips on the Rail Runner continue to be popular with women auxiliary groups, veterans’ groups, and senior centers who do exchanges with seniors from the pueblos along the rail corridor.

Summer Program (June - July)

In an effort to encourage young people to ride the train, a summer program (June and July) was launched for youth 17 and under to ride free. Radio, print, flyers, television interviews, website articles and social media were all used to promote this campaign across central New Mexico.



Women in Transportation

The ‘Women in Transportation’ series which shone a light on women in key positions expanded beyond Rio Metro and MRCOG, bringing awareness to the talented pool of women across the state.

Zozobra (September 1)

The Kiwanis Club of Santa Fe has been hosting the Burning of Zozobra which continues to draw huge crowds every year. Boarding and deboarding is at the South Capitol Station where free shuttles are provided. A late night southbound train gets folks home.

Disney The Lion King (September 25- November 1)

In partnership with Disney Theatrical Productions, we promoted the tour coming to Albuquerque through social media, website, and info cards on the train.

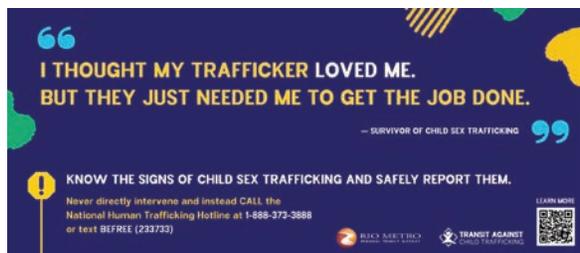


Day of the Tread (October 29)

This Halloween/Day of the Dead themed bicycle event includes routes from 9-55 miles through picturesque landscapes. A featured event is the Rail Runner 12 mile Family Fun Ride where cyclists ride from Downtown Albuquerque to the Los Ranchos/Journal Center Station where a reserved train takes them back.

Protect All Children From Trafficking (January -March)

Rio Metro RTD was one of two transit agencies to be part of a nationwide awareness campaign called Transit Against Child Trafficking (TACT). It aimed at disrupting child sex trafficking at the intersection of public transportation by educating public transportation riders and employees on how to identify the signs of child sex trafficking and how to safely report them. The campaign included social media, text messages, email communications, advertisements in and around Rio Metro transit locations, signage in and on buses and the New Mexico Rail Runner Express, and within transit offices.



Miss Indian World on the Train (April 23)

Miss Indian World, Tori McConnell, rode the Rail Runner ahead of the annual Gathering of Nations Powwow, greeting and visiting with passengers.

New Mexico Law Enforcement Memorial Bike Ride (May 11)

Cyclists ride from Albuquerque north to the NMLE Memorial in Santa Fe. A train car is reserved for those who want the ride back. The fundraising bicycle ride pays tribute to the more than 200 New Mexico officers who have died in the line of duty.



Shakespeare on the Rail (Every Saturday in June):

The actors from the New Mexico Shakespeare Festival (NMSF) like to call it “Shakes on a Train”. They perform short scenes from some of Shakespeare’s most popular plays to the delight of train riders.

Santa Fe Railyard Concert and Movie Series (June 1 - August 23)

Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation (SFRCC) and Lencis360 promoted their summer concert and movie series (Friday and Saturday nights respectively), with the benefit of the Rail Runner adding a late-night southbound trains on Fridays.

International Folk Art Market (July 11-14)

The partnership with IFAM has been on-going for many years, but this is the second year it’s been held at the Santa Fe Railyard Park just a short walking distance from the Santa Fe Depot Train Station.

Rio Metro Marketing Awards

Marketing’s streak of winning awards continues and so far, we have won twelve awards at the international, national, and local levels, including winning the APTA Grand AdWheel Award for two consecutive years. We are proud of the new videos that were produced: A Rail Safety PSA which featured Rail Runner crew members sharing specific safety tips; a Senior 60+ Ride Free on Wednesday video which focused on activities in Santa Fe with two of the actors from the previous award-winning video; and a Rio Metro video highlighting the services and employees of this wonderful transit organization.



Once again, the train schedule was expanded to accommodate attendees both to and from the event.

Sports Partnerships

They include signage, social media contests, Trax (Rail Runner’s mascot) appearances, a trip on the train (NM United U23 team to a game in Santa Fe). We partner with Albuquerque Isotopes (Baseball), New Mexico Bowl (Football), New Mexico United (Soccer), and New Mexico Ice Wolves (Hockey).

MRCOG Board of Directors

Bernalillo County

Commissioner Barbara Baca
Commissioner Eric C. Olivas

Sandoval County

Commissioner Katherine Bruch
Commissioner David Heil

Torrance County

Commissioner Kevin McCall
County Manager Janice Barela

Valencia County

Commissioner Jhonathan Aragon
Commissioner Gerard Saiz

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Councilor Klarissa Peña
Councilor Louis Sanchez
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Councilor Renee Grout

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City of Moriarty

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Councilor M. Steven Anaya

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Councilor Robert Tyler

City of Rio Communities

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Town of Edgewood

Commissioner Jerry Powers

Town of Mountainair

Jesse Davidson

Town of Peralta

Leon Otero

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Village of Corrales

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Councilor Zachary Burkett

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Village of Jemez Springs

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Village of Tijeras

Village of Willard

Mayor Robert Chavez
Clerk Emily Sanchez

Pueblo of Laguna

CNM

Albuquerque Public Schools

Josefina Dominguez

Los Lunas Public Schools

Ron Williams

Rio Rancho Public Schools

Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority

Ronald Brown

Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District

Stephanie Russo Baca

Southern Sandoval County Arroyo Flood Control Authority

Ron Abramshe

MRCOG's board of directors consists of forty-eight elected and appointed officials from the local, municipal and special units of governments within State Planning and Development District Three: Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, Valencia Counties and the Town of Edgewood. The Board of Directors works to address issues from a regional perspective.



MRCOG Boards and Committees

Metropolitan Transportation Board

Councilor Nicole Rogers
Councilor Joaquin Baca
Councilor Klarissa Peña
Councilor Dan Lewis
Councilor Renee Grout
Councilor Louie Sanchez
Patrick Montoya
Samantha Sengel
Josefina Dominguez
Sal Maniaci
Commissioner Eric Olivas
Commissioner Barbara Baca
Commissioner Walt Benson
Commissioner David Heil
Lina Benavidez
Councilor Rudy Espinoza
Joshua Ramsell
Mayor Gregory Hull
Councilor Robert Tyler
Councilor Paul Wymer
Mayor Jack Torres
Wayne Ake
Councilor Stuart Murray
Michael Jaramillo
Mayor Joe Craig (posthumous)
Mayor Jake Bruton
Ron Brown
Ron Abramshe
Tony Sylvester
David Quintana
Paul Brassher
Merrill Yazzie
Lt. Governor Juan Rey Abeita

WCCNM Board

Carl Adams
Marvis Aragon
Odes Armijo-Caster
Joseph Bizzell
Doug Calderwood
Karla Causey
Danielle Casey
Robert Chavez
Vaadra Chavez
Troy Clark
Kristen Gamboa
Bobby Getts
Marni Goodrich
Tracy Hartzler
Antoinette Holmes
Justin Hilliard
Mayor Gregory Hull
Krista Kelley
Joe LiRosi
Roxanna Luna
John Mierzwa
Debbie Ortiz
Stacy Sacco
James Salas
Waldy Salazar
Leslie Sanchez
Diane Saya
Jerry Schalow
Tom Schuch
Jennifer Sinsabaugh
Raymond Trujillo
David Valdes
Susan YaSenka

Rio Metro RTD Board

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Councilor Dan Champine
Councilor Tammy Fiebelkorn
Councilor Renée Grout
Mayor Tim Keller
Councilor Nichole Rogers
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Commissioner Adriann Baroba
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Councilor Mel Knight
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Rural Transportation Planning Organization Committee

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Dennis Fulfer
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Benjamin Bachwartz-Lopez
Leonard Lujan
Mayor David Dean
Glenn Tortalita

Water Resources Board

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Erin Callahan
Stephanie Russo Baca
Jim Chaisson
Commissioner Katherine Bruch
Cassandra D'Antonio
Steve Glass
Lynn Montgomery
Juan Sanchez
Sal Reyes
Bobby Ortiz

MRCOG would like to thank everyone who serves on these boards and committees. Participation takes commitment and dedication, and is crucial to facilitating a collaborative planning process—one that includes input from the entire region.

MRCOG Staff Listing

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Outreach/Engagement Planner

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Saul Araque
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Bonnie Berni
Procurement Specialist

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Information Systems Officer

Tanya Blewett
Sr. Train Dispatcher

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Train Dispatcher

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Grant/NTD Manager

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Terry Brown
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Sheila ter Bruggen
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Transit Operator

Gregory Cabrera
Transit Operator

Elizabeth Carter
Operations Review & Policy Compliance Manager

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Executive Director

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Albert Chavez
Transit Operations Supervisor, Sandoval

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Train Dispatcher

Mark Chavez
Train Dispatcher

Martin Chavez
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Marketing Manager

Tara Cok
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Transit Operator

Jennifer Dunn
Transit Operator

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Teanna Gutierrez
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Transit Operator

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Transportation Improvement Program Coordinator

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Economic Development Manager

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Rex Musselman
Transit Service Worker

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Accountant I

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Phillip Pino
Procurement Officer

Lisa Portillo
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Transit Operator/Dispatcher

Ricardo Ramirez
Transit Operator

Tracee Ramirez
Transit Operator

Forest Replogle
Transportation Planner III

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Lead Program Manager, WIOA

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JoAnn Saenz
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Robert Sanchez
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Dispatch Operations Supervisor

Daniel Zagar
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MRCOG



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