

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Mid-Region
Council of Governments

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From The Executive Director



As we emerge from more than a year of uncertainty, I think it is safe to say that we are in a better place than we were last year at this time. That said, we can also look back on the past 18 months and be proud of our efforts to adapt to the unforeseen challenges we were faced with as a result of a global pandemic. It's been said that it's not what happens to us, but more importantly "how we deal with" what happens in life. And I think in that regard, we have much to celebrate in the way of accomplishments here at MRCOG.

For starters, hats off to the representatives from our member governments and agencies for adapting to the challenge of not being able to meet in person. In fact, not one time did we lack for a quorum in any of our virtual meetings, and to me, that fact alone speaks volumes about the dedication and commitment of those who represent our four-county region. Likewise, to our staff, who so diligently kept our programs running behind the scenes, often from laptops set up on their own kitchen counters!

One tremendous example of this effort can be seen by looking at the efforts of our New Mexico Workforce Connection one-stop locations, which never missed a beat in assisting both job seekers and businesses through a totally virtual platform. And, thanks to a grant from the Economic Development Administration, our MRCOG Regional Planning Program was able to expand services and provide assistance to small businesses in the region by helping to develop special training courses for those wanting to improve upon their financial practices and grow their business.

On the transportation side of the house, I'm happy to report that the metro area was not adversely affected by financial decreases leveled by the pandemic. In fact, the MPO was able to put additional funds into the transportation system and deliver a slate of projects amounting to nearly seven million dollars in improvements to move people, goods, and ultimately benefit the economy of our region. And when it comes to moving people, not only were we able to literally get things "back on track" after nearly a full year of postponed service on the New Mexico Rail Runner Express, but we were able to do it with the addition of Positive Train Control, the \$60 million federal safety mandate, that I'm proud to say Rio Metro installed, tested and implemented faster than any other railroad in the US. This just months before the Rail Runner reached a major milestone celebrating 15 years of service!

So, you see... if we've learned anything from what we've gone through over the course of the past year, we've learned that we are perhaps much stronger than we thought we were. And so as you leaf through the pages of this year's Annual Report, I believe you will see evidence of an organization that not only demonstrated immense fortitude and determination in the face of adversity...but also found ways to provide more opportunities to be inclusive because of it.

I look forward to seeing more of you, hopefully now "in person," and to continuing to work together as we strive to accomplish greater achievements for central New Mexico and the abundant communities we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dewey V. Cave". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dewey V. Cave,
MRCOG Executive Director

**A Word From
MRCOG
Board Chair
Debbie O'Malley**



Once again, I find myself at the half-way point of my term as Board Chair for the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). The last time I was at this point was in 2012, and I remember remarking back then on what a challenging year it had been for all of us. After all it was just two years after the financial crisis of 2008.

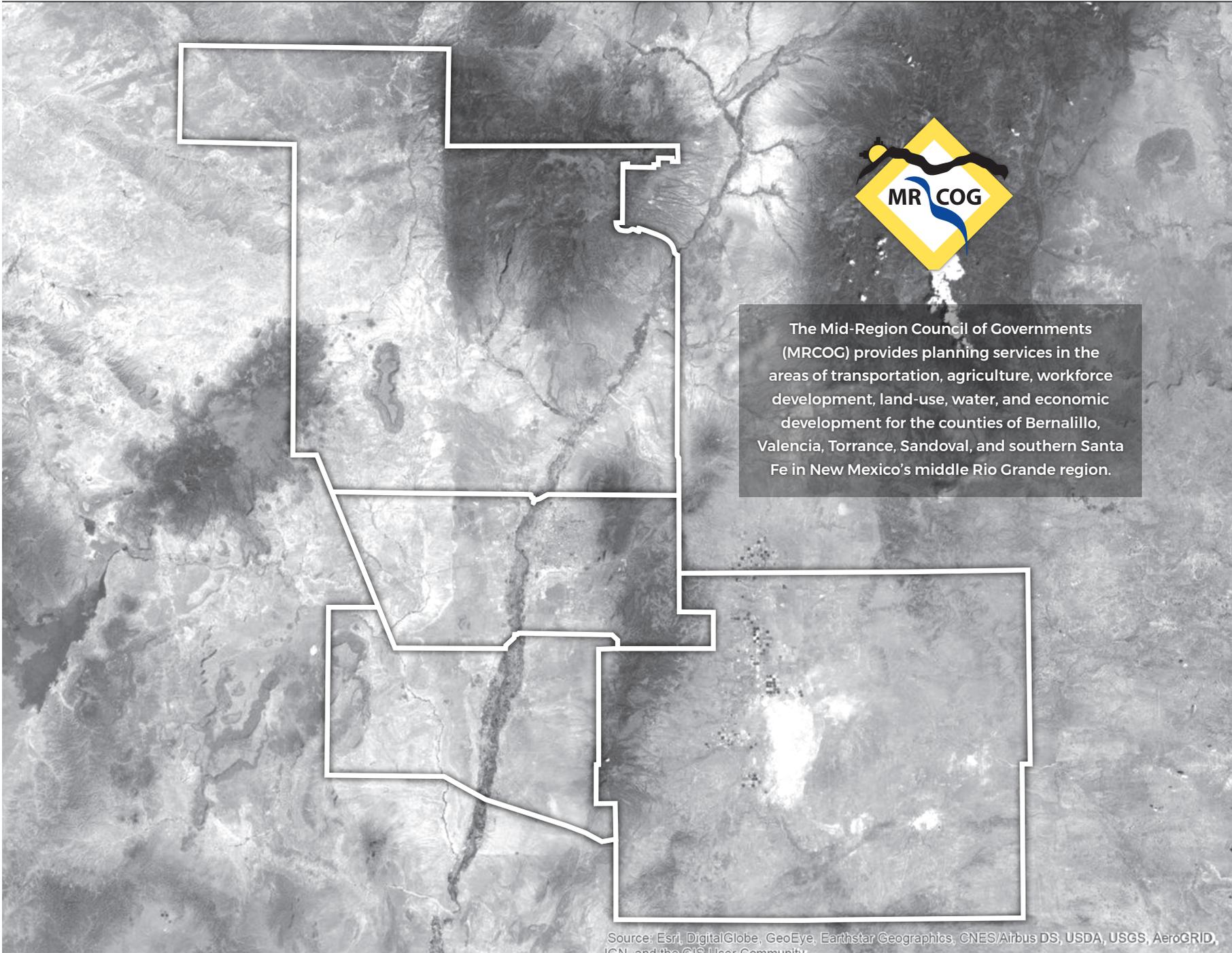
Little did I know that 2020 would redefine the term “challenging” in ways that I could never have imagined! Interestingly, much like when I was MRCOG Chair ten years ago, I also find myself making yet another similar observation: that, even in the midst of unprecedented times, I am reminded just how dependent we truly are on one another. The fact that we rely on one another to succeed is not a weakness, rather it is strength that we can build on as communities when we find common ground.

How this translates to members of MRCOG is through the relationships we foster with one another. We all have different needs and priorities when it comes to infrastructure, but we can all agree that what we all want is safety, security and success for our families, our neighborhoods, and the larger community.

Over the years, thanks to the support of the dedicated, professional staff at MRCOG, we continue to get real things done for the communities we serve despite the many challenges we face, and I believe we will continue to do so. And we will do it together!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie O'Malley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Debbie O'Malley
MRCOG Board Chair



The Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) provides planning services in the areas of transportation, agriculture, workforce development, land-use, water, and economic development for the counties of Bernalillo, Valencia, Torrance, Sandoval, and southern Santa Fe in New Mexico's middle Rio Grande region.

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

COVID

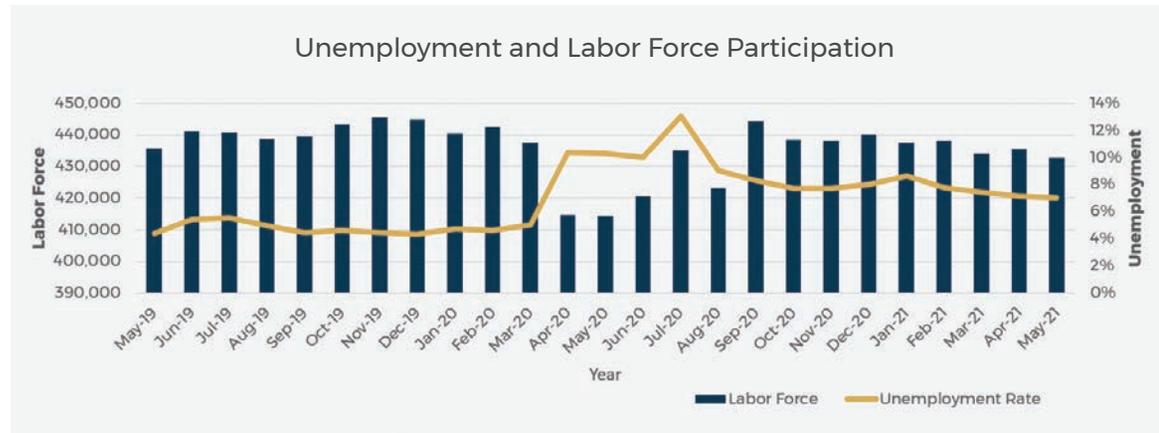
It is always challenging to make predictions about growth, but perhaps now more than ever. As we emerge from a pandemic that stunned the globe, experts in all industries, including transportation and the economy, are trying to understand what the future might look like.

Growth in the Region: Uncertainty, Opportunity

At the writing of this article, two-thirds of all New Mexicans are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. On July 1st, by order of the Governor, New Mexico removed all pandemic-related restrictions, and businesses are operating at 100 percent. However, things feel far from normal. If there is a single word that describes expectations for the future, it might be “uncertainty”.

Labor Force

Economic indicators, both nationally and locally, remain turbulent. The region currently has 26,000 fewer jobs than before the pandemic, and unemployment hovers around seven percent. As businesses open their doors, the number of available jobs has begun to increase, and unemployment is edging downward. However, the number of workers participating in the labor force is also declining.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Not Seasonally Adjusted

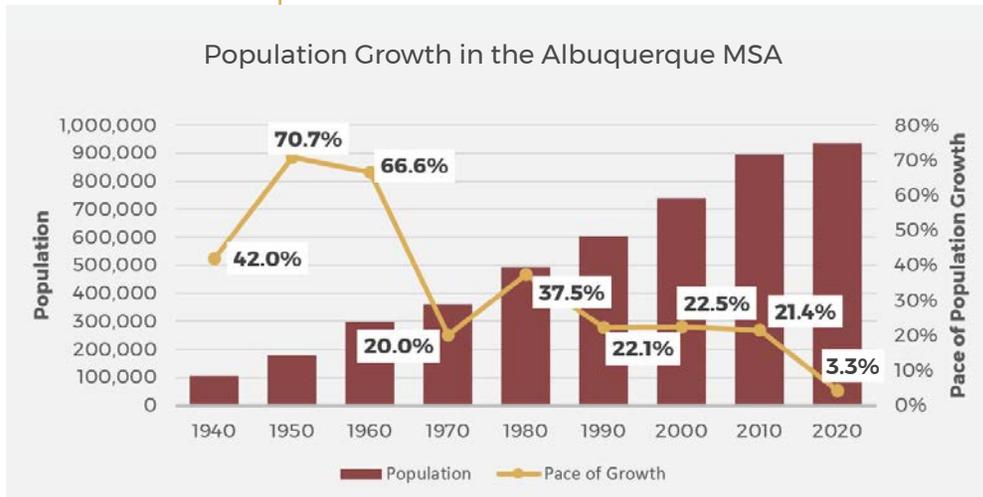
This is perplexing, as a growing economy should bring people back into the labor force. The labor shortage has had the effect of driving up prices of consumer goods, worsening people’s financial insecurity, particularly among those hit hardest by the pandemic. Fortunately, wages are also rising in response to increased demand for goods and in an effort by employers, particularly those in the Accommodation and Food Services industry, to entice workers to return to work.

Slowed Population Growth

The pace of population growth in the MRCOG region is at an all-time low: just 3.3 percent over the past decade; adding just 30,000 people



Some Albuquerque Businesses Were Unable to Survive the COVID Pandemic. Photo courtesy of abqjournal.com.



Photos above and below courtesy of abqjournal.com.

between 2010 and 2020. This is also reflected in national numbers. The 2020 Census revealed the country's second slowest decade of growth since the Census began in 1790. It helps to understand why when we break down growth into its two core components: natural increase (number of births minus the number of deaths) and migration.

Natural Increase

The past decade has seen a sustained decline in birth rates. Contributing factors to this trend are higher educational attainment causing people to delay having families, as well as greater debt and economic uncertainty. In addition, teenage and unintended pregnancies are on the decline. Birthrates have declined most notably among immigrants.

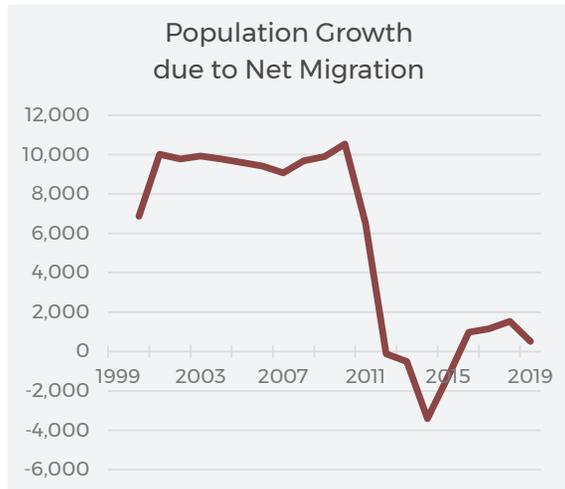
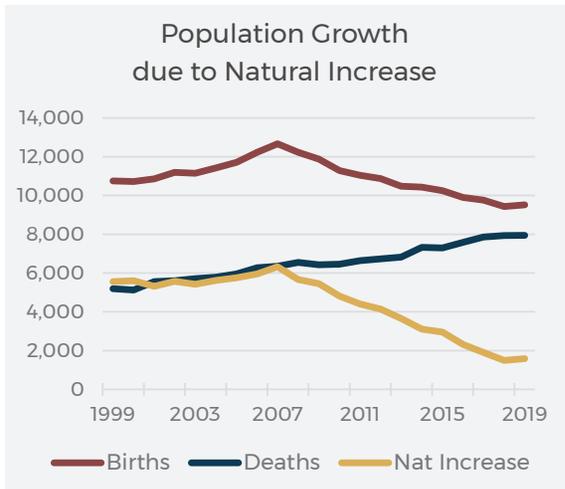
At the same time, there has been a rise in deaths, primarily due to the aging baby boomer generation. Most recently, the region has been adding just 1,500 people a year due to natural increase. If this downward trajectory continues, we will cease replacing our existing population, and population loss could result.

Migration

The ability to attract and retain new residents, students, workers, and businesses has a substantial influence on how much we will grow. During the 2000s, a majority of overall population growth was due to migration, as the region had a net gain of approximately 10,000 residents a year due to in-migration.

Following the Great Recession, more people left the state than moved here. Over the past several





years, this trend was reversed, and we are back in positive territory again, but nowhere near past levels. Migration is an extremely difficult variable to predict and is highly dependent on quality of life factors, regional assets and institutions, and a the state of the local economy.

Forecasting Growth

The years surrounding the housing boom, the Great Recession, and COVID-19 highlight the challenges in projecting the future during times of volatility and uncertainty. Population projections from the University of New Mexico's Geospatial Population Studies group (UNM-GPS), which are released approximately every four years, show how declining trends in

natural increase and migration have negatively impacted growth expectations for the region.

In 2008, we were preparing for a population gain of over 600,000 new people based on existing growth trends at that time. Today, that expectation is adjusted downward to 200,000. The most recently released projections from UNM-GPS show our actual growth could be even lower.*

Opportunity

There are many reasons to remain hopeful as we look toward the future. Announcements of new firms (Amazon, Orion) and existing expansions (Netflix, Intel) bring thousands of new jobs and inspire "economic migration" as workers move here and bring their

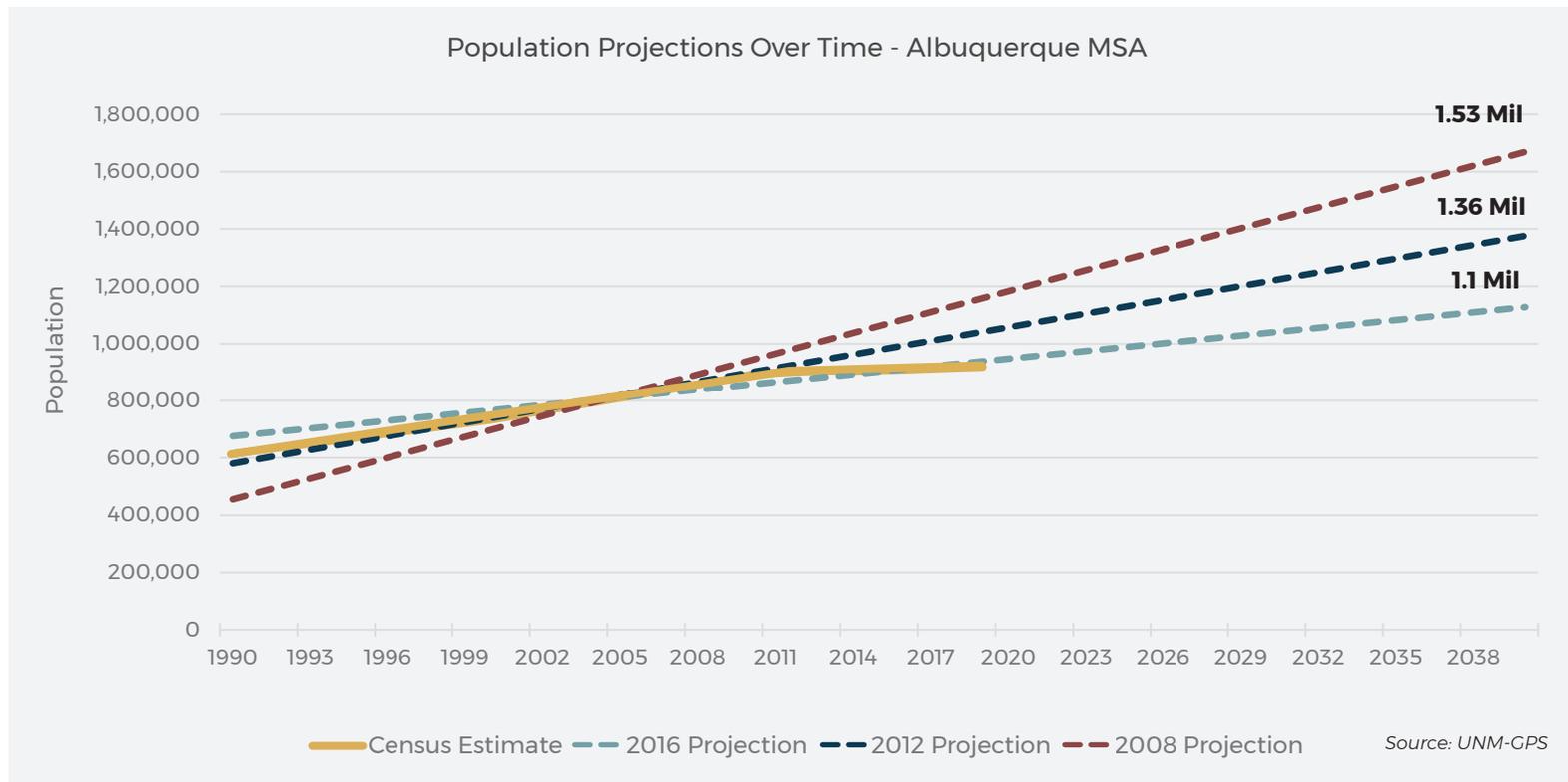


* The *Connections 2040 MTP* is based on the 2016 released projection from UNM-GPS, and is the most recent officially adopted forecast by the MTB. UNM-GPS released an updated projection in 2020.

families. In addition, the pandemic ushered in a new way to make creative use of spaces: parking lots that have been transformed to accommodate outdoor dining, streets that have been temporarily closed to traffic and activated for community uses, and more. A rise in teleworking has opened up the possibility that new residents can live in New Mexico while retaining their jobs in another state.

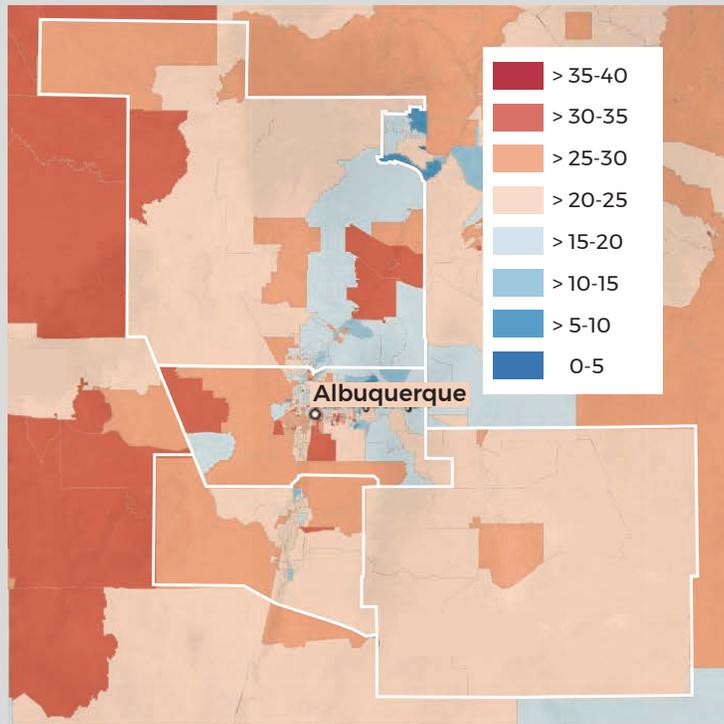
Locally, increased teleworking means less traffic congestion during peak periods of travel. In addition, we are seeing increased investment in our aging infrastructure, with a record number of homeowners making home improvements, renovations of commercial buildings that accommodate a mix of uses, and continued investment in anchor institutions like schools, higher education campuses, and hospitals..

These are times of great uncertainty, where opportunity and caution are closely intertwined. It is important that, as we plan for the future, we place a premium on positioning our region to be flexible by planning for transition. The growth mindset that dominated our past is gradually making way for planning for resilience--a guiding theme that will serve us well as we face an uncertain future.



United States[®] Census 2020

2020 Census NM Response Rate, MRCOG Region*



* Center for Urban Research's Census 2020 Hard to Count Map

On April 26, 2021 the US Census Bureau released the Census 2020 population counts for each state. It shows that the U.S. population grew by 7.4 percent (or 22,703,743 people), which is the second slowest annual growth rate in U.S. history. The population count for New Mexico is 2,117,522, which is an increase of 2.8 percent over 2010 Census figures. While New Mexico was ranked among one of the slowest growing western states, the population count did exceed previous Census estimates by 0.5 percent (11,405 people). This modest difference translates to approximately \$2.1 billion in additional federal funding for education, healthcare, childcare, and roads. New Mexico will retain its three members of congressional representation based on the apportionment population counts.

The state of New Mexico has been classified as one of the most difficult states to count, with approximately 42 percent of residents (887,041 people) living in "hard-to-count" areas.* Populations that are often under-counted include Native Americans, Hispanics, immigrants, people living in poverty in rural areas, and people without access to the internet. In New Mexico, nearly a quarter of the population has no internet access in their home.

Census advocates in our state had to tackle these hurdles in order to ensure a complete count, but with a 99.9 percent enumerated response, it appears that there was no net undercount of New Mexico households in the 2020 Census. This major accomplishment is in large part due to the work of non-profit organizations, tribal nations, businesses, government agencies, and community leaders who worked to increase awareness of the benefits of participation in the Census. These efforts were invigorated by the investment of \$8 million by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham for Census outreach..

Block-level population and housing data, which is used for the purpose of redistricting political boundaries, is scheduled to be released on September 30, 2021.

TRAVEL

COVID-19 and its associated Stay-at-Home restrictions on work and public activity has had a significant effect on travel demand. As we emerge from the pandemic, increased public activity is apparent as businesses and restaurants are starting to reopen.

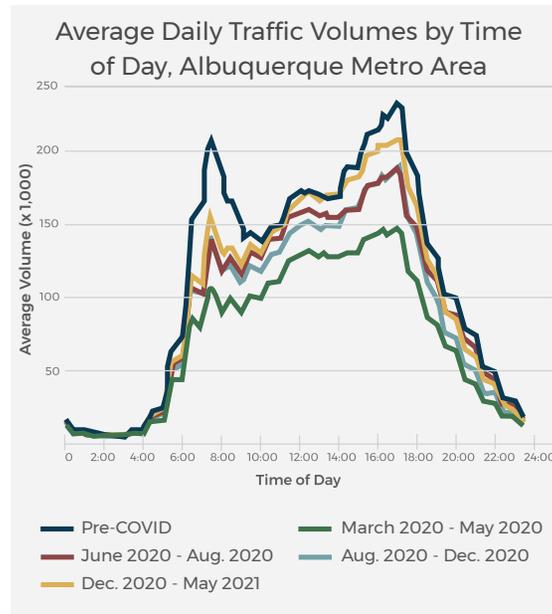
COVID and Its Effects on Transportation

Air traffic at the Albuquerque Sunport, though still below pre-COVID conditions, has reached its highest levels of passenger traffic since the pandemic, and is exceeding 2020 levels by 365 percent. Interstate freight traffic is now approaching pre-COVID levels.

Overall, vehicular traffic is well on its way to returning to pre-COVID travel conditions. Where the first three months of 2020 showed a 33 percent reduction in regional traffic, the end of 2020 saw that reduction decreased to 18 percent below 2019 levels. Traffic data collected in 2021 is indicating a gradual return to pre-pandemic levels, a likely response to the relaxing of the state-enacted restrictions.

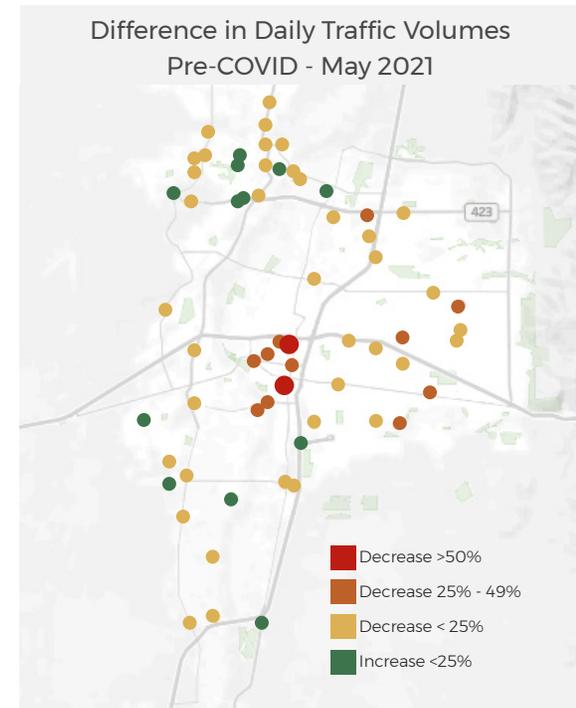
Recovery by Area

The impacts of COVID on traffic varied significantly from area to area, from roadway to roadway, with areas of high employment and those with Activity Centers seeing the largest



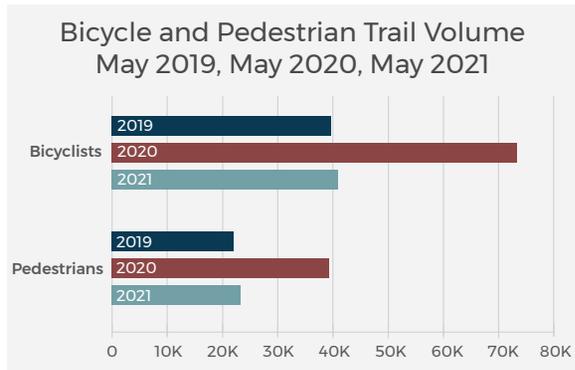
declines in volumes. Likewise, some areas are now quickly recovering and seeing pre-COVID traffic volumes, where others appear to lag behind.

Clearly, the effects of the pandemic on travel have been significant. Work at home, shortened/flexible hours, and school shutdowns with remote classes are likely to have lasting effects on travel, though the magnitude and character of the changes remains to be seen.



Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel

During the early days of the pandemic and the height of more stringent COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, bicycle and pedestrian volume count data for the region revealed big increases. Trips on multi-use trails in Albuquerque were up 39 percent in April 2020 compared to April 2019. During this very disruptive time,



when many lost their jobs or were required to work and go to school from home and many businesses had to close, people likely began to ride their bicycles and walk more as there were limited options for things to do, people had more time on their hands, and/or for exercise and to relieve stress. These large gains, however, would prove to be short-lived.

Trail Use Data

When we compare the period of March 15, 2020 to March 15, 2021 (during the pandemic) with the period of March 15, 2019 to March 15, 2020 (pre-pandemic), bicycle and pedestrian counts on the seven permanent trails counters that MRCOG maintains show an overall increase in use of 27 percent.

Comparing current trail usage (May 2021) to usage during the same month in 2020 and 2019, unfortunately shows that, while there is a clear spike in 2020, bicycle and pedestrian



Active Street Closure on Bell Street.

travel on trails now appears to be returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Although we would have liked to see a sustained increase in bicycle and pedestrian travel as we come out of the pandemic, at least some observable increase is better than none, and of course also better than a decline. MRMPO and its planning partners will continue to monitor these trends and work to improve conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians in our region.

ACTIVE STREETS

As part of the Healthy Here Initiative and in support of City of Albuquerque's Active Streets Initiative, MRMPO staff partnered with Vision Zero, the International District Healthy Communities Coalition, the Health Equity Council, community groups and residents to identify locations where safe, socially-distanced outdoor space would provide the most benefit.

Bell Ave in Albuquerque's International District was identified as one such location and was transformed into an Active Street for several months during the pandemic. Using simple, low-cost temporary signs and barriers, the street was closed to through traffic, community cleanups were held, regular small-group walks for neighborhood residents were organized, and benches were built and placed along the route.



Transportation Funding

Prior to the pandemic, MRMPO had officially adopted the FFY 2020-2025 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which includes reserve funds for each Federal Fiscal Year of the TIP. These reserve funds were included in order to absorb any funding reductions and to ensure the delivery of projects as programmed. However, these reserve funds became especially critical as the pandemic hit.

The total reserve funds for the Albuquerque Large Urban Area amounted to 10.7 million dollars. In early winter of 2021, the Albuquerque Large Urban Area received an additional 8.2 million dollars in stimulus funds under the Highway Infrastructure Program-- Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. The Metropolitan Transportation Board tasked MRMPO with programming both towards existing projects

in the FFY 2020-2025 TIP that needed additional funds to be completed. MRMPO staff developed a funding scenario to program the cumulative amount. The table shows all projects that the MTB approved in May of 2021.

Overall, MRMPO and the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area have not been adversely impacted by any decreases in funding during the pandemic.

Lead Agency	Project Name	Control Number	Fund Source	FFY 2021	FFY 2022	FFY 2023	FFY 2024	FFY 2025	Total	
Bernalillo County Public Works	NM 500 Rio Bravo Blvd & 2nd St Intersection Improvements	A300942	COVID Relief	\$0	\$0	\$3,500,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,500,000	
Bernalillo County Public Works	Bridge Blvd and Tower Rd Reconstruction Phase 2	A300504	COVID Relief	\$0	\$1,500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,500,000	
City of Albuquerque-DMD	Albuquerque Complete Streets-West	A300849	STP-Large Urban	\$0	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,000,000	
City of Albuquerque-DMD	ITS - Albuquerque Traffic Management Systems - Louisiana Blvd, Indian School Rd & Americas Pkwy	A300759	COVID Relief	\$600,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600,000	
City of Albuquerque-DMD	Unser Blvd Gap Widening Phase 2	A300304	STP-Large Urban	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$900,000	\$2,500,000	\$3,400,000	
City of Rio Rancho	NM 347 (Paseo del Volcan) and Broadmoor Blvd Intersection Improvements	A301753	COVID Relief	\$0	\$0	\$150,000	\$0	\$0	\$150,000	
City of Rio Rancho	Westside Blvd Bike/Ped Path	A301052	COVID Relief	\$460,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$460,000	
NMDOT	I-25 and Gibson Interchange	A301891	STP-Large Urban	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$610,932	\$602,727	\$1,213,659	
NMDOT	I-25 and Montgomery Interchange	A301901	STP-Large Urban	\$0	\$0	\$1,773,409	\$0	\$0	\$1,773,409	
Rio Metro	Commuter Rail: Centralized Traffic Control	TA00371	COVID Relief	\$0	\$333,926	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$333,926	
Town of Bernalillo	Bernalillo Main St Streetscape Phase 4	A301313	SP-Large Urban & COVID Relief	\$0	\$0	\$322,603	\$677,397	\$0	\$1,000,000	
Village of Los Ranchos	4th Street Revitalization Phase 2	A302151	COVID Relief	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$1,000,000	
Reserve STP-Large Urban				\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000	
Total Amount Programmed in Scenario				\$17,930,994	\$1,060,000	\$1,833,926	\$8,746,012	\$3,188,329	\$3,102,727	\$18,930,994
Total Amount Unprogrammed in Scenario				\$1,000,000						
Total Funds Available (STP-Large Urban Reserve)				\$10,709,671						
Total Funds Available (COVID Relief)				\$8,221,323						
Grand Total Available				\$18,930,994						

Congestion Data Goes Digital

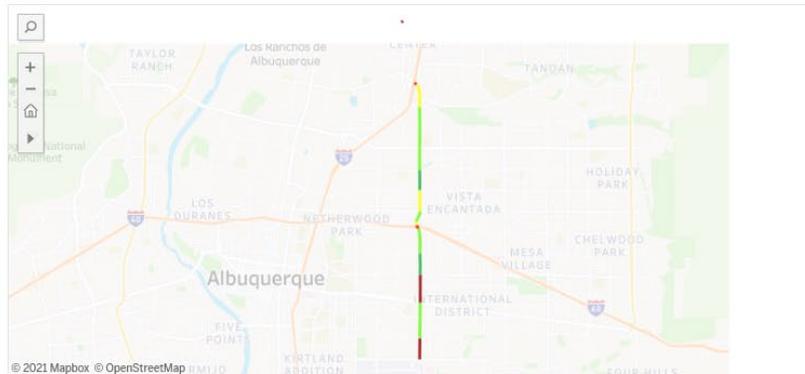
Every two years, MRMPO staff updates the Congested Corridor Rankings, a list that ranks 31 crucial corridors in the region by level of congestion. This ranking is used for the project selection process of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in order to target congestion on the most congested corridors in the mid-to-long range planning horizon.

In years past, the analysis culminated in the creation of a static document, called “Profiles in Congestion,” with maps and tables to illustrate congestion on each corridor being studied. But this year,

MRMPO staff have digitized the data and developed an interactive data visualization. Now, users can hover over tables and see exactly how many vehicles traveled on a certain roadway segment during the peak hour and at what speed. Users can also hover over segments of roadway on the map and see the volume to capacity (V/C) ratios, as well as the speed differential for that specific location.

The data being displayed in the current visualization represents the

SAN MATEO



Congestion Summary MPH

Sum of Highest Volume Segment	45,912
Average Speed (PM East/North)	21
Average Speed (PM West/South)	21

Corridor Ranking Out of 31 Corridors

Crash Rank	6
V/C Rank	25
Speed Rank	5
Overall Rank	13

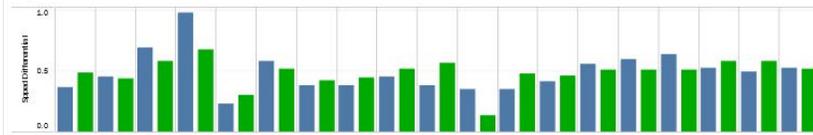
Corridor Profile

Study Area	11.5 Sq. Miles
Functional Classification	Principal Arterial
Speed Limit	35-40 mph
Transit	ABQ Ride: Route 140 (local), Route 141 (local)
Bicycle Facilities	None
IT Designated Corridor	Yes
IT Deployment	

Corridor

SAN MATEO

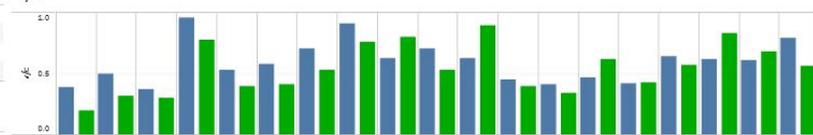
Speed Differential



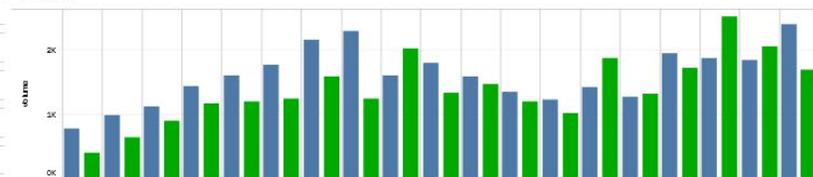
Observed Speed



V/C

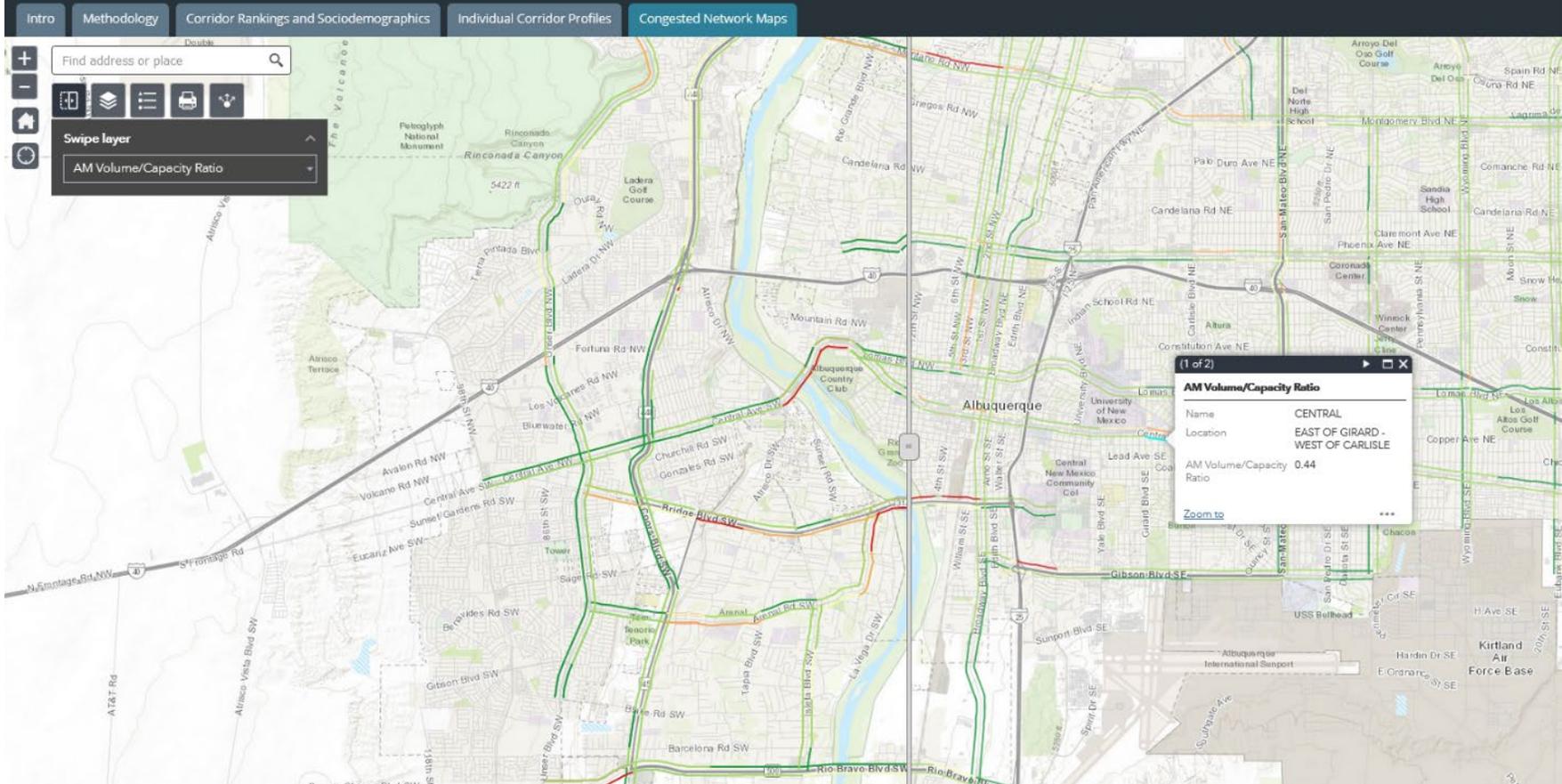


Volume



Blue = East North bound . Green = West South bound.

2018 Corridor Profiles for the Congestion Management Process



conditions on our roadways in 2018. There are three different data sources that go into creating the rankings: crash, speed, and volume data. There is a bit of a lag before each dataset becomes available to us, particularly with crash data. However, MRMPO is not involved in the day-to-day operations of our transportation network, and focuses instead on long-term infrastructure needs. A slight lag in data does not hamper our ability to track congestion over the years and make long-range plans to address it.

There are several interactive, network-wide maps to accompany the individual corridor profiles. These maps allow you to pan around the

31-corridor congested network and explore what types of congestion are most severe on which segments. There is also a “swipe” feature on the congested network maps that allows the user to compare two layers using the swiper.

MRMPO hopes this new, interactive approach to the “Profiles in Congestion” report will greatly enhance the user experience and allow for a more thorough inspection of congestion at certain locations. The data visualization will soon be available on the MRCOG website.

ECONOMY

During the past year, economic growth seemed to come to halt. Federal dollars entering the region provided much-needed aid to the economies of our local communities. Workforce services for businesses and individuals needing training and employment went virtual.

CARES Act Assistance to the Rescue

While much of last year saw a shift from economic *development* to economic *recovery*, one of the bright spots that took place in the region was that in September 2020 Bernalillo County was notified by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) that it was awarded a two million dollar CARES Act Recovery Assistance Grant through EDA's Economic Adjustment Assistance Program. In total, the EDA awarded nearly 1.5 billion dollars in additional Economic Adjustment Assistance funds to assist communities throughout the country with responding to and recovering from the impacts of the COVID pandemic.

Bernalillo County

The monies were awarded for Bernalillo County's application to assist in the construction of a new Amazon Fulfillment Center on Albuquerque's West Side in an area known as Upper Petroglyphs near I-40. County leaders



say they anticipate that other large companies will follow suit with Amazon, which would help balance the West Side's employment/housing balance. Historically, most West Side development has been residential; lacking in employment centers and retail amenities.

New Mexico Trade Alliance

The New Mexico Trade Alliance also applied for and received an EDA SPRINT Challenge Grant (\$750,000), to address economic risks caused by the pandemic. Grant monies would be used to assist the Trade Alliance in providing a

collaborative ecosystem in which industry, small business, workforce training, entrepreneurs and start-ups intersect with New Mexico's aerospace and defense industry to create community and stimulate business growth.

EDA released another round of funding for economic injury from the pandemic in mid-2021 under the American Rescue Plan, and, once again, many communities throughout the region have applied. The EDA evaluates applications in part based on the extent to which a proposed project responds to needs caused by the pandemic.



COVID-Recovery Services Across the Region

As the MRCOG area is classified as an economic development district, MRCOG was able to apply for the CARES Act Economic Development District Supplemental Disaster Recovery and Resiliency Award. This grant allowed the MRCOG Regional Planning Program to expand its services and provide assistance with the economic development efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Regional Planning Program sought input from member communities to determine how to best assist. The need for information sharing was expressed, and resulted in a new page on the MRCOG website to host COVID-19 information and resources for both businesses and communities. The Regional Planning Program also increased outreach to communities through a monthly newsletter that alternates between a community and a business resource focus.

A great need for training for small businesses in the Mid-Region was also expressed. With many funding sources becoming available with very short deadlines, businesses needed to be ready to apply at the drop of a hat. Many businesses were lacking in the ability to quickly produce the necessary documents to meet the deadlines for these funding sources.

MRCOG partnered with Silva Strategies LLC. to provide small business bookkeeping training to help businesses be ready for funding opportunities. The seven-session training course was available to any business in the Mid-Region.

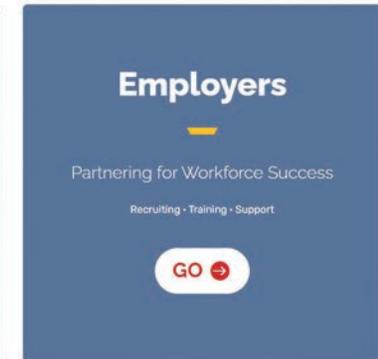
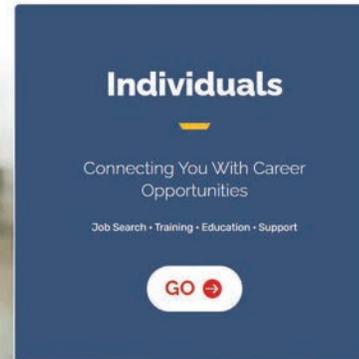
Work has also begun on the creation of a Recovery and Resiliency Plan that will outline

weaknesses in the MRCOG region that are exacerbated during disasters like pandemics, recessions, or natural disasters. This plan will create strategies to improve recovery times and help the region be more resilient and prepared for disasters moving forward.

The Recovery and Resiliency Plan will be a companion to the MRCOG CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy), which was approved by the MRCOG Board of Directors in January 2020.



Workforce Connection of Central NM



At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, in March 2020, the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico (WCCNM) suspended all in-person services in the New Mexico Workforce Connection (NMWC) centers across the four-county region. Services provided by the WCCNM and all NMWC partners to job seekers and the business community were quickly and successfully adapted for virtual platforms.

One year later, in March 2021, in-person appointments for employment, education, and career-related services and programs began to be offered on an as-needed basis. Today, the Workforce Connection centers are open for walk-in customers and in-person appointments. However, many lessons learned were learned during the pandemic, and phone, email, and video conferencing are still being used.

Virtual Service Highlights

- Title I.B Adult & Dislocated Worker program YouTube videos
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Application and Orientation videos
- Virtual recruitment events recorded and streamed in-house at the New Mexico Workforce Connection in Albuquerque

- Weekly “Hot Jobs” announcement on IGTV and social media sites
- Efforts to convert all forms to electronic fillable PDFs
- Resume, interview, and soft skills webinar workshops
- WIOA Title I.B Adult & Dislocated Worker program, the WIOA Youth program, and other workforce program support to students through digital learning challenges
- WIOA Youth program short 15-second videos about training/education programs, on-the-job training, and work experience airing on KRQE and social media

Tech Upgrades

- WCCNM also invested in much-needed tech upgrades, including:
- a cloud-based communications system for phone, text, and video conferencing

- a new WCCNM website (www.wccnm.org)
- an online partner referral system embedded in the WCCNM intranet
- an employer/business services inquiry tool on the new website that allows for businesses to quickly submit their workforce needs

As the WCCNM has adapted the marketing mix to the COVID-19 crisis, e-blasts and social media have been invaluable modes of communication, and our social media presence is growing.



Facebook Career Connections

In 2020, the WCCNM's Adult & Dislocated Worker program was one of the first WIOA programs in the country to successfully partner and fund internships through Facebook Career Connections.

Career Connections is a Facebook initiative that helps motivated job seekers (18+) prepare for a career in digital marketing. Their trainings cover topics like interview techniques mastering digital media marketing. The WIOA matched individuals with a competitively paid, virtual internships funded and administered by the WCCNM.

With a focus on underserved communities, the Career Connection Program also dedicates resources to employer partners, including \$500 in Facebook and Instagram ad credits, access to exclusive training, and online recognition. They also benefit from a pool of career-ready, technically trained employees from which to fill future positions and reduce recruitment costs. The WIOA program provides additional funding to employers who transition interns to full-time, permanent employment through on-the-job training (OJT) opportunities.

In 2020, fifty people obtained internships. Once these ended, more than half of the were offered full-time, permanent employment.

Fast forward to 2021, and the Career Connections program has expanded to 11 additional regions, including Austin, TX; Las Vegas, NV; and six cities in California, using best practices and outreach strategies developed here in the Central Region. In the Central Region, the WIOA program placed 27 interns with the Career Connections program this year.



FACEBOOK CAREER CONNECTIONS SUCCESS STORY

Faith began her journey with the WIOA program through the Facebook Career Connections internship program. At that time, she was attending CNM and working towards her Associates in Liberal Arts. She was also working part-time at Bob's Burgers but did not enjoy working in the fast food industry. Having recently graduated from high school, she had minimal work experience aside from some house sitting and helping a small Etsy business.

When Faith learned about the Facebook internship, she was hopeful, as this was exactly the type of opportunity she had been looking for. Faith enrolled in the program and was matched with Don Smith Designs. She thrived there right away, and within a few months of working as an intern, she was rolled over to an OJT with a full-time, permanent position.

Faith loves the experience she is gaining and enjoys the work at Don Smith Designs. She Faith is nearing graduation, and she plans to continue embracing employment and education opportunities as she moves ahead in her new career path.

RIO METRO

Even during the suspension of rail service for almost a year, and reduced Rio Metro bus service, Rio Metro staff was kept plenty busy. Advantage was taken of the lack of service by taking care of projects much more difficult to complete during normal times.

Rail Runner Express Back on Track

After an unprecedented service suspension that lasted almost a whole year, on Monday, March 8, 2021, the New Mexico Rail Runner Express re-opened its doors to a small, but enthusiastic group of passengers, even though service was reduced to half of its normal schedule, weekend service was not available, and the train could only operate at 25 percent capacity. Then, on May 24, 2021, passenger service finally resumed its full pre-COVID schedule. Almost a full year is a long time to be shut down, but the downtime was put to good use.

PTC – It’s a Wrap

On December 17, 2020—just 13 days before Congress’s deadline—the Federal Railroad Administration certified the Rail Runner’s Positive Train Control (PTC) system. In just 20 months, Rio Metro and its partners installed, tested, and implemented PTC on its 18 cab cars, locomotives, and on the 100-mile rail line



between Belen and Santa Fe—faster than any other railroad in the US. It may go unnoticed by our passengers, but PTC is now working behind

the scenes to prevent trains from colliding with one another, derailing because of excessive speed, entering work zones without permission, and moving through red “stop” signals and switches in the wrong position.

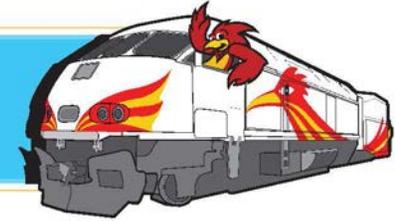
With careful scheduling and social distancing, PTC test trains, training trains, and braking test trains were run throughout the past year to ensure crews were staying on their toes and learning the ins and outs of the new PTC system.

Continuing Tasks

For the Track and Signal departments work continued because the Albuquerque subdivision is shared by tenant railroads, and all normal track and signal maintenance was still needed. Likewise for the Dispatch department, which continued to ensure that BNSF and Amtrak got through the territory safely and efficiently.

Other departments used the train’s downtime to repair bridges, culverts, tracks, station facilities, and right of ways, to resurface all station parking lots, make shop and yard improvements, and to begin a complete refurbishment of the coach interior seating. The customer service department, meanwhile, stayed connected with the public by handling phone calls and responding to website inquiries.

The Right Trax to Rail Safety



Rio Metro RTD Marketing and Advertising

Despite the suspension of train service and the reduction of bus service, Rio Metro's Marketing Department continued to produce educational campaigns, as well as to win awards for them.

Operation Safe Driver Week (July 2020)

To promote safe driving behaviors by both bus operators and the general public.

Rail Safety Activity Sheets (July 2020)

A set of rail safety activity sheets for grade school age kids, available for free for parents and schools to download and print from the website.

Transit Operation Appreciation Day (March 2021)

Rail Safety Week (September 2020)

Seven educational videos designed to prevent trespassing and teach correct rail crossing. Awards received:

- > Communicator Awards for Excellence
- > Spotlight Award for Overall Campaign, South West Transit Association
- > 2nd Place AdWheel Award for Best Educational Shoestring Tactic, American Public Transportation Association

New Mexico Transit COVID-19 PSA

To help reinforce wearing a face mask while riding public transportation.

Awards received:

- > Communicator Award of Distinction
- > Hit the Spot Award (Electronic), South West Transit Association

Rio Metro received additional awards for the Freedom to Ride Veterans Program Outreach and Resource Website, the Seniors 62+ Love Your Wednesdays - Magazine Print Ad, Albuquerque Business

First Book of Lists Chapter Tabs 2020-2021, and the New Mexico Rail Safety Rack Card..

Operation Safe Driver Week
July 13-17, 2020

- Monday, July 13
Obey the Speed Limit
- Tuesday, July 14
Obey Traffic Control Devices
- Wednesday, July 15
Buckle Up for Safety
- Thursday, July 16
Always Be Aware
- Friday, July 17
Avoid Using Your Phone

OPERATION SAFE DRIVER

RIO METRO
REGIONAL TRANSIT DISTRICT



Love Your Wednesdays | **62+ RIDE FREE!**

All Trains, All Day

Dining, Shopping, Outdoor Recreation,
Museums & More!

riometro.org



A large, public event to celebrate the 15th Anniversary was unfortunately not possible, but elected officials and executives from the Rio Metro RTD still got together for a festive press conference. Pictured from left to right are Dewey Cave, Chief Executive Officer, Rio Metro RTD; Diane Gibson, Rio Metro Board Chair; Augusta Meyers, Rio Metro Communications Manager; Terry Doyle, Director Rio Metro RTD.



15 Years of Service!

Fifteen years ago, on July 14, 2006, the New Mexico Rail Runner Express first opened its doors to passengers. The state's only commuter train with 15 stations along a 100 mile corridor between Santa Fe and Belen, the Rail Runner, along with its bus connections, provides transportation connections to places as far south as Socorro and as far north as Taos.

The train's schedule was specifically designed to serve daily commuters, and provides the majority of its service on weekdays, with fewer runs on the weekends. Fifteen years later, this is still the case. Seven years ago, the Veterans ride free program was initiated, and five years ago, the Seniors 62+ ride free on Wednesdays was launched. Both programs proved hugely successful.

To help facilitate easy ticket purchases, a mobile ticketing app was introduced in 2017, and, throughout it all, ticket prices have remained unchanged since the Rail Runner's very inception.

Over the years, the Rail Runner has become a valued partner in major community events, like The New Mexico Law Enforcement Memorial Ride, The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta., Zozobra, and The International Folk Art Market. The Rail Runner has also hosted its own events, such as the Rail Runner Bike Tour, Shakespeare on the Rail for seven years, and the most notable event - Santa's Village, which has seen attendance grow to standing-room only on the train.

Of course, COVID necessitated the postponement of most of these event during the past year and a half. Thankfully, service has started up again, and we can get ready for the next 15 years!

ON THE MOVE

Rio Metro Hard at Work 

TAKING CARE
OF BUS-INESS

Rail Safety

On March 4, 2021, NMRX submitted a System Safety Program Plan to the Federal Railroad Administration for review and approval. The plan unites all safety initiatives involved in rail service: train crews, mechanical, station and facility maintenance, procurement, customer service, operations, dispatch, track and right-of-way maintenance, signal maintenance, special projects, marketing, IT, quality assurance, and other railroads with shared-track agreements (Amtrak, BNSF, and Santa Fe Southern).

Once final federal approval is received, safety staff will begin training all involved safety-sensitive employees about the purpose of the plan, how to report safety items, and their own department's role in the entire process. The goal is to give everyone within railroad maintenance and operations an equal chance to voice their safety concerns, an opportunity to report those concerns either confidentially or at a safety meeting, and receive feedback about what is being done to mitigate the risk involved with the reported issue.

Bus Safety

In December of 2020, the RMRTD's Board of Directors formally approved the Agency Safety Plan for bus service operations. The plan's approval was followed by bus staff trainings about what types of safety issues to report, where and how to report them, and the vital role staff play in letting administrative staff know about issues that need attention.

Part of the Safety Plan is a dedicated section of the RMRTD website for bus safety reporting both for employees and for customers. Regularly scheduled safety meetings have also been a crucial component in learning about safety concerns on roadways, at bus stops, in office environments, and at facilities.

The *On the Move* quarterly e-newsletter, has become very popular with staff. It highlights upcoming training programs, discusses pertinent current-events articles in the bus world, tracks the status of received safety reports (items solved or still in progress), and showcases pictures of staff.



Valencia Transit Supervisor Winnie Tinney helping a transit operator to conduct a pre-trip inspection of a bus (which was going out on an urgent call to replace another bus that was involved in a mechanical issue).

REGION

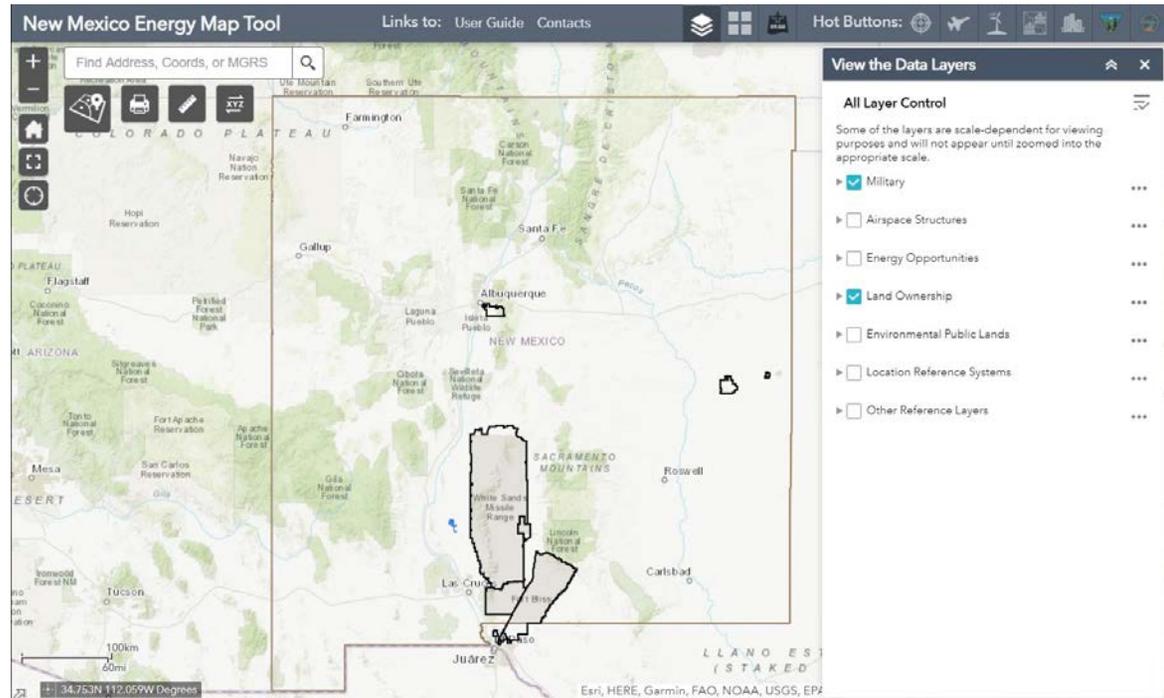
MRCOG's Regional Planning Program houses the Regional Transportation Planning Organization, a forum for decision making on transportation issues, and the Local Planning Assistance program, which acts as an extension of local government staff.

Regional Planning Program

RTPO

This year, the New Mexico State Legislature, under SB 20, authorized new funds for the Transportation Project Fund, a statewide funding source for local road and bridge projects. The Mid-Region RTPO is responsible for soliciting and coordinating project applications from our member entities, and is currently seeking \$7.6 million in new funding for a total of nine new projects. These projects range from bridge repairs and replacements to safety improvements and new road construction across the region.

MRRTPO is also updating its Regional Transportation Plan, which guides the transportation decision making process, including how best to spend federal funding coming through from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program, Transportation Alternative Program, and the Recreational Trails Program.



Local Planning Assistance

In 2018, MRCOG, along with the New Mexico Office of Military Base Planning and Support, was awarded an Energy Compatibility grant to develop a state-wide process to reduce existing and potential future conflicts between military installations and surrounding areas while accommodating alternative energy, economic development, and protecting public health and safety as well as the mission of the military.

A web-based tool, The New Mexico Energy Map Tool, was developed to identify areas of potential conflict. This can guide the siting and early coordination of energy development projects between energy developers, local, regional, state and federal stakeholders, and military installations.

The New Mexico Energy Map Tool can be found at: <https://nmenergytool.com/>

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES

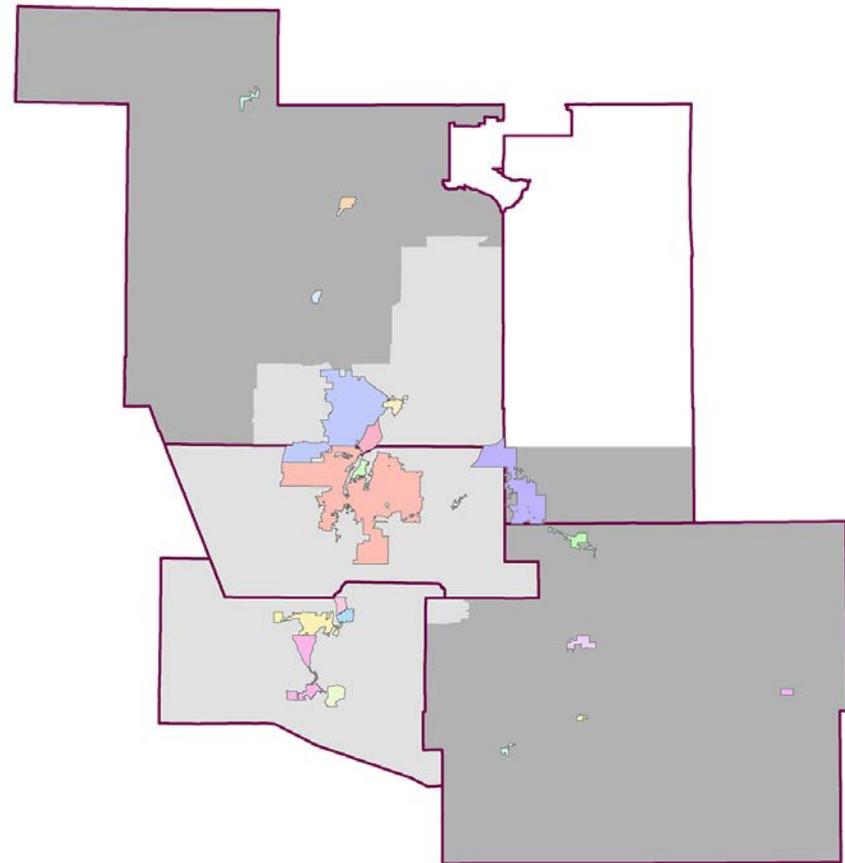
Counties, municipalities, and special districts use their share of gross receipts tax proceeds to fund public services such as police, fire, water and jails. Depending on the community, this may represent a large portion of the budget, so ensuring that each entity gets its fair share of tax revenue is important for the provision of public services.

In July 2021, state law will require that some businesses convert to destination-based sourcing for reporting gross receipts taxes. Under destination-based sourcing, businesses pay the tax rate in effect in the jurisdiction where their goods and most services are delivered. Most taxpayers currently pay the GRT rate for the location of their business. What this means for Mid-Region communities is that the accuracy of municipal boundaries is now even more critical in ensuring proper allocation of tax dollars.

This spring, MRCOG worked with the NM Taxation and Revenue Department and our member governments to verify municipal boundaries in the Mid-Region. Once verified by the communities, these boundaries are used to determine the GRT rate whenever goods and most services are sold.

This is a unique opportunity for the MRCOG to show up and shine in a very specific area of expertise to bridge the gap between State and local entities. It represents a very specialized delivery of services to our partners in the region to help get the most bang for their buck and ultimately see where the fruits of their labor are going.

Municipal Boundaries in MRCOG Region



MRCOG Board of Directors

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Commissioner Debbie O'Malley
County Manager Julie Morgas Baca
Commissioner Steven Michael Quezada

Sandoval County

Commissioner Katherine Bruch
Commissioner David Heil

Torrance County

Commissioner Leroy Candelaria
County Manager Janice Barela

Valencia County

Commissioner Jhonathan Aragon
Commissioner Gerard Saiz

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Councilor Diane Gibson
Councilor Klarissa Peña
Councilor Cynthia Borrego
Councilor Lan Sena
Councilor Brook Bassan

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Mayor Jerah Cordova

City of Moriarty

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Councilor M. Steven Anaya

City of Rio Rancho

Mayor Gregory D. Hull
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City of Rio Communities

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Town of Bernalillo

Mayor Jack Torres

Town of Edgewood

Mayor John Bassett

Town of Estancia

Trustee Manuel Romero

Town of Mountainair

Jesse Davidson

Town of Peralta

Leon Otero

Village of Bosque Farms

Mayor Russell Walkup

Village of Corrales

Mayor JoAnne Roake
Councilor Mel Knight

Village of Cuba

Mayor Richard R. Velarde
Clerk/Trustee Vandora Casados

Village of Los Lunas

Mayor Charles Griego
Erin Callahan

Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque

Mayor Donald Lopez

Village of Tijeras

Michael Wismer
Maxine Wilson

Village of Willard

Mayor Robert Chavez
Clerk Emily Sanchez

Albuquerque Public Schools

Candelaria Patterson

Los Lunas Public Schools

Ron Williams

Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority

Bruce Thomson

Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District

Barbara Baca

Southern Sandoval County Arroyo Flood Control Authority

James Fahey

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Councilor Diane Gibson
Councilor Lan Sena
Councilor Klarissa Peña
Councilor Isaac Benton
Councilor Brook Bassan
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Comm. Steven Michael
Quezada
Commissioner Walt Benson
Commissioner David Heil
Commissioner Nancy Gonzales
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Mayor Gregory Hull
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Mayor Russell Walkup
Councilor Kevin Lucero
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Mayor Donald Lopez
Mayor Jake Bruton
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Terry Doyle
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Justin Gibson
Merrill Yazzie
Kathy Trujillo
Jon Paul Romero

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Councilor David Dornberg
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City Manager Martin Moore
Councilor Robert Tyler
Councilor Jim Owen
Commissioner Michael Meek
Commissioner Joseph Bizzell

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Sheri Bozic
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Mark Hatzenbuhler
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Nancy Gonzales
Steve Glass
Lynn Montgomery
Brenda Smythe
Sal Reyes
Bobby Ortiz

MRCOG Staff Listing

Yoshiro Akutagawa

Facility Maintenance Manager

Joe Aragon

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Lloyd Aragon

Workforce Manager

Paul Aragon

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Michael Baca

WIOA Network Administrator

Wilfred "JR" Barela

Facilities Maintenance

Kelly Benavidez

Customer Service, NMRX

Peter Blewett

RMRTD Network/System Tech

Bianca Borg

Transportation Planner

Eduardo Borunda

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

James Breiterman

Train Dispatcher

Grant Brodehl

Special Projects Planner

Donald Brown

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Sheila ter Bruggen

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Gregory Cabrera

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Veronica Campbell

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Wendy Candelaria

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Elizabeth Carter

Transit Operations Manager

Dewey Cave

Executive Director

Jane Chavez

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Mark Chavez

Train Dispatcher

Martin Chavez

Facilities Maintenance

Allyne Clarke

Marketing Manager

Tara Cok

Transportation Planner

Leon Cordova

Transit Manager, Los Lunas

Ross Cummings

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

James DeLaO

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Terry Doyle

Rio Metro RMRTD Director

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Information Systems Specialist

Danny Duran

Facilities Maintenance Manager

Kirk Estrada

Train Dispatcher

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Train Dispatcher

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Joy Forehand

WCCNM One Stop Manager

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Facilities Maintenance

Vangie Gabaldon

Special Projects Planner

Sandra Gaiser

Regional Planning Manager

Angela Galindo

RMRTD Dispatcher, Los Lunas

John Gallegos

Transit Operator, Rio Rancho

Kenneth Garcia

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Samuel Garcia

Traffic Counter

Ted Gaudette

Information Systems Officer

Nicole Giddings

Program Support Coordinator, WIOA

Clyde Gonzales

Facilities Maintenance

Deanna Gonzales

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Robert Gonzales

Operations Manager, NMRX

Carmen Gutierrez

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Eric Gutierrez

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Michelle Harrison

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Jay Harvey

Transit Operator, Rio Rancho

Sherri Hastings

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Carlos Hercules

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Kristin Hodgson

Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Channing Hofman

Regional Planner

Larry Horan

Attorney

Sarah Ijadi

Transportation Planner

Avrian Jaramillo

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Daniel Jimenez

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Michael Jiron

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Mona Koehler

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James Kolberg

Transportation Planner

Denise Kurtz

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Train Dispatcher

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David Maes

RMRTD Training Coordinator

Sylvia Maestas

Accountant

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Paul Marrujo
Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Arthur Martinez
WIOA Administrator

Lydia Martinez
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Jocelyn Martinez
Program Support Coordinator

Riann Martinez
Marketing Specialist

Nathan Masek
Transportation Planner

Martha Mendoza
Administrative Assistant

Claudia Merlo
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Augusta Meyers
Communications Manager/
Economic Development Program
Manager

Elizabeth Middleton
Senior Program Manager, WIOA

Adrienne Molinar
Accountant

Kim Monjaras
Procurement Officer

Kendra Montanari
Senior Socio-Economic Program
Manager

John Montano
Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Marla Montiel
Special Projects Coordinator

Steven Montiel
Transportation Planner

Dominic Montoya
Special Projects Planner

Marie Morra
Marketing Specialist

Kendra Morrison
Education Transition Specialist

Steve Moya
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Transit Operator, Rio Rancho

Eric Murphy
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Senior Finance Manager, MRCOG

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Elizabeth Olson
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Renee Padilla
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Rafen Page
Intern

Stephanie Paiz
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Coordinator, NMRX

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Nicole Perches
Program Support Coordinator

Yvonne Perez
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Forest Replogle
Transportation Planner

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Tech Hire Career Development
Specialist

Ashley Romero
Tech Hire Career Development
Specialist

Tawnya Rowland
Tech Hire Director

Maida Rubin
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Irma Ruiz
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Steve Saavedra
Transit Operator, Los Lunas

JoAnn Saenz
Transit Operator, Los Lunas

Alexander Sanchez
Facilities Maintenance

Robert Sanchez
Facilities Maintenance

Lisa Sedillo
Customer Service, NMRX

Sagert Sheets
Transportation Planner

Payton Showalter
Regional Planner

William Simon
Transportation Planner

Joel Steinhauser
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Matthew Stone
Operations Supervisor/Dispatcher

Anthony Sylvester
Planning and Project Development
Manager

Vera Taylor
Transit Services Surveyor

Barbara Thomas
Office Manager

Winifred Tinney
RTD Dispatcher, Rio Rancho

Jesse Turley
WIOA Accounting Manager

Conni Vigil
Senior Finance Manager RMRTD

Josephine Vigil
Accounting Manager RMRTD

Sandra Wallace
Transit Operator, Rio Rancho

Jacob Wolff
Transportation Planner

Matthew Wylie
Quality Assurances Coordinator



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