Transportation Plans and Studies – Supporting Documentation

An array of policies, plans, and studies provide guidance for transportation improvements in the High Capacity Transit Study (HCTS) study area. These include regional transportation plans, as well as comprehensive, area, and sector development plans that contain transportation elements. These plans generally refer to current and projected roadway conditions and growth patterns outlined in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area's *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* (MTP). Many of the plans and studies discussed below, including the *Westside Transit Study* and *Rio Metro Service and Financial Plan*, refer to older demographic projections than those contained in the 2035 MTP, the most recently adopted long-range transportation plan. One constant feature of planning efforts over the last ten-plus years is the recognition of Westside population growth and the challenge of limited river-crossing capacity. This is to say that long-term congestion along the region's river crossings is not a new concern, although the 2035 MTP describes problem as one of greater magnitude than previously thought. Many of these documents use the demographics to frame the need to ensure mobility across the region, including additional transit service west of the Rio Grande.

2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The *2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan* analyzes the effects of projected growth on the region's transportation network and outlines the infrastructure improvements that are planned in response. Despite $3 billion allotted for capacity projects between 2008 and 2035, congestion becomes prevalent across much of the Westside and speeds along river crossings are dramatically compromised. Although no new river crossings are planned, the level of demand is projected to be so great that "adding capacity alone will not be enough as growth will outpace the amount of roadway expansion that can be funded and built" (Ex-1). Rather than try to build its way out of congestion, the region should "build upon its recent successes and create efficient transit with stations that are serviced by bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure" (Ex-2).[1]

The MTP contains three general goals: 1) preserve and improve quality of life; 2) mobility of people and goods; 3) support economic activity and growth. These goals are purposefully vague but speak to the overall need to ensure mobility despite the upcoming challenges and create access to goods and services in a more sustainable way that emphasizes transportation choices, investments in multi-modal infrastructure, and enhancing the performance of existing roadways.[2] In short, the MTP emphasizes a comprehensive approach to improvements to the overall transportation system (e.g. transportation demand management, high capacity transit), rather than focusing exclusively on increasing capacity and enlarging the roadway network.

[1] Full quote: "Transit also provides perhaps the best option for addressing the excessive river crossing demand as no other strategy provides the opportunity to transport large numbers of commuters and travelers across the region in as cost-effective and efficient a manner. The region must build upon its recent successes and create efficient transit with stations that are serviced by bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. These efforts will in turn reduce dependence on single occupancy vehicles for all trips while also reducing congestion, providing clear public health benefits and creating more transportation options for a wide spectrum of users."

[2] The second goal, mobility of people and goods, includes the objective statement: "enable the efficient movement of people and goods within and through the region and provide residents with a range of viable transportation choices."

In addition to language supporting innovative transportation solutions, the 2035 MTP contains policy that is supportive of transit as a general long-term strategy. One such measure is the development of **transit mode share goals** in which 10% of river crossing trips are to be completed by public transit by 2025 and 20% of river crossing trips are to be completed by public transit by 2035 (p. 3-7). To support this ambitious goal, the Metropolitan Transportation Board (MTB) adopted a policy of allocating a minimum of 25% of federal discretionary funds (STP-U, STP-E, and CMAQ funding categories) available through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for transit projects that create connections across the Rio Grande (MTB Resolution R-10-16, November 19, 2010). This **suballocation of TIP funds** begins in 2016 and equates to a minimum of $5.4 million in 2016 and $5.5 million in 2017. The transit projects that are programmed in 2016 and 2017 actually totaled $11.7 million and exceed the 25% suballocation by $700,000 (meaning a total of 26.6% of available federal discretionary funds were allocated for transit projects that provide service along river crossings).

In the 2016 and 2017 years of the TIP a total of $13.6 million in funds, including local match, were programmed that may be utilized in the development of a high capacity transit system along Paseo del Norte. The primary recipient of these funds is a project titled "Northwest Metro Area Bus Rapid Transit Implementation Phase I," slated to receive a total of $11.4 million. Federal funding for the TIP for 2018 and 2019 will be determined in winter 2012/2013. Although federal funds available through the TIP are for capital projects only and are not available for basic operations, the transit suballocation does ensure a sustainable funding source for premium transit projects such as Paseo del Norte HCT.

Figure 1: TIP projects using suballocation funds for river-crossing connections via transit:

Project	Federal (TIP)	Local Match	Total
NW Metro Area Bus Rapid Transit	$9,704,807	$1,653,815	$11,358,622
ABQ Ride Fixed Route Expansion	$1,450,000	$247,097	$1,697,097
Park & Ride - NW ABQ/ Southern Rio Rancho	$500,000	$85,206	$585,206
Total	$11,654,807	$1,986,118	$13,640,925

MTP mode share goals and the MTB policy allocating federal funds for transit are further supported by the **Project Prioritization Process**. The Project Prioritization Process is a method of comparing and prioritizing projects proposed for federal funding through the TIP and contains criteria specific for major modes (roadway, transit, and pedestrian/bicycle) to determine the projects that best meet regional needs. From a transit perspective, the Prioritization Process highlights projects located along primary transit facilities and heavily emphasizes projects that cross the Rio Grande. (Paseo del Norte is considered a "Tier I" priority transit facility – the highest threshold for "geographic need" transit criterion.) The Prioritization Process also awards points to projects serving major activity centers and roadway and pedestrian/bicycle projects that create connections to transit facilities.

Project Prioritization Process evaluation criteria are derived in part from analysis found in products of the MRCOG Congestion Management Process (CMP), including the CMP Congested Corridor Rankings and CMP Strategies Matrix. In MRCOG's most recent rankings Paseo del Norte is the #3 most congested corridor in the AMPA, qualifying Paseo for the highest point threshold in the "geographic need" roadway

criterion in the Project Prioritization Process. The Strategies Matrix identifies appropriate transportation strategies by corridor through "high," "medium," and "low" priority designations. Projects implementing high priority strategies receive additional points in the Project Prioritization Process.

High Priority CMP Strategies for Paseo del Norte[1]

- Transit service expansion
- Fixed guideway transit travelways and dedicated transit lanes
- Park and ride facilities
- ITS implementation/traveler information devices

Appendix B of the 2035 MTP contains a **BRT Scenario**, an exercise to demonstrate a model BRT system for the AMPA. One of the routes identified in the scenario traverses the study area. The BRT Scenario is not supported by any policy, but is intended to show conceptually how a long-term system could be developed. In this scenario, funds equivalent to those provided from the TIP suballocation over a twenty-year span support the development and operations of three BRT routes and supporting stations and park and ride facilities. This scenario is inherently unrealistic because TIP suballocation funds may not be used for operations. The scenario nonetheless shows the level of financial commitment necessary to achieve a certain level of regional transit service, and that such financing exists within the region.

General **support for public transit** in the AMPA is evidenced by a survey conducted at public meetings during the MTP development process. When asked how best to address river crossing congestion, 30% of respondents, the highest of any option, selected transit as the most desirable method for improving mobility around the region. Land use considerations (23%) were the second most common response (Ex-3). The survey also showed that "people who reported having more transportation options (i.e., auto, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian options) reported being more satisfied with the transportation network as a whole compared to those who felt they had fewer transportation options" (p. 2-25).

Additional roadway considerations in the HCTS study area

Additional Roadway Capacity – the 2035 MTP shows additional capacity planned for Paseo del Norte east and west of the river and a new interchange at I-25, but no additional capacity for the river crossing. Similarly, additional capacity is planned for Alameda Boulevard east of the Rio Grande, but not over the river or to the west. The 2035 MTP does not include any increased capacity on the Albuquerque area's river crossings.

Freight Movement – currently, trucks over five tons are prohibited on Paseo del Norte and Montano Road over the Rio Grande. Therefore, the majority of large truck traffic in the northern half of the metro area uses Alameda Boulevard to cross the river (I-40 is the closest river crossing to the south that permits trucks). Alameda is designated as a Primary Freight Corridor, as is Coors Boulevard from I-40 to NM 528. The MTP predicts that maintaining weight restrictions on key corridors will combine with increasing congestion to cause goods to move much more slowly than passenger vehicles.

Transportation Systems Management (TSM) – TSM refers to a suite of strategies intended to enhance the capacity of the transportation system through improved management and operation of existing facilities. Within the study area, the following TSM strategies are either in place or proposed:

- Intelligent Transportation Systems: measures that involve data collection and communications using advanced electronics or centralized monitoring to manage the operations of the transportation system. These include signal coordination, incident detection and response, traveler information dissemination, access control, and managed lanes (e.g. HOV/HOT lanes). Most of the major roadways in the study area, including Paseo del Norte, Alameda Boulevard, Montano Road, 2nd Street, Coors Boulevard, Golf Course Road, and Unser Boulevard are designated ITS corridors for project planning purposes.
- Access Management: limiting access to roadways can increase their throughput and reduce congestion. Paseo del Norte, Unser Boulevard, and Coors Boulevard are designated as a Limited Access Arterials in the 2035 MTP. Montano Road is also a Limited Access Arterial, but only for a short distance, including the river crossing.
- Managed Lanes: including High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) and truck lanes. Paseo del Norte and Coors Boulevard have been identified as facilities with high HOV potential.

Rio Metro Service and Financial Plan

The *Rio Metro Service and Financial Plan* was approved in July 2008 by the Rio Metro Board and sets an initial direction for the Regional Transit District. Through the projects identified in its *Service Plan*, Rio Metro implicitly defines its role in the region as providing connections to the Rail Runner, as well as local circulation and mobility needs that fall outside of the ABQ Ride service area. However, explicit goals for Rio Metro services are not defined.

The Transit Service and Capital Plan section of the plan calls for a range of new services in the HCTS study area, including a new route originating in Sandoval County in the area near Northern Blvd and Rainbow Blvd with "commuter express" service to Unser and Irving and continuing to the Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station (p. 11). This is considered a distinct and separate service from Route 151 (now 251). The plan also calls for a new commuter express route from the Ventana Ranch area in northwestern Albuquerque to the Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station. The *Rio Metro Service Plan* identifies northwestern Albuquerque, from Montano Rd to the Sandoval County boundary as a "Planned Neighborhood Circulator Area." None of the services outlined by Rio Metro for the HCTS study area have been implemented, however Route 151/251 has been complemented by a commuter service (Route 551) that bypasses the Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station and connects directly to the Journal Center/Jefferson St corridor.

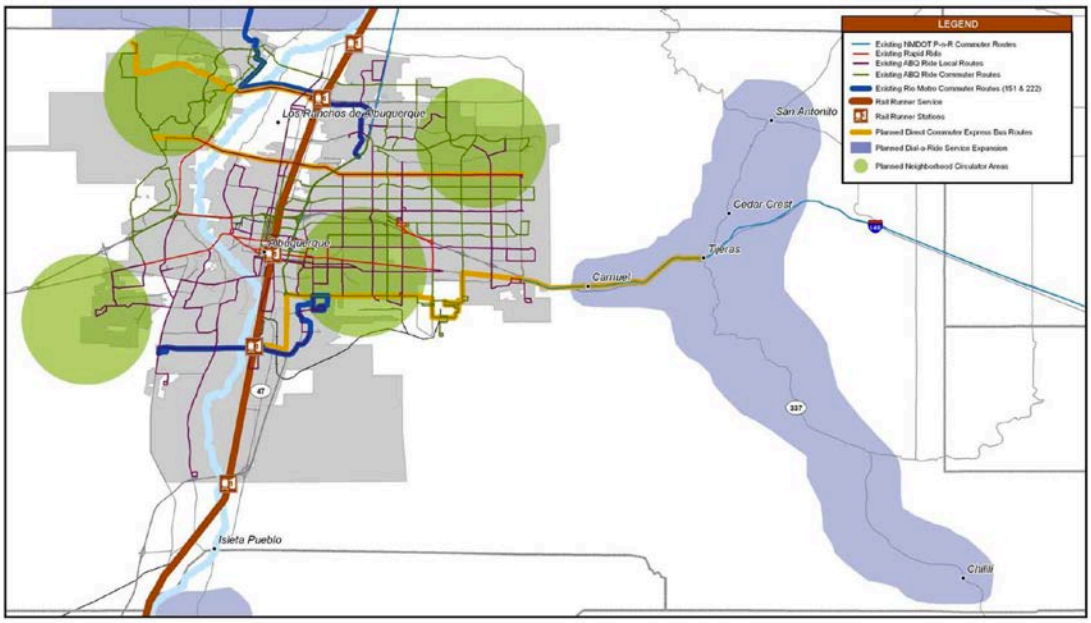
The *Rio Metro Service Plan* establishes the basis for expanded transit service in the HCTS study area and the need to connect to destinations east of the river (in the case of the Service Plan, this specifically includes the Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station). An update to the Rio Metro Service Plan is underway that may evolve beyond the series of commuter and neighborhood circulator services originally identified.

Proposed new routes in HCTS study area:

- Commuter Express: Northern/Rainbow → Unser/Irving → Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station
- Commuter Express: Ventana Ranch → Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station
- Commuter Express: West Montaño to the Montaño & 2nd St. future Rail Runner Station
- Commuter Express: East Montgomery to the Montaño & 2nd St. future Rail Runner Station
- Neighborhood Circulator: Northwest Albuquerque

RIO METRO regional transit district

Figure 5: Bernalillo County Planned Transit Elements



Page 14 Rio Metro Service and Financial Plan

Westside Transit Improvement Study

The *Westside Transit Improvement Study* (WTIS) was prepared by the City of Albuquerque's Transit Department (ABQRide) and completed in 2010. The purpose of the *Westside Transit Study* "was to prepare a plan for improved public transportation services on the Westside…that would be effective in attracting increasing numbers of Westside residents to choose transit as their mode of travel" (p.1). The product of the study is a set of recommendations for service and capital projects for a seven-year span following the completion and adoption of the study.

Recommendations for routes that traverse the study area include:

- Converting Route 92 to all-day service
- Converting Route 94 to all-day service
- Increasing frequency on Route 790
- Consider splitting 151 between two services that terminate at Los Ranchos Rail Runner Station: one service between NWTC and Rail Runner; one service between Jefferson St and Rail Runner.
- Two new routes between northwest Albuquerque and the Jefferson St/Journal Center area (one accesses the corridor from the north; the other would access the corridor from the south)
    - Route #N1: Northwest Transit Center to Jefferson Street/Journal Center corridor via Alameda
    - Route #N2: Unser Boulevard and Montano Road to Jefferson Street/Journal Center
- Additional Westside routes:

- Route #N3: Northwest Circulator using Paradise Boulevard to connect Ventana Ranch residential area to Northwest Transit Center (all-day service)
- Route #NS1 – connect NWTC and Central and Unser Transit Center – all day service
- Route #NS2: New north-south service linking the Central New Mexico Community College with the Southwest Mesa Transit Center via Ventana Ranch and Unser Blvd
- Relocate #162 from Montaño Plaza to NWTC to consolidate point of origins and provide wider connectivity for individuals traveling to CNM Westside
- A circulator across the northwest mesa connecting Volcano Cliffs, North Mesa, Paradise Hills, and Black Ranch

The Westside Transit study identifies Alameda as the means of carrying Route #N1 from the Northwest Transit Center to the Jefferson Street/Journal Center corridor and Montaño as the means of carrying Route #N2 to the Jefferson Street/Journal Center. Despite the fact that no new service is identified along Paseo del Norte, PdN is nevertheless identified as a Premium Quality corridor where the objective is to "provide the highest quality of transit service." These corridors also reflect a "Transit First" policy and are designed to provide linkages between transit centers (p. 75). Coors and Unser are also identified as Premium Quality corridors.

Three locations are identified as suitable for **park and ride** facilities: 1) Irving and McMahon; 2) Montaño Rd and Unser; 3) Coors and Eagle Ranch. These facilities include "major dedicated lots, with 100 spaces or more and generally not shared facilities" (p. 77). Portions of the HCTS study area are identified as having a high propensity for transit usage, including north of Cottonwood Mall and along Paseo between Universe and Golf Course Rd.

The WTIS provides a work travel demand orientation for the Westside and determines that 36% of Northwest Mesa residents travel to one of nine activity centers. The Jefferson St/Journal Center activity center is responsible for 11% of total home-work trips originating west of the Rio Grande. No other activity center generates more than 4.1%, indicating that the employment sites for Westside residents are widely dispersed. The study identifies the lack of connections to Journal Center as a shortcoming of ABQ Ride's Westside transit services (p. 46).

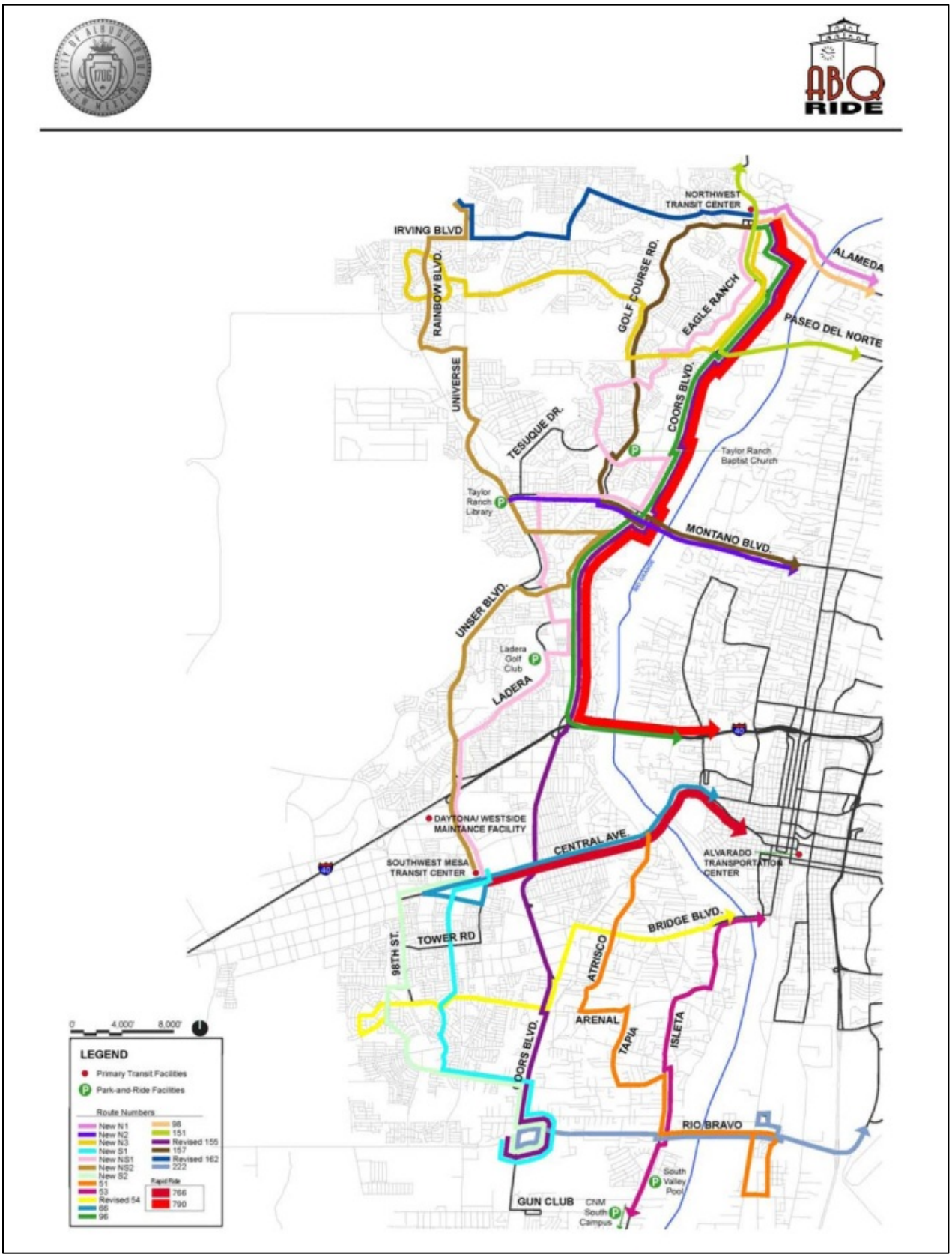
The Premium Quality corridors identified in the Westside Transit Study are "closely associated" with the High Capacity Transit corridors identified in the 2030 MTP. The 2035 MTP does not identify High Capacity Transit corridors, but does indicate "Priority Improvement Corridors" and "Study Corridors," including Paseo del Norte, which outline routes that merit additional study and perhaps future investment.[3] The 2035 MTP defines NM 528 and Jefferson St as "Priority Transit Improvement Corridors" (p. 79). The portion of southern Rio Rancho in the study area is identified in the 2035 MTP as a "Transit Corridor for Future Study." This designation reflects the ongoing development and population growth in the area and calls for future analysis of the appropriateness of transit service

Additional infrastructure improvements recommended in the WTIS include:

- Signal prioritization and queue jump lanes on Coors Blvd to expedite north-south travel along the corridor.
- Pedestrian improvements between Ellison and Seven Bar Loop on Coors Bypass to support access to Northwest Transit Center.

[3] The 2035 MTP was developed after funding had been awarded for the HCTS but before work had begun.

Figure 2: Westside Transit Improvement Study Proposed Enhancements



Rio Rancho Comprehensive Plan

The Transportation section of the *Rio Rancho Comprehensive Plan* considers ways to meet the mobility needs of a growing city that relies heavily on private-vehicle use. The plan contains few specific prescriptions for transit improvements, despite the dearth of public transit service currently available for Rio Rancho residents. The transportation section does, however, contain explicit references to coordination with Rio Metro Regional Transit District and the role of the HCTS in connecting Rio Rancho with the rest of the region through transit. The Implementation section includes a number of general policies and action items that are supportive of changes to land use patterns and creating a built environment that allows for more transportation choices:

Goal TR-3

- A balanced transportation system that provides access to a variety of transportation options (automobile, transit, bus rapid transit, rail, bicycle and pedestrian facilities)

Policy TR-1

- Plan land uses to increase mode share and opportunities for multi-purpose trips (trip chaining) through proper location and design of transportation facilities

Policy TR-2

- Advocate for Rio Metro RTD to implement transit improvements concurrent with roadway improvements to improve access and frequency of service and to increase ridership potential and service area. Encourage development of regional high capacity transit including light rail and bus rapid transit.

Policy TR-4

- Support complete street designs in the upgrade of existing and the development of future areas of Rio Rancho

Policy TR-8

- Coordinate transportation projects, policy issues, financing and development actions with all affected governmental units in the area.

Action TR-4

- Work with Rio Metro RTD to establish future high capacity transit corridors and station locations to target single-occupant vehicles commuting to and from City Center, major employment areas, recreational areas. This can be accomplished by creating and adopting station area land use plans to promote Transit Oriented Development and to define intermodal connectivity needs.

Action TR-7

- Establish specific area non-single occupant vehicle mode targets for: the City Center, major employment areas, recreational areas, and future TOD areas consistent with regional goals. (T-10-11)

Middle Rio Grande Connections: A Strategy for the Region's Transportation Future

The 2001 report, sponsored by NMDOT, City of Albuquerque, and MRGCOG, identifies a high-capacity transportation system, including a high capacity *transit* system, as part of a regional transportation vision. Of particular interest is the focus on "high-type" facilities which are suitable for "projects of a substantial cost that are expected to have a significant effect on traffic flow, level of service, or mode share" (p. 4-1).

Middle Rio Grande Connections envisions a "potential high-capacity transit system for the 20-year time horizon" (p. 4-1). The document identifies locations for further study and environmental analysis and evaluates 21 corridors based on residential density and other factors. High ranking corridors include: Central, San Mateo, Louisiana, 2nd/4th, and Bridge Blvd.

The study divides the metropolitan area into quadrants to analyze high-capacity transit potential and considers activity centers showing greatest potential for high-capacity transit (downtown Albuquerque, UNM/CNM, Uptown, Cottonwood/Intel, Sunport, Kirtland AFB/Sandia Labs). The Journal Center is not included as a major activity center/trip generator (p. 4-4). However, Paseo del Norte is characterized as a corridor with high "potential" for HCT (p. 4-5) and a strategic expressway with potential for an HOV lane (p. 4-14).

It is not clear how widely referenced the document is, but *Middle Rio Grande Connections* does contain some of the most comprehensive formal analysis on the feasibility of high-capacity transit in the AMPA. It is also noteworthy in its omission of the Journal Center/Jefferson St corridor as a major destination. Yet the report does consider Paseo del Norte as a viable option for high-capacity transit service ahead of other river crossing in the northwest portion of the metropolitan area.

Westside Strategic Plan (as amended, 2009)

The Westside Strategic Plan (WSP) is intended to guide growth and development on Albuquerque's west side. While the transportation element is out of date (based on the 1994 Long Range Major Street Plan), the WSP identified several transit corridors in the current study area, including Paseo del Norte, Coors Boulevard, and Montano Road. For the purposes of the WSP, transit indicated any mode besides single-occupancy vehicle, to include bus, rail, carpool, and/or HOV lanes.

Coors Corridor Plan (as amended, 1995, update in progress)

The transportation element of the Coors Corridor Plan (CCP) calls for increased capacity and safety and provision of reasonable access on Coors Boulevard. Due to problems with congestion, the recommendations of the CCP include widening of the roadway, additional turn lanes, a bicycle trail, and sidewalks. Access is to be limited, although driveways are permitted. Alternative access should be sought when possible. Intersections should be spaced at sufficient distance so as not to impede traffic flow. The CCP also recommends a series of TSM improvements, including signal coordination, incentives to use HOV lanes and improved transit.

The City of Albuquerque is currently updating the transportation element of the CCP. The update recognizes that increased capacity on Coors Boulevard will not in and of itself relieve the congestion that is expected to occur by 2035. While final recommendations have not been made, the new plan for Coors Boulevard will likely include TSM improvements, additional driving lanes, as well as a Bus Rapid Transit element.

North I-25 Sector Development Plan (as amended, 2010)

The North I-25 Sector Development Plan (North I-25 SDP) covers the portion of the study area north of Paseo del Norte and east of the North Diversion Channel. The transportation goal of the Plan is to improve circulation and access and facilitate the movement of people and goods. The Plan recommends additional transit routes through the Plan area, although it does not specify where those routes should be located. It also recommends that the truck restrictions on Paseo del Norte be removed.

North Valley Area Plan (1993)

The North Valley Area Plan (NVAP) covers the portion of the study area on the east side of the Rio Grande. While also out of date, the transportation element of the NVAP called for increasing non-vehicular modes of travel including transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. Alameda Boulevard, Montano Road, and 2nd Street were proposed for more limited access to maintain traffic flows.

Village of Los Ranchos 2010 Master Plan (1999)

The transportation goal of the Village of Los Ranchos Master Plan is to preserve the village scale and valley nature of the roadways and to enhance possibilities for pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian, mass transit, and other alternatives to vehicular traffic. Fourth Street was identified as the main commercial corridor.

Volcano Cliffs/Heights/Trails Sector Development Plans (2011)

The various Volcano Heights Sector Development Plans cover the area surrounding the Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard intersection. These plans, some of which are still in draft form, recognize the potential for BRT service along Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard. A transit center is recommended near the Paseo del Norte/Unser Boulevard intersection, and the plans include design recommendations for Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard to include dedicated BRT/HOV lanes.

Summary

All of the plans summarized above recognize that the primary functions of the principal arterials in the study area (e.g. Paseo del Norte, Alameda Boulevard, Montano Road, Coors Boulevard, etc.) is to carry large volumes of traffic with high mobility and limited access. In addition, a number of plans (2035 MTP, Westside Strategic Plan, Middle Rio Grande Connections) identify Paseo del Norte as potential site for **HOV lanes**. However, all of the plans recognize transit and other non-vehicular modes as important strategies in maintaining regional mobility into the future. These plans offer varying degrees of specificity in terms of proposed transit enhancements through the study area. Although few specific concepts have been put forward for Paseo del Norte, multiple plans indicate that Paseo del Norte is a high priority transit corridor and a logical candidate for additional service.

Likewise **Coors Blvd** is highlighted for transit enhancements such as dedicated lanes, signal prioritization, and queue jump facilities in both the update to the Coors Corridor Study and the Westside Transit Improvement Study. While Coors Blvd intersects the HCTS study area and does not provide an alternative to Paseo del Norte, major transit-specific infrastructure on Coors could inform connections and complementary service to Paseo HCT, such as the efficiency of the Rapid Ride Blue Line.

Finally, a number of policies and practices contained in the **2035 MTP** support and enable funding for transit enhancements in the HCTS study area. These include transit mode share goals, which are supported by the suballocation of federal funds through the Transportation Improvement Program, and the Project Prioritization Process, which could allow transit enhancements proposed for the HCTS study area to generate high scores and increases the likelihood that premium transit service receive federal funding.