

MRCOG 2020 *Annual Report*



at a glance

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MRCOG in 2020

A New Normal

If I had to say one thing about the events of the last year at the Mid-Region Council of Governments, it would be “What a difference a year makes!”

Last year, we were commemorating the COG’s 50-year anniversary, and this year we are embarking on a whole new way of delivering services—whether it be in the area of transportation, workforce, or economic development—MRCOG has had to make some adjustments!

While it has been a learning curve of major proportions, it has also been a true testament to the resiliency of our organization. As you peruse this year’s Annual Report, you will find that not even a pandemic could stop the workings of the COG.

Through a host of cyber platforms, meetings continued to be held, staff, member government staff, and the public were able to stay in touch, and MRCOG’s programs continued to meet the needs of the four-county region.

In the area of transportation, this past April saw the passage of the region’s long-range transportation plan Connections 2040. The Plan lays out how \$11 billion dollars in transportation funding will be allocated over the next 20 years.

The New Mexico Rail Runner Express saw a suspension of service for the first time in its 14-year history. This had a ripple effect that was felt by the passengers who rely on the train, the system’s operator—Herzog Transit—as well as the train’s transit partners that provide bus connections.

During the hiatus staff has been working on implementing upgrades to the system. This includes continued PTC implementation, as well as station and locomotive maintenance in preparation for restarting the system once it is safe.



Another area that was forced to pivot due to the pandemic was our Workforce system. Overnight, our regional one-stop locations went “virtual.” Job seekers and businesses are now able to access a host of virtual services simply by tapping into the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico social media sites. Additionally, I am pleased to announce that a second NM Workforce Connection, Central Region office has been added in Sandoval County, this one in the City of Rio Rancho.

We can hardly talk about our workforce without mentioning our regional economy, which, as you are aware, has been leveled a deep blow by the COVID pandemic. While businesses hurried to take advantage of federal aid and relief, an EDA CARES Act grant is allowing the COG to position

itself to offer more technical assistance and information resources to our member governments and agencies that are working hard on the economic recovery.

2020 has given us a lot to overcome, but with the hard work and dedication of our governing boards, elected officials, member agencies, and certainly our dedicated COG staff, we will continue to provide a framework for success for the region as we look forward to the future with renewed enthusiasm and focus.

Sincerely,

Dewey V. Cave,
MRCOG Executive Director

A Word From Outgoing MRCOG Board Chair Greggory Hull

“When I became MRCOG Chair two years ago, I made a commitment to focus on strengthening regional partnerships and working toward a unified approach to economic prosperity for central New Mexico. And while no one could’ve predicted a global pandemic, I feel that in many ways, that goal has become a reality.

Nowhere is the saying “we are stronger together” more evident than here at the Mid-Region Council of Governments: a diverse organization, with a common goal of serving the needs of every community both big and small. Our economic climate has been challenging



and our resources scarce, but together we have made great strides in the areas of transportation, workforce, and our economy.

It has been my pleasure to serve as MRCOG Board Chair, and I offer incoming Chair Debbie O’Malley well wishes as she assumes the charge. I look forward to much achievement under her leadership, and continued success for all communities in our region.”

About Incoming MRCOG Board Chair Debbie O’Malley

Bernalillo County Commissioner Debbie O’Malley brings a 30-year career of strong, effective leadership to the MRCOG Board.

Her public service career began in 1995 when she founded the Sawmill Community Land Trust. She later served as its executive director, as Bernalillo County Commission chair and vice-chair, and as Albuquerque City Council President and Vice President.

An Albuquerque native, Debbie is a champion of working families, public safety, workforce housing,



neighborhood planning, and revitalization.

When it comes to MRCOG, Debbie is no stranger: she has served as Chair of the Metropolitan Transportation Board, as well as MRCOG Board Chair from 2011-2013.

Debbie and her husband of 45 years, Mike, have two daughters, April and Kristy, and four grandchildren.



MID-REGION COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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.

People, Jobs and COVID-19



**Local Favorite,
Frontier Restaurant,
Closed its Indoor
Seating**

photo courtesy KRQE News

Pre-Pandemic

The MRCOG region started the year 2020 with 403,000 jobs, having fully recovered from the employment losses of the early part of the last decade.

Large-scale hiring events were being held at Sandia National Laboratories and Intel Corporation, \$500 million in private funds were being invested along the central corridor, Netflix had recently settled into its new production hub at Mesa del Sol, both UNM Hospital and Presbyterian Hospital

were moving forward with major expansions, and Amazon had chosen Bernalillo County's westside for a new fulfillment center with an expected 1,000 new jobs.

In the real estate world, home sales had rebounded to pre-recession levels, and migration had returned to positive.

COVID-19 and the Economy

And then, in February, everything changed as the world suddenly

became aware of the threat of a novel Coronavirus: COVID-19.

The virus' impact in terms of the number of people infected, the loss of life, and the strain on public healthcare systems was immediate and devastating.

The pandemic also had an immediate impact on the functioning of schools, businesses, transportation systems, and other critical areas of daily life. Public transit services stopped operating,

restaurants and other services closed or changed their operations to take-out or curbside only, schools moved their classes online, and those who had the option, started working from home.

The US lost 12.6 million jobs between January 2020 and July 2020 (recovering some of the 21 million jobs that were lost between January 2020 and April 2020). In the MRCOG Region 33,000 jobs were lost during the same period. Seemingly

Drive-Thru COVID-19 Testing Site at Downtown Lovelace Hospital

photo courtesy KRQE News



overnight, retail stores, restaurants and entertainment venues were shuttered, leaving thousands out of work. The local unemployment rate skyrocketed from 4.6 percent in January to 12.4 percent by April, improving to 8.9 percent by July.

Essential Workers

The pandemic placed a spot-light on “essential workers.” More Americans

became aware of the fact that the jobs most essential to the functioning of our society are the ones that receive the lowest compensation, are held predominantly by the poor, by women, and by minorities.

These include nurses and medical technicians, utility workers, janitorial staff, solid waste workers, trucking and goods distributors, mail carriers, grocery store workers, food bank

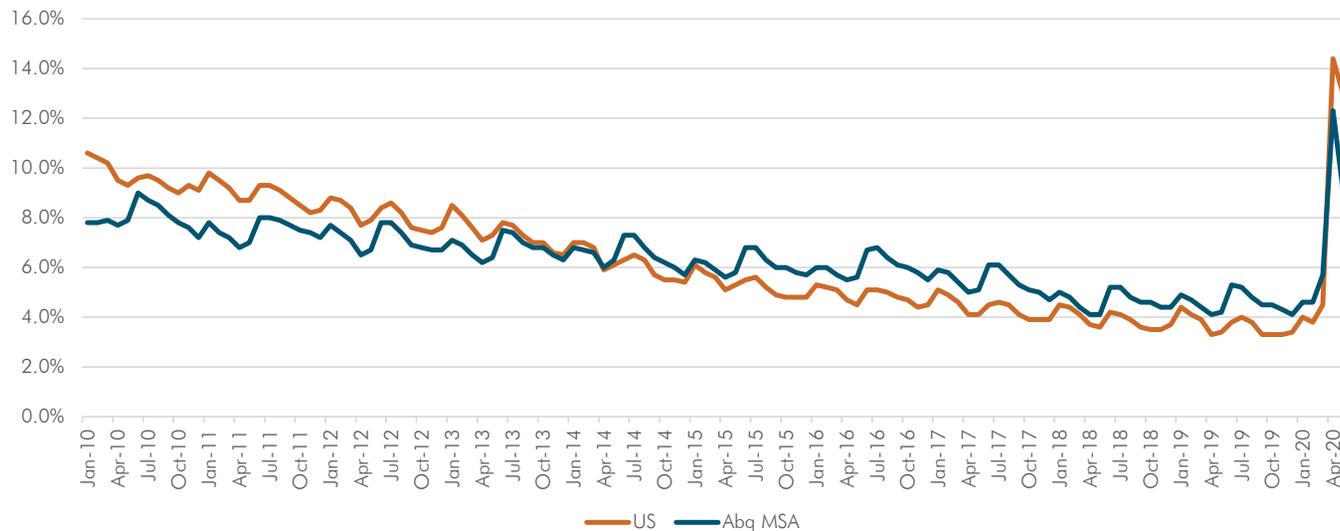
operators, and social service providers. Many of these workers remained on the front lines at increased risk to their own health to provide much-needed goods and services.

Vulnerable Populations

Data released by the New Mexico Department of Health demonstrates that certain population groups are seeing disproportionately high rates of COVID infection and loss of life: seniors and populations of color.

By August 2020, more than one in five of all COVID-related deaths had occurred in nursing homes. Black and Indigenous populations are also affected at much higher rates than the general population. In New Mexico, Native Americans, while accounting for only nine percent of the total population, represented 57 percent of all COVID-19 positive cases in June.

Unemployment Rate US and Albuquerque MSA, January 2010 - July 2020*



*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, not seasonally adjusted

Urban Areas and Migration

The highly contagious nature of the coronavirus has led to thoughtful conversations about the future of cities. No doubt resilient cities such as New York will adapt and thrive once more, but there is some indication that there may be a movement of people away from dense cities.

Vacancy rates in some metros are edging upwards. It is possible that the greater Albuquerque area may fare well in this regard with its relatively spacious terrain.

While migration levels fell dramatically following the recession, the region has traditionally experienced rather high levels of in-migration, attributing about 50 percent of its growth to migration between 2000 and 2010.

Workforce and Industry

There have been many other changes ignited by the pandemic related to how we live and work. People who were resistant to online shopping have found themselves taking the plunge in to the world of front door

delivery. This is having ripple effects that deals a blow to brick and mortar retail and places additional demands on the warehousing and trucking industries.

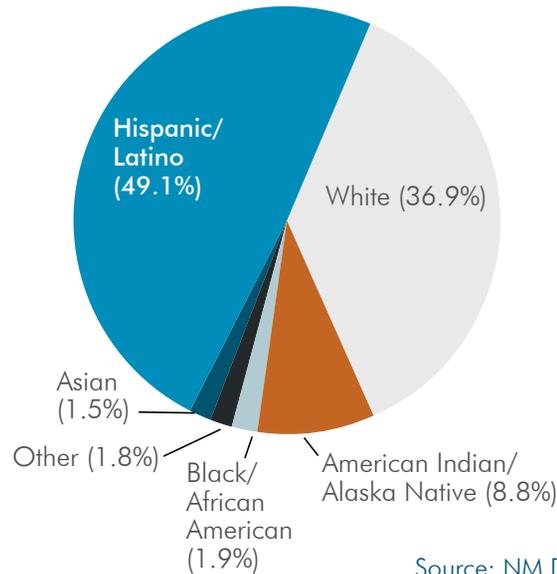
Some employers who have sent their employees to home workstations for social distancing purposes are finding that they are able to maintain productivity while lowering their overhead.

It is too soon to say if these shifts will have an enduring impact beyond COVID-19, but it is likely that at least some are here for the foreseeable future, and have the potential to leave an imprint on the workforce, industry, transportation and our built environment.

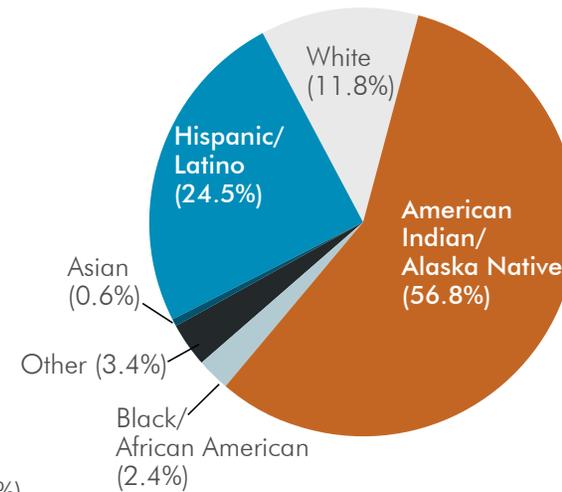
The long-term impact of COVID-19 on population growth will depend heavily on the ability to contain the virus as

well as the potential for future waves of the disease before we have a vaccine.

NM Population
by Race/Ethnicity



NM COVID-19 Cases
by Race/Ethnicity



Source: NM Dept. of Health, US Census Bureau, June 2020



United States®
**Census
2020**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

**This is the official questionnaire for this address.
It is quick and easy to respond, and your answers are protected by law.**

Para completar el cuestionario en español, dele la vuelta y complete el lado verde.

FOR
OFFICIAL
USE ONLY

Census 2020

Since 1790, the US has counted its entire population every 10 years. The results determine how many seats in congress each state receives. They also determine how billions of dollars in federal funding flow into states and communities.

The Census Bureau began counting every person in the US in March of this year. Shortly thereafter, field operations had to be temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The count resumed in late spring. Census officials have extended the schedule to allow persons to self-respond.

New Mexico has historically been undercounted by the census. This is in part due to the fact that this is a largely rural state with sparse population and, in more modern times, with limited broadband and computer access. It is estimated that each person in New Mexico that is missed by the census means \$3,700 fewer federal dollars received every year for critical services such as healthcare, education, transportation, and more. Missing a family of four would cost the state nearly \$150,000 over the course of the next decade.

Start here OR go online at my2020census.gov to complete your 2020 Census questionnaire.

Use a blue or black pen.

2. Were there any additional people staying here on April 1, 2020 that you did not include in Question 1?

**Downtown
Albuquerque
Without The Hustle
And Bustle**

photo courtesy KRQE News

Traffic Patterns and COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and the associated stay-at-home restrictions on work and public activities have had a significant effect on travel demand. Restrictions put in place to help “flatten the curve” of infections in order to not overwhelm our medical facilities is having a dramatic effect on the quantity and distribution of traffic. Impacts have been noted across all modes of transportation: airport activity at the Albuquerque Sunport is at a record low, truck freight traffic has dropped by about six percent in the western multi-state region, and the freeways have seen monthly volumes drop by 11 percent in March and by 26 percent in April (INRIX, NMDOT, 2020).

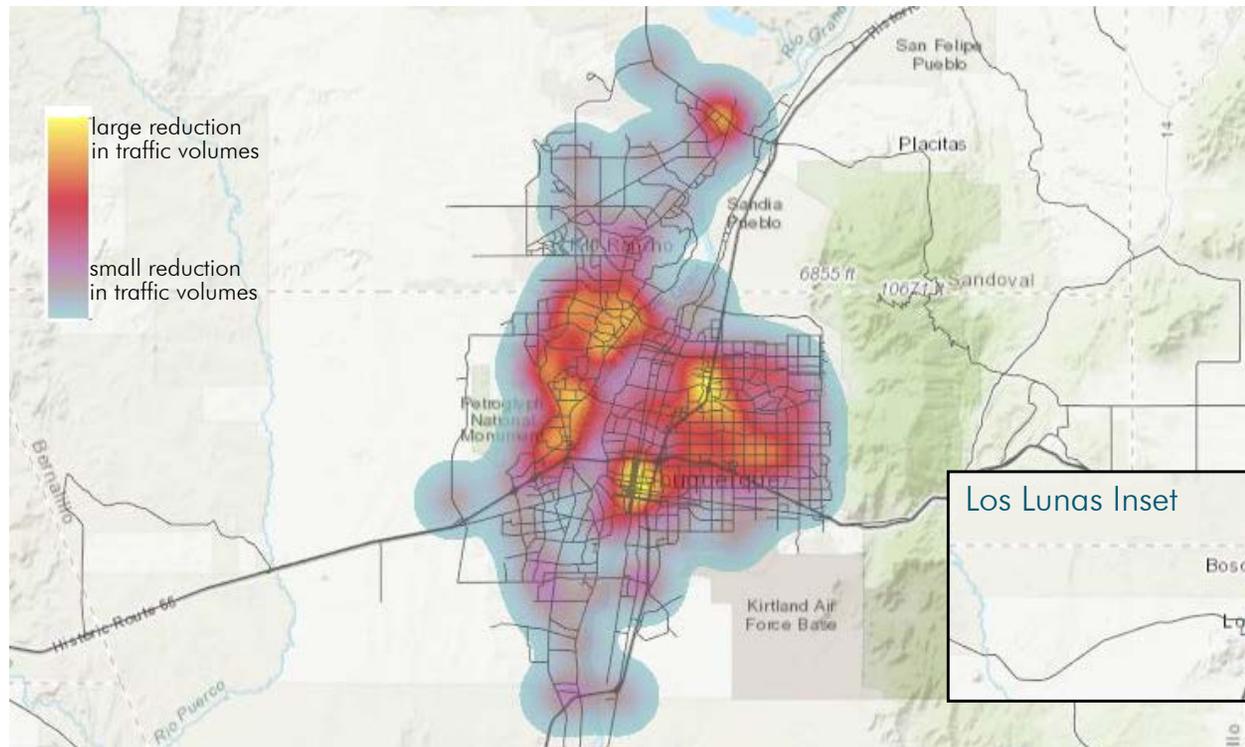
Traffic volumes in the MRCOG region are recorded on an ongoing basis, and a committee comprised of local agency traffic engineers and planners is continually analyzing the data and monitoring any changes.

Changes are certainly present when traffic volumes recorded while stay-at-home orders are in effect are compared to those recorded during the previous year. In fact, early data shows an approximate reduction in vehicle trips of 18 to 48 percent, depending on the specific area.

Work-trips dominate both the AM and PM peak periods, whereas non-work trips tend to take place during the mid-day and PM periods. Analysis shows that the majority of the observed reductions in vehicle-trips are due to corresponding reductions in work trips associated with stay-at-home orders and school closures. The amount of reduction in volume varies by time of day in a way that coincides with known travel patterns:

- AM reductions in traffic volume average 46 percent
- PM reductions in traffic volume average 36 percent

Changes in Daily Traffic Volumes during COVID Stay-at-Home Orders



"[...] the data shows an approximate reduction in vehicle trips of 18 to 48 percent."
 (MRCOG Traffic Monitoring Program).

**One Of The Many
 "Closed During
 COVID" Signs
 Around Town**

photo courtesy Daily Lobo

The map shows how widespread and substantial the changes in daily traffic volumes are as measured at over 150 locations during the nine weeks of the stay-at-home restrictions. Clearly visible are the reduced traffic volumes in areas where employment and Activity Centers are located, such as:

- Downtown
- UNM/Uptown
- Journal Center
- Coors Blvd Corridor north of I-40
- Cottonwood Mall area

- NM528/US 550 area

Regional Principal Arterials and key commute corridor areas experienced more of a reduction in traffic volume than other facilities as they are more affected by the reduction in work trips.

Exactly how a roadway's traffic volumes are affected is dependent on a roadway's function (neighborhood street or principle arterial), location, and adjacent land use. The graphs on the next page illustrate this well.



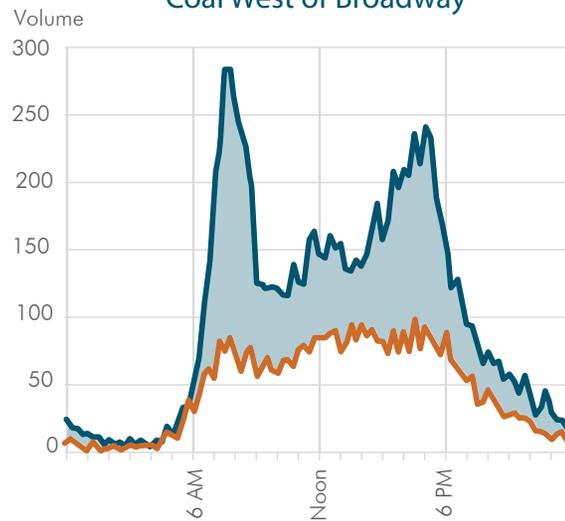
Coal Avenue is the eastbound part of a regional principal arterial that connects several activity centers as well as the interstate. The location of Coal West of Broadway shows a huge reduction during the AM, and also a reduction in PM demand—suggesting this is a corridor dominated by work trips.

Dellyne Avenue, on the other hand, is a major collector between Coors and Unser Boulevards, with adjacent residential land use. The location of Dellyne West of Coors shows the same pronounced reduction in AM demand, but minimal reduction in PM, and even an increase in the mid-day.

Lomas Boulevard is a principal arterial with both residential and commercial adjacent land uses. It provides connectivity across the entire metro region and includes a river crossing, interstate access, and varied activities/origins and destinations along the route.

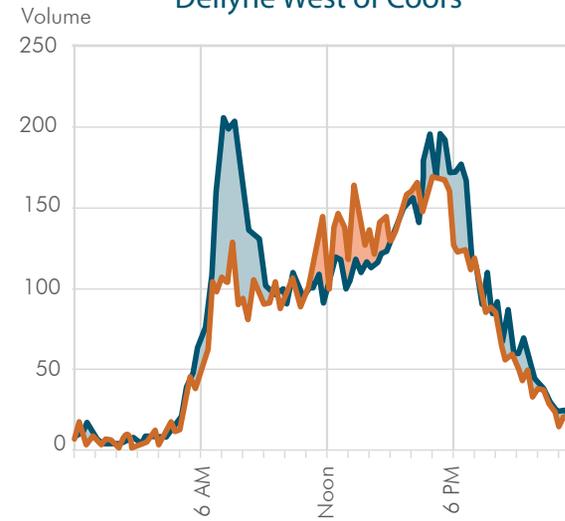
As staff continues to analyze the impacts of COVID-19 on traffic patterns, MRCOG will investigate how to incorporate this information into the transportation planning process to better inform local transportation

Coal West of Broadway

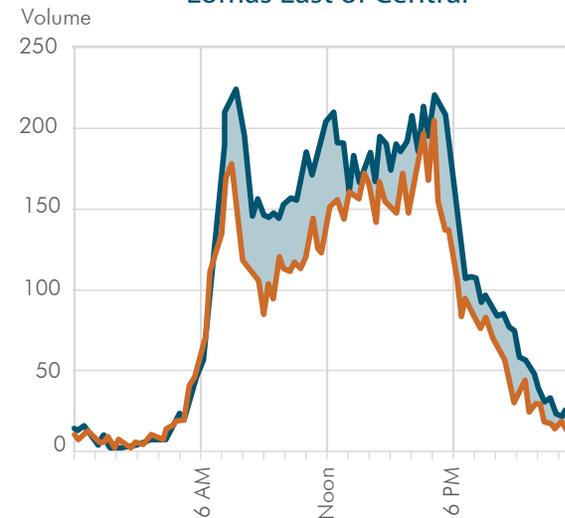


- Previous Volume (2018, 2017)
- Current Volume (2020)
- Change: Lower Current Volume
- Change: Higher Current Volume

Dellyne West of Coors



Lomas East of Central



planning policy and project development decisions.

Approximately 150 location are being closely monitored to this end, and the COVID Traffic Impacts Committee will be using this information, along with the governor’s stay-at-home orders and school closures, to help determine progress towards a “new normal” of traffic.

Bicyclists On The Bosque Trail Near Central Avenue



Walking and Biking During COVID-19

While people were driving less during the stay-at-home orders and closures, they started walking and biking more. Seven permanent trail counters managed by the Mid Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MRMPO) reveal just how much.

During the month of April of this year, the total number of bicyclists and pedestrians on these seven trails was 114,251. This represents a 39 percent increase from April 2019.

Another source of bicycle and pedestrian data is provided by Strava Metro data. Strava data is collected by people on their smart phone app or GPS device. They track their bicycling, walking, hiking, or running trips. Strava

collects and anonymizes the data and makes it available for purchase.

Although not a perfect source of data because it represents a small segment of total trips and is biased because of the people who choose to use the application, it does help supplement other data.

Strava data shows total bicycle trips were up by 65 percent in April 2020 compared to April 2019, and the total number of people traveling by bike was 39 percent higher. Not surprisingly, bicycle commute trips were down by about 27 percent.

Total pedestrian trips (including hiking and running), were up by a whopping 162 percent, and the total number

of people walking increased by 47 percent.

If there are some silver linings in the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that many were reminded how enjoyable and healthy walking and biking can be for both transportation and recreation. Perhaps planners and decision makers in the region can take advantage of this by exploring how to keep this momentum going and improve conditions for biking and walking in our region.

“[...] non-motorized travel on our shared bike and pedestrian paths has increased by 39 percent” (MRCOG Non-Motorized Traffic Monitoring Program).

Pedestrian Fatalities are Up During COVID Stay-at-Home Orders

photo courtesy KRQE News



Traffic Safety Trends During COVID

Although the COVID shutdown in March, April and May caused a significant reduction in traffic volumes, there does not appear to be an equally large reduction in traffic fatalities. Detailed data is not yet available, but the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) reports monthly fatalities for the whole state, providing some insight.

The period of January through April of 2020 saw 124 traffic fatalities, whereas 2019 during the same period saw 130. This 5 percent reduction was not distributed equally across all modes of travel: there was no change in the number of traffic fatalities for sedans, and only a slight reduction in the number of deaths for pickup trucks, SUVs, motorcycles, and cyclists.

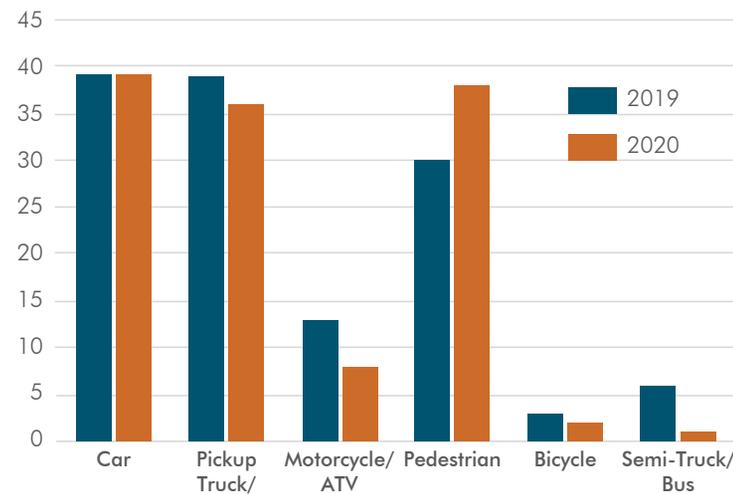
However, more pedestrians died in the

first four months of 2020 than the first four months of 2019: 38 pedestrian deaths as compared to 30 during the same time period in 2019—a 27% increase. When more detailed data becomes available, we will be able to pinpoint exactly where these crashes happened.

This increase in pedestrian deaths during the Coronavirus shutdown may seem counterintuitive as fewer cars were out on the roadways, but can likely be partially explained by the increase in walking and biking during the pandemic, increasing pedestrian exposure throughout the city.

Another point to keep in mind is that our analyses have found that some of the roadway segments that are most dangerous to pedestrians in the metro area are actually not congested. The

Traffic Fatalities by Mode: 2019 vs 2020



most notable example being Central Avenue from Louisiana to Tramway. This means that those pedestrian crashes are not related to vehicular traffic volumes, and thus would not decrease with a decrease in vehicular volumes.

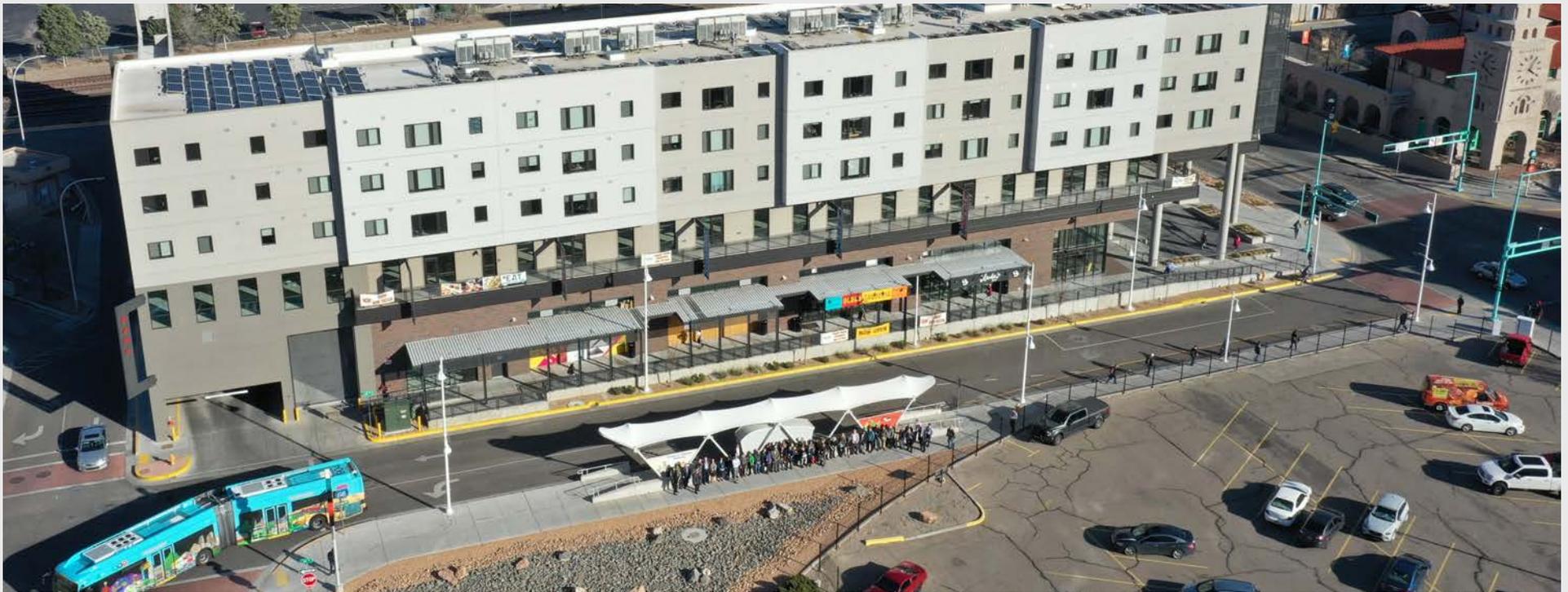
In addition, reduced traffic volumes during COVID stay-at-home orders have been leading to more aggressive driving, putting pedestrians at risk.

Arriving by ART

Urban Land Institute New Mexico hosted “Arriving by ART” on March 5th to showcase how placemaking unlocks the potential of transit investments to accelerate new development in the urban core. More than 50 developers, architects, and public officials filled two ART buses. They toured the ART route and were shown how the public investment of \$130 million in rapid transit has activated more than \$500 million in private development along the historic Central Avenue Corridor.

Back in 2013, when ULI and MRCOG hosted a day long public conference on BRT, many attendees wondered if bus rapid transit would have the same economic impact along Albuquerque’s Route 66 as it did in other cities. It did. The most recent local data shows that new commercial projects and innovative housing developments are indeed clustering in activity centers near the transit line.

The Connections 2040 MTP, the MRMPO’s newly adopted long-range transportation plan (see next article), prioritizes Complete Streets urban development as a way to attract and retain millennial workers in metropolitan Albuquerque. Not only does transit oriented development lead to the kind of development and spaces millennials prefer, public transportation also allows them to work as they travel.



Facilitated by MRMPO, the Target Scenario was Developed by Member Governments.



Connections 2040 MTP

On April 17, the Metropolitan Transportation Board (MTB) voted to adopt the Connections 2040 MTP, the region’s long-range transportation plan that will guide multi-modal transportation investments in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area (AMPA) for the next 20 years.

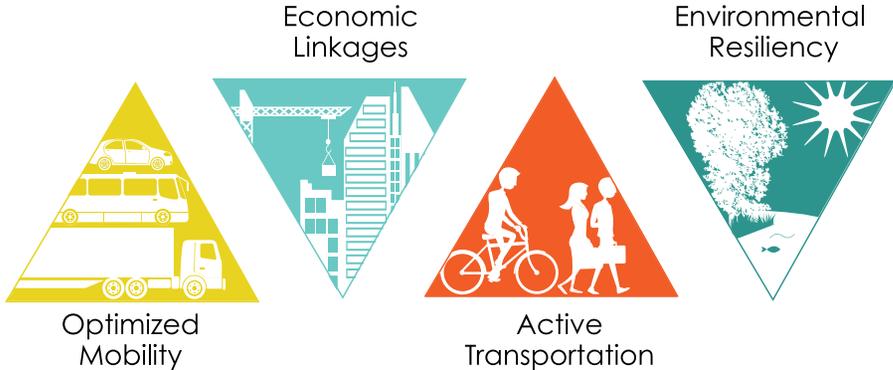
With close to a million residents and the state’s largest concentration of jobs, our region depends on the safe and efficient movement of people and goods for the economy to thrive. Albuquerque is located at the intersection of Interstates I-25 and I-40, strategically linking commercial freight routes through the BNSF inter-modal railyard and airports. Residents commute along arterial roadways, on transit lines, and the Rail Runner. Infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists are equally essential for safe daily travel.

The plan includes approximately \$1.5 billion in public funds to maintain and preserve existing roads and bridges. Investments in new projects aim to improve efficiency along and between existing transportation networks. For example, over \$57 million is committed to a new river crossing and interchange on I-25 in Los Lunas to improve accessibility, alleviate congestion, and reduce response times for emergency services.

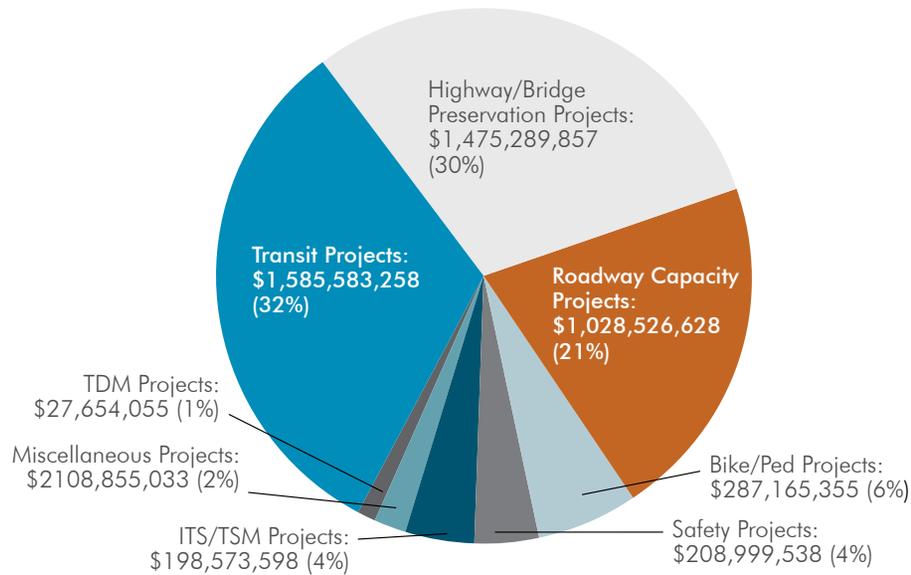
In total, this MTP includes an estimated \$11.45 billion in public and private funds that are available for maintenance, operations, and capital projects on multi-modal transportation systems in our region. Among the many funded projects, the Connections 2040 MTP commits resources for major roadway reconstructions, development of park and ride facilities, rail and transit improvements, and



2040 MTP Goals



2040 MTP Publicly Funded Projects by Type



One of the Projects in the 2040 MTP: Reconstruction of the I-25/ César Chávez Interchange

mobility services, and improving active transportation (walking and biking) infrastructure.

construction of multi-use trails and bike lanes. Pursuant to federal regulations, transportation projects funded through the MTP are fiscally constrained, meaning programmed spending does not exceed the forecasted availability of public funds.

All projects for which monies are programmed must align with the long-range plan's vision and goals, which were developed with input from member governments, regional stakeholders, and the public.

In the development of the plan, extra efforts were made to engage young

adults, people of color, and lower-income residents--groups we have not heard much from during past public outreach efforts. Over 1,800 public comments and questionnaires were collected, in addition to online "gap map" submissions where people were able to indicate exactly where they experience gaps in the current transportation system. During stay-at-home orders, over 200 people joined a virtual open house on Facebook Live.

New home construction continues to outpace job growth on the west side. The Target Scenario of the

MTP provides an alternative vision that aspires to align local plans, policies, and development patterns to improve future transportation and land use conditions. A significant strategy to improving efficiency, the Target Scenario's balance of jobs and housing on the west side could reduce anticipated river crossing delays by as much as 43 percent.

Encouraging Transit Oriented Development (TOD) may also help the region achieve the Target Scenario, by helping minimize congestion and maximizing the use of transit, shared

By pursuing the projects listed in the Connections 2040 MTP and by following key pathways for meeting the long-range goals, regional decision makers and community members can improve our shared future. Targeted investments over the next 20 years will result in a 20 percent decrease in congested lane-miles during peak commutes when compared to the "do-nothing" scenario. The economic benefits of a proactive approach are also substantial, with an estimated savings in travel time equivalent to approximately \$2 billion dollars over the 20-year life of the plan.

The Railyards in Albuquerque

photo courtesy: FreeABQImages

The Economy and WORKFORCE



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were a number of solid economic development projects gaining steam in the region. One of the highlights of the past year was the awarding of a \$1.2 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to the City of Albuquerque for public utilities critical in developing the historic 27-acre Albuquerque Rail Yards. Through its role as the EDA's designated Economic Development District, MRCOG worked with the City of Albuquerque as it developed its application.

The Rail Yards has a long history that dates back to its heyday in the 1920s when as much as 25 percent of the city's workforce was employed there!

Once a global pandemic became a reality, the region's focus shifted from "Economic Development" to "Economic Recovery". All of the communities in the Mid-Region, from the big cities to the smallest rural communities, experienced loss of revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

MRCOG immediately applied for, and was recently awarded, a \$400

thousand EDA CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant to assist with economic recovery and resilience.

The grant allows MRCOG to build on existing partnerships and add value to the technical assistance that MRCOG staff currently provide to its member governments and organizations. For instance, services such as support with grant applications, and business trainings, and even hiring additional staff to help assist in these endeavors. These are some of the areas where we can expect to see these funds make a difference.



WCCNM Staff at Explora for the Facebook Career Connections Internship Program

New Mexico Workforce Connection

A Proud Partner of the American Job Center Network

Youth Work Experience

Youth Work Experience is a short-term paid, planned, and structured learning experience that occurs in a workplace and is focused on career exploration and the development of work-readiness skills.

With a focus on our top three employment sectors—healthcare, IT, and construction—eligible participants are placed at partner worksites with the opportunity to gain knowledge, develop skills, and gain good work habits, increasing their potential for employment success.

Work experience also gives participants the opportunity to establish relationships and network

YOUTH WORK EXPERIENCE
171 youth placed at worksites
46 youth completed online training during COVID-19*
**as of May 29, 2020*

with professionals in their field, and it provides a bridge from temporary jobs to permanent employment, and more importantly, a career.

TechHire

TechHire New Mexico is a four-year, four-million dollar USDOL grant designed to provide paid Information Technology (IT) related training and career development support to eligible individuals between the ages of 17 and 29. The grant program is designed to develop a pipeline of IT

talent ready to work and advance in high demand IT careers.

Work experience is a critical component of the training funded through the TechHire New Mexico grant and is facilitated through subsidized internships, on-the-job training (OJT), customized incumbent worker training, as well as unsubsidized IT job placement assistance.

With a focus on employer needs, TechHire New Mexico helps individuals just starting IT training or currently employed in an entry level IT position to succeed in gaining or advancing in IT careers. Through customized 12-week internships, up to six months of OJT, and/or incumbent worker training, TechHire NM works with employers

TECHHIRE NM
429 participants enrolled
388 participants earned one or more certificate or credential*
**since January 2017*

to develop specific training goals and outcomes for entry level IT staff.

In early 2020, WCCNM received a six-month TechHire NM grant extension, which will allow the program to continue through December 31, 2020. The TechHire New Mexico program has successfully developed a sustainable foundation for the Central Region’s emerging IT Sector Strategy initiative that will allow the TechHire program successes to evolve and continue well into the future.



Internships, Apprenticeships, and Work Experience

The Workforce Connection of Central NM (WCCNM) developed policy and implemented programs to promote paid internships which allow participants to gain experience in an actual work environment. An additional benefit is that these internships allow employers an opportunity to get to know a potential employee prior to hiring.

Facebook’s Career Connections

The WCCNM is partnering with Facebook’s Career Connections program to provide Central Region’s small and medium size businesses with up to 100 Facebook-trained college interns who will work on improving their social media presence along with additional tasks as appropriate during a 10-week internship.

The program provides both businesses and students with access to exclusive Facebook trainings and professional development opportunities.

Enrollment: 50
Total Cost: \$174,000
(over two program years)

Construction Employers Apprenticeship/Incumbent Worker Training

This is a collaboration between WCCNM and Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of New Mexico to assist with the increasing shortage of craftspeople within the region and state.

The WCCNM is ameliorating the cost of Apprenticeship training through ABC by contracting with participating employers to reimburse a portion of the associated training.

This program provides apprenticeships as well as incumbent worker training.

Enrollment: 171
Total Cost: \$208,075

Electric Line Worker Pre-Apprenticeship

WCCNM collaborates with CNM on pre-apprenticeship training, including a CDL A license to individuals looking to enter the workforce as Electrical Line Worker apprentices.

With many aging linemen, demand for these skills is high. The work is dangerous and involves long hours, but the salary and benefits are good. The apprenticeship consists of a 4-year training program with an electric company, co-op or contractor. Upon completion, the individual is eligible to obtain their journeyman’s licensure.

Enrollment: 20
Total Cost: \$164,981

Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico

SUCCESS STORIES



Information
Technology

Kristi was laid off from a company where she had been employed for over eight years. Devastated, both emotionally and financially, she was even facing the potential of losing her home. Kristi got in touch with Workforce Connection, and was eventually placed in an On the Job Training (OJT) contract with Next State Systems, which she completed. She now has a full-time job at this company, working as their Office Manager. Kristi is planning to continue her education and work toward obtaining a bachelor's degree in business.



Welding
Training
Program

Justus obtained his Welding Certificate from CNM in 2016. He found a job, but was laid off after only a year. After five months of unemployment, a WCCNM case manager referred Justus to CNM's Welding Technology Training Program, and a business consultant determined his skills set, updated his resume, and helped him apply for jobs. Within a week, AMFAB Steel reached out and offered Justus a welder/fabricator position. Once Justus completes his probationary period, he will be considered for a shift supervisor position.



Youth
Program

In July of 2019, Shamonica Ly was referred to the WCCNM Youth Program. At the time of intake, she was 23-year old high school dropout and mother of two. Shamonica started High School Equivalency HSE classes through YDI and enrolled in the youth program. She received work experience by working at the New Mexico Workforce office as an Administration Assistant. Shamonica has learned many skills during her time at WCCNM and obtained her HSE in December, 2019. Shamonica wants to further her education possibly in the medical field, nursing, or social work.



TechHire
New Mexico

Judah was resigned to waiting to attend college and start a career until he could afford to do so. Not so easy on busboy wages. After learning about CNM Ingenuity and the Bootcamp Courses, and how those could get paid for through the TechHire New Mexico grant, he quit his job and committed himself. After graduating, he started a digital media productions business, while taking projects as a freelancer. Then he got accepted into a Comcast Digital Media Studio Internship. He is now working in exactly the line of work that he always wanted.

Rio Metro and NM RAIL RUNNER

On March 16, 2020, the New Mexico Rail Runner Express suspended service for the first time in its 14-year history. This unprecedented event was due to the COVID-19 Pandemic which resulted in widespread closures across the state of New Mexico. In the interest of saving lives and mitigating risks, NM Governor Michele Lujan mandated that all non-essential services stop operations.

The impact of the decision to suspend Rail Runner service not only affected everyone who relies on the train for transportation, Rio Metro staff, and the system's contractor, Herzog Transit International, but also the train's

partner transit agencies which provide bus connections, causing suspension of some of those service routes. Most Rio Metro buses continued to operate. However, ridership was down almost 70 percent. And, although many

people were working from home, those who continued to report to a job site and typically used the train for their commute were forced to find another mode of transportation.

Following the suspension of service, the marketing department continued to communicate to passengers via email updates, social media, and the Rio Metro website. However, a noticeable drop in visitors to the website (by 81 percent) was evident.

Advertising on the digital screens on the train, poster displays both inside the cars and at the stations came to a

halt. Since Rio Metro buses were still in service, revenue continued to be gained from clients who purchased advertising on those vehicles.

In preparation for resuming Rail Runner service at a future date, Rio Metro is working on measures that can be put in place to mitigate the risks of infection to both passengers and the train crew: social distancing seat signage, markings at the station platforms, reminder ads on the digital screens, and posters at the entrances and exits.



Signage to be Used on NM Rail Runner Trains Once Service Resumes



Terry Doyle, Director
Rio Metro Regional Transit District
Terry's Safety Tip: As an agency, safety is our number one priority. Always remember, the train can't see you and it can't stop on a dime.



Robert Gonzales, Operations Manager
Rio Metro Regional Transit District
Robert's Safety Tip: Don't get hurt; stay alert.



Gilberto Melgarejo, General Manager
Herzog Transit Services, Inc.
Gil's Safety Tip: Safety is no accident.



Rio Metro Marketing Staff
Safety Tip: Don't be distracted. Stay focused, stay alive!



Matthew Stone, Operations Supervisor
Rio Metro Regional Transit District
Matthew's Safety Tip: Always be aware of your surroundings around the tracks. Even standing railroad cars can move at any time.



Stephanie Paiz, Program Support Coordinator
Rio Metro Regional Transit District
Stephanie's Safety Tip: Being on the tracks is trespassing. It is both dangerous and illegal.



James Breiterman, Senior Train Dispatcher
Rio Metro Regional Transit District
James's Safety Tip: If the gate arms are down at a railroad crossing, do not drive around them. Even if you don't see a train.



Customer Service Staff
Safety Tip: Always be aware of your surroundings.

Marketing Awards

In February 2020, Rio Metro's Rail Safety Week campaign received a 1st Place AdWheel Award from the American Public Transportation Association. The award was given for best educational campaign on a shoestring budget. The unique element of the campaign was the Rail Runner staff providing safety tips to help educate the public. The campaign also won the South West Transit Association Spotlight Award in August 2020.

In total, Rio Metro took home five marketing and communication awards during the past year, including three Communicator Awards of Distinction from the International Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts. With more than 6,000 entries, the Communicator Awards is one of the largest and most competitive awards of its kind in the world.

A Tour of Valencia County

Last fall, Rio Metro partnered with the Village of Los Lunas and Santa Fe's historic La Fonda on the Plaza hotel to host the first-ever docent familiarization tour of Los Lunas and Valencia County. The tour provided docents from La Fonda with a unique hands-on learning experience about all the attractions the region has to offer.

The day started at the Santa Fe Depot, where the group was given an overview of the Rail Runner and the connections it provides throughout the region, continued on to the Pueblo of Isleta to a photography exhibit and to the St. Augustine Church. The tour continued on to Los Lunas for a visit of historical and cultural sites and wrapped up in Belen where participants caught the train back to Santa Fe.



**Rio Metro Staff
Being Trained
on Operating
Wheelchair Lifts**



Operational Safety Improvements

The Rio Metro Regional Transit District Bus Division is developing a Safety Management System (SMS). This is in accordance with a new rule from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), which requires bus agencies across the country to develop a “formal, top-down, organization-wide approach to managing safety risk and assuring the effectiveness of a transit agency’s safety risk mitigation”. It is intended to bring all RMRTD staff into a process of aiding in the safety of staff, riders, and the general public.

Part of these safety improvements is a new reporting system that allows staff to anonymously report any safety concerns or near-misses. This includes a Bus Safety Reporting section on the RMRTD website. It lays out all available means of reporting--call/text message Safe Hotline, online reporting, written/

hard copies of the form either mailed or placed in a designated safety box at their main offices, and the option of having in-person conversations with Division Managers-- but also explains the benefits of reporting their concerns without fear of retribution.

Any reports that are received will elicit a response from management within ten days. The responses, including any updates on the status of longer-term remedies, will be posted on both the safety website and on a bulletin board in each office. The goal is to use the information received to create a safe and honest environment that promotes an open safety dialogue.

The RMRTD Board of Directors will receive a copy of the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (ASP) and provide their input before

the plan is submitted for federal review. The document describes the safety processes and procedures that are developed. The document fosters agency-wide ownership of safety, and makes RMRTD eligible for FTA funding. Staff training for the SMS and the ASP are being organized.

Seniors

One of the targeted demographics for ridership on the New Mexico Rail Runner Express is Seniors age 62+. For the past five years, Rail Runner has offered free rides for seniors on Wednesdays. Thanks to a very successful marketing campaign, the program has seen over 62,550 senior boardings. This has led to the decision to make this a permanent, year-round program.

Love Your Wednesdays
62+ RIDE FREE!
All Trains, All Day

Take the train with family
riometro.org



**Los Ranchos/
Journal
Center Station
Improvements**

Los Ranchos Journal Center Station Improvements

The Los Ranchos Journal Center Station is one of the most popular for Rail Runner commuters. After opening in 2006, the main parking lot on a typical weekday would fill to capacity. Parked cars would spill out on to the shoulders of El Pueblo Rd.

Funded primarily with Federal Transit Administration funds a new 130-space parking lot opened in December 2019 on the opposite side of the tracks from the station. Other improvements include lighting, security cameras and landscaping, additional ADA-accessible parking spaces, as well as a new sidewalk through the El Pueblo Rd. crossing. A new multi-use trail was constructed to connect the parking lot to the Paseo del Norte Trail.

Valencia County Transit Facility

Rio Metro assumed responsibility for the bus services in Valencia County in 2010, and has leased office space and bus storage space from the Village of Los Lunas ever since. However, the Village's recent growth meant that Rio Metro needed to find a new home. With financial support from a \$6 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration, Rio Metro will build a new facility on an eight acre parcel near the intersection of NM 6 and NM 47.

Phase 1 of the project includes a new administration building, storage unit, parking areas, drainage, landscaping, fencing and gates, and security cameras. Construction is anticipated to be complete in early 2022. Rio Metro is already pursuing grants for Phase 2, which will include a maintenance building, bus wash, fuel island, and fare collection vault.



**Future
Valencia County
Transit Facility**



Rio Metro ACCESS

In late 2018, Rio Metro adopted a policy that allows social service organizations to purchase transit passes for Rio Metro's rail and bus services at a discount. These organizations may then re-distribute the passes to clients living within 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

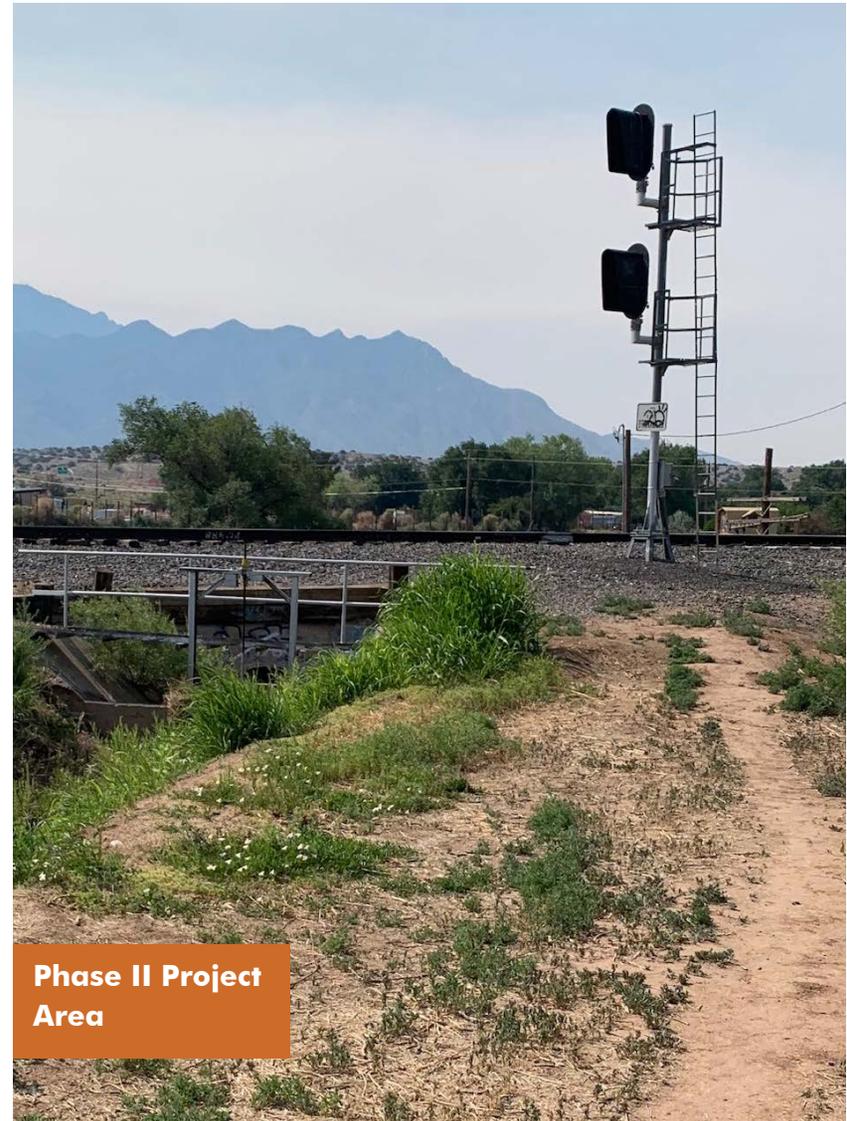
To kickstart the social service fare program, named Rio Metro ACCESS, Rio Metro received a \$181,000 grant from NMDOT in FY2020 to hire a part-time program coordinator and a program manager, to cover print marketing materials and passes, and to subsidize the initial distribution of passes.

The COVID pandemic has delayed implementation of the program due to suspended train service, but once Rail Runner service is reinstated, Rio Metro ACCESS will provide an essential resource to those who rely on public transportation in the region.

Phase II Town of Bernalillo Pedestrian Improvements

With the completion of the pedestrian path and rail crossing in Downtown Bernalillo at the NM Rail Runner station, town residents are experiencing improved, convenience and access to Camino del Pueblo, the town's local retail and service center.

The planning on and engineering of expansion of the trail system, including a rail crossing near W.D Carroll Elementary School, is well underway. With construction planned to begin in early 2021, the completed project will result in over a mile of paved multi-purpose path along the railroad track, additional lighting, safety fencing, and sidewalk connections to adjacent streets.



Phase II Project Area

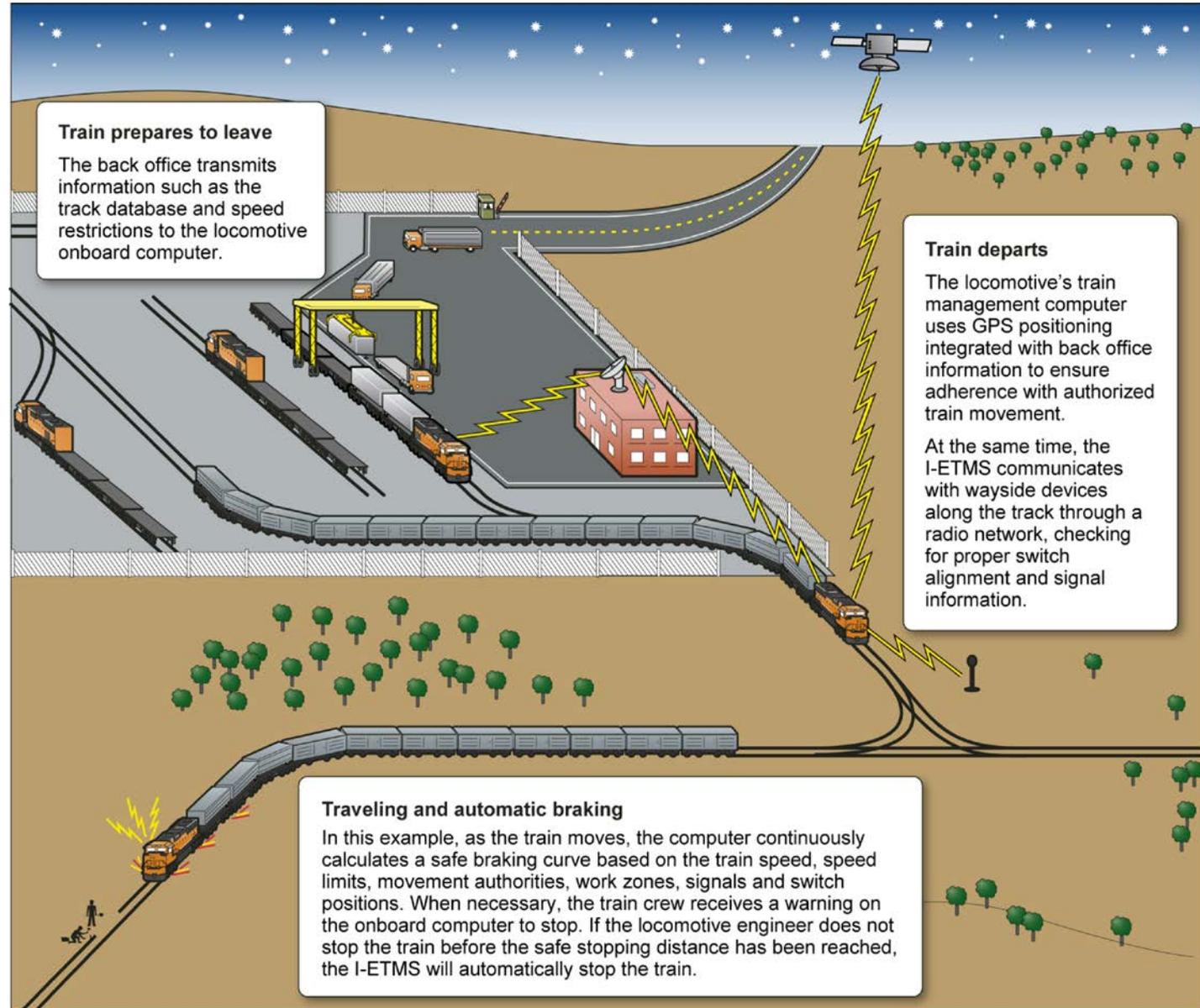
Positive Train Control

Rio Metro has until December 31, 2020 to fully implement the congressionally-mandated Positive Train Control (PTC) system designed to protect against train-on-train collisions, over-speed derailments, work zone incursions, and movements through red signals and misaligned switches. With an approximate cost of \$65 million and a schedule spanning over two years, this is by far the Rail Runner's largest capital project to date.

Rio Metro is on track to implement PTC by the deadline:

- Rio Metro installed all required equipment on all nine locomotives cab cars, and at 57 wayside locations and five communications base stations
- Brake testing—relying on PTC to automatically stop trains short of a stop target—was completed this spring
- Summer and fall will be marked by additional laboratory and field testing, and training of Rio Metro and Herzog staff

The project will conclude with the successful operation of the PTC system in everyday Rail Runner service and its interoperability with Amtrak and BNSF trains by the deadline.



Source: GAO. | GAO-18-367T

Rural Transportation & PLANNING ASSISTANCE

This past year, over five million dollars in funding was granted to rural communities in the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) district to benefit a variety of projects the MRCOG region.

The Town of Edgewood and the Pueblo of Jemez received federal funding through programs such as the Recreational Trails Program and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program to begin preliminary engineering and construction on trailhead facilities and pedestrian or multi-purpose paths.

The State of New Mexico provided significant funding through the Local Government Transportation Project Fund for projects like traffic calming, bridge designs, resurfacing, and new pedestrian paths in the Town of Edgewood and the Pueblo of Jemez.

The Village of Cuba unveiled its newly paved St. Francis of Assisi Park

Trail last September with a ribbon cutting ceremony and an inaugural walk/run on the new trail, which MRCOG staff attended.

The trail spans one-mile around the perimeter of the St. Francis of Assisi Park and features a new kiosk with information about the Continental Divide Trail. This project also received its funding through the Recreational Trails Program.



**Newly Paved
One-Mile Trail
Around St.
Francis Park in
Cuba**

Switching Gears: MRCOG's 2020 Planning Commissioners' Workshop



**MRCOG PLANNING
COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP
2020**
SWITCHING GEARS

Covid-19 has turned a sizable share of the workforce into remote workers and has put a halt to large gatherings of people for the time being. Local governments are moving toward conducting essential services remotely, including public meetings, as a public health measure. This comes with a variety of new challenges. What constitutes proper public notice? How will the public be able to comment, and how can we ensure that everyone has access to the meetings?

This year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MRCOG's annual Planning Commissioners Workshop switched gears, as well as platforms, to address these issues. This workshop was held as a webinar, which allowed MRCOG

staff to easily open up registration to communities from across the state.

Our goal was to provide a platform for information sharing and collaboration throughout all of New Mexico.

MRCOG's legal counsel, Larry Horan, spoke about the potential legal issues that come with holding remote meetings, including an update on the Inspection of Public Records Act and the Open Meetings Act. Additionally, staff from four local governments of varying size, representing the City of Rio Rancho, the Village of Los Ranchos, the Town of Edgewood, and Valencia County, shared their lessons learned from holding virtual public meetings in their own jurisdictions, such as

planning commission and council meetings.

Although restrictions on group gatherings may start to ease, we suspect the trend of remote work as well as the expectation of communities to provide remote access to public meetings is likely not going away altogether anytime soon. We want communities throughout New Mexico to be ready to handle changing digital needs with ease.

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