

Travel Markets

Summary

Within the Paseo del Norte Corridor, travel demand challenges are defined largely by one key trip purpose, daily work trips. The West Side development is primarily residential and most Northwest residents must rely on employment in other areas for their income. In simple terms, the markets that drive transportation needs in the Paseo del Norte Corridor are housing and employment and they are not geographically balanced.

For context, the geographic coverage of the Paseo del Norte High Capacity Transit Study (PDNHCTS) is illustrated in Figure 1. The study area includes the northwest part of Albuquerque and southern Sandoval County eastward to the I-25 corridor. The study area is centered along Paseo del Norte (PDN) – an east-west limited access principal arterial highway that spans the northern portion of the Albuquerque metropolitan area. This route is the highest volume non-interstate facility within the Albuquerque region. It is also the primary thoroughfare that connects outlying residential communities to a large employment district along North I-25. This area, known as the Journal Center (see Figure 1), is home to 38,000 jobs and is the City's largest employment center in terms of size and employees. The discrepancy between what happens on either side of the Rio Grande is what defines the primary transportation issue in the Paseo del Norte corridor.

Reasons for Travel in the Corridor

As it is in any community, the demand for travel revolves around a need to get to work, visit friends and relatives, shop, go to school, or seek entertainment or recreation opportunities. In Northwest Albuquerque, the need to access employment during the peak period is one of the primary drivers of transportation demand. While other needs are important, they tend to be less time-dependent and have the flexibility to use the transportation system in more efficient ways. Within the Northwest Area, the Cottonwood Mall area provides one of the few employment opportunities in the area, but is a major retail center that serves not only the Northwest, but Rio Rancho and much of the metropolitan region. Intel, in southern Rio Rancho, is one of the largest employers in the region, but draws employees from all over, not just from the Northwest. Capacity across the Rio Grande is so limited that even a “reverse” commute contributes to transportation issues.

Other pockets of employment are beginning to emerge in the Northwest such as health care and government centers at key locations. However, as shown in Figures 2 and 3, it appears to be insufficient to offset the anticipated growth in the demand for jobs in the Northwest.

Housing and Jobs Imbalance

Growth forecasts in the region show that the imbalance noted above will be exacerbated over the years given current plans. Population will grow in the Northwest with only a small increase in the number of jobs per capita. At the same time, the Journal Center and other destinations east of the Rio Grande will continue to be the primary attractions for employees from the Northwest. This means the challenges of travel today, particularly related to river crossings, will become more pronounced in the future. Figures 2 and 3 show the changes between population and employment today and in 2035 and provide insight into impending issues as growth continues.

Figure 1: General Coverage for the Paseo del Norte High Capacity Transit Study

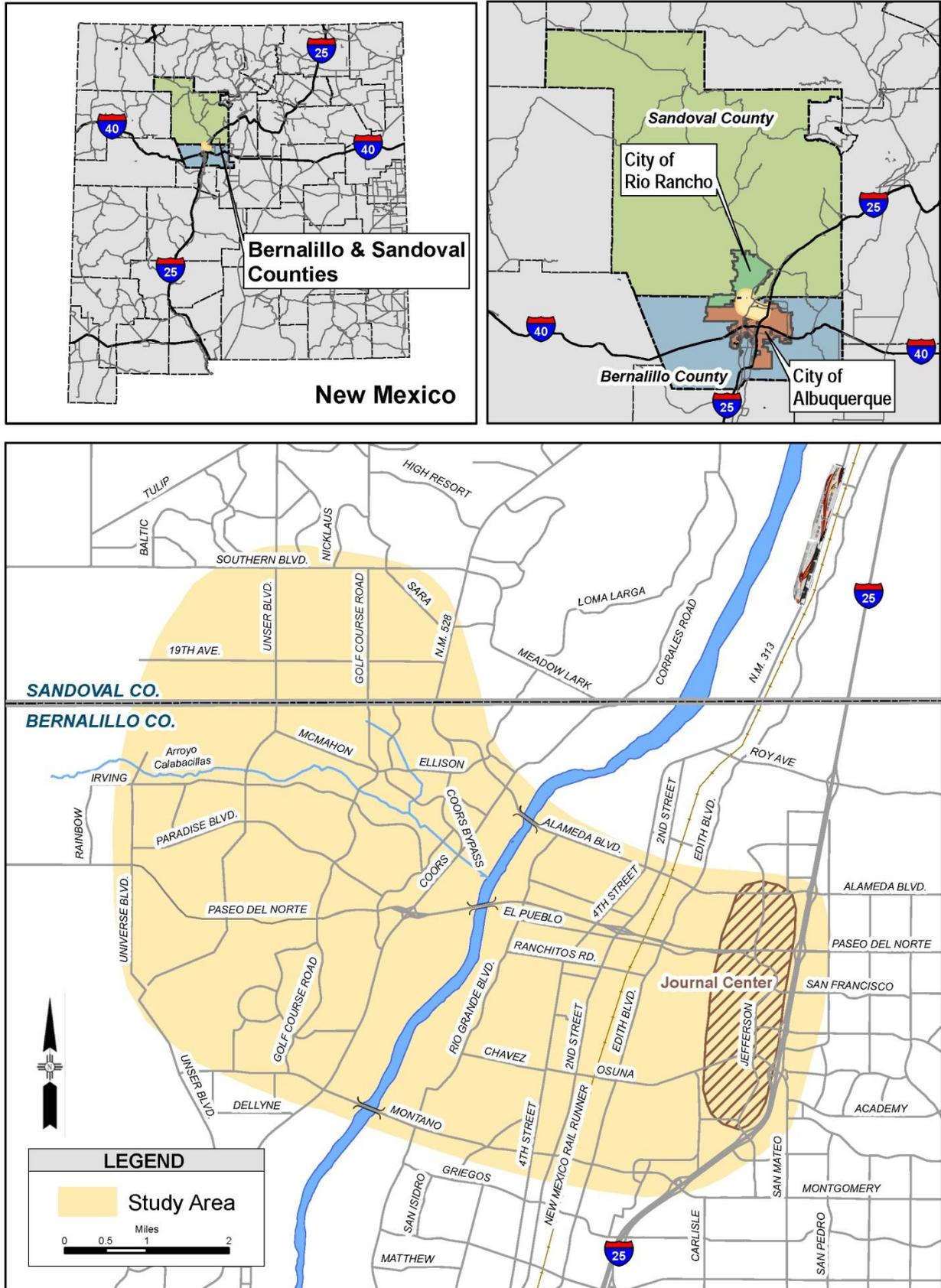


Figure 2 – Population Density in the Albuquerque Region, 2010 and 2035

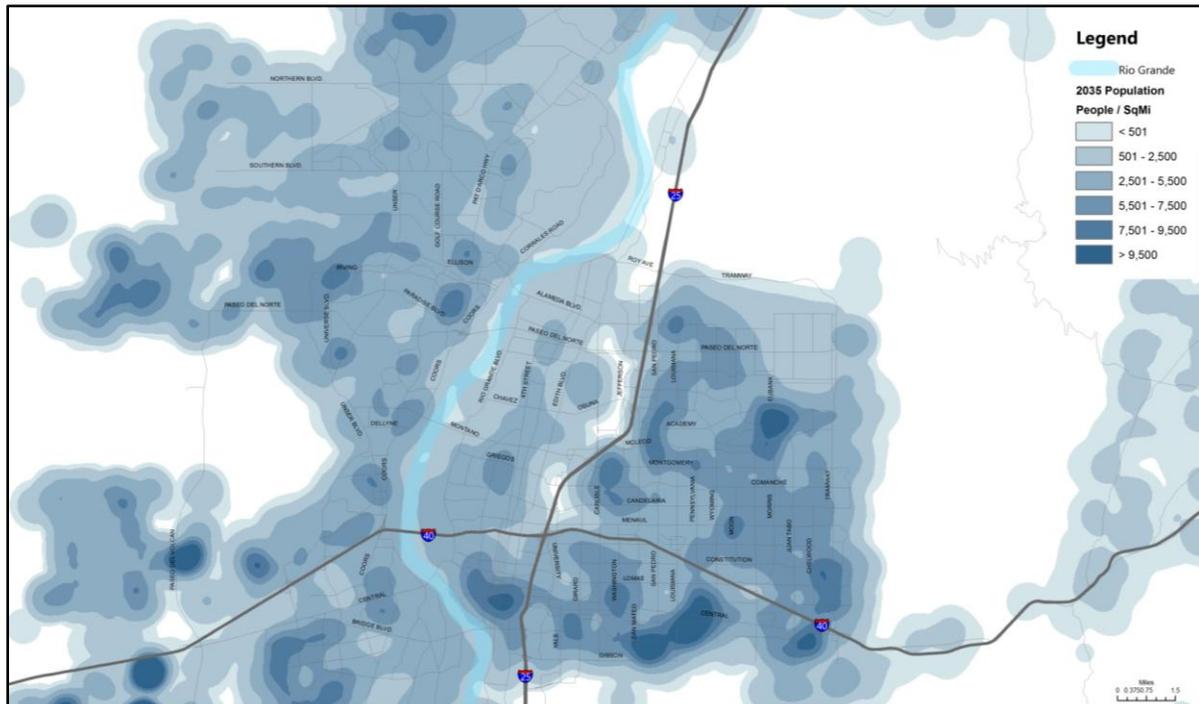
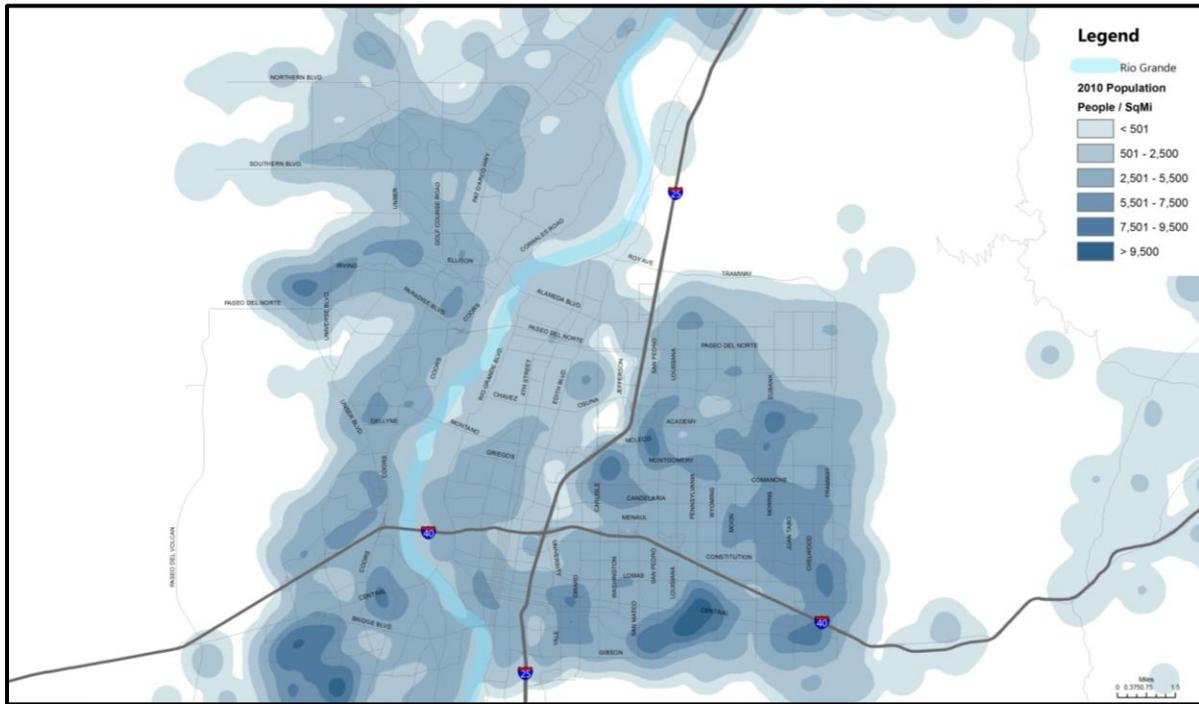
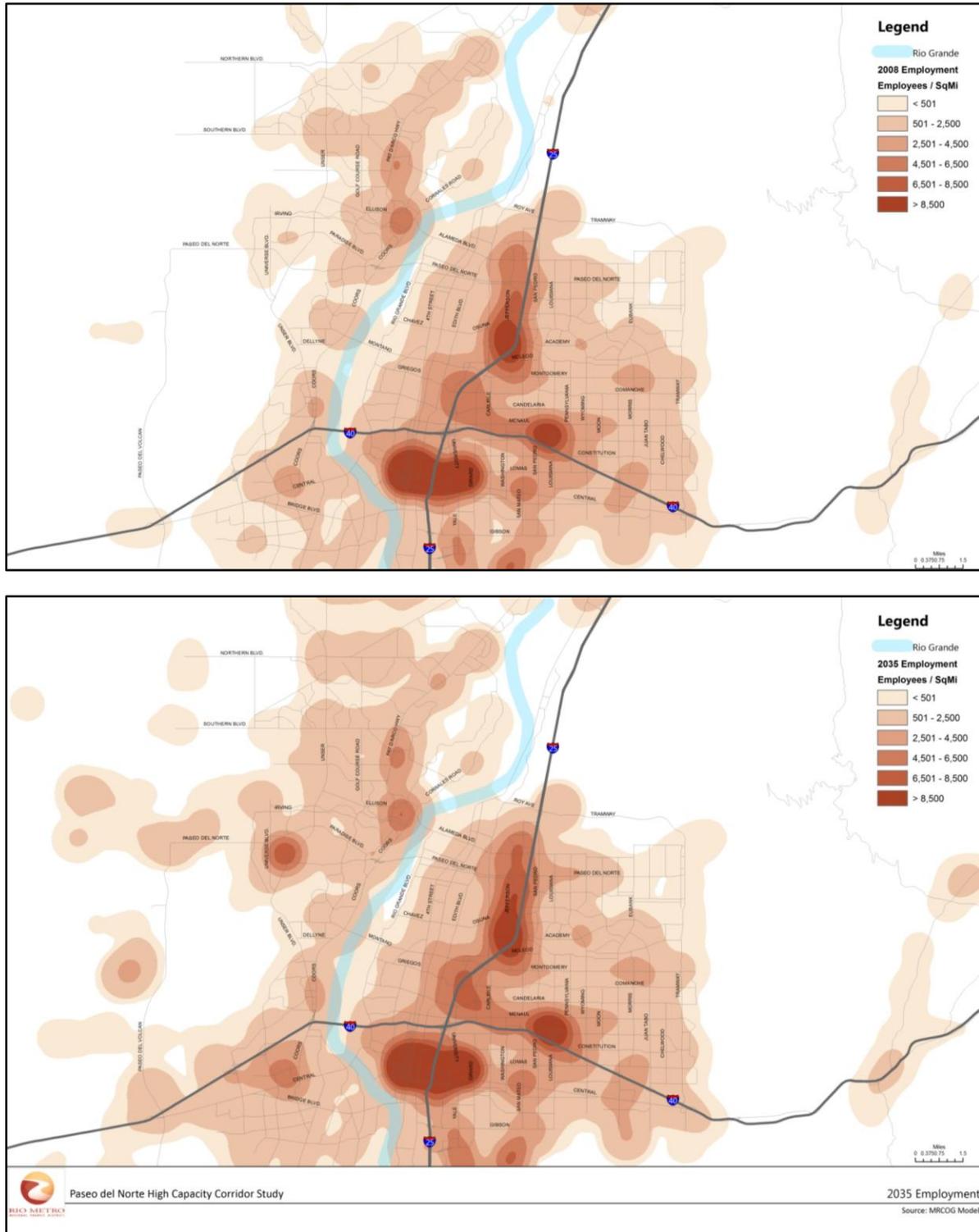
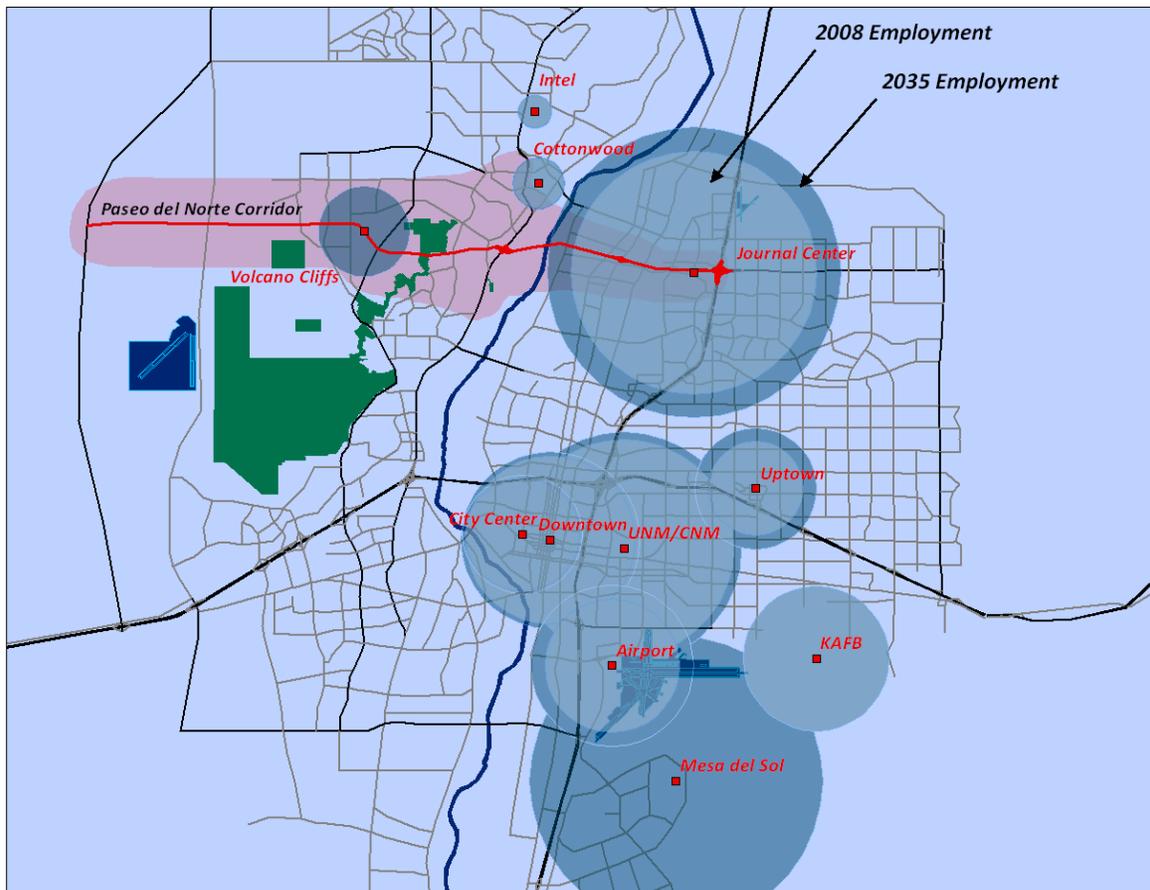


Figure 3 – Employment Density in Albuquerque, 2008 and 2035



As can be seen in Figure 4, the job emphasis remains on the east side of the river while most of the population growth is on the west side. This leads to the transportation challenges being addressed in the study.

Figure 4: Major Employment Center Locations within the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area



In recognition of this worsening trend, efforts are underway to add more and larger employment centers to the Westside. However, significant shifts in the existing pattern will take many years to realize thus current and near-term commute patterns will continue for the foreseeable future.

Existing and projected land use patterns and jobs-housing distribution combined with the limited number of river crossing roadways within the metro area result in high travel demand on Paseo del Norte. In 2010, this six-lane expressway carried a daily traffic volume of 81,800 vehicles per day (vpd) and an evening peak hour volume of approximately 7,500 vehicles per hour (vph). Projections by MRCOG indicate that the demand on this route will continue to increase over the next 20 years with over 180,000 daily and 15,000 evening peak hour trips using the Paseo del Norte river bridge by year 2035.

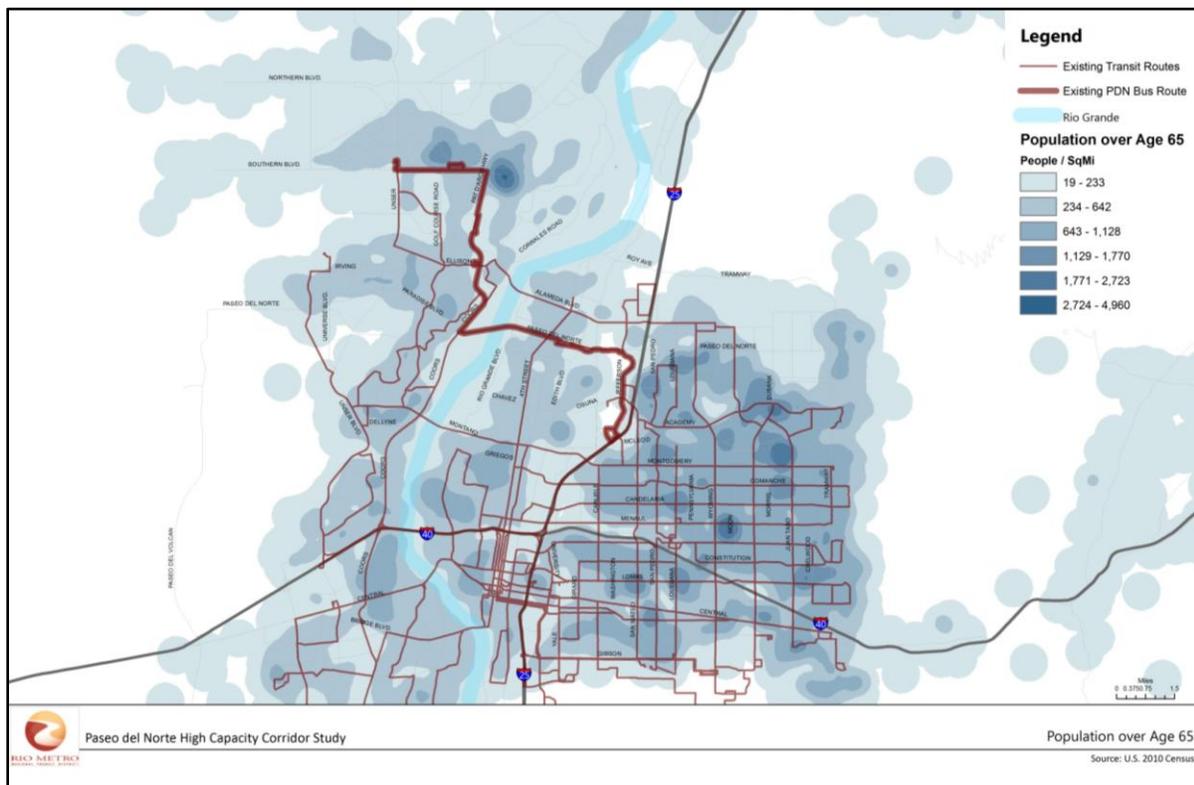
Other Travel Populations

There are other populations beyond the housing-employment link that affect the travel demand in the Paseo del Norte Corridor, but their effect is not a significant determinant of transportation need. The project team has collected information on a number of other categories to verify their contribution to travel demand, but the primary challenge is connecting population with employment across the Rio Grande.

Transit-Dependent Populations from the 2010 Census Data

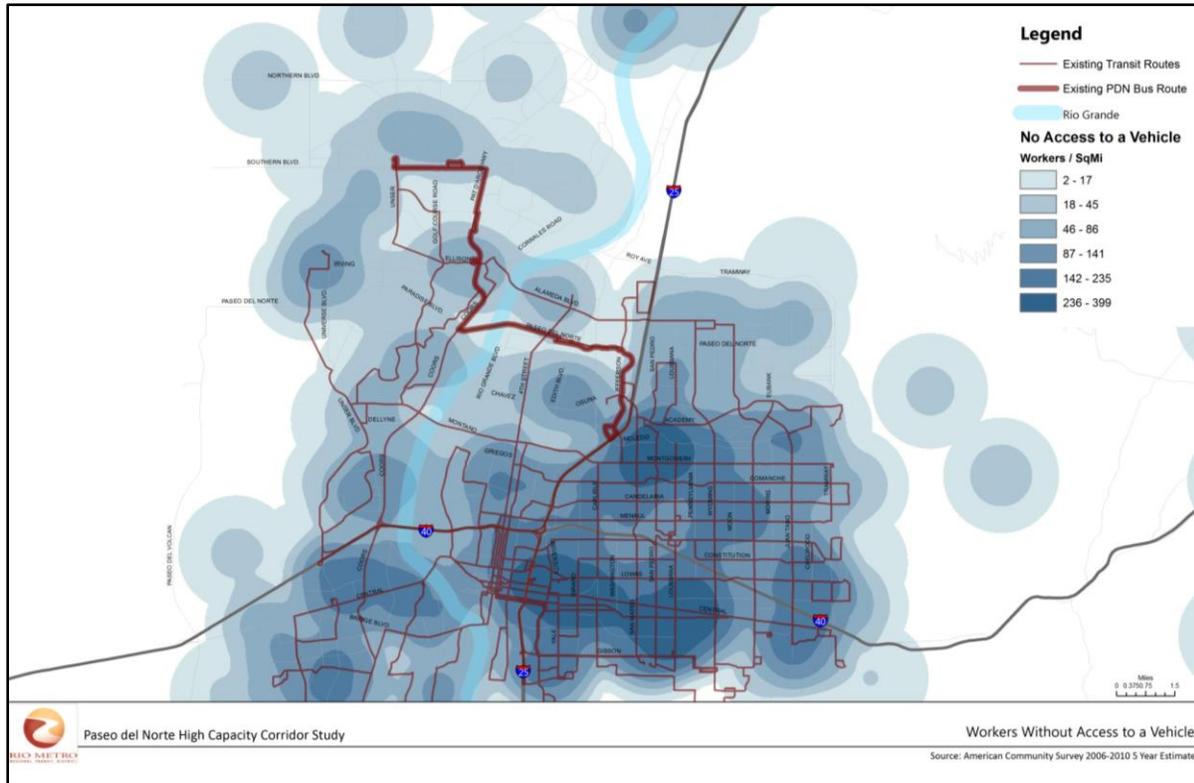
Senior citizens – As shown in Figure 5, while there are a few pockets of citizens above age sixty-five in Rio Rancho, most of the new development in Northwest Albuquerque does not fit that description and even in the larger region, this demographic does not appear to be a major factor in how the transportation system operates. At the same time, this is a group that is most likely to show significant growth over the coming years as the Baby Boom Generation reaches this age. While it is not a major factor now, it could become one over the next 20 or 30 years and accommodations will have to be considered to serve them. This is a potentially valuable market in the Paseo del Norte Corridor.

Figure 5 – Senior Citizen Population Density in 2010 (over age 65)



People without access to a private vehicle –In Figure 6, the densest indication of workers that do not have a car lives on the east side of the river clustered around UNM and along Central Avenue, but based on the numbers, the primary finding here is that there are few people without access to a vehicle in the region.

Figure 6 – Density of Worker Population without Access to a Private Vehicle (2006 – 2010 5-Year Estimate)



Youth (under 18) – Figure 7 indicates, consistent with new growth in the west, that there is a high density of people under 18 in the new developments west of the Rio Grande. This is a potential market for transit emphasis because the numbers are already large and can become significant as the area grows.

Low income populations – In Figure 8, the main concentrations of low income residents are in the Central Corridor and portions of the Southeast Valley, but the numbers are relatively small and do not contribute significantly to findings about travel.

Figure 7 – 2010 Density of Population under Age 18

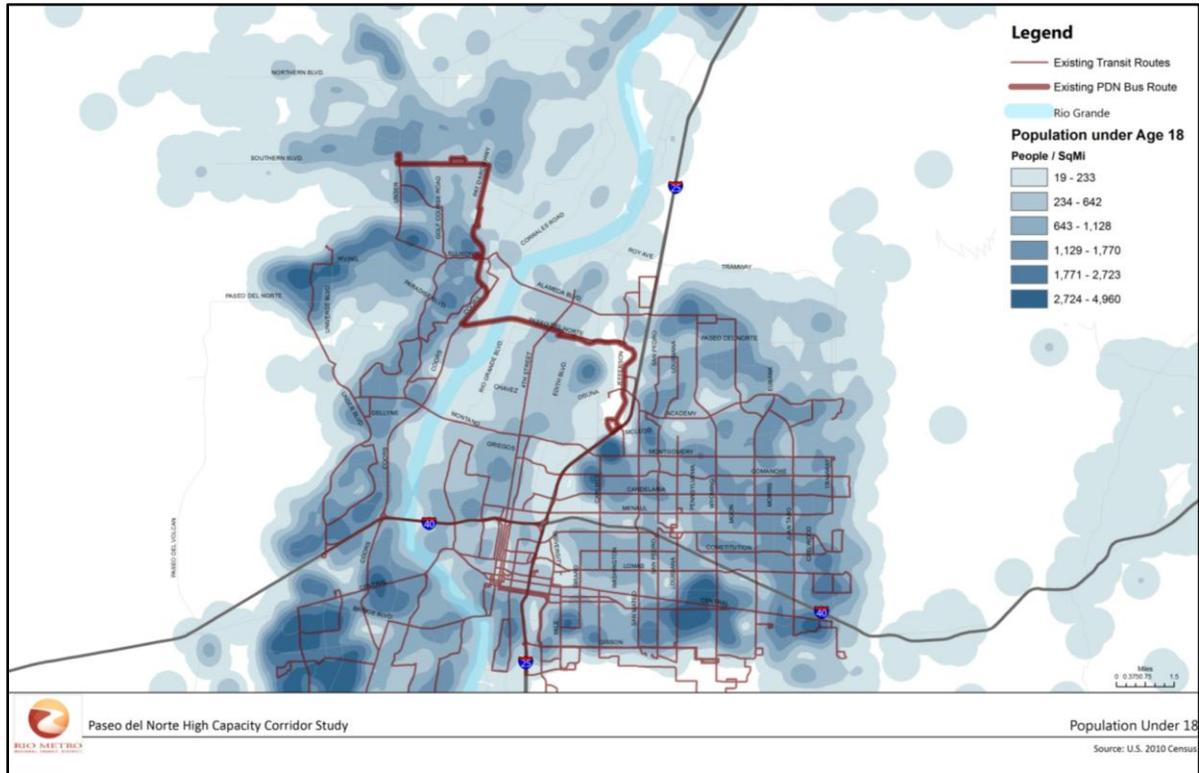
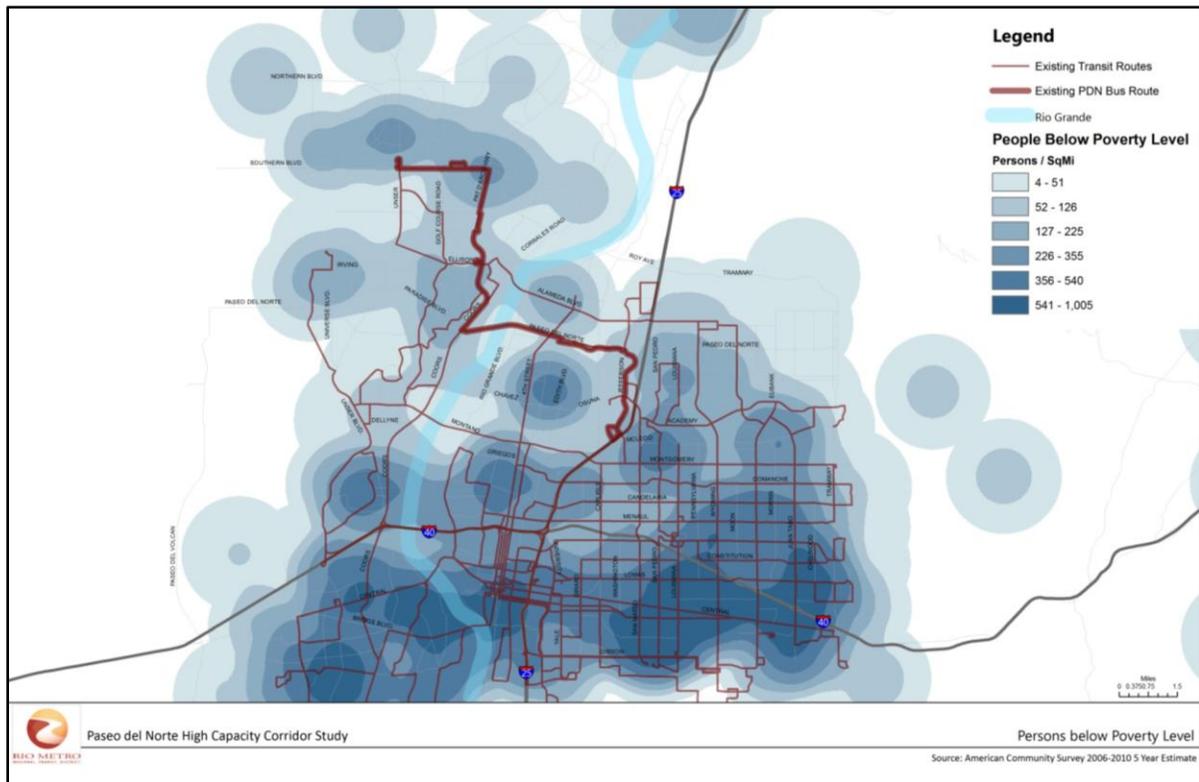


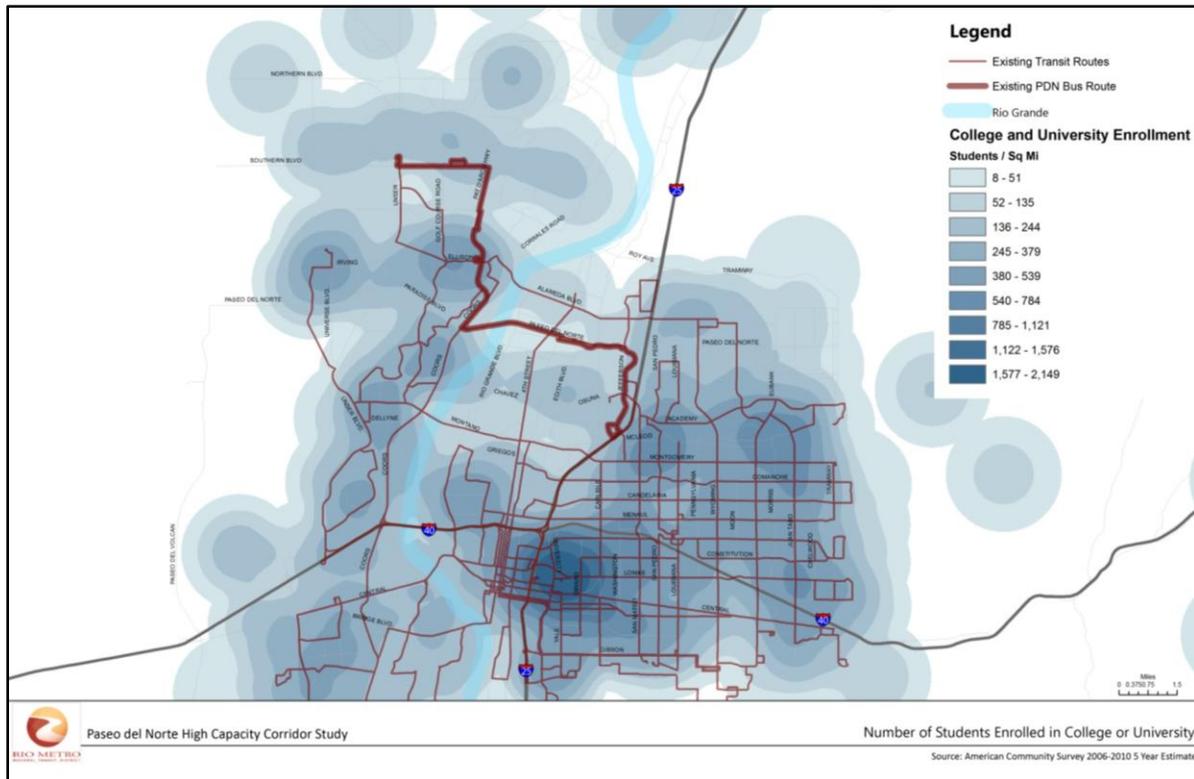
Figure 8 – Low Income Population Density (2006 – 2010 5-Year Estimate)



Populations that Choose to Use Transit instead of Driving

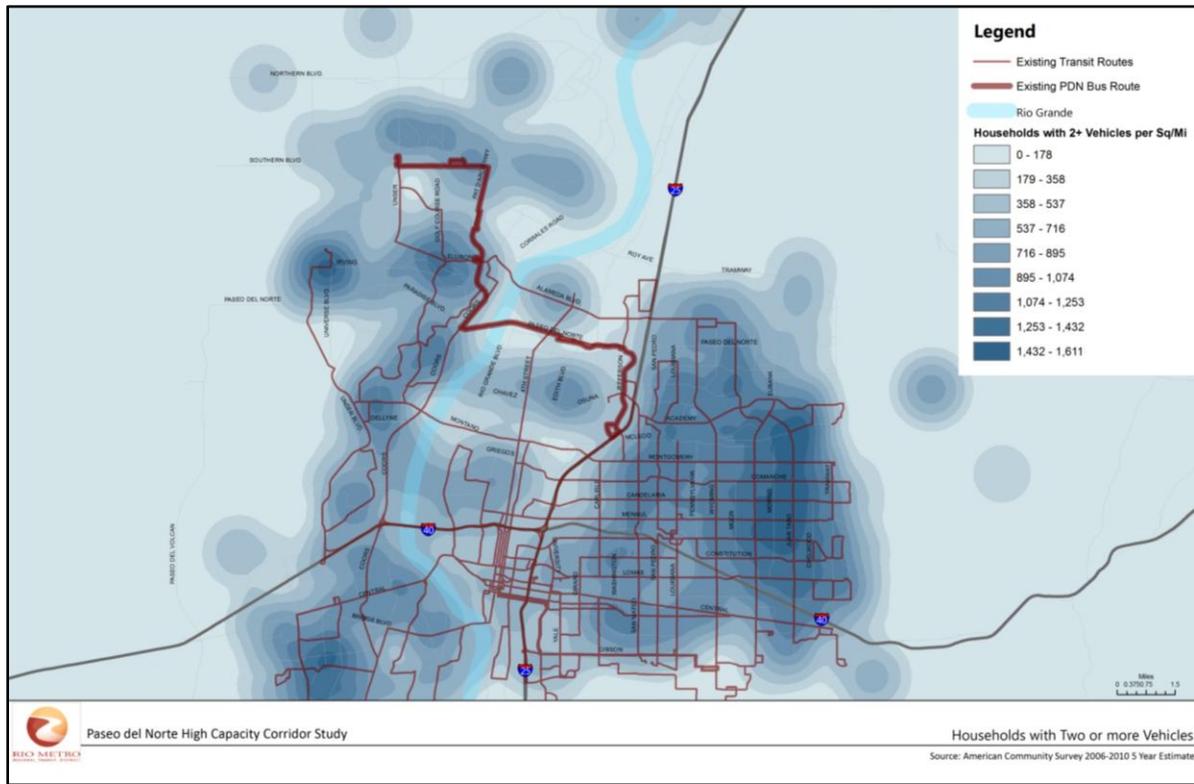
College students –There is a strong attraction for transit travel among students, but the heaviest concentrations of student populations are understandably near the universities and colleges. Figure 9 shows there are college students throughout the metropolitan area, but their numbers are not high enough to represent a significant travel demand factor in the Paseo del Norte Corridor. They can be a part of a transit opportunity as part of a broad range of specialized services such as direct or fast travel to the UNM/CNM from the Northwest.

Figure 9 – College Student Density (2006 – 2010 5-Year Estimate)



Households with two or more vehicles - As the category suggests, this population is not a likely candidate to take transit unless there is an especially high level of service that would help avoid congestion stress and save travel time. Figure 10 indicates most of the region boasts high car ownership which is not conducive to transit travel.

Figure 10 – Density of Households with 2+ Vehicles (2006 – 2010 5-Year Estimate)



Destinations

While there would appear to be a logical connection between the Northwest and the Journal Center because of their proximity to each other, travel demand from the Northwest is not limited to a single employment destination. Current peak hour bus service from the Northwest (not necessarily along Paseo del Norte) is most popular to locations in Downtown and the University of New Mexico and even Uptown and the Sandia/Kirtland area. At the same time, river crossings throughout the region are becoming overburdened by demand to these destinations as well as the Journal Center and others. Travel solutions will have to address, not only how to access the Journal Center, but the other destinations in the region to which employees from the Northwest are drawn with the river crossings being the primary bottleneck.

Conclusion

While there are many travel markets that shape the overall demand for travel in the Albuquerque region in general and in the Paseo del Norte Corridor in particular, the main focus in addressing travel demand and capacity limitations is the linkage between population and employment. Workers in the Northwest need to travel to the east to access most jobs and there is no effective way to get them there using the limited existing bridge crossing capacity. In the future, expansion of job offerings in the Northwest or the west would be an effective way to address transportation needs. For now, providing the best possible access within the available infrastructure, such as high capacity transit, has the potential to provide a viable alternative to sitting in congestion every day.