Transit

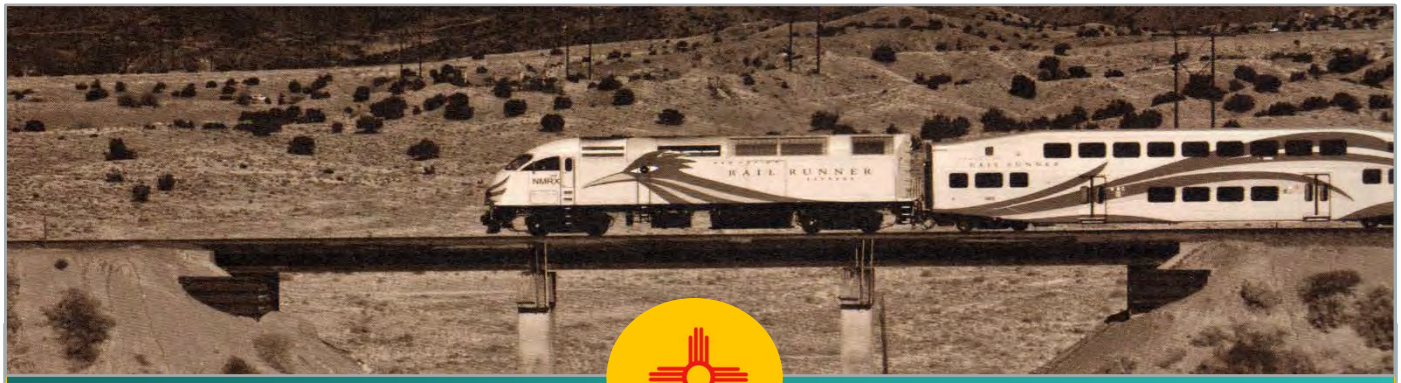
CENTENNIAL 1912-2012

NM C+

NEW MEXICO

LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

New Mexico Rail Runner.
Photo by: Robert McDonnell (2008).
http://kupit-knigu-krug-zhenskoj-sily.prv.pl/new-mexico-rail-runner-express.php.



Overview: Transit

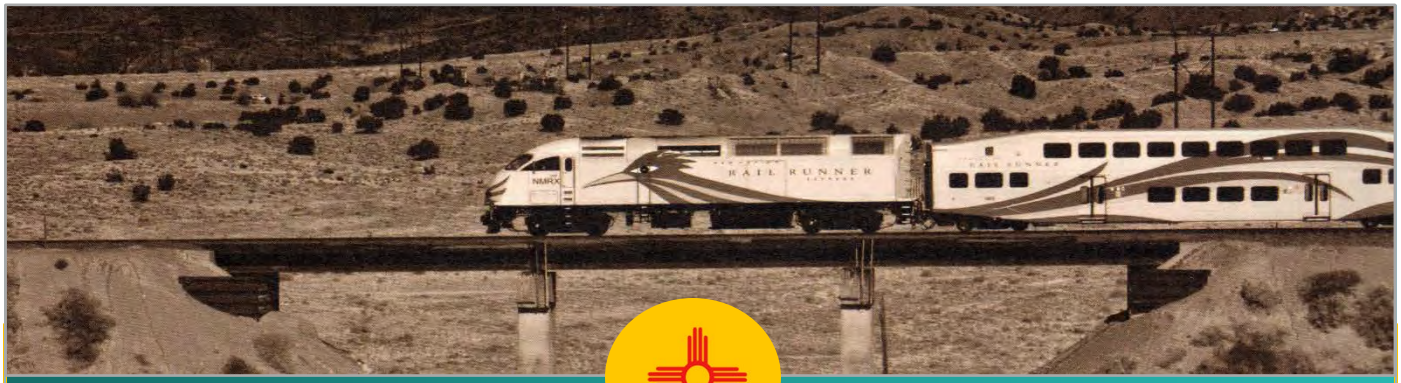
ABQ Ride, the City of Albuquerque's Transit Department, continues to be the largest transit agency in the state. ABQ Ride operates 253 maximum available vehicles including buses and vans, and nearly 11,380,763 unlinked trips in 2010. ABQ Ride was ranked nationally in the top 100 by the 2011 Public Transportation Fact Book, for number of unlinked (not counting transfers) trips.

Santa Fe Trails, transit agency for the state capital, is the state's second largest transit agency with a fleet of 34 transit buses and 15 para-transit vans; and serving 880,335 unlinked trips in 2010 ranking it in the top 400 nationwide for unlinked trips.

Finally, Las Cruces Area Transit maintains a transit fleet of 36 total vehicles available for maximum service serving 655,919 unlinked trips. The remaining communities are generally served by much smaller rural agencies with fleets ranging anywhere from a few para-transit vans (Meadow City Express-City of Las Vegas) to a fleet of 35 buses and vans (North Central Regional Transit District). Most of these communities are demand response services, although some like City of Hobbs do have regular bus routes. The Rio Metro Regional Transit District (RMRTD) operates the Railrunner, which provides regional rail transit service between Albuquerque and Santa Fe since 2008, serving 11.5 million passengers in 2011.

The Railrunner could play a crucial role in freeing highway capacity and offers an alternative to driving between the two cities. Statewide, transit use has increased 7.2% between 2009 and 2010 serving a total of 16.2 million passengers.

A survey discussing capacity, fleet condition, funding, operations and maintenance, public safety, and resilience was distributed to 25 agencies with 13 responding. Respondents provided a good cross-section of the New Mexico transit agencies ranging from the largest to the much smaller communities.



Capacity

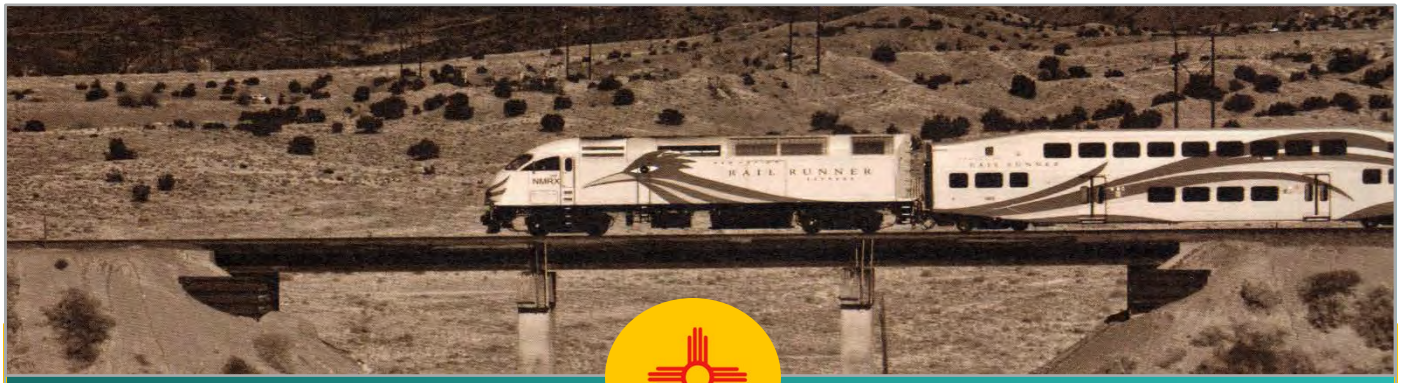
For the majority of communities, especially in the large urban centers, transit demands have grown steadily over the past 5 years. The "Transit Totals" table indicates the past three years of ridership in terms of percent growth or decline for the three major transit agencies. As indicated, all have shown anywhere from a four percent to an eight percent annual growth rate.

It should be noted that Las Cruces experienced a decline between 2009 and 2010 due to fare increases, but now is trending back toward growth. Based on the majority of the survey responses, transit agencies in the state are expecting ridership demands to increase anywhere from five percent to seven percent annually.

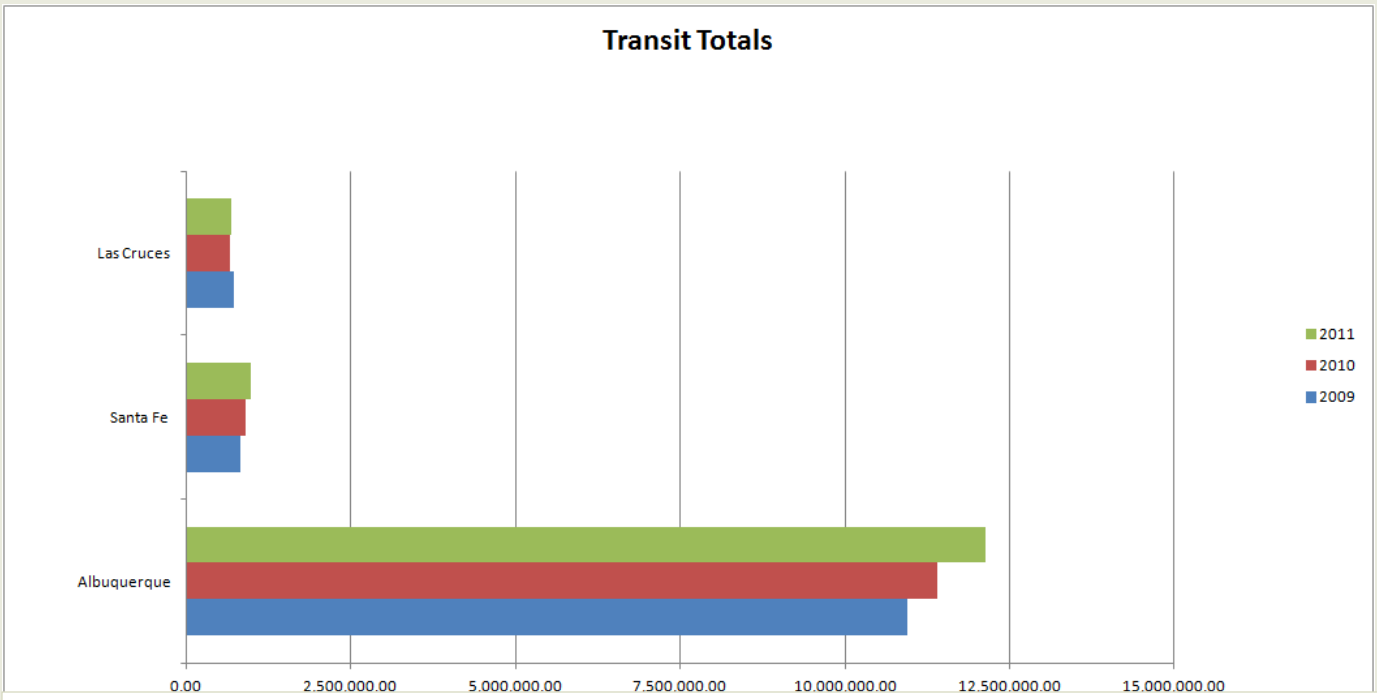
Additionally, some transit agencies such as NCRTD cover wide areas, in this case three counties, and are looking to expand operations. The Railrunner currently operates nine locomotives, nine cab cars, and 13 coach cars. Expansion of operations could increase demand growth even more than anticipated.

This has already been the case in such communities as Clovis where new fixed route systems have been introduced. In general, transit agencies are meeting needs of current demands, but due to increase in future demands will need to expand services which will require more funding.

Farmington Red Apple Transit.
Photo by Lee Engineering.



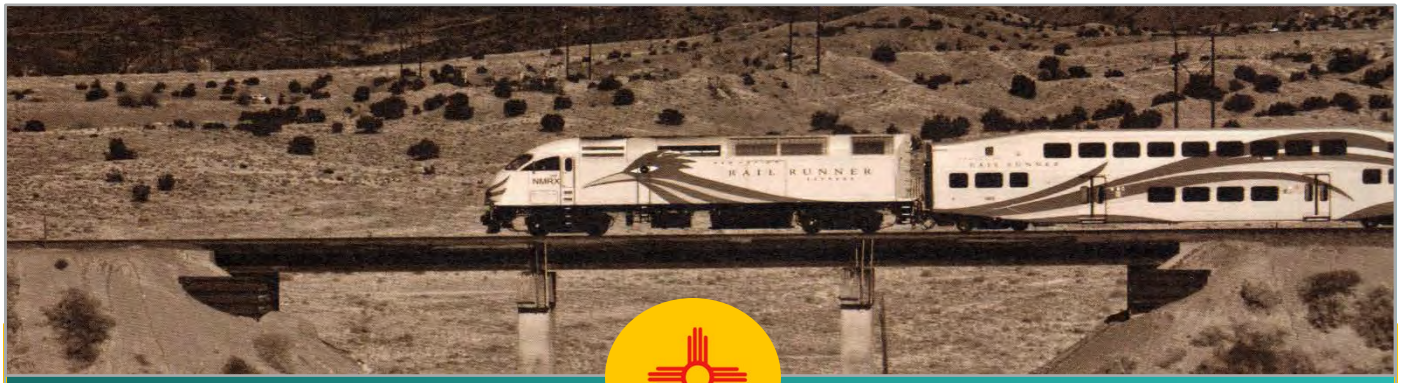
Capacity (cont'd)



Ridership (Number of Passengers)

Year	Albuquerque	Santa Fe	Las Cruces	Statewide
2009	1,076,0341	824,733	656,590	1,141,308
2010	11,177,097	892,789	601,782	1,403,849

Source: National Transit Database.



Funding

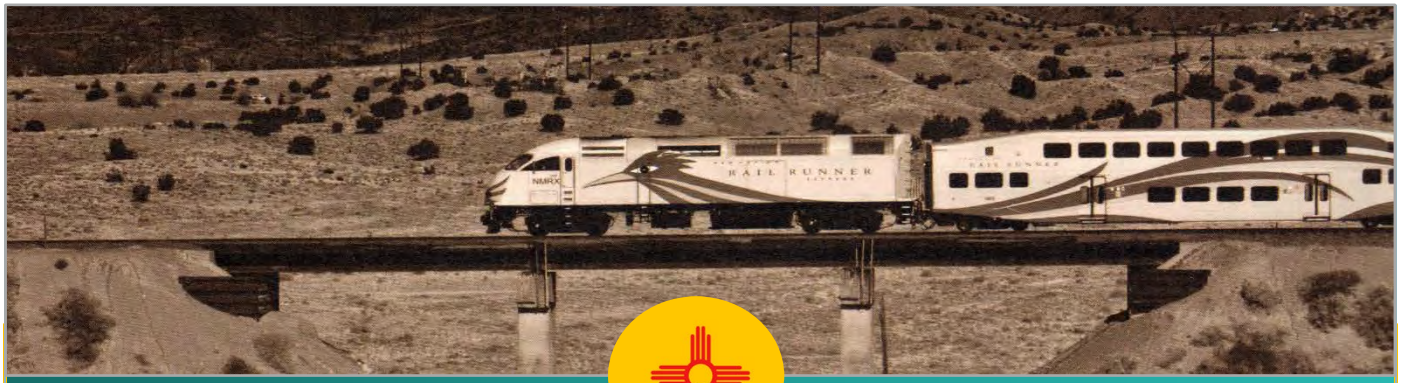
In order to maintain capacity and expand services to meet the growing transit demand of the future, transit agencies must keep their fleets in excellent working order. For more recently formed agencies, this is not as great an issue. However, it is important for these newer agencies to keep a record of fleet ages in order to know when new vehicles are needed.

In general, most of New Mexico's transit agencies have a fleet management plan in place with average fleet ages ranging from six to seven years for buses and four to five years for vans. Most agencies identified that at the moment their fleet is in excellent shape, but will require additional funding to maintain.

Also, some communities are in the process of transitioning from a demand-response service to some fixed route services, which will require funding for new vehicles. Per survey responses, the general consensus among transit agencies, large or small, is that funding is not enough and is getting smaller to maintain current operations.

Agency responses ranged from 30 to 100% of funding levels relative to funding needs. Some agencies mentioned that they have been operating with the same budget levels for the past three years, and if this trend continues may have to reduce services. Additionally, with operating budgets constrained, many agencies desiring to expand services will need to delay these plans without new funding sources.

Albuquerque Ride Transit Stop.
Photo by Lee Engineering.



Operations and Maintenance

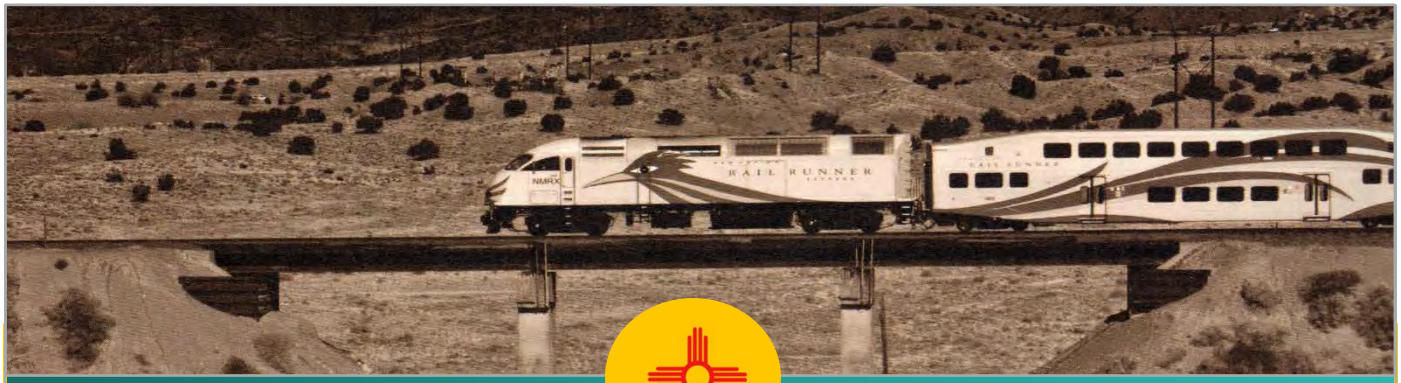
All agencies reported that operations and maintenance levels are adequate to more than adequate for meeting current demands. However, some of the smaller agencies identified the need for their own full-time mechanic for vehicle maintenance. Also, most agencies voiced concerns about having the required budget to replace older fleet vehicles.

Several agencies such as the City of Albuquerque have expanded facilities such as new park and ride facilities and implemented operational improvements such as signal preemption for buses. It should also be noted here that transit agencies across the nation have taken the lead in providing alternative fuel and low emission vehicles. New Mexico is no exception with several agencies utilizing natural gas buses, hybrid vehicles, and utilizing solar panels for transit facilities in order to reduce energy expenditures. Continuation of these energy smart strategies will be crucial in meeting budgets in a future that will likely see traditional energy costs continue to increase. The majority of agencies reported low vehicle related crash rates, with the greater frequency of crashes occurring within the larger service areas like Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces. However, when compared to the ridership of these agencies, the crash rate of their vehicles are relatively low.

Public Safety

In general, New Mexico transit vehicles and facilities are safe with low safety incidences.

There were responses that indicated many agencies' concern with the frequency of mechanical break-downs of vehicles, especially at the larger agencies where there is much more technology equipped on their vehicles that may need to be serviced and can cause a vehicle not to be deployed into the field that certain day. This concern could be mitigated through better fleet management and condition maintenance.



Resilience

Resilience deals with a transit system's ability to handle natural disasters and an interruption of service. Most transit agencies surveyed either have a current emergency response plan in case of disasters or participate with another agency's emergency response plan, and feel they can be up and running relatively quickly after an emergency.

However, the ability to get transit up and operating after an event is very much dependent on what the disaster is and to what severity it is.

Most respondents conceded that while they did have a contingency plan, usually in coordination with local emergency response agencies, further attention and planning could be done in attempt to be ready for disasters common to our state, such as fires, storm events, dust storms etc.

Also, it was identified that transit agencies could actually help mitigate disasters if they are returned to operation quickly by providing emergency transportation for citizens that have been displaced by a disaster and need transport to a disaster housing facility. This is something that could be reviewed in the development of future emergency plans.

As mentioned, current funding levels for many transit agencies have remained level for the past three years, and in order to meet the growing demand, additional funding sources will need to be secured just to maintain current operations.

New Mexico transit agencies have the current demand and desire to expand routes and fleets, but lack the capital to implement these expansion plans, and therefore in the foreseeable future these expansion plans will need to be put on hold. Therefore, new and creative funding methods will be needed to get these expansion plans started.

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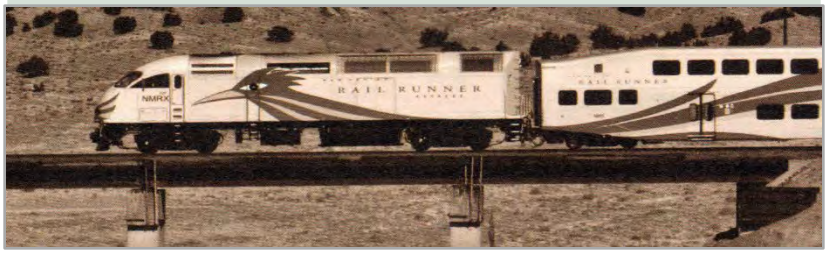
TRANSIT

Similar to national trends, the need and demand for transit to take a greater role in New Mexico's transportation system is more crucial with every passing year. When one thinks of transit, the image of a city bus comes to mind, but by the sheer numbers of transit systems in this nation, Para-transit , a call demand based transit usually utilizing smaller vehicles like vans, is the most common form of transit tending to serve our rural and smaller urban areas. From the larger communities such as Albuquerque, needing to solve a continuing road congestion and bridge crossing issue to smaller communities like Farmington needing to maintain commercial health and connectivity for the future, transit is an important factor in both urban and rural transportation.

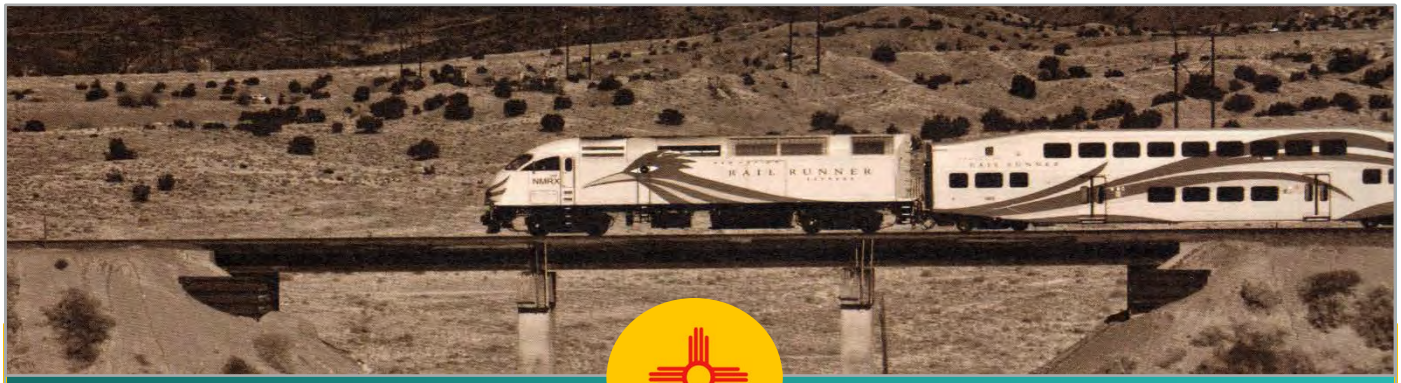
Summary NM Transit 2012:

C+

Category	Grade
Capacity	C
Condition	B
Funding	C-
Operation and Maintenance	B
Public Safety	C+
Resilience	B+
Transit Final Grade = C+ (78.6)	



Currently, New Mexico's communities are providing excellent transit services with the limited resources available. However, the fact remains: The construction of streets alone cannot sustain future transportation growth and demand. State and local governments will need to assign greater priority and funding to transit in the coming years in order to resolve the continuing congestion problems.



Recommendations

It is understood that in the coming years funding will continue to be constrained, but a higher prioritization of transit budgets could ease budget needs and open up capacity in other transportation areas such as roads.

Investigate the viability of high occupancy routing options, such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) for the larger urban areas. BRT could specifically offer capacity values for constrained bridge crossings in the City of Albuquerque.

Continued alternative energy strategies for both vehicles and facilities such as solar power, and natural gas powered and hybrid powered vehicles.

Continued implementation of capacity improving strategies for transit vehicles such as signal pre-emption, queue jump lanes, and exclusive bus lanes.

Increased investment in public awareness and advertising for transit services.

Develop new and creative funding sources to allow transit expansion of service and new routes.