



PURPOSE AND NEED

Introduction

The project is being initiated on the basis of the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area (AMPA) 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2035 MTP), which emphasizes the need for public transportation improvement, including study and implementation of premium transit service (i.e., bus rapid transit (BRT) or other high capacity transit improvements) in identified major corridors (see Figure 1). The preparation of the 2035 MTP included the active participation of multiple agencies, stakeholders, and interested public.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the proposed improvements is to provide enhanced transportation capacity linking Northwest Albuquerque and Southern Sandoval County with activity centers in the Albuquerque metropolitan area. The proposed improvements would represent one of the initial efforts in the AMPA to implement an element of the high capacity transportation system identified in the 2035 MTP.

Because river crossing capacity is the foremost transportation deficiency within the AMPA, a major focus of the proposed improvements is on the Paseo del Norte corridor, which is the primary one of only three river crossings within Albuquerque north of Interstate 40. Prior consideration of constructing new river crossings has been seen as unfavorable for significant reasons, including the difficulty in finding acceptable alignments without severe effects on existing development or the river environment. Substantial expansion of cross-river vehicular capacity would also have adverse effects on traffic levels, generally, and raise the severity of environmental impacts. In view of these circumstances, a logical next step is to evaluate the case for expansion of public transportation service and use, possibly with operational and minor capacity-expanding capital improvements of roads and bridges that serve the area, which will be documented in an Alternatives Analysis (AA) report developed consistent with Federal Transit Authority (FTA) requirements.

Demonstration of Need

The need for the project arises from the recognized extent and pace of development in Northwest Albuquerque and Southern Sandoval County, and the extent to which that development is dependent upon access to the metropolitan area east of the Rio Grande. The need is demonstrated by the following:

- ◆ There is a large and growing numeric imbalance between population and employment west of the river, with the result that many trips to and from work and other activities entail cross-river travel. The population west of the Rio Grande is projected to double between 2008 and 2035.
- ◆ The ratio of jobs to population is now and is projected to continue to be approximately twice as high east of the Rio Grande as it is to the west.
- ◆ Consequent use of the available river crossings already results in traffic congestion that is severe during peak periods, particularly within the Paseo del Norte, Alameda Boulevard and Montaña Road corridors.
- ◆ Travel demand is projected to grow within the near future to levels far beyond available transportation capacity. The result is already undesirable in terms of travel delay and accident frequency, and these effects will only grow worse with time, threatening the economic health of the region.

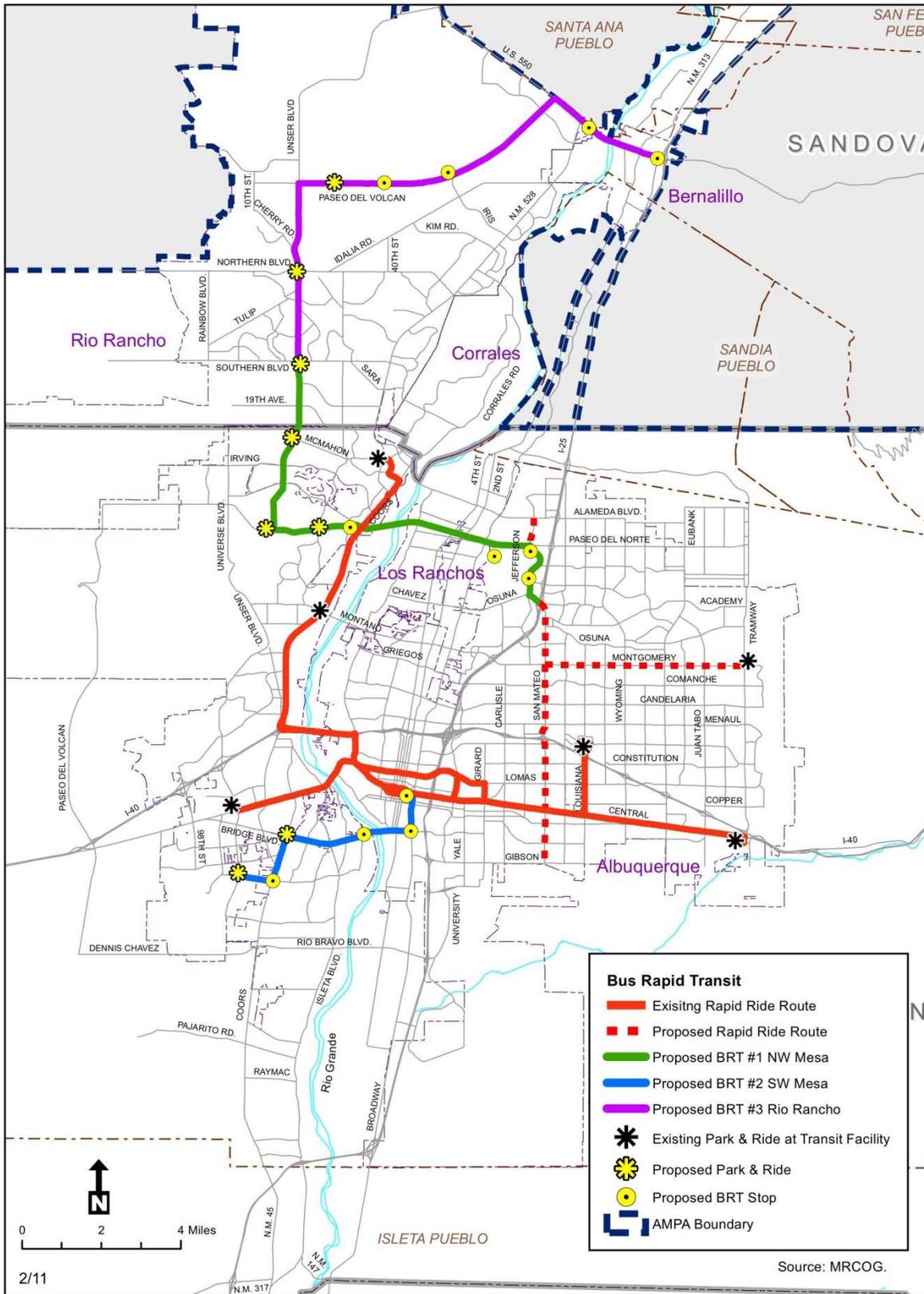


Figure 1, 2035 MTP BRT System

The following information provides an overview of the existing and projected conditions that contribute to the need for a potential investment in enhanced transportation capacity serving north Albuquerque.

Westside Population Growth and Jobs/Housing Imbalance

Projections by the Mid-Region Council of Governments indicate over 36,000 acres (56 square miles) of new development, adding 257,000 to the population, will occur on the metro Westside by the year 2035. In fact, almost half (46%) of all population growth projected for the four county metro area is expected to occur on the metro Westside (see Figure 2). In contrast, the overwhelming majority of jobs and major employment centers are and will continue to be located across the river valley in the eastern part of the metropolitan area (see Figure 3). This imbalance in jobs and housing results in heavy east-west commute patterns.

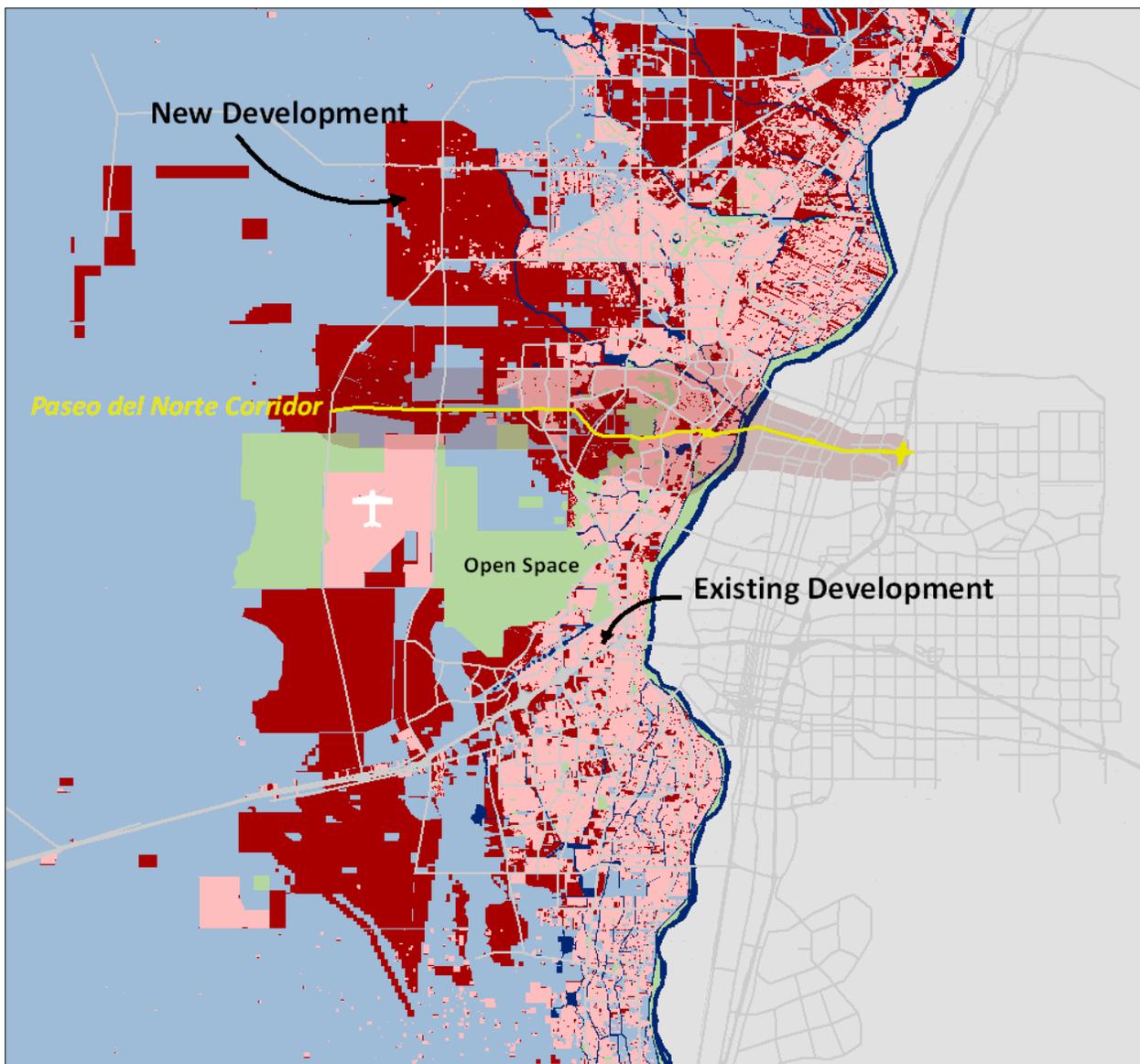


Figure 2: New Development Projected for the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area by Year 2035 – The area in red identifies new growth areas. Pink shading indicates areas of existing development.

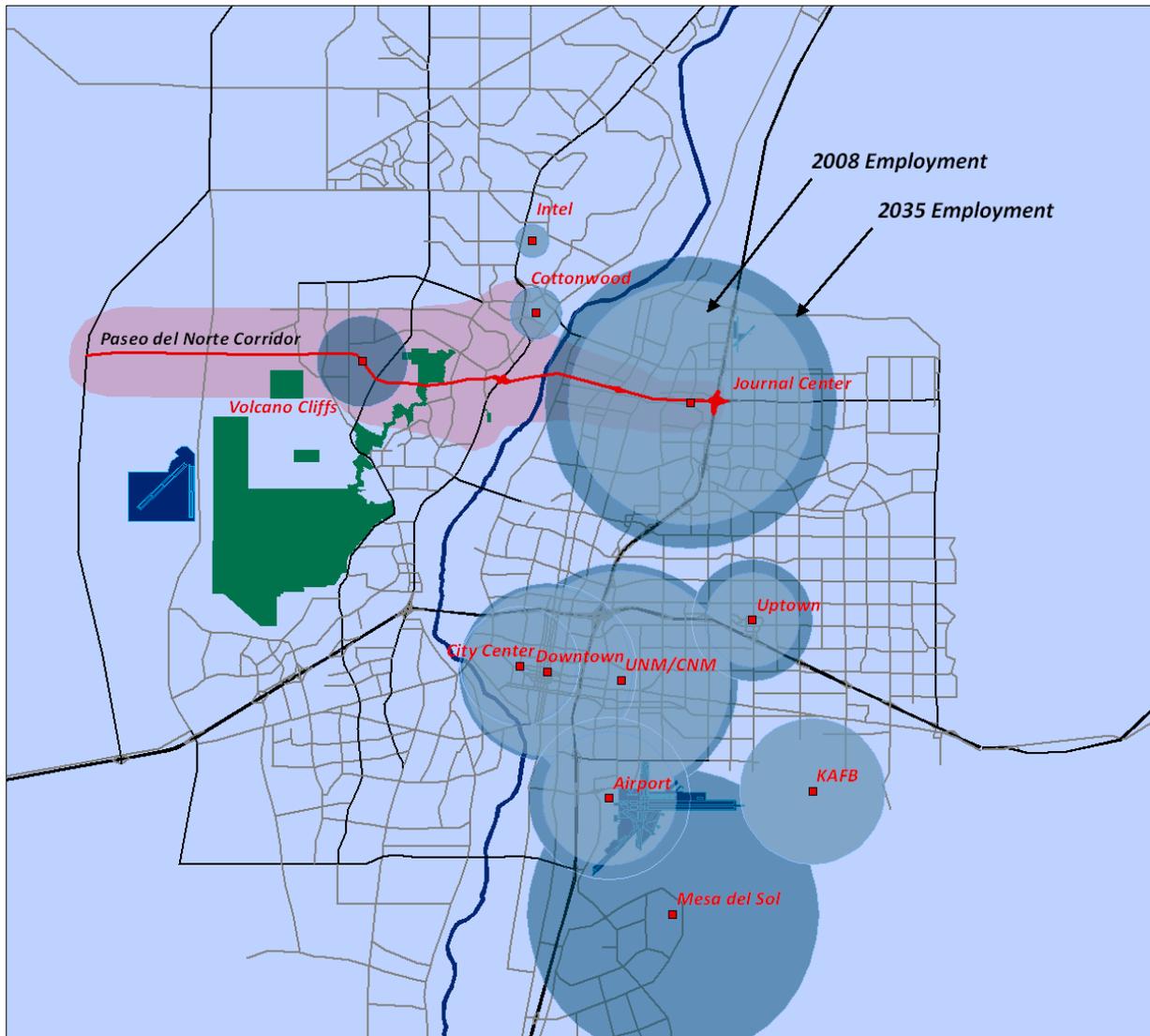


Figure 3: General Locations of Major Employment Centers within the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area

River Crossing Deficiencies and Increasing Travel Demand

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 very high travel demand on Paseo del Norte. In 2010, this roadway carried a daily traffic volume of 81,800 and an evening peak hour volume of approximately 7,000. Projections by the 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 vehicle trips using the Paseo del Norte river bridge by year 2035.

Trend line analysis indicates that the capacity of Paseo del Norte and all other river crossings within the metro area will be reached by year 2013 and there will be a net shortfall of 75% to 80% by year 2035 (see Figure 4). Assuming no improvements are made, severe impacts to mobility will result and travel times will increase sharply. Travel time analysis indicates commute times from trips originating in the northwest portion of the metro area and destined to the Downtown and UNM areas will almost triple. The current travel time of 30 minutes will increase to about 90 minutes by year 2035 (Figure 5).

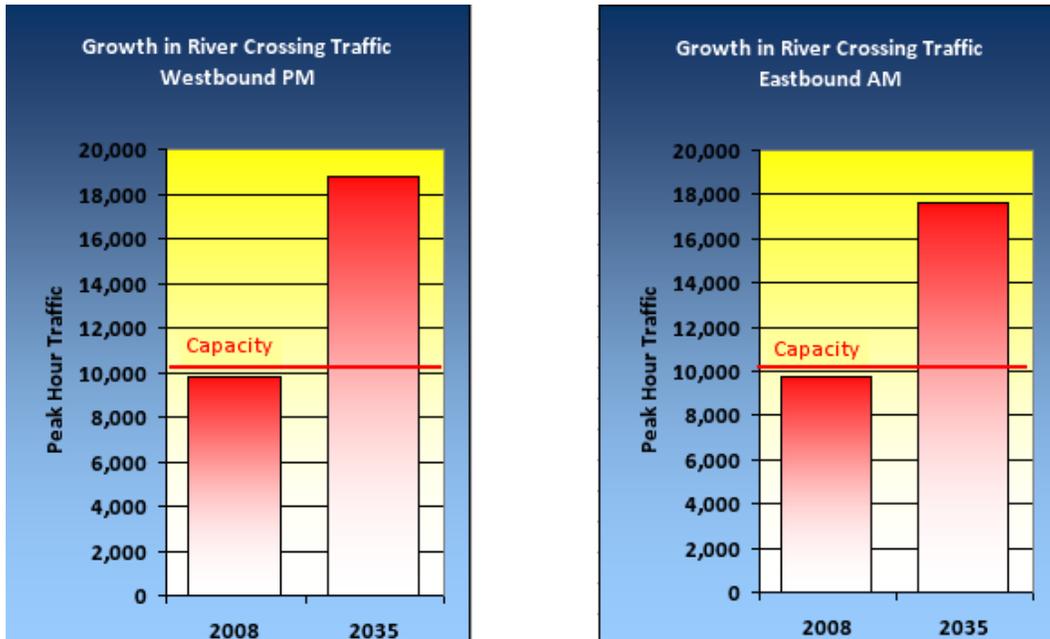


Figure 4: Comparison of Projected River Crossing Demand and Available Capacity

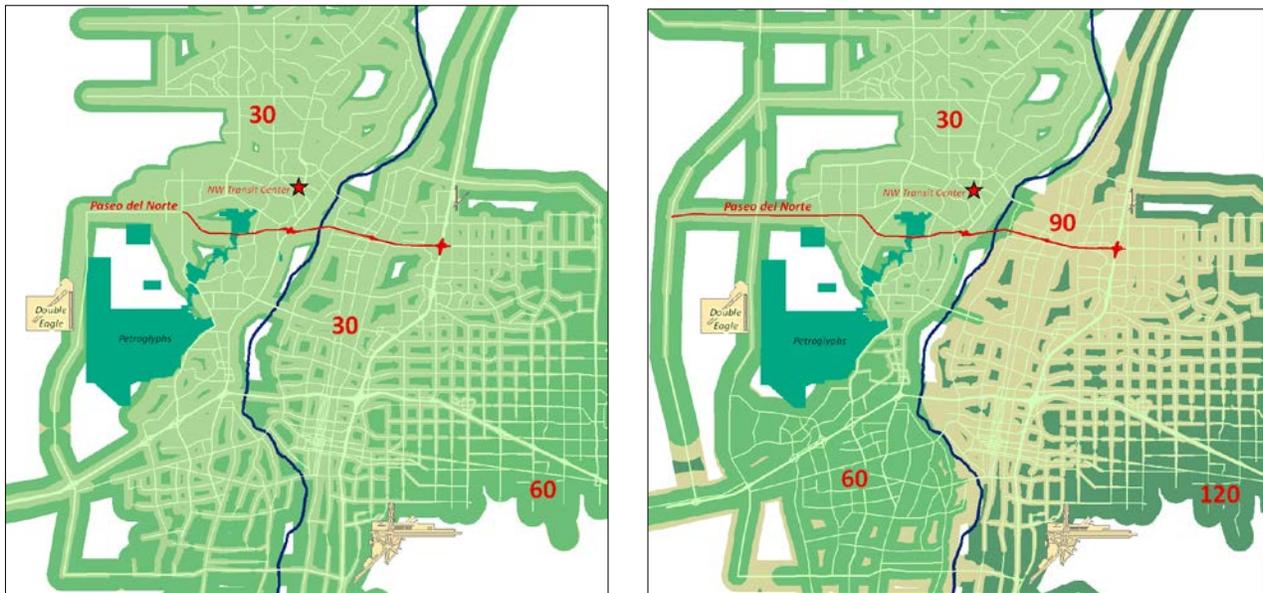


Figure 5: Comparison of Current (left image) Travel Times to Year 2035 (right image)

Because the capacity deficiency affects all river crossing and more general purpose lanes would require widening existing or constructing new bridges, the unmet demand cannot be readily addressed by adding general purpose lanes. The feasibility of high capacity transit to help meet the unmet demand and to provide a viable alternative to auto travel will be evaluated by the Paseo del Norte High Capacity Transit Study.