New Mexico State Rail Plan

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Prepared for

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAR	Association of American Railroads
ABS	Automatic Block Signal System
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
ATSF	Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway
AZER	Arizona Eastern Railway
BNSF	BNSF Railway
BUILD	Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development
C&TS	Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad
CBO	Congressional Budget Office
CEDS	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
CIP	Capital Investment Program
COG	Council of Governments
CR	County Road
CRISI	Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements
CSI	Customer Satisfaction Index
CTC	Centralized Traffic Control
EDA	Economic Development Administration
EDD	Economic Development District
EPCOG	Eastern Plains Council of Governments
EPMPO	El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization
FAST Act	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FMPO	Farmington Metropolitan Planning Organization
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FY	Fiscal year, State (July 1 to June 30)
FFY	Federal Fiscal year (October 1 to September 30)
GRT	Gross Receipts Tax
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Program
INFRA	Infrastructure for Rebuilding America
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
LLC	Limited Liability Company

LRTP	Long-Range Transportation Plan
MEGA	National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program
MGT	Millions of Gross Tons
MP	Milepost
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MRMPO	Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
MRRTPO	Mid-Region Rural Transportation Planning Organization
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
MVMPO	Mesilla Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization
NCRTD	North Central Regional Transit District
NCNMEDD	North Central New Mexico Economic Development District
NEC	Northeast Corridor (Amtrak)
NERTPO	Northeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization
NM ___	New Mexico (XXX) State Highway
NMBA	New Mexico Border Authority
NMDOT	New Mexico Department of Transportation
NMEDD	New Mexico Economic Development Department
NMFA	New Mexico Finance Authority
NMHR	New Mexico Heritage Rail
NMFP	New Mexico Freight Plan
NMPRC	New Mexico Public Regulatory Commission
NMRX	New Mexico Rail Runner Express
NMSLRHS	New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad History
NPRTPO	Northern Pueblos Regional Transportation Planning Organization
NWNMCOG	Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments
NWRTPO	Northwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization
O&M	Operating and Maintenance
OTP	On-time Performance
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
POE	Port of Entry
PRIIA	Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act
PTC	Positive Train Control
RAISE	Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity
RMRTD	Rio Metro Regional Transit District
RRIF	Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing
RSIP	Rail Service and Investment Program
RTD	Regional Transit District
RTIPR	Rural Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
RTPO	Regional Transportation Planning Organizations
SCCOG	South Central New Mexico Council of Governments
SCRTD	South Central Regional Transit District
SCRTPO	South Central Regional Transportation Planning Organization
SERTPO	Southeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization
SFMPO	Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization
SFS	Santa Fe Southern Railway
SNMEDD	Southeastern New Mexico Council of Economic Development District
SRTP	Short Range Transit Plan

STB	U.S. Surface Transportation Board
STBG	Surface Transportation Block Grant program
STP-U	Surface Transportation Program - Urban
STIP	Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
STRACNET	Strategic Rail Corridor Network
STS	Santa Teresa Southern Railroad
SW	Southwestern Railroad
SWEDFA	Statewide Economic Development Finance Act
SWNMCOG	Southwest New Mexico Council of Government
SWRTD	Southwest Regional Transit District
SWRTPO	Southwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization
TIFIA	Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act
TIGER	Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery
TIP	Transportation Improvement Plan
TXN	Texas & New Mexico Railway
TWC	Track Warrant Control
UP	Union Pacific Railroad
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
VMT	Vehicle miles of travel
WCS	Waste Control Specialists

0. Executive Summary

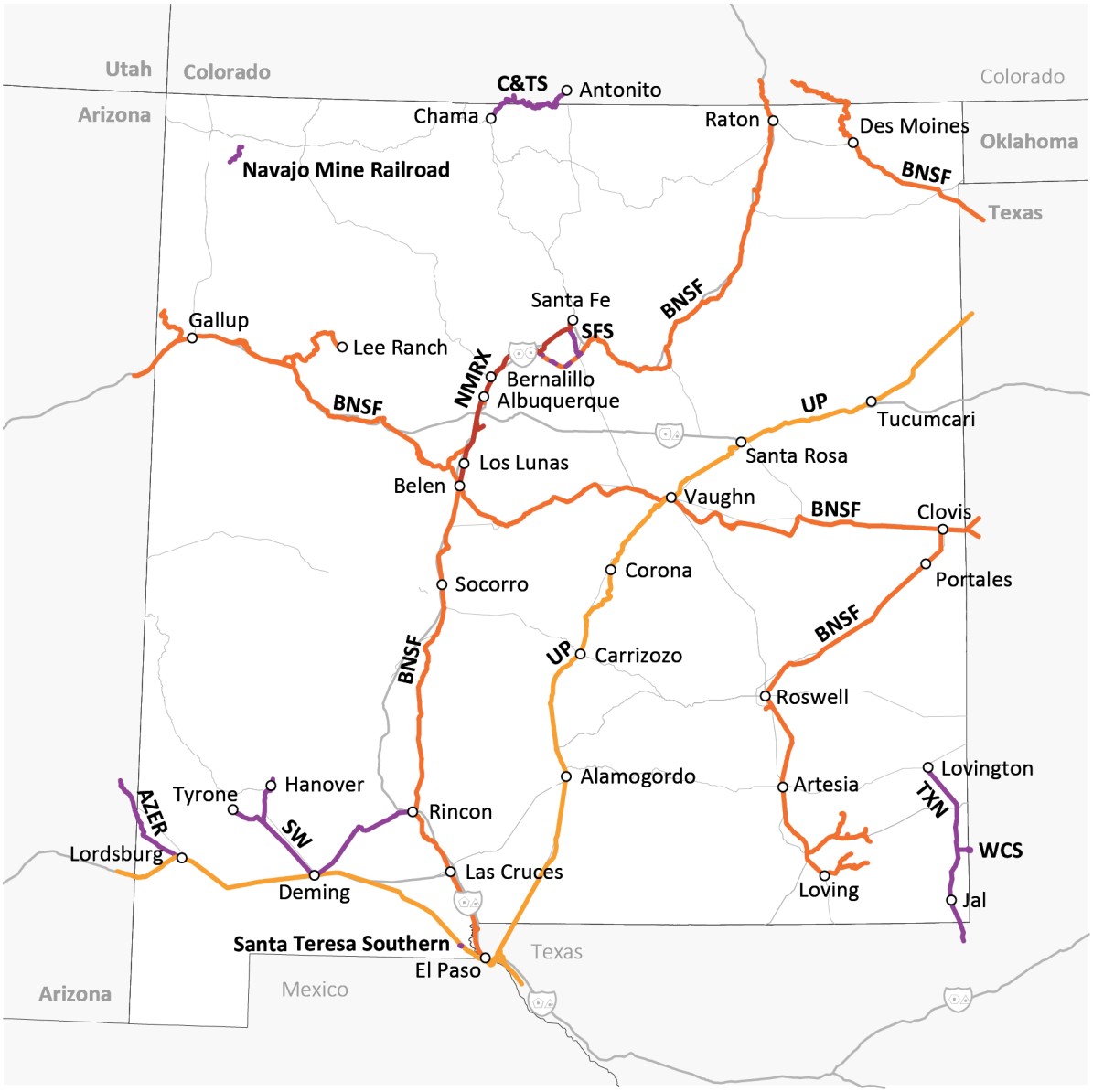
Rail service is essential to the economic framework of New Mexico and has played a significant role in its development since December of 1878, when the first rail line was extended into New Mexico. Today, New Mexico has an extensive network of rail lines that serve various purposes. The New Mexico rail system includes the two largest freight railroads in the United States, which are the BNSF Railway (BNSF) and the Union Pacific Railroad (UP); five shortline railroads; two private railroads; two long-distance Amtrak routes; a commuter railroad (New Mexico Rail Runner Express); two passenger excursion lines (the narrow gauge Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad and Sky Railway); and the New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Heritage Society. Collectively, this system provides the movement of goods and people on the national rail system, serves the needs of local businesses and industries, provides a passenger rail alternative as part of New Mexico's multimodal transportation system, and is an important part of New Mexico's tourism industry.

New Mexico is strategically positioned at a national crossroads of both freight and passenger rail services. Two of the most important transcontinental railroad lines—BNSF's Chicago-Los Angeles "Southern Transcon" and UP's New Orleans-Los Angeles "Sunset Route" —run through the state, accounting for 82% of the total rail mileage in the state. The operations of BNSF and UP rail lines generate substantial revenues, facilitating continuous capital investment for the maintenance and improvement on their lines. However, those lines primarily focus on through-freight operations, connecting long-distance markets. Consequently, New Mexico must exert greater effort to attract industrial development or to initiate new or expanded local service within the State. Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* and *Sunset Limited* offer New Mexicans the opportunity to travel far and wide, connecting destinations from Chicago and New Orleans to Los Angeles. Nonetheless, while the *Southwest Chief* provides daily service in both directions, the *Sunset Limited* only operates three times weekly in each direction, with both routes being oriented to east-west travel. Notably, significant gaps in Amtrak's western network limit the ability for convenient north-south oriented travel.

Within the state, both passenger and freight service contribute substantially to the local economy by providing people a meaningful alternative to driving on I-25 between Belen, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe; alternatives to flying or driving for long-distance travel; and providing cost effective transportation solutions for New Mexico's manufacturers, processors, consumer, and natural resource extraction industries.

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) has developed this State Rail Plan as a guide for the state's rail freight and passenger transportation planning activities and project development plans. This Plan is intended to meet the requirements established by the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) to qualify future rail projects for federal funding. The Plan is compliant with the *State Rail Plan Guidance* as specified by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

Figure 0-1: Freight and Passenger Rail Routes in New Mexico



Legend

- Arizona Eastern RW (AZER)
- BNSF RW (BNSF)
- Cumbres and Toltec Scenic RR (C&TS)
- Waste Control Specialists (WCS)
- Navajo Mine RR
- Rail Runner Express (NMRX)
- Santa Fe Southern RW (SFS)
- Santa Teresa Southern RR (STS)
- Southwestern RR (SW)
- Texas & New Mexico RW (TXN)
- Union Pacific RR (UP)
- Stations along rail lines
- Freeways
- Major Roadways
- State Boundaries
- New Mexico State

1" = 70 miles

0 | 35 | 70 | 140 mi

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Source: NMDOT

New Mexico's Rail Vision and Supporting Goals

Vision

The State of New Mexico's vision for its rail system is as follows:

> New Mexico's rail network is a fully integrated and safe multimodal rail system that provides efficient and competitive passenger services to, from, and within the state; provides a competitive option for New Mexico shippers; is a vital component of the national transportation network; and supports sustainable, inclusive economic development statewide.

Helping the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) realize this vision, this State Rail Plan defines goals and objectives for rail transportation in New Mexico. It articulates both the existing and future role of freight and passenger rail within the State, identifies potential rail improvement projects, and prioritizes future investments as part of a long-range service and investment program. The vision was presented to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), and other rail stakeholders during meetings conducted in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces between the spring and fall of 2017. Additionally, it was also shared with the general public through an online survey hosted on the NMDOT website between June and September 2017; the survey was advertised through the local press and on social media platforms. The rail vision remains similar to that presented in the 2014 New Mexico State Rail Plan.

Goals and Objectives

The vision is supported by four key goals, which are aligned with the vision and various objectives to achieve the rail service vision for the state.

Support economic growth and development – NMDOT objectives include promoting rail-related tourism, increasing capacity and efficiency of long-distance freight corridors, and developing and promoting local freight connections and industrial sites.

Improve railroad safety and security – NMDOT objectives include linking rail investments to strategies that support economic development, continuing improvements for safety measures at highway-rail at grade crossings, and reducing impacts of rail crossings on local mobility.

Maintain railroad assets in a state of good repair – NMDOT objectives include supporting the state's small railroads in maintaining their infrastructure in a state of good repair and enhancing operating conditions, including crossing safety.

Promote efficient and competitive passenger rail service – NMDOT objectives include support for Amtrak routes and station improvements and Rail Runner service enhancements as part of overall improvement of passenger rail options in New Mexico as part of a comprehensive multimodal transportation system.

The New Mexico Rail System

The New Mexico Rail System Includes Freight and Passenger Lines of National, Statewide, and Regional Significance

New Mexico has a total of 2,055 miles of railroad infrastructure in New Mexico including two major transcontinental rail corridors that are critical for the movement of goods on the national freight network.

Through traffic – trains passing through New Mexico bound for long-distance markets – represents a large amount of all rail traffic. The types and volume of through rail freight traffic are indicative of national and even global economic activity, with New Mexico benefiting from jobs created to maintain the rail lines and to crew and service the trains.

Freight Rail System

In 2014, the seven common carrier railroads[1] (the two Class I railroads and the five Class III railroads) carried a total of 146.5 million tons of commodities to, from, within and through the state. The two Class I railroads in New Mexico are BNSF and UP. The BNSF principal main lines include its east-west BNSF Southern Transcon through Belen and the central tier of the state and the El Paso line between Belen and El Paso. The UP lines include the Sunset Route through Lordsburg, Deming, and El Paso and the Golden State Route through El Paso, Vaughn, Santa Rosa, and Tucumcari. The Class I railroads in New Mexico are part of two national networks: the National Multimodal Freight Network (NMFN) and the National Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET).

There are five Class III railroads, also known as short lines or local, switching, and terminal railroads, operating in New Mexico: Arizona Eastern Railway, Santa Fe Southern Railway, Santa Teresa Southern Railroad, Southwestern Railroad, and Texas & New Mexico Railway. The two private railways are the Navajo Mine Railroad and Waste Control Specialists' rail line.

Passenger Rail System

New Mexico has long-distance, commuter, and tourist railroads serving those living in and visiting the state.

Amtrak operates mostly over the trackage of Class I freight railroads in New Mexico. Amtrak's frequency of train service through New Mexico has remained consistent, and ridership at New Mexico stations is recovering steadily from the loss of riders five years ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amtrak riders in New Mexico are primarily bound for destinations in other states. Amtrak also operates over the 97 route miles owned by the NMDOT between Belen, Albuquerque, and Lamy. The three long-distance trains include the *Southwest Chief*, operating between Los Angeles and Chicago; the *Sunset Limited* operating thrice weekly between Los Angeles and New Orleans; and the *Texas Eagle*, operating thrice weekly between Los Angeles and Chicago (the *Sunset Limited* and the *Texas Eagle* operate as a combined train through New Mexico). In 2024, a total of 88,614 passengers boarded and alighted at the seven Amtrak stations across the state, with 54,692 boardings and alightings occurring at the Albuquerque Station.

The Rail Runner Express provides multiple daily commuter trains between Belen, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe, operating on 97 routes miles of NMDOT-owned trackage. The Rail Runner system includes 15 stations and shares the Albuquerque Station with Amtrak. Rail Runner ceased operations for nearly a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ridership has since recovered to approximately 80% of the pre-

[1] Railroads that transport goods on regular routes at set rates. Common carrier railroads are mandated by federal law with providing their services to shippers on a non-discriminatory basis.

pandemic levels. The total annual ridership for the service grew from 319,635 in 2022[2] to 593,671 for FY2024[3], showing good recovery. Rio Metro Regional Transit District is the operator of the service on behalf of NMDOT.

The narrow gauge Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad draws tourists from around the world eager to ride trains consisting of vintage coaches pulled by historic steam locomotives through rugged mountain landscapes. C&TS trains operate from the end of May through October on a 64-mile route between Antonito, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico. Prior to COVID-19, the railroad drew over 40,000 passengers annually from around the world. In 2024, there were 38,500 riders, and C&TS is diversifying the types of experiences to attempt to regain and exceed the previous ridership levels. The C&TS is jointly owned by the States of Colorado and New Mexico and is an important generator of economic activity in the north-central region of New Mexico.

The Santa Fe Southern Railway (SFS) is an independent railroad, also known as Sky Railway, that operates passenger excursion rail services out of Santa Fe and Lamy. Sky Railway operates on 18 miles between Lamy and Santa Fe, offering live music, performances, food, and drink in historic passenger cars. SFS, under the Sky Railway marquee, has been running excursion services since 2021 and have had over 75,000 people enjoy their tours since the service began.

The New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society (NMSLRHS) is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that has spent 20 years restoring the former Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe (ATSF) 2926 steam locomotive. Throughout the last 10 years, the NMSL&RHS has pushed toward operational readiness with installation of FRA-compliant equipment and testing apparatus with current efforts concentrated on establishing Positive Train Control (PTC) compliance and working toward further agreements to eventually run passenger tourist services.

Rail Impacts

Rail service is essential to New Mexico's economy and support three primary objectives: moving goods, moving passengers/commuters, and serving tourists as attractions. When the employment associated with all parts of the rail industry are included, rail-related employment in New Mexico totals nearly 181,210 or about 20 percent of the state's 845,580 jobs as of May 2023, as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While this is a larger-than-average share for a state, it reflects the comparatively small size of the state's economy and the large role of the agriculture, energy, and mining industry in the state's economy.

In addition to the direct employment benefits, the availability of rail transport provides cost and logistical advantages to New Mexico firms that enable the state to compete effectively. The access to rail service is especially important in rural areas to provide cost-effective means to connect manufacturing, agriculture, consumers and local industries to the national and global marketplace. Railroads are also more fuel efficient than trucks on the basis of ton-miles transported, and the diversion of freight traffic to rail also increases the safety of state's highway system by reducing truck traffic. Rail is also one of the safest modes of transportation. Per passenger-mile traveled rail transportation has lower death rates than automobiles.

Amtrak intercity passenger rail service connects major urban areas, which is important to supplement air service in the state. Rail Runner commuter trains carry riders to and from work centers, removing an estimated 18.7 million vehicle miles of travel (VMT) from our busiest highways during busiest commute

2 https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/transit-agency-profiles/rio-metro-regional-transit-district
3 NMDOT Transit and Rail Division Fact Sheet. January 2025.

hours.[4] C&TS offer visitors an unparalleled opportunity to experience rail transportation in the golden age of steam. Sky Railway provides unique experiences like sunset and stargaze trips unlike anywhere else in the country. Passenger train travelers generate income not only for the rail operations, but also for restaurants, hotels, and other visitor service establishments. Passenger stations have the potential to increase economic development around the station areas.

Passenger and freight rail can deliver positive impacts to local communities, improving the general quality of life. To the extent that it moves people and goods through communities safely without negatively impacting the surrounding environment, rail transportation makes life better in the communities. The benefits of rail are often more broadly dispersed than the impacts.

Proposed Capital Investment Program and Studies

The heart of the State Rail Plan is the Rail Service and Investment Program (RSIP), that is, a program of projects and investments which are aimed at realizing the state rail vision and its goals over the next 21 years. In accordance with the FRA's 2013 *State Rail Plan Guidance*, the RSIP is divided into two components, a short-range plan for the next four years; and a long-range plan, for Years 5 to 20, or in this instance to 2045. The short-range program and the long-range program funding totals appear in the table below, which includes projects related to passenger rail, freight rail, and rail-related safety projects. Some projects are studies aimed at shaping subsequent investments. The program represents investments that would improve freight rail and passenger rail, as well as safety at highway-rail at-grade crossings.

Short-range passenger rail investments include Rio Metro projects such as an operations and maintenance facility and new siding projects as well as Amtrak improvements that could include daily Sunset Limited service and station improvements to provide ADA accessibility. The freight project included is the funded study regarding the San Juan County freight line. The program excludes projects pertaining to Class I railroads, as these railroads are considered to have sufficient cash flow to fund their respective improvement programs or may have proprietary considerations. Safety improvements include continuation of the federally mandated Section 130 grade crossing improvement program (Section 130 Program) as well as strategic investments in more expensive grade crossing separation projects. The Section 130 Program is authorized by Title 23, United States Code, Section 130 (23 U.S.C. 130).

Table 0-1: Rail Service and Investment Program – Short-Range (2025 - 2030) Overview

Short-Range Projects	**Cost (Millions)**
Passenger Projects	$113.9
Freight Projects	$4
Safety Projects	$165.2
Short-Range Total	**$283.1**

New Mexico's long-range investment program projects were identified by the state's freight railroads, Rio Metro, Amtrak, County-led studies, and NMDOT. The improvements will address passenger and freight rail needs and crossing safety. The long-range program includes two large freight projects – the Farmington Line and the Santa Teresa Border Crossing in addition to passenger-related efforts like Southwest Chief route improvements, intercity rail corridor studies, New Mexico Heritage Rail improvements, and additional Rio Metro projects like sidings, platforms, rolling stock replacement, and track and structure improvements. The Section 130 Program is also ongoing.

[4] NMDOT Transit and Rail Division's January 2025 Fact Sheet

State Rail Plan Summary

New Mexico has undertaken a comprehensive study of its passenger and freight rail network and has identified key issues and opportunities through a wide-ranging rail stakeholder and public outreach process in conjunction with various technical analyses. This State Rail Plan serves to document this information and set a direction for rail planning and project development into the future while meeting the federal requirements to qualify the state for any future federal rail funding.

The chapters that follow describe New Mexico's rail planning processes, the existing conditions of New Mexico's railroads, proposed concepts for freight and passenger improvements, and a state program of rail investments.

Chapter 1, the State of the New Mexico Rail System, discusses the existing rail system, trends and forecasts of freight and passenger rail traffic, and needs and opportunities facing New Mexico's railroads and rail stakeholders. It also notes the specific rail improvements planned by Class I railroads (UP and BNSF), the needs of the state's short line and private railroads, and the state's grade crossing improvement program.

Chapter 2, New Mexico Rail: Funding, Agencies, and Coordination, discusses the role of rail in New Mexico's multimodal transportation system and the state's organization to provide political, legal, and financial support to rail development.

Chapter 3, Rail Impacts and Trends, discusses the economic, environmental, and community impacts of rail as well as the socio-economic trends at work in New Mexico.

Chapter 4, The Future of Rail in New Mexico, outlines the vision and goals for rail in New Mexico and the proposed program of short-range and long-range rail improvements and studies.

The development of this Plan was possible because of the participation of many rail stakeholders, interested agencies, and others, along with the general public. The New Mexico Department of Transportation extends its gratitude to all individuals and parties who participated in this effort.

1. The State of the New Mexico Rail System

1.1 The Rail Plan's Role

The 2025 New Mexico State Rail Plan is a federally required systematic analysis of New Mexico's rail system and identifies a long-range service and investment program for freight and passenger rail improvements in the state. The plan is aligned with the New Mexico 2045 Plan, which discusses passenger and freight rail transportation in the state, though the State Rail Plan provides additional depth on rail issues and concerns. This State Rail Plan is an update of the 2014 New Mexico State Rail Plan.

1.2 Description and Inventory of State Rail System

Today, the New Mexico railroad network fulfills many of the same functions it did a century ago. New Mexico railroads continue to be major carriers of transcontinental rail passenger and freight movements, in addition to international freight movements into and from Mexico. All rail lines in New Mexico are shown in Figure 1-1.

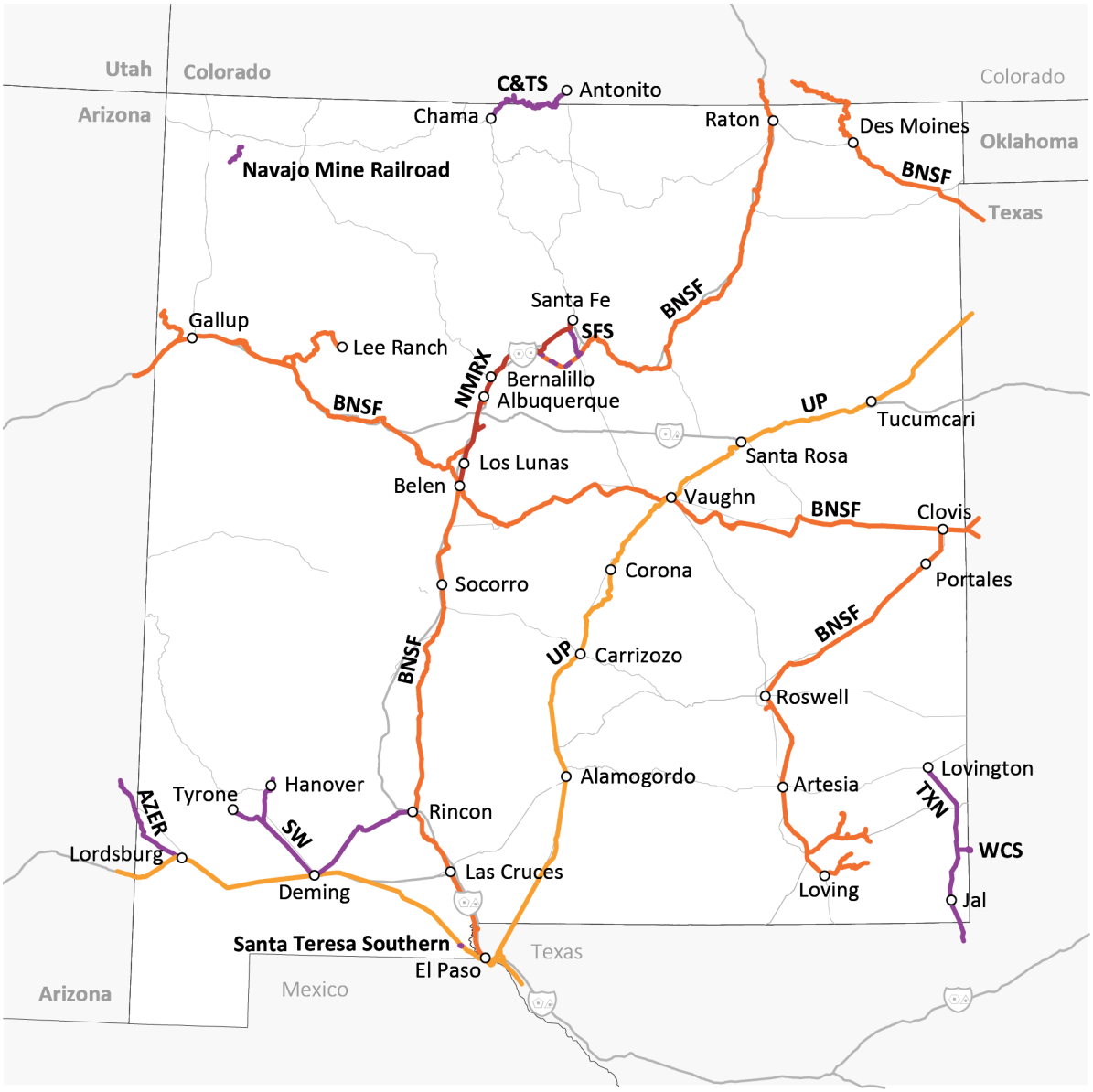
Multiple railroads operate in New Mexico:

Passenger – New Mexico is linked to the rest of the United States by two Amtrak routes: the daily *Southwest Chief*, which traverses through the northern and western parts of the state (including Albuquerque) on the way between Chicago and Los Angeles, and the triweekly *Sunset Limited*, which operates across southern New Mexico on its way between New Orleans and Los Angeles. Within the state, the Rail Runner commuter service runs between Belen, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe. The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, a narrow-gauge, steam-powered heritage tourist railroad, operates between Chama and Antonito, Colorado, and the Santa Fe Southern Railway, a Class III railroad, runs an excursion tourism service branded as Sky Railway out of the Santa Fe Depot. The New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society, doing business as New Mexico Heritage Rail, which presently operates the restored ATSF 2926 steam locomotive within Albuquerque without carrying passengers, looks to eventually offer passenger excursion services in New Mexico.

Freight – There are nine freight railroads in New Mexico. Two are Class I railroads, or large railroads[5]; five are Class III or small railroads; and two are private railroads that are not subject to federal regulation. An additional private railroad, Escalante Western Railroad, ceased operation in January 2020 due to the closure of the coal fired power plant it served. The two Class I railroads are the largest freight railroads in the United States: BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad. Two of the most important transcontinental railroad lines—BNSF's Chicago-Los Angeles "Southern Transcon" and UP's New Orleans-Los Angeles "Sunset Route" —run through the state.

5 Class I railroads are defined by the U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB) as having revenue in excess of $250 million per year in 1991 dollars, or about $490 million today. U.S. Class I Railroads are line haul freight railroads with annual operating revenue of $457.9 million or more. Class II railroads have annual operating revenue of between $$457.91 million and $36.6 million; Class III railroads have operating revenue less than $36.6 million.

Figure 1-1: Freight and Passenger Rail Routes in New Mexico



Legend

- Arizona Eastern RW (AZER)
- BNSF RW (BNSF)
- Cumbres and Toltec Scenic RR (C&TS)
- Waste Control Specialists (WCS)
- Navajo Mine RR
- Rail Runner Express (NMRX)
- Santa Fe Southern RW (SFS)
- Santa Teresa Southern RR (STS)
- Southwestern RR (SW)
- Texas & New Mexico RW (TXN)
- Union Pacific RR (UP)
- Stations along rail lines
- Freeways
- Major Roadways
- State Boundaries
- New Mexico State

1" = 70 miles

0 | 35 | 70 | 140 mi

N

Source: NMDOT

The rail system in New Mexico includes 2,055 track miles owned by freight railroads, the New Mexico Department of Transportation, the City of Santa Fe, and the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (which is jointly owned by the state of New Mexico and the state of Colorado). The Class I railroads own 1,703 route miles, or 82% of the total rail mileage in the state. Five Class III[6] (small freight) railroads own 167 route miles and operate another 103 route miles via trackage rights or on lines either leased or under contract. The two small private railroads operate on 17 route miles. The National Rail Passenger Corporation, also known as Amtrak, operates three long-distance services (two of them combined) through New Mexico. Amtrak owns no route miles in New Mexico but has a statutory right to run intercity passenger rail service on tracks of the general railroad system. Intrastate passenger rail service returned to New Mexico in 2006 when New Mexico Rail Runner Express began operating. Rail Runner now serves 15 stations on a 97-mile corridor linking the cities of Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Belen. The route mileages of New Mexico's railroads are shown in Table 1-1.

Figure 1-2: Amtrak and BNSF at Gallup Station

Photo by Huitt-Zollars.

6 Class III railroads, also known as local, switching or terminal railroads, or as short lines, are defined by the STB as having revenues less than $20 million per year in 1991 dollars, or $47.3 million in 2023 dollars.

Table 1-1: Route Mileage of New Mexico's Freight and Passenger Railroads

Railroads	Alpha Code	Owned	Leased/ Operate under Contract	Trackage Rights	Total Miles Operated
Class I Railroads					
BNSF Railway	BNSF	1,171.5		514.0	1,685.5
Union Pacific Railroad	UP	531.6		85.0	616.6
Total Class I		**1,703.1**		**599.0**	**2,302.1**
Class III Railroads					
Arizona Eastern Railway	AZER	25.0		27.0	52.0
Santa Fe Southern Railway (Sky Railway)	SFS	0.3	13.3	4.4	18.0
Santa Teresa Southern Railroad*	STS		2.9		2.9
Southwestern Railroad	SW	66.0	53.0	2.0	121.0
Texas & New Mexico Railway	TXN	76.0			76.0
Total Class III		**167.3**	**69.2**	**33.4**	**269.9**
Private Railroads					
Waste Control Specialists rail line	N/A	5.5			5.5
Navajo Mine Railroad	N/A	13.0			13.0
Total Private		**18.5**			**18.5**
Passenger/Tourist Railroads					
Amtrak	AMTK			596.0	596.0
Cumbres & Toltec Scenic RR**	C&TS	32.0			32.0
New Mexico Rail Runner Express***	NMRX		120.9		120.9
Total Passenger/Tourist		**32.0**	**120.9**	**596.0**	**748.9**
Other Railroad Ownership					
City of Santa Fe	N/A	0.7			
NMDOT Lines	N/A	133.4			
Total Other Railroad Ownership		134.10			
Total Railroad Miles		**2,055.00**	**190.10**	**1,228.40**	**3,339.40**

Notes: * Mileage in an industrial park.
** C&TS route mileage is owned almost evenly between the states of Colorado and New Mexico.
*** Showing miles owned by NMDOT and leased for operation of Rail Runner Express.

Source: NMDOT

1.2.1 Passenger Rail Services

New Mexico has long-distance, commuter, and tourist railroads serving those living in and visiting the state:

Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail services with three services, the daily *Southwest Chief* operating between Chicago and Los Angeles via Albuquerque; the thrice weekly *Sunset Limited* between Los Angeles and New Orleans; and the thrice weekly *Texas Eagle* between Los Angeles, El Paso, San Antonio, and Chicago. The *Sunset Limited* and the *Texas Eagle* run as a combined train through the southern tier of the state. Amtrak riders in New Mexico are primarily bound for destinations in other states.

NMDOT's Rail Runner Express gives commuters a meaningful alternative to driving I-25 between Belen, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe, with 26 trains on weekdays and with reduced service on weekends. Rail Runner handles a significant number of commute trips on the corridor between the Albuquerque and Santa Fe metropolitan areas.

Santa Fe Southern Railway, under new ownership since 2020, began offering passenger service as Sky Railway in December 2021, following a decade when excursion services that began when the railroad was purchased from ATSF in 1992, were not offered. Sky Railway operates on the 18-mile line between Santa Fe and Lamy, with excursions originating from both endpoints, on a series of different ticket options with music and performances.

The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad enables tourists to experience railroading in a historic context while providing an economic stimulus for the north central portion of the state, operating on a 64-mile route between Chama and Antonito, Colorado.

Lastly, the New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society, operating as New Mexico Heritage Rail, has refurbished the ATSF 2926 steam locomotive and begun non-passenger operations within Albuquerque. NMHR desires to eventually offer passenger excursion services.

Amtrak

The National Railroad Passenger Corporation, commonly known as Amtrak, is the primary provider of intercity passenger rail in the United States and is a Federally Chartered Public Corporation. Amtrak does not own any track in New Mexico–it operates with trackage rights on privately-owned rail lines. Amtrak operates two long-distance trains through New Mexico, the *Southwest Chief* and the *Sunset Limited* train, as seen in Figure 1-4.

The *Southwest Chief* operates one train per day per direction between Chicago and Los Angeles, with 5 stops in New Mexico. The *Sunset Limited* operates three trains per week per direction between New Orleans (*Sunset Limited*) or Chicago (*Texas Eagle*) and Los Angeles, with 2 stops in New Mexico. Amtrak's service is limited by both federal funding and by equipment availability. Amtrak is currently running all its Superliners to their maximum capacity and has the demand to run more coaches if they were available.

Amtrak has historically provided Thruway bus connections at Raton and Albuquerque. However, much of this service was through a joint ticketing agreement with Greyhound, and in recent years, many Greyhound services have been cut, leaving fewer passengers with access to Amtrak cross-country service. Amtrak does provide shuttle van services between Lamy (a stop for the *Southwest Chief*) and Santa Fe. Previous thruway services included a connection to Denver and between Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and El Paso, connecting the *Southwest Chief* in Albuquerque with the *Sunset Limited* in El Paso. Amtrak typically employs between 50-60 staff in New Mexico.

Southwest Chief

The *Southwest Chief* operates one train daily in each direction linking Chicago, Kansas City, Albuquerque, and Los Angeles, a distance of 2,256 miles, including 431 miles within New Mexico. Within New Mexico, it operates on right-of-way owned by BNSF and NMDOT. Westbound trains enter New Mexico from Colorado via the BNSF Raton Line, travelling on the NMRX Albuquerque Subdivision between Lamy and Isleta, and return to BNSF right-of-way on the Isleta-Dalies connector and Gallup Subdivision before entering Arizona west of Gallup. Station stops for the *Southwest Chief* in New Mexico are at Raton, Las Vegas, Lamy, Albuquerque, and Gallup. Albuquerque and Raton are staffed. Travel time for the *Southwest Chief* within New Mexico is approximately eight and one-half (8.5) hours, with eastbound trains scheduled into

Albuquerque at 11:32 AM and westbound trains scheduled into Albuquerque at 3:34 PM. The train typically consists of nine or ten cars, including several coach cars and sleeping cars, a dining car, a lounge car, a dormitory car (for the crew), and a baggage car.

Sunset Limited

The *Sunset Limited*, the oldest named train in the U.S., links New Orleans, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, Tucson, and Los Angeles – a distance of 1,995 miles. The *Texas Eagle* links Chicago, St. Louis, Fort Worth and San Antonio (a distance of 1,305 miles), where two cars are attached to or detached from the *Sunset Limited* for continuing service to Los Angeles. The combined train then covers 167 miles within New Mexico on the UP Sunset Route. Westbound trains enter New Mexico from Texas at El Paso and make station stops at Deming and Lordsburg before entering Arizona west of Steins Pass. Travel time for the *Sunset Limited* in New Mexico is approximately three hours, with westbound trains passing through New Mexico in the late afternoon on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays and eastbound trains passing through the state mid-day on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The train typically consists of nine or 10 cars, including several coach cars and sleeping cars, a dining car, a lounge car, a dorm car (for the crew), and a baggage car. Amtrak is studying daily *Sunset Limited* service.

Stations

Amtrak operates seven stations in New Mexico:

Gallup Station, situated on historic Route 66, is adjacent to the historic downtown area of the city. The City of Gallup has planned construction to start this year to address platform non-compliance with the ADA, scheduled to be completed in FFY 2026.

Albuquerque's Alvarado Transportation Center is a major hub for the Southwest Chief. New Mexico Rail Runner Express, intercity bus lines, and local bus services also serve the Alvarado Transportation Center. Amtrak made ADA improvements at the ticket counter in FFY2024. Amtrak has staff and facilities in Albuquerque, and it is one of the most important stations along the route as it is a designated station for in-route servicing of trains (at their 1500-mile inspection point), where the trains also get fueled and its water tanks get refilled. Amtrak usually has a spare locomotive in Albuquerque for use as a replacement if this becomes necessary.

Lamy Station, located 18 miles south of Santa Fe, serves the Southwest Chief and connects to Santa Fe via Amtrak Thruway bus service. It most recently had a platform ADA compliance project completed in FFY2017. Phase 2, addressing the station interior bathrooms and waiting rooms, will commence in FFY2025 with completion in FFY2026.

Las Vegas station, built in 1899, is located adjacent to the historic downtown area of the city. Amtrak is currently in the design stages of modifying the station's platform to ensure ADA compliance. This will include a new platform with associated ramps, stairs, railings, and signage for the station. This project is expected to be completed in FFY2027.

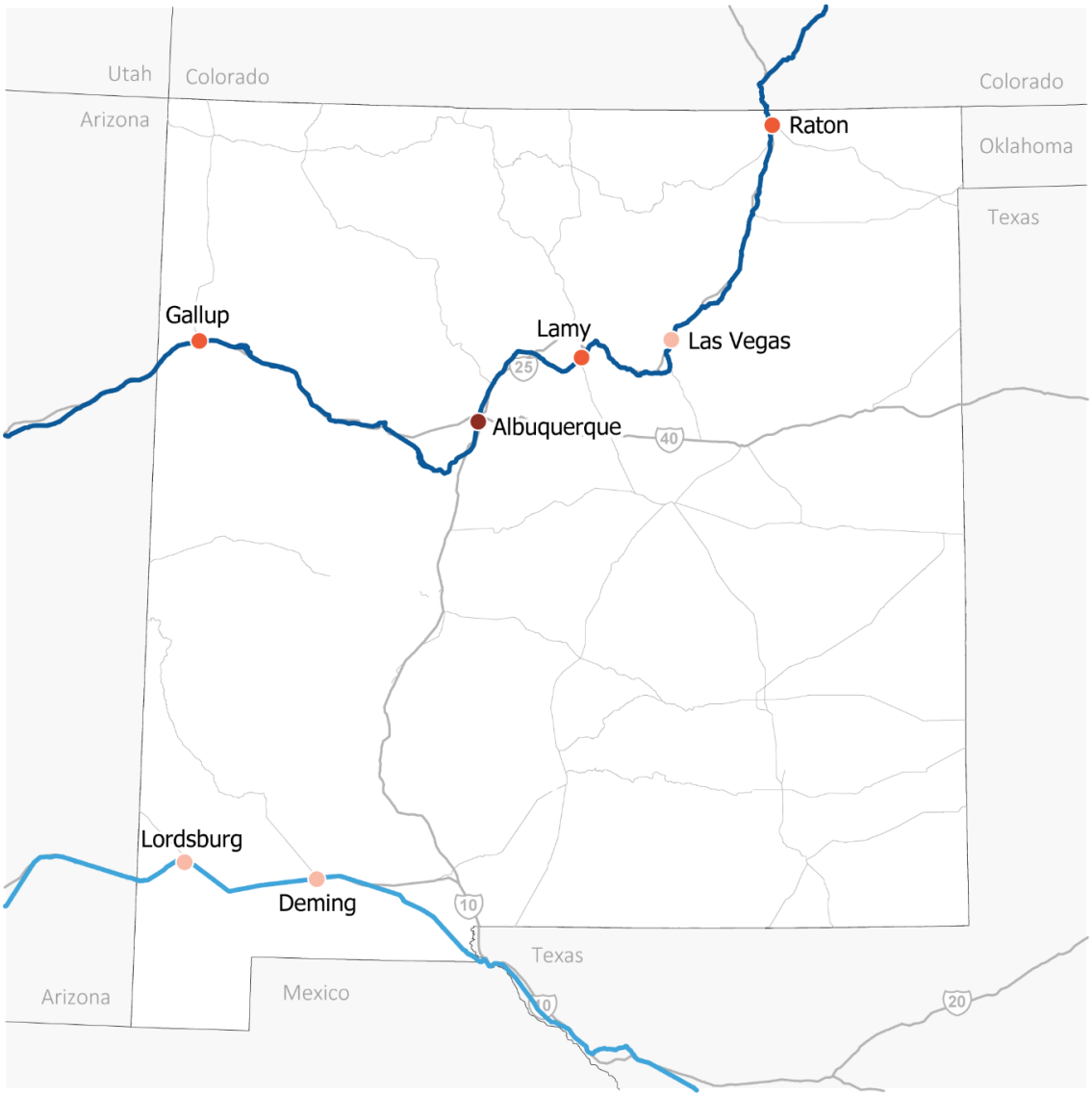
Raton Station, designed in the Mission Revival architectural style, is located adjacent to the downtown area of the city. Each summer, the Philmont Boy Scout Ranch hosts over 22,000 scouts and others, with about 20% arriving via Amtrak. This is about half the usage of the Raton station. Amtrak is currently in the design stages to provide a new platform, accessible walkways to the public right-of-way, and new lighting and signage for the platform and walkways. Construction will commence in FFY 2025 and be completed in FFY 2026.

Deming and Lordsburg Stations, located in southwestern New Mexico, serve the Sunset Limited route. Deming and Lordsburg are planned to have platform construction to meet ADA compliance to be completed by FFY 2027. These stations were flag stops until about 10 years ago, and neither station has a depot or formal platform.

Figure 1-3: Amtrak platform in Raton

Photo by Huitt-Zollars.

Figure 1-4: Amtrak Routes in New Mexico



Source: NMDOT, Amtrak

Ridership

Amtrak compiles and reports the ridership, financial performance, on-time performance, and customer satisfaction of its trains on each route by month and by federal fiscal year (FFY)[7]. Nationwide, Amtrak ridership reached 32.8 million passengers in FFY2024, up by 14% from FFY23. This was Amtrak's highest ridership year ever, with a large percentage of riders using Amtrak for inter-city service throughout the country. Amtrak's long-distance services were up 8% from FFY23, contributing to the overall success in ridership growth. Amtrak tracks new and returning customers, and a significant number of the riders in the last 4 years are new riders, who are using Amtrak for the first time post-pandemic.

In 2024, total ridership for the *Southwest Chief* was 261,485, and on the *Sunset Limited* it was 76,937.[8] In 2024 there were 87,980 boardings and alightings (on's and off's) at the seven Amtrak stations in New Mexico, up from 84,136 in 2023.[9] As seen in **Table 1-2,** the busiest of Amtrak's seven New Mexico stations in terms of boardings and alightings is Albuquerque, which Amtrak shares with the Rail Runner commuter rail service, generating 62% of 2024 boardings and alightings in the state.[10] Amtrak's least busy New Mexico stations are Deming and Lordsburg. Ridership is heavily influenced by the schedule at each station. For example, in 2012, Amtrak revised its schedule for the *Sunset Limited*, shifting the station times at both Deming and Lordsburg to the mid-day or afternoon in each direction. This schedule change resulted in roughly a 50 percent ridership increase at each station. Prior to 2012, westbound trains arrived in the evening (6:30-8:00 PM), while eastbound trains arrived in the early morning (5:00-6:30 AM).

Table 1-2: Amtrak Riders (Boardings and Alightings) at New Mexico Stations – FFY2018 through FFY2024

Station	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	Change over 2018-2024 Period
Albuquerque, New Mexico	54,692	51,328	41,692	25,821	38,315	67,354	65,539	-16.6%
Deming, New Mexico	1,405	1,266	1,085	989	828	1,295	1,388	1.2%
Gallup, New Mexico	13,305	11,246	9,138	5,084	8,504	15,739	14,775	-9.9%
Lamy (Santa Fe), New Mexico	7,034	8,327	6,115	3,771	4,895	9,064	9,731	-27.7%
Las Vegas, New Mexico	4,159	3,659	3,051	1,830	3,054	4,648	4,630	-10.2%
Lordsburg, New Mexico	634	688	661	519	455	624	733	-13.5%
Raton, New Mexico	7,385	7,622	6,133	8,472	6,121	18,062	7,392	-0.1%
Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Amtrak								

Table 1-3 and **Table 1-4** provide an overview of the ridership and passenger-mile results for Amtrak routes serving New Mexico from FFY2024 through FFY2022. Overall, nationwide Amtrak long-distance train ridership increased during the period. However, while the Southwest Chief has seen an increase in ridership, the Sunset Limited has seen declines.

7 October 1 through September 30.
8 Amtrak
9 Amtrak
10 Amtrak

Table 1-3: Amtrak Total Riders on Routes Serving New Mexico – FFY2022 through FFY2024

Route	2025	2024	2023	2022	Change over 2022-2025 Period
Southwest Chief	294,359	261,485	253,838	223,654	30.1%
Sunset Limited	91,493	76,937	77,288	73,904	23.8%
All Long-Distance	4,449,602	4,272,287	3,944,124	3,493,412	27.4%
Source: Amtrak					

Passenger-miles per train-mile are a measure of utilization generated by dividing service passenger-miles (moving one passenger one mile is one passenger-mile) by route train-miles (moving a train one mile is one train-mile). As seen in Table 1-4, the *Southwest Chief* outperforms the *Sunset Limited* as well as the average long-distance train. All three routes showed improvements in performance over the past four years. Most Amtrak passengers traveling in New Mexico ride the *Southwest Chief*. Roughly one in six *Southwest Chief* boardings and alightings occur in New Mexico, while only about two percent of *Sunset Limited* riders board or alight in New Mexico. Additionally, roughly half of boardings and alightings at the Gallup and Las Vegas stations are oriented to/from Albuquerque, indicating that the *Southwest Chief* provides a meaningful role in intrastate connectivity.

Table 1-4: Passenger-Miles (in millions) per Train-Mile on Routes Serving New Mexico

Route	YTD April 2025	YTD Oct 2024	YTD Oct 2023	YTD Oct 2022
Southwest Chief	130.2	193	184	169
Sunset Limited	36.2	86	53	37
All Long-Distance Trains	1270.2	176.3	171.3	147.5
Source: Amtrak Monthly Performance Reports				

Financial Performance

Revenue and cost information by route is shown in Table 1-5. The revenue-to-cost ratio is calculated as follows: total ticket revenue, including ticket revenue and revenues from meals and other operating sources, divided by fully allocated operating costs (excluding interest and depreciation). The ratio is a metric of how much of services' costs are covered by revenues. It is measured for the entire route, not just a segment of it. All three routes have farebox recovery ratios below Amtrak's overall farebox recovery for its long-distance services, which was 50.3 percent in October FFY25.

Table 1-5: Amtrak Revenue/Cost Ratios on Routes Serving New Mexico FFY2022 through FFY2025

Route	YTD April FFY25	YTD Oct FFY24	YTD Oct FFY23	YTD Oct FFY22
Southwest Chief	35%	38.4%	39.1%	49.3%
Sunset Limited	22.3%	22.2%	25.0%	22.9%
All Long-Distance Trains	48.7%	51.2%	51.7%	49.4%
Source: Amtrak Monthly Performance Reports				

Long distance overnight trains are generally expensive to operate. Additionally, Amtrak has infrequent service through areas where it does not operate any other service and therefore does not achieve the

economies of scale necessary to reduce these costs. *Sunset Limited's* revenue/cost ratios are some of the lowest in the Amtrak system. The most important contributing factor is that the Sunset Limited is a thrice weekly train (three round trips per week) as opposed to a daily train, which puts the train at a competitive disadvantage versus modes with higher frequencies. The route also has historically poor on-time performance and lacks direct service to Phoenix, the 5th largest U.S city.

On-Time Performance

Amtrak defines On-Time Performance (OTP) as the total number of trains arriving on-time at a station divided by the total number of trains operated on that route. A train is considered on-time if it arrives at the final destination within an allowed number of minutes, or tolerance, of its scheduled arrival time. Tolerances vary as trains are allowed a certain tolerance based on how far they travel. The overall federal standard is that on-time is within 15-minutes of the scheduled arrival 80% of the time at all stations.

Amtrak tracks on-time performance in two ways: customer on-time performance and at all stations along the route. Customer on-time performance is defined in 49 CFR § 273.5 as "the percentage of all customers on an intercity passenger rail train who arrive at their detraining point no later than 15 minutes after their published scheduled arrival time, reported by train and by route." The rule sets a minimum standard of 80% for any two consecutive quarters. Customer OTP can also be reported at the station level.

Table 1-6 shows the percentage of on-time customers over the last four years. A consistent and high on-time performance makes the rail service more attractive to riders, and in earlier years, the Southwest Chief previously had better OTP than it has in recent years – for example, in FFY2016, it was 69 percent and in FFY18 it was 55 percent,[11] whereas for CY24 it was 32 percent. The OTP for Amtrak routes in New Mexico is due to a combination of issues along the entire route; the trains running through New Mexico are often late before they enter the state. Trends are looking up for FFY25, with the *Southwest Chief* reporting 50 percent customer OTP and the *Sunset Limited* reporting 76 percent customer OTP in quarter one.

Table 1-6: Percentage of On-Time Customers CY21 - CY24

Route	CY2024	CY2023	CY2022	CY2021
Southwest Chief	33%	34%	27%	37%
Sunset Limited	62%	44%	19%	28%
All Long-Distance Trains	55.3%	56%	45%	50%
Source: Amtrak Host Railroad Reports				

In the most recent nationwide data, the poorest performing routes were the *Silver Star* (35.2%), *Silver Meteor* (42.4%), and *Southwest Chief* (33.1%)[12].

Conflicts with NMDOT's Rail Runner (NMRX) service can cause delays to the *Southwest Chief* when it does not enter NMRX territory at its scheduled time. The NMRX line is very near the midpoint of the *Southwest Chief* route, so trains entering the territory from either direction may already have encountered significant delays and may in turn impact Rail Runner's afternoon/evening (PM) peak service. This is particularly true for the westbound *Southwest Chief*, which has a scheduled 3:34 PM arrival in Albuquerque. A delay of two hours in arriving on the system places the train in conflict with PM peak Rail Runner service and usually results in additional delays for the *Southwest Chief*. When a late arriving Amtrak train is held up by a Rail Runner train, NMDOT is mandated to pay Amtrak a penalty for the additional delay to Amtrak. These are

11 Amtrak Host Railroad Reports
12 Amtrak Host Railroad Report Customer OTP January 2025

called "host responsible delays" and the delay penalties can become significant when a high percentage of trains arrives late.

Causes of OTP Delays

Many factors contribute to Amtrak train delays.

Table 1-7 shows the leading causes of delay, by total delay minutes per 10,000 train miles, for routes through New Mexico in September 2016. The largest cause of delay for the *Southwest Chief* on the BNSF and NMRX portions of the *Southwest Chief* is interference from freight and commuter trains. For the *Sunset Limited* the largest delays are due to slow orders and freight train interference, as well as the need to wait on the *Texas Eagle* if it's delayed for the connection in San Antonio. The average delay for all long-distance trains is 3,644 minutes per 10,000 train miles – higher than the total for the *Southwest Chief's* total but lower than for the *Sunset Limited's*. Amtrak does not provide monthly summaries of delays that are attributable to Amtrak or to third parties.

There are many causes for delay, and the following list provides definitions of each of the largest causes of delay for passenger rail in New Mexico.

- Freight Train Interference (FTI) – Delays from freight trains.
- Servicing (SVS) – All switching and servicing delays.
- Signal Delays (DCR) – Signal failure or all other signal delays, wayside defect-detector false-alarms, defective road crossing protection, efficiency tests, etc.
- Slow Orders (DSR) – Temporary slow orders, i.e., reduced speeds to allow safe operation due to track problems, excepting heat or cold orders.
- Unused Recovery Time (NOD) – Waiting for the scheduled departure time at a station.

Table 1-7: Major Causes of Delay to Amtrak Trains Serving New Mexico – 2024
(Minutes of Delay per 10,000 Train Miles)

Train	Host Railroad	Minutes of Delay June 2024	Minutes of Delay 12 Mos.	Largest Two Causes of Delay				Route Miles
				Cause #1	Minutes of Delay	Cause #2	Minutes of Delay	
Southwest Chief	BNSF	771	776	FTI	256	DSR	198	2,206
	NMRX	3484	3044	CTI	1875	DCS	1076	80
	Total	4255	3820		2131		1274	2,286
Sunset Limited	BNSF	1121	1224	DSR	473	FTI	416	190
	UP	1671	1418	FTI	1015	FTE	220	1,784
	Total	2792	2642		1488		636	1,974
All Long-Distance Trains – Average Delay		3644						
Source: Amtrak Host Railroad Report, June 2024								

Customer Satisfaction Indicator

Amtrak's Customer Service Indicator (CSI) scores measure satisfaction by passengers on an 11-point scale relative to specific aspects of their trip. For example, a CSI score of 80 on a certain trip aspect means 80 percent of respondents rated that aspect of their trip in the top three of the 11 points of the scale.

- Overall Service is the measure for the respondents' rating of their overall trip experience.
- Amtrak Personnel is the measure for the respondents' rating of Amtrak reservations personnel, station personnel, train crew and on-board service crew.
- Information Given is the measure for the respondents' rating of all information they received pertaining to their trip.
- On-Board Comfort is the measure for the respondents' rating of seat or sleeping compartment comfort, air temperature and ride quality.
- On-Board Cleanliness is the measure for the respondents' rating of the cleanliness of the train and on-board restrooms.
- On-Board Food Service is the measure for the respondents' rating of the quality of the food and snacks purchased on-board the train.

Table 1-8 shows the CSI scores of the three long-distances services in New Mexico for the fourth quarter of FY2024 compared to Amtrak's standard. While all three trains had Overall Service scores below the Amtrak standard (82), they were all relatively close to the Overall Service scores of all 15 Amtrak long-distance trains (68). All three trains achieved performance at or slightly below the Amtrak standard with respect for Amtrak personnel.

Table 1-8: Customer Satisfaction Indicator Scores for Amtrak Trains Serving New Mexico in FFY24 Q4

Service Metric	Standard	Routes		
		Southwest Chief	Sunset Limited	Average for All Long-Distance Trains
Overall Customer Service Index	82	81%	75%	83%
Amtrak Personnel	80	86%	87%	90%
Information Given	80	80%	84%	83%
On-Board Comfort	80	79%	81%	85%
On-Board Cleanliness	80	74%	72%	82%
On-Board Food Service	80	74%	76%	69%

Note: A score in red indicates a score below Amtrak's standard.
Source: FRA Quarterly Report on the Performance and Service Quality of Intercity Passenger Train Operations, FFY2024; Q4 (Adjusted)

History

Congress envisioned the implementation of Amtrak service as a means of preserving intercity passenger rail service while freeing freight railroads of the burden of providing intercity passenger service, which had seen a decline in patronage, revenues, and profits with the onset of higher capacity, fast jetliners and the interstate highway system in the 1950s and 1960s. Prior to that time, passenger trains were highly popular and a preferred mode of intercity travel. Most major railroads had 'named' passenger trains, some of which being the streamliners that offered the finest passenger comfort, luxury, and the speediest rail transit times for the period. New Mexico had several. In the years immediately preceding Amtrak's creation, a number of intercity passenger rail trains had already ceased operations.

Amtrak began operations in 1971 as a corporation, with the federal government as its largest stockholder. Amtrak used rolling stock obtained from the freight railroads, which became Amtrak's host railroads, with Amtrak operating over their lines by virtue of a federal statute[13]. Amtrak assumed a subset of routes previously operated by the freight railroads, and in some cases, crafted new routes. Over time, several routes continued to change, and Amtrak began implementing new rolling stock, giving the trains a new Amtrak look.

In addition to long-distance service, Amtrak also operates high-speed passenger rail service on the Northeast Corridor and operates state-supported intercity passenger services under agreements with individual states or groups of states. State-supported routes are intercity passenger rail routes of less than 750 miles in length, which the federal government ceased providing financial support for under the Passenger Rail and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA). There are no state-supported routes operating in New Mexico.

The seven Amtrak stations in New Mexico have varying levels of facilities. Two stations – Raton and Albuquerque – are staffed. Five of the stations were constructed in a Mission Revival architectural style. Four of these are historic structures 100 years old or more; the present Albuquerque station was opened in 2002 as part of the Alvarado Transportation Center after the old ATSF station burned down in the early 1990's. One of the four historic stations, Raton, is on the National Register of Historic Places; and another, Gallup, was a former Harvey House[14].

New Mexico Rail Runner Express (NMRX)

The NMDOT New Mexico Rail Runner Express (Rail Runner) is New Mexico's commuter rail service and is operated by Rio Metro. Inaugurated in 2006, Rail Runner today provides service seven days per week to 15 stations in a 97-mile corridor serving Belen, Los Lunas, Isleta Pueblo, Albuquerque, Sandia Pueblo, Bernalillo, Santo Domingo Pueblo (Kewa), and Santa Fe. Rail Runner operates 26 trains each weekday, 15 trains on Saturday, and nine trains on Sunday. Rail Runner coordinates service with many other agencies that provide bus service, offering passenger connections as far away as Farmington, Questa, and Socorro.

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13 The Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 gave Amtrak the right to operate intercity passenger rail services over tracks of the general railway system operated by the major freight railroads at incremental cost to its new host railroads.
14 Fred Harvey, an Englishman who came to the United States in the 1870s, established restaurants and hotels along rail lines in the Southwest and Midwest where rail passengers could eat and rest before continuing their rail journeys. The Fred Harvey Company hospitality establishments became known simply as Harvey Houses.

Figure 1-5: Rail Runner Express passengers

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

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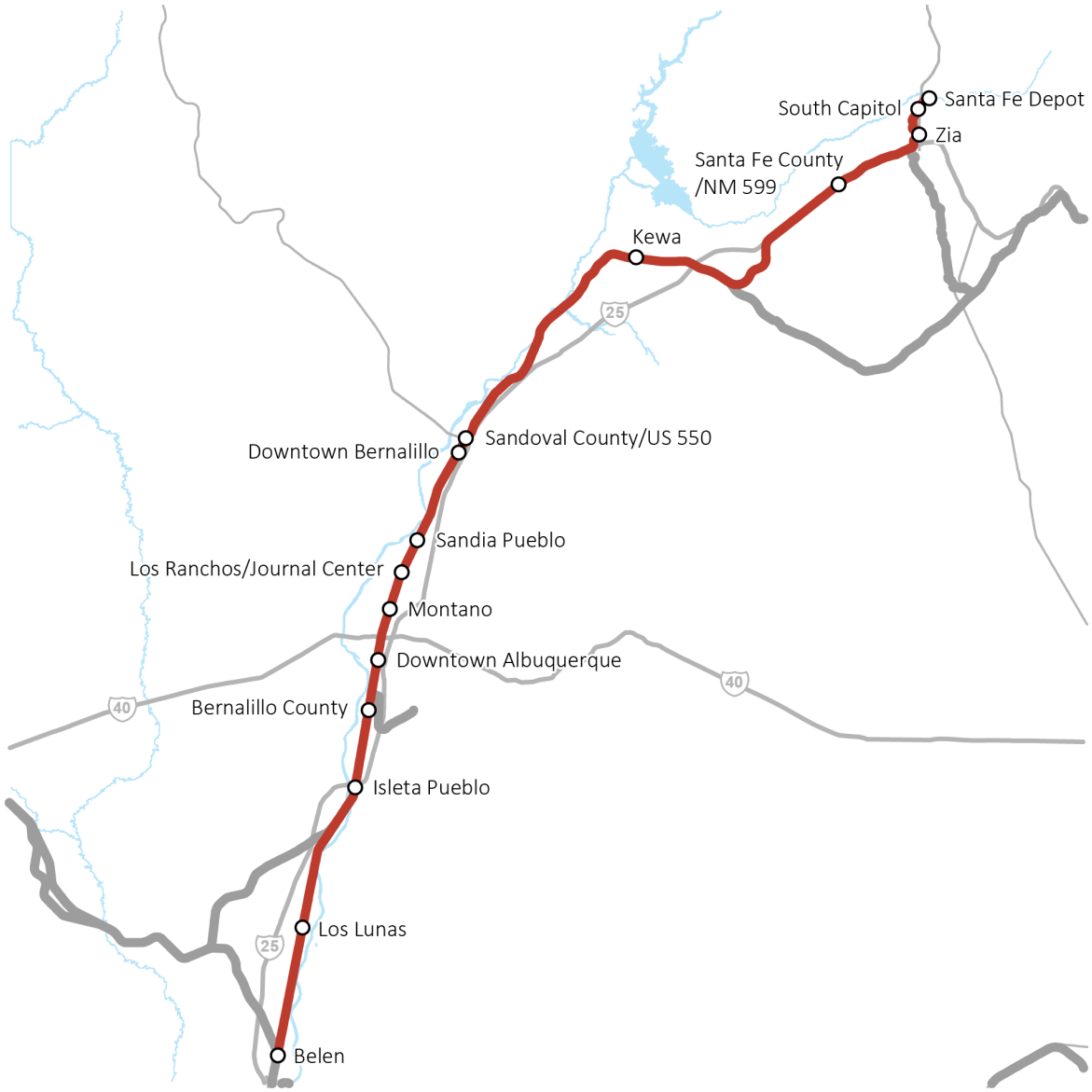
Figure 1-6: Rail Runner Express



Source: NMDOT

Most stations have parking and transit connections. All have ADA-accessible platforms and ramps. The station platforms share similar architectural features: a decorative information kiosk (each kiosk is built around a mast, that bears the Rail Runner icon and a station name), open-air shelter(s), and platforms paved mostly with brick, as in Figure 1-7.

Figure 1-7: Rail Runner Express Station at Belen

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

Rio Metro Regional Transit District (Rio Metro) manages Rail Runner and the NMDOT-owned railroad property used by both Rail Runner and Amtrak. Rio Metro sets Rail Runner's schedules and fares, and dispatches trains on the line it manages. Rio Metro has 23 staff specific to Rail Runner out of nearly 100 total staff supporting the organization. Some Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) staff support both organizations. Rio Metro contracts with a private company, currently Herzog Transit Services, for Rail Runner operations and for railroad right-of-way, track, signal, and equipment maintenance.

Ownership and Development

Rail Runner service was developed in two phases. Phase I operations on right-of-way formerly owned by BNSF began in July 2006 between downtown Albuquerque, Los Ranchos, and the Sandoval County stations; service was extended to Belen in early 2007. In December 2008, Phase 2 service to Santa Fe was inaugurated, utilizing former BNSF and Santa Fe Southern right-of-way as well as 18 miles of new right-of-way, including 12.5 miles within the I-25 median. Additional stations were opened after the start of Santa Fe service, with the 15th and final planned station, Zia Station, opening in April 2017. Figure 1-4 shows the Rail Runner alignment and stations.

Rail Runner is owned by NMDOT--NMDOT owns the railroad infrastructure, equipment, and right-of-way[15] except for 0.7 miles within the Santa Fe Railyard that is owned by the City of Santa Fe and for which NMDOT has a railroad easement. NMDOT executed and manages agreements with each of the tenant railroads on its railroad property. NMDOT entered into an agreement with the Rio Metro Regional Transit District to be its managing agency for Rail Runner and NMRX railroad operations and maintenance. The Rail Runner's right-of-way navigates many different terrain conditions from highway medians to mountainous terrain, as shown in Figure 1-8.

The Rail Runner commuter service managing agency, Rio Metro, was formed after receiving approval from the State Transportation Commission in 2005 under legislation enacted in 2003 that allowed RTDs to be created and amended in 2004 to allow RTDs to collect gross receipts tax (GRT) revenue from their districts to support transit operations. Rio Metro offers bus transit service in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Belen, Bernalillo, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, Bosque Farms, Los Lunas, and Corrales in Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Valencia Counties, in addition to the Rail Runner Express commuter rail service. Rio Metro also contributes to ABQRide, a local transit agency in Albuquerque, which serves some Rail Runner stations.

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15 NMDOT owns and operates 134 route miles between Belen, CP Madrid, and Lamy (98.4 miles); between CP Madrid and Santa Fe (22.3 miles); and between Lamy and Santa Fe (13.5 miles).

Figure 1-8: Rail Runner

Photos taken by Huitt-Zollars.

To facilitate Rail Runner development, NMDOT purchased the BNSF mainline and some industrial spurs between Belen and Lamy as well as the Santa Fe Southern railroad property between Lamy and Santa Fe. BNSF retained a freight easement that provides BNSF the perpetual, exclusive right and obligation to provide rail freight services and supporting activities on this line. To support this retained freight easement, BNSF excluded two freight facilities in Albuquerque from the sale of properties to NMDOT. Santa Fe Southern also retained its rights to provide passenger excursion and freight services between Lamy and Santa Fe.

NMDOT-owned track is divided into three subdivisions, two of which Rail Runner operates on and are managed by Rio Metro. The Albuquerque Subdivision is the former BNSF rail line connecting Belen, Albuquerque, CP Madrid, and Lamy, totaling 98.4 miles. Rail Runner shares this route with BNSF freight trains from Belen to a point south of CP Madrid, and Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* from Isleta to CP Madrid. Between CP Madrid and Lamy, NMDOT owns the track and Rio Metro maintains it, but only Amtrak trains operate on that stretch of rail line. BNSF and Amtrak pay trackage rights fees to NMDOT for use of the NMDOT track. The Santa Fe Subdivision consists of new or reconstructed track built in 2008 for Rail Runner service between CP Madrid and Santa Fe, totaling 22.3 miles. The northern 5.3 miles of the Santa Fe Subdivision is shared with Santa Fe Southern. The third subdivision is the Eldorado Subdivision between Santa Fe and Lamy, a total of 13.5 miles, of which NMDOT owns 13.3 miles and Santa Fe Southern owns the remaining 0.3 miles. This track is managed by the Santa Fe Southern Railway, the only railroad operating here.

Performance Overview

Rail Runner performance is measured by ridership, passenger trips per vehicle hour (PT-VRH), end-station on-time performance, and by measuring the percentage of track miles under speed restrictions. Table 1-9 shows the high and low measures for Rail Runner during SFY2023 and SFY2024. Ridership is generally higher in the summer months and lower in the winter. This is also reflected in the PT-VRH. On-time performance is less correlated with the season and is more sensitive to a wide variety of factors that can include weather events, but also staffing, maintenance, and other schedule factors beyond Rail Runner's control such as freight rail and Amtrak.

Rio Metro completed its Transit Asset Management (TAM) plan in September 2018 and has a SFY23-26 update. The TAM plan identifies performance targets for commuter rail assets – locomotives, passenger cars, track conditions, such as track speed. Rail Runner's top speed is 79mph and increasing it to 90mph would significantly increase maintenance costs. There is generally only one segment of track that can accommodate 90mph, and the benefit to passengers would be less than 5 minutes of time saving. The Albuquerque Subdivision contains approximately a half mile of track under Restricted Speed (train speed cannot exceed 20 mph) in downtown Albuquerque and there is also Restricted Speed for approximately a half mile in the Santa Fe railyard. Increasing track speed through Santa Fe would likely be unfeasible, as it would require significant land acquisitions to realign and soften track curves. For most of the year, there are no temporary speed restrictions on Rail Runner track. Temporary speed restrictions are primarily caused by maintenance occurring on or near the track but are sometimes weather related.

Rio Metro completed construction of two new sidings in 2024: Alameda Siding, a 2000-foot siding north of Albuquerque to help alleviate Amtrak conflicts, and Broadway Siding, a 6,800-foot siding just south of Albuquerque to aid in coordination with BNSF. These projects lay the groundwork for additional Rail Runner service opportunities by reducing conflicts.

Table 1-9: Rail Runner Performance Measures FY2023 and FY2024

Performance Measure		FY2023		FY2024	
	Range	Month	Measure	Month	Measure
Average Weekday Ridership	High	June	1,983	Sept	2,040
	Low	Dec	1,524	Dec	1,743
Average Saturday Ridership	High	Sept	1,367	Jul	1,575
	Low	Dec	869	Jan	877
Average Sunday Ridership	High	Aug	724	July	847
	Low	Feb	465	Dec	534
Passenger Trips / Veh. Hr.	High	Jul	15.9	Sept	15.4
	Low	Dec	11.2	Dec	12.6
On-time Performance	High	Nov	96.38%	Sept	94.94%
	Low	Apr	89.59%	July	82.8%
Source: Rio Metro (2024)					

Ridership

Since the launch of operations in the summer of 2006, Rail Runner's ridership steadily increased, reaching a high of 1,239,805 riders in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2010[16]. Ridership on Rail Runner reached an all-time high in 2009, the first full year of service to Santa Fe, with 1,349,990 riders. In the wake of Rail Runner's success, a number of new passenger rail services in the state have been proposed. Of these, only a commuter rail service linking Las Cruces with El Paso has advanced to a feasibility study, which was completed in 2017. After the initial peak of ridership passed, ridership slowly declined over the next decade. This decline was partially due to a relatively low level of highway congestion and general stability in gas prices, save for a rise during 2011 when gasoline process rose sharply. Throughout the years leading up to 2020, yearly ridership was between 750,000 and 800,000 passengers, down from over 1 million in 2010. Rail Runner schedules remained essentially unchanged during the 2012-2020 period (save for minor revisions when new stations were added) and fares were held constant from 2006-2012 as well.

Rail Runner suspended operations for nearly one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, ridership has recovered to about 80 percent of pre-pandemic levels. Total annual ridership for the service increased from 319,635 in 2022[17] to 593,671 for SFY2024[18], showing good recovery. Rio Metro has added additional weekday trips and recovered the full-service schedule. In 2024, average weekday ridership on the Rail Runner was just under 2,000 per day. Average weekday boardings and alightings at the 15 Rail Runner stations for April 2024 appear in Table 1-10, whereas total ridership by month in SFY 2024 is shown in Table 1-11. Santa Fe Depot, South Capitol, US 550/Sandoval County, and Albuquerque stations have the highest weekday ridership, but on weekends more than half of all trips either are destined for or depart from Santa Fe Depot. Late fall and winter are consistently the periods with the lowest ridership. Sunday ridership was, on average, about 60 percent of Saturday ridership for 2023 and 2024.

16 New Mexico's State Fiscal year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30 every year.
17 https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/transit-agency-profiles/rio-metro-regional-transit-district
18 NMDOT Transit and Rail Division Fact Sheet. January 2025.

Table 1-10: Average Weekday Rail Runner Boardings and Alightings for April 2024

Station	Boardings	Alightings	Total
Santa Fe Depot Station	347	351	698
South Capitol Station	219	222	441
Zia Road Station	61	49	110
SF County/NM 599	147	144	291
Kewa Station	43	45	88
Sandoval 550 Station	211	213	424
Bernalillo Station	15	18	33
Sandia Pueblo	27	28	55
Los Ranchos Station	166	172	338
Montano Station	164	158	322
Albuquerque Station	301	315	616
Intl Sunport Station	17	20	37
Isleta Pueblo Station	29	29	58
Los Lunas Station	70	66	136
Belen Station	79	66	145
Total	**1,896**	**1,896**	**3,792**
Source: Rio Metro			

Table 1-11: Average Weekday and Saturday Ridership

	FY2023 - Weekday	FY2024 - Weekday	FY2023 - Saturday	FY2024 – Saturday
July	1,630	2,023	1,063	1,575
August	1,762	2,028	1,336	1,438
September	1,872	2,040	1,367	1,325
October	1,879	2,170	1,204	1,199
November	1,688	1,878	992	1,135
December	1,524	1,743	869	1,054
January	1,683	1,874	897	877
February	1,839	1,864	1,077	1,007
March	1,914	1,879	1,173	1,080
April	1,807	1,896	1,112	1,004
May	1,877	1,915	1,219	1,154
June	1,983	1,986	1,476	1,322
Annual Avg.	**1,792**	**1,941**	**1,130**	**1,178**
Source: Rio Metro				

Following the completion of PTC at the end of 2020, Rio Metro undertook a study to understand the possibility of increasing the number of trains per day, especially midday. This study identified several siding and infrastructure projects, some of which Rio Metro has moved forward with: more midday and Saturday service, signal and track improvements, CTC implementation in downtown Albuquerque, and completion of the Alameda and Broadway sidings. Rio Metro has also added fare discounts (especially for pass holders) to encourage ridership. Year-over-year ridership has gone up for every quarter since the service restart in 2021.

Connecting Services

Rail Runner serves as a spine for many transportation services in New Mexico, and Regional Transit Districts (RTDs) play a big role in running Rail Runner and the connecting services as shown in Figure 1-9 and .

Table 1-12. More information about RTDs is available in Chapter 2.

Table 1-12: Rail Runner Transit Connections by Station

	ABQ RIDE	Santa Fe Trails	Rio Metro	NCRTD	NM Park & Ride	Casino Shuttle	Other Bus
Santa Fe Depot Station		x		x	x	x	x
South Capitol Station		x		x	x		x
Zia Station							
SF County/NM 599		x		x	x		x
Kewa Station			x			x	
Sandoval 550 Station			x		x	x	x
Bernalillo Station							
Sandia Pueblo						x	
Los Ranchos Station	x		x		x		
Montano Station	x				x		
Albuquerque Station	x		x		x		
Bernalillo County Station	x		x				x
Isleta Pueblo Station			x			x	
Los Lunas Station			x				
Belen Station			x				x
Source: NMDOT Transit and Rail Division's 2025 Commuter Rail Fact Sheet.							

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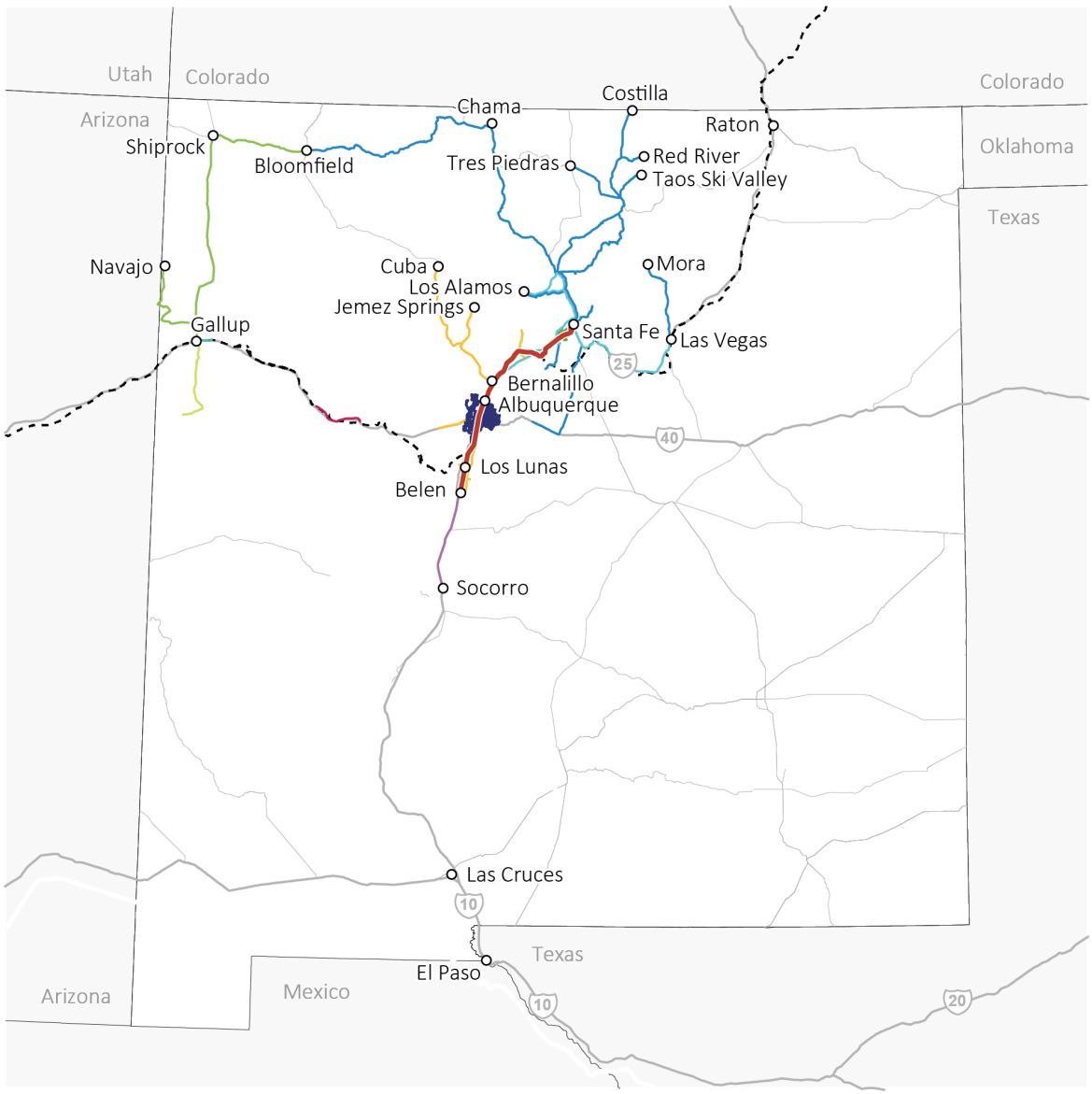
Figure 1-9: Rail Runner and Connecting Services



The North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) encompasses Los Alamos, Taos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe Counties, along with six pueblos. NCRTD operates 26 fixed routes and offers fixed route connections to Rail Runner. These routes primarily run on weekdays and connect with Rail Runner at both South Capitol Station and Santa Fe County/NM 599 Station. During ski season, NCRTD provides service to both Taos Ski Valley and Ski Santa Fe. Rio Metro Regional Transit District (RMRTD or Rio Metro) comprises Sandoval, Bernalillo, and Valencia Counties. In addition to operating the Rail Runner Express commuter train, RMRTD operates commuter bus, fixed-route local service that connects to rail stations, demand-response service in Valencia County and the City of Rio Rancho, and demand taxi service in Bernalillo County. Many of these services also connect to Rail Runner stations. At many stations, Rio Metro offers Dial-a-ride services. In Albuquerque, ABQ RIDE has over 40 routes that are useful from the Alvarado Transportation Center, which is collocated with the Downtown Albuquerque Station, which serve both Amtrak and Rail Runner. These include a route to the Albuquerque International Sunport, a route to City and County buildings, and the frequent ART Red and Green Bus Rapid Transit Lines that serve major corridors and destinations in Albuquerque.

Connections between Rail Runner and intercity rail, bus and air services are available from the Downtown Albuquerque Station. Both Amtrak and intercity bus operators serve the Alvarado Transportation Center directly, and there are frequent shuttles that take air passengers between Alvarado and the Albuquerque International Sunport. Figure 1-10 shows a Rail Runner train in Albuquerque.

Figure 1-10: Rail Runner train and connecting bus service at Alvarado Transportation Center

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

Some specialty services are also available along the Rail Runner route. At Belen, the City of Socorro provides a weekday and Sunday shuttle. Isleta Resort & Casino Shuttle meets every train at Isleta Pueblo Station, 7 days a week. In the past, other casinos have also offered shuttle services connecting to the Rail Runner.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been measured through surveys many times throughout Rail Runner's existence. The surveys include questions on customer satisfaction based on various criteria, such as customer service, staff courtesy, ticket toward staff courtesy, and improving marks for ticket prices and travel time. Other factors include train prices, travel time, service frequency, on-time performance, comfort, parking availability, accessibility, station, train, and bathroom cleanliness, and bicycle capacity on trains and at stations. Customer feedback is favorable for cleanliness and fares as well.

The most recent Rail Runner customer satisfaction survey was completed in 2024, with over 1,000 participants. The survey captured information from people who ride the train regularly, people who have ridden before but no longer ride regularly, and people who have never ridden Rail Runner. Most respondents are employed, working on site or hybrid, or retired. Respondents primarily ride Rail Runner for work or leisure, with some trips for school and tourism. The primary reason people cited for not taking Rail Runner for more trips was that the schedule doesn't fit their needs. Some other reasons include working remotely, COVID-19 concerns, fewer leisure and entertainment options, cost, and safety concerns.

On-time Performance

In 2023 and 2024, Rail Runner trains had high on-time performance records of 96 percent and a low of 82 percent as shown in Table 1-13. This measure has remained relatively consistent over time. OTP is an important measure for Rail Runner because many users have the option of driving if they regularly experience late arrivals. There are also financial incentives and penalties in the operations and maintenance contract with Herzog Transit that are based on the monthly OTP performance.

Table 1-13: Rail Runner Average On-Time Performance

	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Ave.
FY23	91.32%	95.05%	96.12%	96.09%	96.38%	92.10%	94.55%	91.05%	90.55%	89.59%	93.15%	91.58%	93.13%
FY24	82.80%	92.51%	94.94%	92.46%	93.03%	95.32%	92.18%	93.60%	91.69%	90.27%	94.46%	85.25%	91.54%
Source: Rio Metro													

Budget and Funding

The SFY2025 Rio Metro rail budget is $95.0 million in revenues and $78.3 in costs, largely split between operations/maintenance and capital and inclusive of government grants, BNSF and Amtrak gross ton mileage fees, local tax receipts, and fare revenue. The Rail Runner budget includes operations and maintenance (O&M), capital expenditures, and debt service costs for financing for PTC implementation. These costs do not include remaining debt service costs on the bonds issued for the initial development of Rail Runner, which NMDOT pays. O&M costs are budgeted at $36 million, inclusive of the Herzog Transit Services contract. Capital expenditures are budgeted at $41 million, with significant portions covering the capital maintenance program, Centralized Traffic Control improvements, and Phase 1 of a new O&M facility.

Rio Metro's *Budget and Capital Plan FY2025 – FY2031, April 2024* projected Rail Runner's SFY2024 fare box revenue at $1.5 million, amounting to a fairly low farebox recovery rate. Rio Metro keeps fares low as an incentive to increased ridership, despite the negative impacts on the cost recovery ratio.

Rail Runner has three dedicated public financing sources that it relies on for the majority of its operating and recurring capital expenses: a one-sixteenth percent dedicated local Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) for transit collected in the four counties served by Rail Runner ($20 million in SFY 2024); FTA Section 5337

State of Good Repair Grants Program ($14 million in FFY 2024); and Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Funding ($9 million in FFY 2024). Rio Metro used its remaining ARPA funding in 2024. These are the principal recurring funding sources for both commuter rail operations and capital investments. Other significant recurring income sources are the revenues for track usage from BNSF and Amtrak ($2.3 million in FFY 2024) Rio Metro receives from NMDOT, and farebox revenue.

There are limitations on how most funding sources can be used, resulting in Rio Metro historically being unable to fully utilize the FTA funds that it receives due to difficulties in establishing a local match. Some of the major limitations are:

- While FTA Section 5337 State of Good Repair Grants can only be used on the rail lines used by Rail Runner trains, they must be used for either capital maintenance or operating maintenance costs. They are not eligible for train operations or maintenance on the 24-mile segment between Lamy and CP Madrid used only by Amtrak.
- FTA Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Grants can be used for planning as well as capital projects and maintenance costs associated with the Rail Runner route. Section 5307 funding apportioned to urbanized areas with less than 200,000 population, such as Los Lunas, New Mexico, may be used to support train operations. Section 5307 funds are not eligible for use on the 24-mile segment used only by Amtrak.
- GRT funds can only be used for the Rail Runner route but may be used to support operations or maintenance, including as a local match for Federal funds. They are not eligible for use on the 24-mile segment used only by Amtrak.
- BNSF and Amtrak track use fees can only be used to maintain the portions of the railroad used by BNSF and Amtrak, respectively.

With the exception of a portion of the Section 5307 small urban area funding, the only recurring revenues available for Rail Runner operations are GRT and farebox revenues. GRT revenues must also be used as local match requirements for Section 5307 and Section 5337 funds used for maintenance as well as for Federal discretionary grants identified in its Short-Range Plan, which it updates annually. The amount of available GRT is insufficient to cover all available FTA funding, requiring additional steps to match the funding. Rio Metro transfers about $1.2 million annually from GRT revenue it receives to support the non-train side of its operations to its rail operations, and it provides the same amount of Section 5307 funding to its non-rail operations. Rio Metro also annually requests approximately $2 million in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) flexible funding annually to support train operations, freeing up an equivalent amount of GRT funds to use as a local match for federal funds. Recent improvements in the State's revenue forecasts have enabled the legislature to appropriate capital outlay funds that qualify as the local match for federal funds.

Table 1-14: GRT Funding for Rail Runner since 2018

FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025
$13,200,000	$16,700,000	$11,625,000	$15,000,000	$18,000,000	$20,000,000	$23,000,000
Source: Rio Metro						

Rio Metro does not provide funding for capital improvements on the 24-mile Lamy to CP Madrid segment that is used only by Amtrak. NMDOT and Amtrak are the principal non-Federal funding contributors for competitive grant awards that fund these improvements. These awards are part of the *Southwest Chief* Improvement Program, which since 2014 has leveraged federal funding for capital improvements to the *Southwest Chief* on the 625-mile segment connecting Hutchison, Kansas and CP Madrid where there is little or no freight traffic.

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (C&TS)

The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad operates on 64 miles of narrow-gauge track between Antonito, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico from late May until October. The historic railway service provides an opportunity for tourists to experience scenic rides in open-air gondolas pulled by steam locomotives built early in the last century. In 2012, the U.S. National Park Service designated the C&TS a National Historic Landmark[19]. The railroad's right-of-way traverses the state line numerous times, with approximately 32 miles of track located in each state.

Figure 1-11: Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

The San Juan Line, constructed in 1880-1881 by the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, was established to serve mining camps in the San Juan Mountains. This line was ultimately abandoned in 1969. In 1970, the segments running from Chama to Antonito were acquired by the states of New Mexico and Colorado for the proposed use as a passenger excursion service operation. A separate segment between Durango and Silverton, Colorado was also preserved and became a heritage railroad–the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. Oversight of the C&TS Railroad is managed by the bi-state agency Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission. The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad endeavors to offer visitors an authentic experience reflective of operations of the narrow-gauge San Juan Line as it was run during the early part of the 20th century.

19 Per the National Park Service website (accessed 2017), National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. Today, just over 2,500 historic places bear this national distinction. (https://www.nps.gov/nhl).

The railroad operates scheduled passenger excursions from late May through late October, Tuesday through Sunday, and it also operates special excursions during other months throughout year. It has gained recognition for its extensive collections of historic steam locomotives, all of which originally served on the San Juan Line. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the railroad attracted over 40,000 passengers annually from around the world. In 2024, a total of 38,500 riders were recorded, and C&TS is actively diversifying the types of experiences and offerings to regain and exceed the previous ridership levels.

C&TS operates five active steam locomotives, which undergo comprehensive boiler inspections every ten years and routine maintenance of running gear annually. Major inspections of the running gear are conducted every 15 years. Occasionally, the railroad will host historic 'guest' steam locomotives from other organizations. The railroad has 40 full-time employees, many of whom are dedicated to maintenance, and the staff expands to a total of nearly 100 during the April-October busy season. The fleet contains 21 passenger cars, three of which have capabilities to ramp and lift mobility devices into the car. Once in the train car, all cars are accessible.

C&TS is supported by a non-profit organization, Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc. The organization has about 2,000 members globally. As volunteers, the Friends manage the preservation, interpretation, museum, and restoration efforts of the railroad. In particular, the Friends assume the responsibility for preserving the railroad's historic assets that are not used in regular tourist train operations and interpreting the railroad to the general public.

Funding

The operating expenses of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad are predominately funded through ticket and merchandise sales. However, the financing of substantial and recurring capital expenses such as upgrades to the 64-mile route and equipment rehabilitation, requires financial support from the states of New Mexico and Colorado. In recent years, the annual contributions from both states have approximated $2 million to address these expenses. New Mexico's contributions are contingent upon annual appropriations by the Legislature.

Santa Fe Southern: Sky Railway Excursion Service

The Santa Fe Southern Railway (SFS), operating as Sky Railway, is an independent railroad that provides passenger excursion rail services from Santa Fe and Lamy. As illustrated in Figure 1-12, Sky Railway trains can be seen on the left side of Santa Fe Depot adjacent to Rail Runner trains. SFS operates 18 miles between Lamy and Santa Fe, offering live music, performances, food, and drink in historic passenger cars. SFS was bought by new owners in 2020 who resumed passenger operations in December 2021 that had been suspended in 2014, adopting the Sky Railway name. While SFS is also a Class III freight railroad, it has not resumed freight operations. More information regarding SFS's freight services is provided later in this chapter.

Figure 1-12: Santa Fe Depot Station with SFS and NMRX services

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

SFS purchased the rail line between Lamy and Santa Fe from Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railway in 1992. In 2005, it sold most of this line to NMDOT to facilitate the development of New Mexico Rail Runner Express while retaining freight and operating rights. The line interchanges with BNSF freight service and Amtrak at Lamy. SFS operates via trackage rights, under an agreement with NMDOT, on track shared with Rail Runner and managed by Rio Metro (4.3 miles), and on the remaining 13.5 miles of track it maintains itself between Santa Fe and 0.3 miles west of Lamy, and on its own track the remaining 0.3 miles to Lamy. SFS also has trackage rights on a short section of the Albuquerque Subdivision between East and West Lamy siding switches on the main track and siding to allow for interchanges with BNSF and Amtrak. SFS locomotives were built before event recorders were required on new and rebuilt locomotives; the locomotives are limited to maximum speeds of 30 mph, even on the Santa Fe Subdivision where track class allows trains to operate up to 35 mph. The Class I track from CP Hondo to Lamy is limited to 15 mph.

SFS, under the Sky Railway name, has been running excursion services since 2021 and have had over 75,000 people enjoy their tours since the service began. Their excursion trips are offered year-round, Thursdays through Sundays, and charter excursions can be any day of the week. Schedules for their trips vary by time of year but are posted in advance for ticket sales. All SFS track from Santa Fe to Lamy sees regular passenger excursion service, with two trains per day regularly run on Saturdays and Sundays and one train per day on Fridays during the busy season (June – December). During the holiday season SFS

sometimes runs five trains a day from Lamy. All excursions are entertainment-based rather than destination based, so almost all are round-trip with the exception of an occasional one-way charter. The most popular trips are the Sunset and Stargaze trips. SFS doesn't typically go all the way to Lamy on their trips out of Santa Fe because some people may not want to spend 4 hours on a train. Instead, SFS provides train rides that are 2 hours. In 2024, their yearly ridership was 28,852 and has increased every year. It now compares very well to what SFS was carrying prior to the NMRX construction.

Santa Fe Southern employs 25 people. 11 are part-time and work on board the train as servers, concierges, A/V techs, and front desk customer service. 11 people work in train operations, with 8 working mostly full-time, and 3 are salaried, full-time managers. They do not have any seasonal employees. Ticket fares generally cover operating costs, and there are times when the railway runs a deficit, especially if there are major unforeseen costs. Some of the major costs have been that their engines and passenger cars are over 70 years old, and their 85 lb. track is also old. They have four passenger coaches, two locomotives, two cabooses (one inactive), three flat cars for passengers (one inactive), one flat car for rail projects, two stainless steel cars (one passenger lounge and one sleeper), and two boxcars. They have supplemented their revenue streams from movie and television productions using their equipment for filming such as the film *Oppenheimer*.

Prior to 2018, SFS also moved private passenger cars, known as "Private Varnish" between Lamy and Santa Fe, being removed and added to Amtrak trains at Lamy. These Private Varnish movements brought wealthy tourists to Santa Fe multiple times per year and were a profitable revenue source for SFS. However, in 2018 Amtrak changed its policy on where it would exchange passenger cars, eliminating mid-route stations where Amtrak did not have recovery time built into its schedule.

New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society (NMHR)

The New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society, doing business as New Mexico Heritage Rail, is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that has spent 20 years restoring the former Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe (ATSF) 2926; a 2900-class, 4-8-4 "Northern" steam locomotive built in 1944 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. The 2926 is one of the last steam locomotives built for the ATSF and is the only operating 2900-class locomotive in the United States. The 2926 locomotive is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is recognized by the state's legislature as the Official Steam Locomotive of New Mexico. NMHR runs tours of the locomotive regularly and operates on a 3-mile stretch of NMDOT's NMRX under a joint use agreement with NMDOT. NMDOT and NMHR recently amended the joint use agreement to expand the locomotive's operating limits north to Bernalillo and south to Los Lunas.

NMHR was formed in 1999 after the ATSF donated the locomotive to the City of Albuquerque in 1956. Throughout the first ten years of the society, the group worked on environmental and structural remediation, boiler evaluation, and documentation. The mechanical overhaul began in 2011 and fully rebuilt the driving wheels, air systems, tender, and frame, as well as reassembly of critical mechanical and electrical components. Throughout the last ten years, the NMHR has pushed toward operational readiness through the installation of FRA-compliant equipment and testing apparatus.

NMHR is focused on establishing PTC compliance and working toward further agreements to eventually operate passenger tourist services. Passenger services would run northward from Albuquerque and require a turnaround track able to accommodate the locomotive's long wheelbase.

1.2.2 Freight Rail Services

Railroads have contributed to the development of New Mexico's economy since the first rail line was extended into New Mexico, then a territory, in 1878. Railroads built and maintained facilities for servicing and repairing trains and in many cases built the communities for the workers who staffed those facilities. Railroads also encouraged local development through land grants that generated rail freight to help pay for the costs of extending the rail lines. Since the second transcontinental rail link was completed at Deming, New Mexico in 1881, the State's rail network has also been a major carrier of transcontinental rail passenger and freight movements. Most of the local rail lines in New Mexico were built to serve New Mexico's extraction industries, a purpose that still holds today.

New Mexico's rail lines are an important part of the national rail system, critical for the movement of goods. The Rocky Mountains are a formidable barrier to travel between the West Coast of the United States and the rest of the country, and railroad builders, like the wagon trails before them, sought routes that avoided the steepest ascents and the highest elevations. The topography of New Mexico offered railroad builders a route that avoided the tallest ranges to the north, and the warmer weather in New Mexico meant that winter snows were less of a threat to railroad builders and operations. Currently, the two largest freight railroads in the United States, the BNSF Railway (BNSF), and the Union Pacific (UP), operate in New Mexico, as well as several other short line railroads.

The majority of the tonnage shipped through the state does not have an origin or destination located in New Mexico. In total, the Class I and III freight railroads carried 146.5 million tons of various commodities to, from, within, and through New Mexico in 2014. 87 percent of this traffic was through traffic, 12 percent was traffic to or from New Mexico, and one percent was intrastate traffic; that is, rail traffic having an origin and a destination within the state. The vast majority of New Mexico rail traffic, in terms of tonnage and value, travels more than 500 miles. The largest classification of rail-borne commodities in New Mexico is Freight All Kinds, commonly handled in intermodal freight service (containers and trailers). Two other major commodity groupings are Food and Kindred Products, and Coal.

There are many rail facilities and interchanges for both freight rail and passenger rail in New Mexico. Freight rail facilities include switching yards, intermodal facilities, and transload facilities. Facilities considered major by Class III railroads or local communities may not be considered major facilities by Class I railroads, even when used by both.

Class I Overview

The two Class I railroads in New Mexico are BNSF and UP, shown in **Figure 1-13.** The BNSF principal main lines include its east-west BNSF Southern Transcon through Belen and the central tier of the state and the El Paso line between Belen and El Paso. The UP lines include the Sunset Route through Lordsburg, Deming, and El Paso and the Golden State Route from El Paso and through Vaughn, Santa Rosa and Tucumcari.[20] Besides serving New Mexico shippers and interchanging traffic with New Mexico short lines, BNSF and UP provide long-haul rail services linking Pacific Coast ports and large urban centers with Midwest and Gulf Coast markets. There is also some long-haul freight movement to/from the Mexican state of Chihuahua that passes through New Mexico.

Class I Local rail service is concentrated, for the most part, in Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and along the Carlsbad Subdivision (in particular, communities near its southern end (Roswell, Artesia, Carlsbad, Loving).

20 Union Pacific, Union Pacific in New Mexico, 2020, https://www.up.com/cs/groups/public/@uprr/@corprel/documents/up_pdf_nativedocs/pdf_new_mexico_usguide.pdf.

Albuquerque and the surrounding region are served by a BNSF intermodal facility and new automobile distribution facility in Albuquerque and a UP new automobile distribution facility in Santa Rosa. The Las Cruces area is served by a UP intermodal facility in Santa Teresa and a BNSF intermodal facility in El Paso, just across the state line. The Santa Teresa intermodal terminal opened in 2014[21], and has become a catalyst for additional economic development, including warehouses, trucking, and logistical distribution centers.

Class I carriers BNSF and UP conduct large-scale maintenance operations on their main lines in New Mexico.

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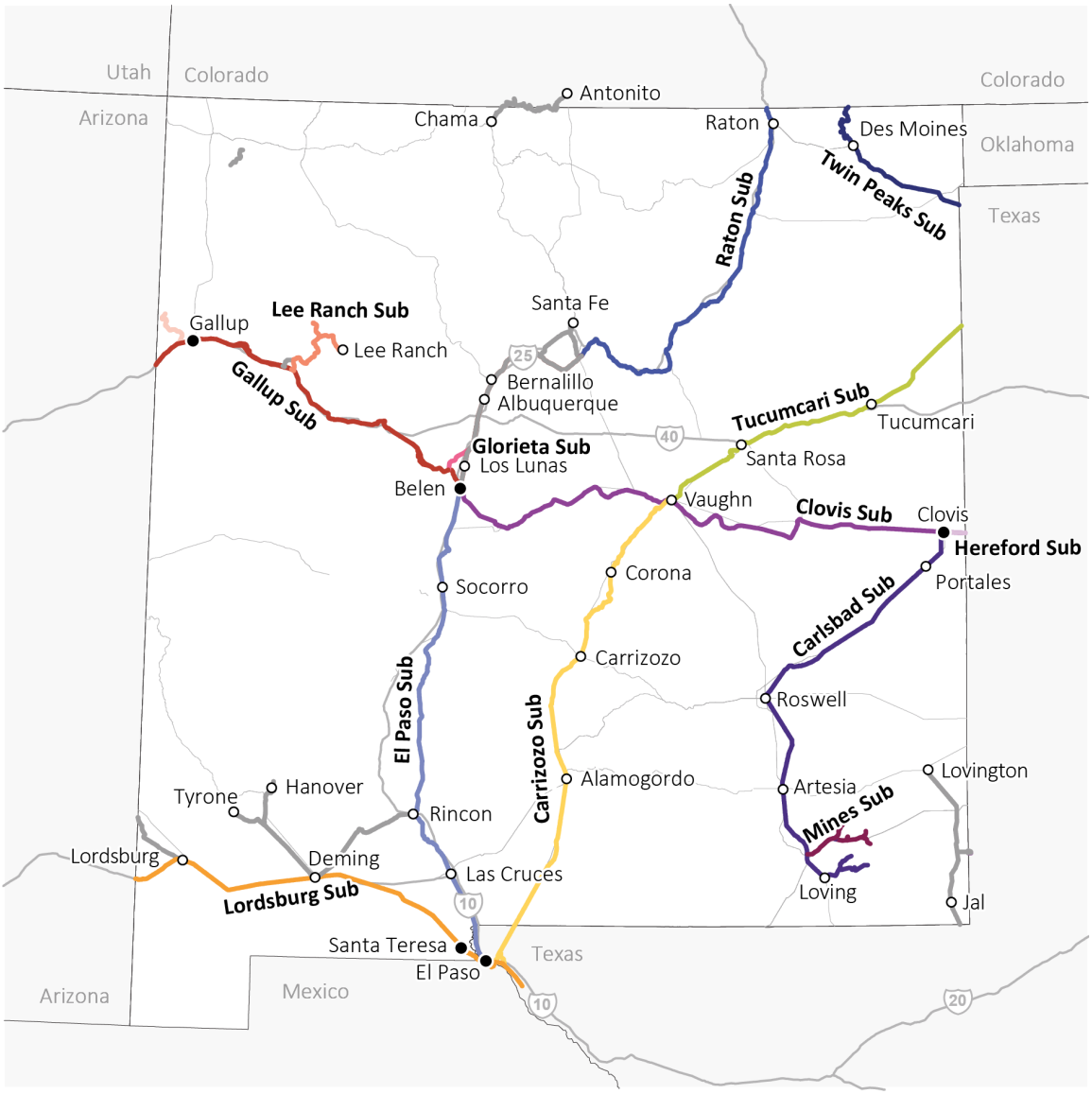
21 https://www.up.com/customers/announcements/intermodal/domesticterminals/IM2014-72.html

Figure 1-13: BNSF and UP Subdivisions in New Mexico



Legend

- BNSF Defiance Sub
- BNSF Gallup Sub
- BNSF Lee Ranch Sub
- BNSF Glorieta Sub
- BNSF Hereford Sub
- BNSF Clovis Sub
- BNSF Carlsbad Sub
- BNSF Mines Sub
- BNSF Raton Sub
- BNSF Twin Peaks Sub
- BNSF El Paso Sub
- Other Railroads
- UP Tucumcari Sub
- UP Carrizozo Sub
- UP Lordsburg Sub
- Stations along rail lines
- Major Yard
- Freeways
- Major Roadways
- State Boundaries
- New Mexico State

1" = 70 miles

0 | 35 | 70 | 140 mi

N

Source: NMDOT

BNSF Railway

BNSF Railway was created by the merger of the Burlington Northern Railroad (BNSF) and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway (ATSF) in 1996, following the holding companies' merger in 1995. ATSF built the first railroad in New Mexico when the rail line was extended south from Colorado into New Mexico over Raton Pass in 1878. Today, BNSF has the largest presence of any railroad in New Mexico, owning 1,125 route-miles of track, and having trackage rights over an additional 511 miles.

One of BNSF's major lines, the Southern Transcon (shown in Figure 1-14), connects Chicago, Illinois, with Los Angeles, California (with connecting lines to Phoenix, Northern California, Texas and the Southeast). This line passes through the center of New Mexico (Clovis, Fort Sumner, Vaughn, Willard, Abo Canyon, Belen, Grants, and Gallup). The Transcon sees between 64 and 69 trains per day. A BNSF main line connecting Belen with El Paso and the international port of entry to Juárez, Mexico feeds into the Southern Transcon. Freight on the Southern Transcon also reaches Albuquerque using trackage rights on the NMDOT line used by the Rail Runner.

Figure 1-14: BNSF Southern Transcon at the Continental Divide

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

Another BNSF main line, connecting the Powder River Basin and power plants in Texas, passes through the northeastern corner of New Mexico (Folsom, Des Moines, and Clayton). A fourth BNSF main line connects the BNSF main line at Clovis with potash mines, salt mines, and Permian Basin oil/gas fields in southeastern New Mexico (Carlsbad, Loving).

The Raton Line, a combination of the Glorieta and Raton Subdivisions, is the original ATSF transcontinental main line. It was bypassed in 1908 by a less mountainous line from Belen to Kansas via Amarillo and Clovis, NM, although construction activities began in 1902. Some through-freight trains continued to use Raton, but the last operated around 2010. BNSF currently hauls no freight on the line north of CP Madrid, leaving over 200 miles of line that carries only Amtrak trains. Figure 1-15 shows track conditions on part of the Raton Subdivision, including the historic semaphore signal. It was built to mainline standards, but much has not been modernized. The CP Madrid to Trinidad line is the last mainline line in the United States still equipped with semaphore signals. A group of semaphore signals were removed between CP Madrid and Lamy on the NMRX portion of the Raton line when that line was recently upgraded with CTC signaling. BNSF has been gradually replacing its semaphore signals between Lamy and Trinidad as well.

Figure 1-15: Raton Subdivision, showing historic semaphore signal

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

In 2023, BNSF had 66,720 carloads originating in New Mexico and 58,694 carloads terminating within the state, with a total of 3,615,952 of carloads handled within the state. In 2023, there were 1,332 BNSF employees in New Mexico with a payroll of $147,897,668.

BNSF's primary deliveries to New Mexico consist of oilfield supplies, plastics, fertilizer, food products, building materials, finished automobiles, consumer products, cement, and petroleum chemical products. BNSF transports coal, cement, copper, potash, perlite, petroleum products, agricultural products, and

gypsum from New Mexico. BNSF also transports grain, flour, sugar, finished automobiles, auto parts, machinery, produce, consumer goods, chemicals, cement, petroleum products, building materials, plastics, windmill parts, military equipment, electronics coil steel, and other steel products through New Mexico.

Subdivisions

Table 1-15 shows the BNSF subdivisions, or specifically designated line segments, in New Mexico.

Table 1-15: BNSF Subdivisions in New Mexico

Subdivision	Begin Station	End Station	Miles in New Mexico
Gallup Subdivision	Belen, NM	Winslow, AZ	176.1
Clovis Subdivision	Clovis, NM	Belen, NM	241.9
Hereford Subdivision	Amarillo, TX	Clovis, NM	8.4
El Paso Subdivision	Belen, NM	El Paso, TX	201.8
Twin Peaks Subdivision	Trinidad, CO	Texas State Line west of Texline, TX.	83.3
Glorieta Subdivision	Las Vegas, NM	Dalies, NM	78.7
Raton Subdivision	La Junta, CO	Las Vegas, NM	118.2
Carlsbad Subdivision	Clovis, NM	Loving, NM	195.0
Mines Subdivision	Carlsbad, NM	Intrepid Junction, NM	25
Lee Ranch Subdivision	West Baca, NM	Lee Ranch, NM	49.4
Defiance Subdivision	Defiance, NM	Carbon Junction	3.0
Source: NMDOT Note: Glorieta Subdivision mileage excludes 81 miles that is now part of the NMRX Albuquerque Subdivision.			

- The Gallup Subdivision, part of the Southern Transcon, connects Belen with Winslow, Arizona, over a distance of 267 miles. Within New Mexico, the Gallup Subdivision includes 166 miles of double-track main line and 10 miles of triple-track mainline. This is a very heavily travelled main line, carrying 153 million gross tons of freight in 2023, in addition to hosting Amtrak's Southwest Chief west of Dalies. Operation over the Class 5 track[22] is by a Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) system[23]. The maximum freight train speed is 70 mph; the maximum passenger train speed is 90 mph, and the tracks are equipped with PTC. Major rail yards serving this subdivision are located in Gallup and Belen.
- The Clovis Subdivision, part of the Southern Transcon, connects Belen and Clovis, a distance of 241.9 miles, all in New Mexico on a fully double-tracked line. Operations are controlled by CTC and the maximum authorized freight speed on this Class 5 track is 70 mph. These tracks are also equipped with PTC. The major freight rail yards are located at Belen and Clovis. Traffic density in 2023 was 161 MGT.

22. The FRA designates railroad trackage by class. There are six track classes for railroads in New Mexico. Each has its own standards for track maintenance and maximum allowable speeds for passenger and freight trains. For example, Class 4 track has a maximum operating speed for passenger trains of 80 mph and 60 mph for freight trains. The lowest designation is Excepted Track, with a maximum operating speed for all trains of 10 mph. The highest is Class 5, which has a maximum operating speed for passenger trains of 90 mph and 80 mph for freight trains.
23. CTC is a train control system whereby a dispatcher in a remote location moves trains across track segments by instructions transmitted by wayside signals, remote controlled switches, radio, and PTC computer displays, where equipped.

- The Hereford Subdivision, part of the Southern Transcon, connects Clovis with Texico, on the Texas state line, a distance of 8.4 miles of double-tracked main line. The Hereford Sub continues across the state line to Amarillo, and also connects to the Slaton Subdivision that leads to Houston/Galveston. The line is controlled by CTC and consists of Class 5 track with PTC and a maximum freight speed of 70 mph. The major New Mexico yard serving this subdivision is at Clovis. Traffic density in 2023 was 174 MGT.
- The El Paso Subdivision extends from Belen to El Paso, Texas, a distance of 221 miles. Of this, 201.8 miles of the single-track line are within New Mexico. Operational authority is Track Warrant Control (TWC). The Class 4 track has a maximum authorized freight speed of 49 mph, is unsignaled, and does not have PTC. Approximately four to eight freight trains per day operate on the line, carrying primarily intermodal, potash, perlite, chemicals, building materials, and grain. New Mexico railyards serving this subdivision are located at Belen and Rincon. Traffic density in 2023 was 14 MGT.
- Twin Peaks Subdivision connects Texline, Texas, and Trinidad, Colorado, a distance of 139 miles, and passes through Clayton and Des Moines in New Mexico. Of the subdivision total, 83.3 miles are in New Mexico. The single-track line is Class 4, and the maximum authorized freight speed is 50 mph. The commodity carried on the line is primarily coal along with intermodal. Traffic density in 2023 was 11 MGT.
- The Glorieta Subdivision connects Las Vegas with Dalies, a distance of 170 miles. A portion of the right-of-way between Lamy and Isleta Junction is owned by NMDOT, and BNSF owns the remaining 78.7 miles in two disconnected segments. This Class 4 track has a maximum authorized freight speed of 55 mph, and the maximum authorized passenger train speed is 79 mph. There is PTC between Isleta Junction and Dalies. Operational authority is by TWC between Las Vegas and Rowe, and by CTC between Rowe and Lamy as well as Isleta to Dalies. BNSF's portion of the line handles Amtrak's Southwest Chief between Las Vegas and Lamy and had a traffic density in 2023 of less than 1 MGT.
- The Raton Subdivision connects La Junta, Colorado, and Las Vegas, a distance of 215 miles; 118.2 miles are within New Mexico. The Class 4 track has a maximum train speed of 79 mph. Between the Colorado State Line and Springer, trains operate by CTC. Between Springer and Las Vegas, trains operate by TWC with Automatic Block Signaling (ABS). This line does not have PTC and does not carry any freight. Handling only Amtrak's Southwest Chief within New Mexico, the line had a traffic density in 2023 of less than 1 MGT.
- The Carlsbad Subdivision connects Clovis and Loving, a distance of 195 miles. The primary commodities hauled are potash, salt, oilfield supplies, grain, and crude oil. There is one main track, and trains are operated by TWC. There is no PTC on this line. Traffic density in 2023 was 6 MGT.
- The Lee Ranch Subdivision is a 49.4-mile branch line connecting the El Segundo coal mine in northwest New Mexico with the Gallup Subdivision at West Baca. The single-track branch line has a maximum authorized freight train speed of 49 mph. The track is owned by BNSF and leased out, operated under TWC authority. The branch line can carry 286,000-pound gross weight railcars. Traffic density in 2016 was 32 million gross tons (MGT). The line also serves the Lee Ranch coal mine, but it is currently idled. Escalante-Western Railway operated a 3.2-mile spur connecting to the Lee Ranch subdivision between Escalante Junction and Lee Ranch Mine but ceased operations in 2020 when the power plant shut down.
- The Defiance Subdivision is a 14.5-mile branch line that originally extended from Defiance to the McKinley Mine near Tse Bonito. The mine closed in 2006, and the final three miles of the line have been abandoned. The active track ends at the Gallup Energy Logistics Park and is currently being used to store intermodal cars as well as haul coal mined in Colorado and trucked to a transload

site as the Energy Park. The track is controlled under TWC authority. The maximum speed for freight trains is 25 mph. Traffic density in 2023 is not available.

- The Carrizozo Subdivision from El Paso to Vaughn is owned by UP, but BNSF has trackage rights. It uses the track only occasionally.

BNSF sold its track between Belen and Lamy to NMDOT in 2006 and 2007 to facilitate the development of the New Mexico Rail Runner Express. BNSF retained a perpetual, exclusive, assignable easement in the rail corridor granting BNSF the perpetual, exclusive right and obligation to provide rail freight services and supporting activities on this line. To support this retained freight easement, BNSF excluded two freight facilities in Albuquerque from the sale of properties to NMDOT.

Facilities and Industrial Parks

In order to assist companies looking for rail-connected locations BNSF Railway certifies facilities like industrial parks, transload facilities, and inland ports along its routes to ensure that these facilities meet railroad and shipper needs. According to BNSF's website, "BNSF's Site Certification Program identifies optimal rail-served sites and conducts in-depth reviews of ten economic development criteria to determine if the site meets BNSF's stringent readiness standards, which are intended to minimize development risks customers may face. BNSF certification means customers will receive an inventory of sites on BNSF's network that have undergone a rigorous review to confirm they are shovel-ready for development.[24]"

There are three BNSF certified sites in the state: Central New Mexico Rail Park, Clovis Industrial Park, and Gallup Energy Logistics Park. BNSF has rail yards in Albuquerque, Belen, Clovis, Gallup, and Carlsbad. BNSF has intermodal facilities in Albuquerque. Albuquerque is the location of one of BNSF's automobile distribution facilities. BNSF's facilities in El Paso, Texas, serve its trains transiting the El Paso Subdivision.

Interchanges

The only active interchange in New Mexico where BNSF transfers railcars to and from another railroad is with the Southwestern Railroad at Rincon on the El Paso Subdivision. BNSF and UP also have an interchange track in Vaughn, but it is typically only used for temporary detours from trains of one railroad over to the other railroad due to a track blockage on one of the lines caused by a derailment or construction project. Before 2010, BNSF and Santa Fe Southern interchanged cars at Lamy, but there is currently no freight on the Santa Fe Southern or on the connecting BNSF line.

Union Pacific Railroad

Union Pacific Railroad established its presence in New Mexico in 1996 when UP purchased the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP). SP constructed a railroad line eastward from Los Angeles reaching Lordsburg in 1880, and Deming in 1881, where it met the ATSF Railway to complete the second transcontinental rail connection before continuing east to El Paso and, ultimately, New Orleans in 1883. In 1905, the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad acquired the route from El Paso northward through New Mexico to connect with the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad (CRI&P) at Santa Rosa, known as the Golden State Route. Subsequently, Southern Pacific absorbed the El Paso & Southwestern and later the CRI&P's line east of Santa Rosa. Today, UP owns 532 route miles in New Mexico. In 2024, UP had 40,751 carloads originating in New Mexico and 43,793 carloads terminating in the state.

24 https://www.bnsf.com/ship-with-bnsf/rail-development/certified-sites.html

The Union Pacific's Sunset Route, connecting Los Angeles, California, and El Paso, Texas, and points east, and UP's Golden State Route (El Paso-Carrizozo-Vaughn-Santa Rosa-Tucumcari-Kansas City), carry consumer goods, finished automobiles, automotive parts, steel, building materials, electronics, military equipment, food products, fabricated metals, plastics, produce, cement, chemicals, grain, flour, sugar, precision machinery, windmill turbine parts, and agricultural chemicals. UP's Golden State Route, seen in Figure 1-16, connects with the Sunset Route at El Paso.

Figure 1-16: Union Pacific's Golden State Route near Santa Rosa

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

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Subdivisions

Table 1-16 shows the Union Pacific subdivisions in New Mexico.

Table 1-16: UP Subdivisions in New Mexico

Subdivision	Begin Station	End Station	Miles in New Mexico
Lordsburg Subdivision	Tucson, AZ	El Paso, TX	167.9
Carrizozo Subdivision	El Paso, TX	Vaughn, NM	210.6
Tucumcari Subdivision	Vaughn, NM	Dalhart, TX	153.1
Source: NMDOT			

- The Lordsburg Subdivision connects Tucson, Arizona, and El Paso, passing through Steins, Lordsburg, and Deming in New Mexico. The line is a high-capacity route linking Southern California with the Gulf Coast and other Southeast markets. The line hosts the thrice weekly Amtrak Sunset Limited. The maximum allowable speed for freight trains is 70 mph and 79 mph for passenger trains. Trains are controlled by CTC and PTC.
- The Carrizozo Subdivision links El Paso, Texas, with Vaughn. The subdivision, along with the Tucumcari Subdivision, connects to the Lordsburg Subdivision to carry traffic between Southern California and the Midwest. The maximum allowable speed is 70 mph. Trains are controlled by CTC, and the line is equipped with PTC.
- The Tucumcari Subdivision links Vaughn with Dalhart, Texas and the Midwest. Maximum allowable speed is 70 mph. Trains are controlled by CTC, and the line is equipped with PTC.
- The Twin Peaks Subdivision from Texline, TX to Trinidad, CO is owned by BNSF, but UP has trackage rights and operates on it regularly.

Facilities and Industrial Parks

Union Pacific has railyards in Lordsburg, Deming, Santa Teresa, and Vaughn. UP's facilities in El Paso, Texas, serve its trains transiting New Mexico. UP directs shippers to approved industrial parks through its Focus Site network, including the Gateway Rail Park in Santa Teresa, served by Santa Teresa Southern Railroad.

The UP Santa Teresa intermodal yard, opened in 2014, is a major intermodal facility on the UP Sunset Route. The 2,200-acre terminal has the capacity to transload 225,000 containers a year, plus capacity for additional growth. The terminal is strategically located in the middle of the UP Sunset Route and also has connections to Gulf Coast ports and to Mexico. It includes an intermodal ramp and refueling station. The general area around the facility is a center for warehouses, trucking, and logistical distribution.

In late 2019, UP reported that it was pausing construction of its new $550 million Brazos Yard in Robertson County, Texas, and shifting remaining funds to siding extensions along the Sunset Route and for the construction of a Block and Swap Yard in Santa Teresa. The changes are aimed at enhancing UP's operating flexibility[25].

UP also operates the Santa Rosa Automotive Distribution Facility, a new car unloading facility in Santa Rosa.

25 https://www.progressiverailroading.com/union_pacific/news/Union-Pacific-pauses-Brazos-Yard-construction--57402

Interchanges

UP interchanges with the Southwestern Railroad at Deming, the Arizona Eastern Railway at Lordsburg, the Texas & New Mexico Railway at Monahans, Texas, and with the Santa Teresa Southern Railroad at Santa Teresa. As noted above, BNSF and UP have an interchange in Vaughn, but the interchange is typically used to detour trains from one railroad to the other in the event of a track blockage on either of the railroad's line due to a derailment or a construction project.

Class I Railroads and the National Rail Networks

The Class I railroads in New Mexico are part of two national networks: the National Multimodal Freight Network (NMFN) and the National Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET).

The STRACNET is an interconnected and continuous rail line network consisting of over 41,300 miles of track serving 141 military defense sites. It is not intended to be a routing guide, as military cargo may also travel over non-STRACNET lines. In New Mexico, portions of the Class I mainlines are also a part of the 2024 draft National Multimodal Freight Network (NMFN), which was released for public comment and has not been updated at the time of this report.

BNSF, UP and NMRX main lines in New Mexico are part of the National Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET), as designated by the U.S. Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's Transportation Engineering Agency, seen in Figure 1-17. This federal agency oversees STRACNET, which comprises a 32,000-mile interconnected network of rail corridors and associated connector lines most important to national defense. The main lines include:

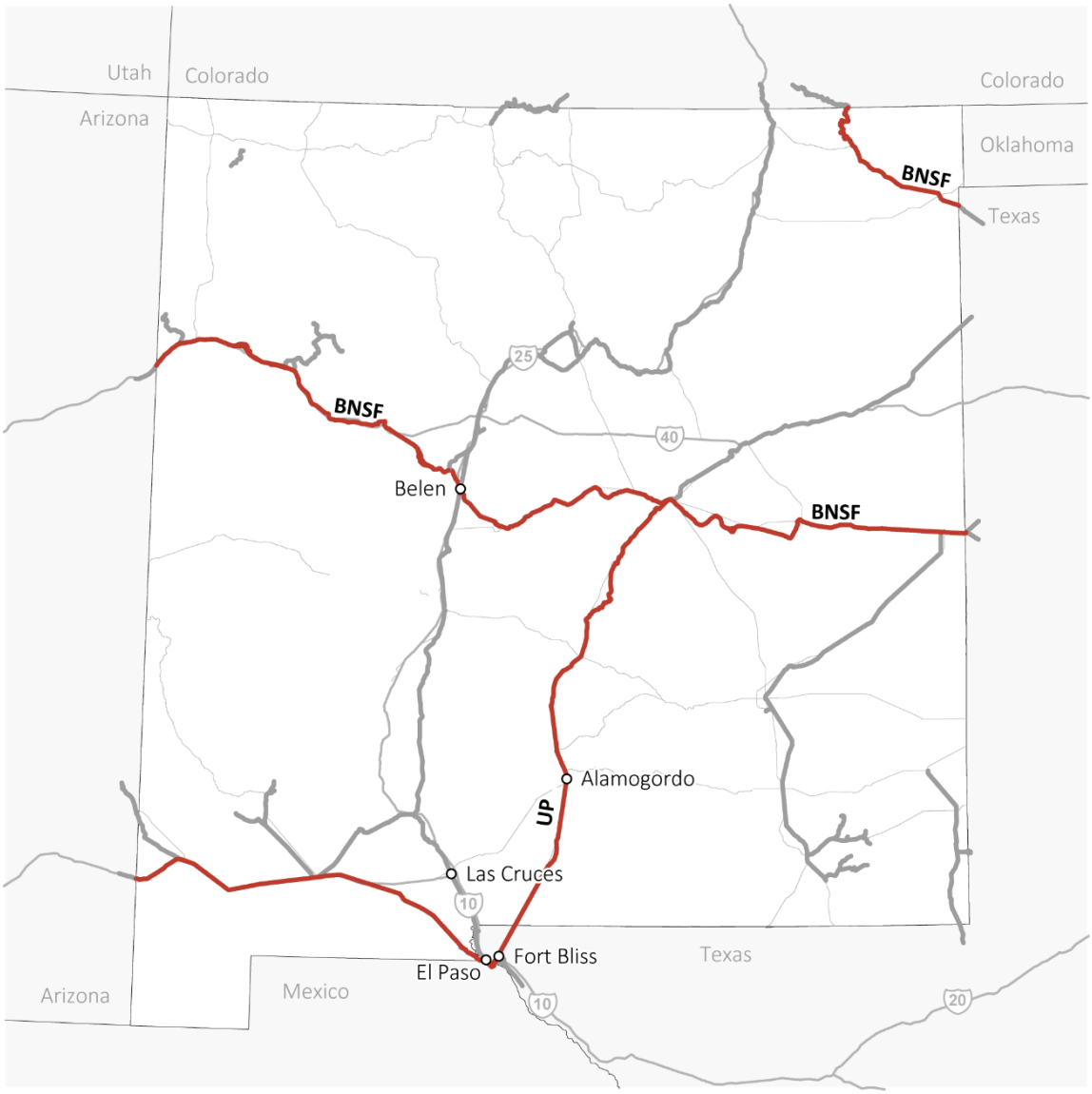
- BNSF's Clovis, Gallup, Hereford, and Twin Peaks Subdivisions
- UP's Carrizozo and Lordsburg Subdivisions

The Transportation Engineering Agency conducts a review of STRACNET every five years to identify issues with readiness. The most recent report was completed in 2023 and was titled "Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET) and Defense Connector Lines". It did not identify any issues with the readiness of the STRACNET segments in New Mexico. In addition to providing main line corridor throughput capability, these lines provide access to major defense contractors, logistics sites, and military facilities critical to national defense.

As per USDOT[26], the Multimodal Freight Office is establishing the National Multimodal Freight Network to assist States in strategically directing resources toward improved system performance for the efficient movement of freight on the Network, to assess freight transportation planning, to assist in the prioritization of Federal investment, and assess and support Federal investments to achieve the national multimodal freight policy goals and the national highway freight program goals.

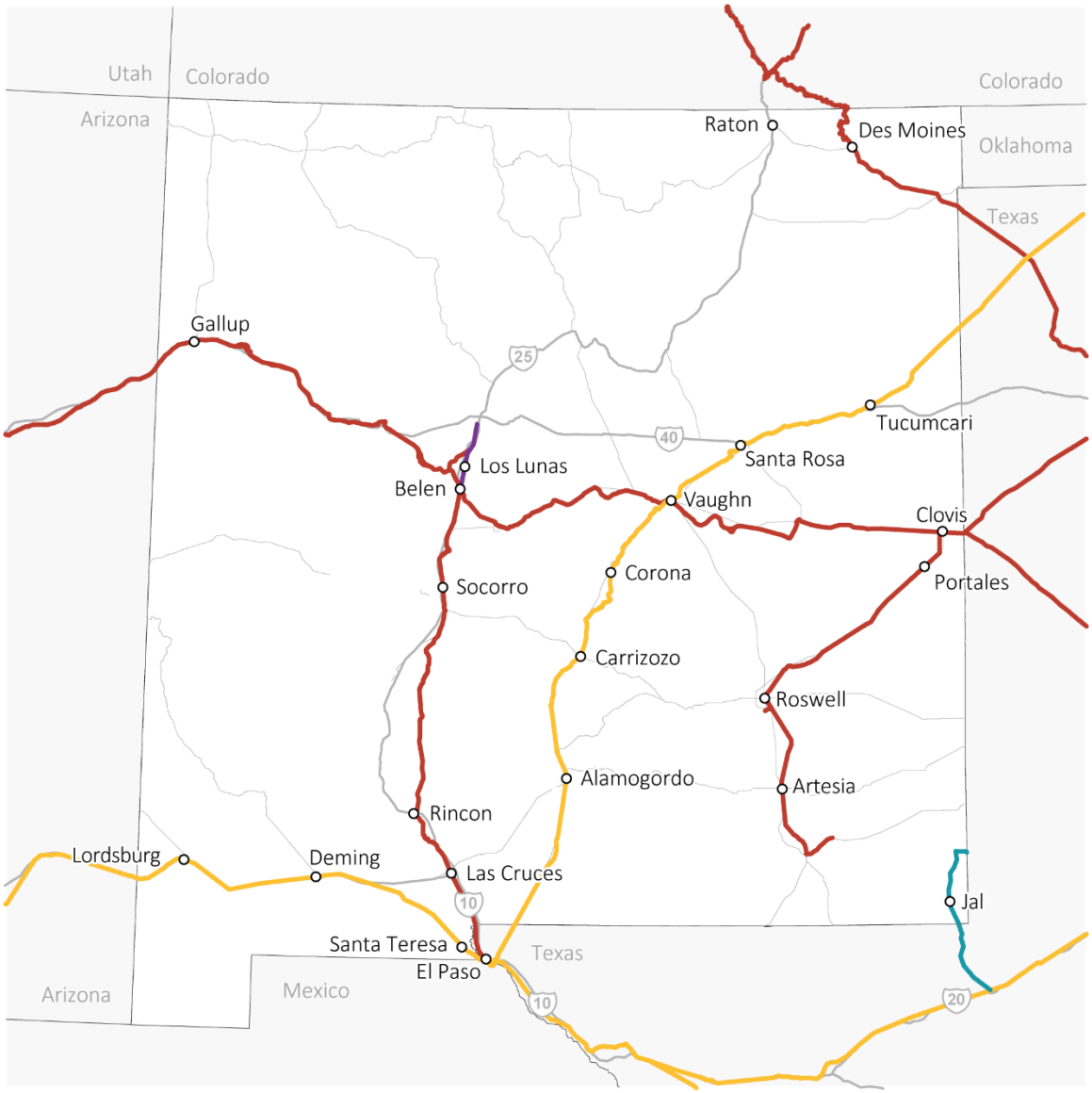
26 https://www.transportation.gov/freight-infrastructure-and-policy/NMFN

Figure 1-17: Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET) Rail Lines in New Mexico



Source: NMDOT

Figure 1-18: National Multimodal Freight Network (NMFN) Rail Lines in New Mexico



Source: NMDOT

Class III Overview

There are five Class III railroads, also known as shortlines or local, switching, and terminal railroads, operating in New Mexico. Like BNSF and UP, these small railroads are common carriers, meaning that they are obligated by federal law to serve all shippers on a non-discriminatory basis. New Mexico shortline railroads continue to serve New Mexico's extraction industries, with the principal industries served today being oil, copper, and potash, in addition to some tourism services. The shortline railroads also form critical connections between industrial parks and local industries and the Class I railroads. However, there are several changes underway in rail's role in New Mexico: serving coal plants has historically been a principal role of freight lines in New Mexico, but due to the decline of coal as an energy resource and the closure of Lee Ranch, San Juan, and parts of the Four Corners coal plants, the need for coal has greatly decreased.

The interchanges for the five Class III and two private railroads in New Mexico are noted below.

- Arizona Eastern Railway – Lordsburg is the interchange point of Arizona Eastern Railway with Union Pacific Railroad.
- Santa Fe Southern Railway – Lamy is the interchange point between Santa Fe Southern and BNSF and Amtrak. Santa Fe Southern formerly interchanged freight with BNSF and private passenger cars with Amtrak at Lamy. Neither are presently interchanging. There is no current freight business, but the railroad is seeking to re-develop freight business. Amtrak no longer offers private car owners the opportunity to connect to the line.
- Santa Teresa Southern Railroad – The Santa Teresa Southern Railroad interchanges with Union Pacific Railroad at Santa Teresa Intermodal Park.
- Southwestern Railroad – Southwestern Railroad interchanges with BNSF at Rincon, and interchanges with Union Pacific Railroad at Deming.
- Texas & New Mexico Railway – The Texas-New Mexico Railway interchanges with Union Pacific Railroad at Monahans, Texas.
- Navajo Mine Railroad– The Navajo Mine Railroad, connects a coal mine with an electrical power generating station and is not connected to the rest of the North American rail network; therefore, it has no interchange point.
- Waste Control Specialists – WCS, while not a railroad company, operates a rail line to serve its waste facility in Texas. The line interchanges with the Texas & New Mexico Railway at Eunice.

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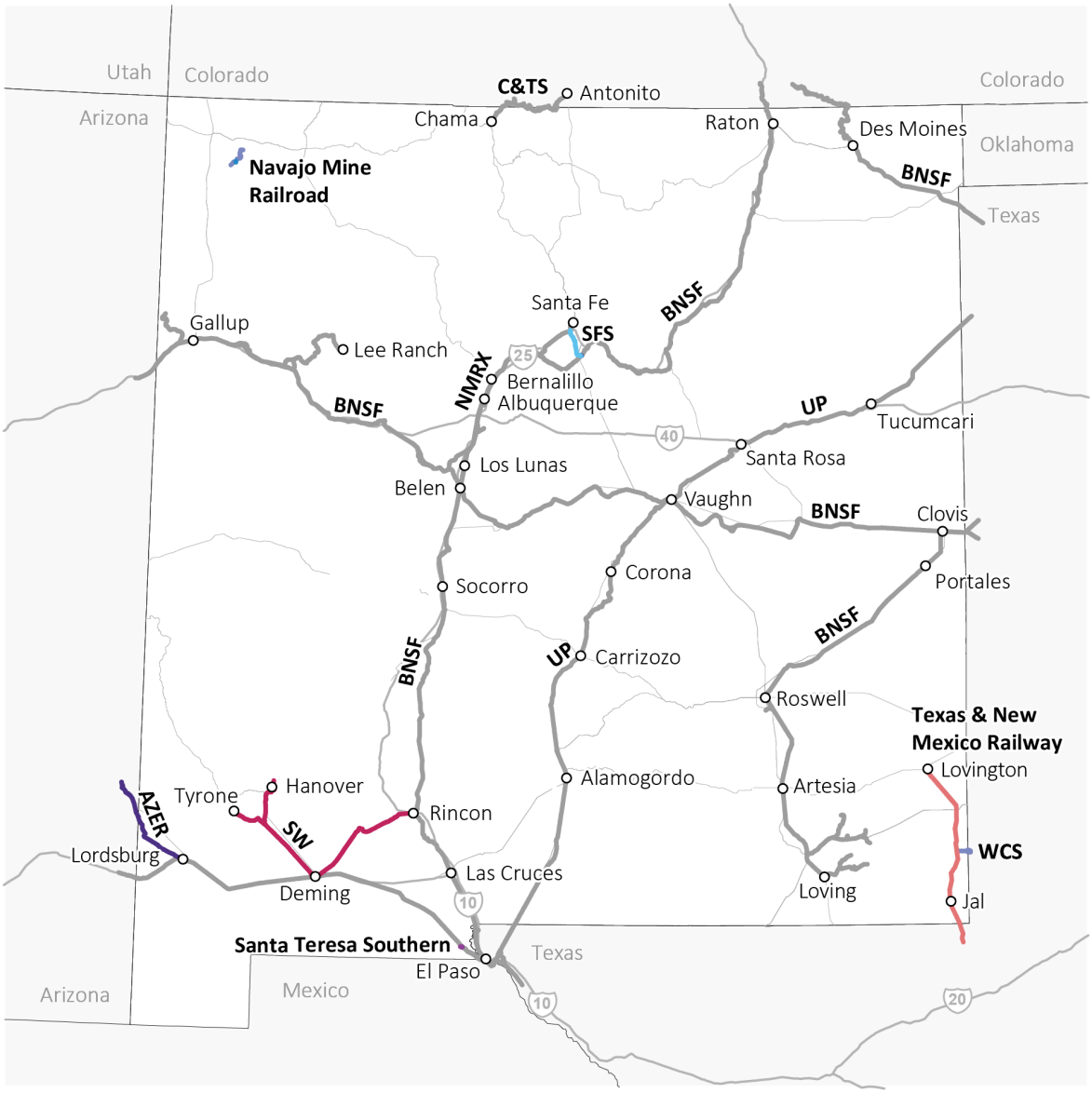
Figure 1-19: Class III Overview



Legend

- Arizona Eastern RW (AZER)
- Waste Control Specialists (WCS)
- Navajo Mine RR
- Santa Fe Southern RW (SFS)
- Santa Teresa Southern RR (STS)
- Southwestern RR (SW)
- Texas & New Mexico RW (TXN)
- Other Railroads
- Stations along rail lines
- Freeways
- Major Roadways
- State Boundaries
- New Mexico State

1" = 70 miles

0 | 35 | 70 | 140 mi

N

Source: NMDOT

Arizona Eastern Railway

The Arizona Eastern Railway (AZER) is a shortline owned by the Genesee & Wyoming. AZER owns 25.3 miles of track in New Mexico on the Clifton Branch, which extends northwest from Lordsburg to Duncan and Clifton in Arizona. Its primary purpose is serving the Morenci Mine, one of the largest open-pit copper mines in the world. The Clifton Branch is a Class III track, with a maximum operating speed of 40 mph. The line can handle 286,000-pound loaded railcars. AZER reported 2.8 MGT carried on the Clifton Branch in 2024. The commodity carried is copper ore, and shipments have increased over the past five years. AZER also owns a second branch in Arizona, from Bowie to Miami.

Figure 1-20: Arizona Eastern Railway

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

AZER also has trackage rights on the east-west Union Pacific Railroad Sunset Route main line to connect its two branches, and 27.1 miles of these trackage rights are between Lordsburg and Bowie, Arizona. Lordsburg is the interchange point with the Union Pacific Railroad for both branches. While most traffic on the AZER once continued onto the national network, about half of Arizona Eastern's traffic stays on its lines, going directly between the mine and the smelter in Miami through Lordsburg.

AZER recently built capacity at the Summit Yard, about 25 miles outside of Lordsburg, which allows it to meet the needs of its growing traffic and provide more efficient interchange with UP. The new yard has relieved many space concerns at the interchange and overall, the traffic trends are growing. About one-third of AZER's fleet has been upgraded to PTC, which allows those locomotives to operate on UP.

Santa Fe Southern Railway

The Santa Fe Southern Railway (SFS) is an independent railroad connecting Santa Fe and Lamy, primarily on tracks it formerly owned, now owned by NMDOT. SFS is a Class III railroad, and it operates passenger excursion rail services under the name Sky Railway. More information about SFS's overall operation and excursion services can be found earlier in this chapter.

SFS retained the exclusive right and obligation to provide freight rail service on the tracks sold to NMDOT but has carried no freight since 2011 due in part to BNSF no longer desiring to move freight into Lamy. To resume moving freight, SFS would need to coordinate with BNSF to interchange closer to Albuquerque and update agreements with NMRX. SFS is hoping to start some freight movement within a couple of years, predicated on the completion of a customer transload facility, which would include bulk transfer from truck to rail. This facility would likely be near Lamy or on a siding between Lamy and CP Madrid.

Santa Teresa Southern Railroad

Santa Teresa Southern Railroad (STS), owned by Ironhorse Resources, Inc., operates over 10 miles of track in the Santa Teresa Intermodal Park in Doña Ana County. Its sole purpose is to connect shippers in the industrial park to the Union Pacific. The track is Class I, with a maximum speed of 10 mph, and can carry railcars weighing up to 286,000 pounds. Commodities carried include corn sweetener, railroad ties, pepper mash, onions, plastics, sheetrock, feed stock, windmill components, biodiesel, cement, and metal scrap. STS interchanges once daily with their customers and with UP east of its Santa Teresa intermodal facility, where they interchange 3-5 times per week.

Santa Teresa Southern's business is unique; it is built on their ability as an independent railroad to build track infrastructure much faster and cheaper than Class I railroads can because they have control over the whole operation. They boast the ability to have a track ready for business in four months. Class I railroads would take that long just to go through an internal approval process. STS also keeps three locomotives in their yard dedicated to providing great service, even on short notice.

The industrial park draws companies primarily due to its proximity to Mexico. An overweight truck zone covers a 12-mile radius around Santa Teresa. Within this zone, trucks that cross from Mexico at the Santa Teresa Port of Entry can weigh up to 96,000 pounds and be up to 280 ft long. Companies use this overweight zone to transport goods because it is more efficient than the Mexican railway system and then transfer them to a train to continue moving through other parts of New Mexico or Texas. Of the average annual 2,900 carloads STS ships, 1,800 outbound carloads originate in New Mexico, and 1,100 inbound cars originate out of state.

Southwestern Railroad

Southwestern Railroad (SW) is owned by Jaguar Transport, which purchased it from The Western Group in 2020. The railway owns 66.1 miles of track, leases 52.9 miles from BNSF, and has trackage rights over 1.5 miles of BNSF track, resulting in a total of 120.5 miles operated. This line used to be owned by ATSF Railway. Southwestern carries a variety of freight from shippers along the line to interchanges with both UP and BNSF.

Figure 1-21: Southwestern Railroad

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

Southwestern track is located in Grant, Luna, and Doña Ana Counties, and principal stations are located at Tyrone, Deming, Fierro, Santa Rita, Rincon, and Hurley. SW interchanges traffic with BNSF at Rincon and with Union Pacific Railroad at Deming. The Deming-Whitewater line is mixed Class I and II track, with a maximum operating speed of 25 mph. The Deming sub is Class II track. The railroad reported that the maximum operating speed on the Deming-Whitewater and Deming-Rincon lines is 20 mph, and 10 mph on all other lines. Maximum loaded car weights are 286,000 across the railroad. Beyond Hurley to Tyrone, 11.9 miles by the mines, there is a 263,000-pound weight limit. Southwestern Railroad employs 17 people in New Mexico.

Southwestern Railroad carries sulfuric acid, quick lime, grinding balls, Butane, UAN fertilizer, magnesium chloride brine, copper concentrate, diesel fuel, and feed grains (wheat, corn, and soybean). Copper shipments make up the majority of the railroad's traffic. Other traffic, like lime, sulfuric acid, and feed grain, is stable. Fertilizer is a seasonal commodity but makes up a small volume of shipments.

Southwestern Railroad does not have any industrial parks but has developed several transload facilities for various commodities to handle traffic for businesses that are not located right on a rail line. They have transload facilities outside of Deming and Hurley, handle lime at Spalding, diesel and butane at Luna Siding, and fertilizer at Whitewater (near Hurley).

Texas & New Mexico Railway

The Texas & New Mexico Railway (TXN) is owned by Watco Companies and owns 104 miles of single-tracked main line between Monahans, Texas, and Lovington, New Mexico, including 76 miles in New Mexico. TXN connects with Union Pacific at Monahans, Texas. Located in the Permian Basin, the railroad primarily handles oilfield commodities such as drilling mud, hydrochloric acid, frac sand (barium sulfate), pipe, as well as scrap metal and petroleum products. TXN also transports waste material to an interchange with a private rail line for forwarding to storage facilities, some of which contains radioactive soil.

The Texas & New Mexico Railway is a Class I track with a maximum operating speed of 10 mph. The track can handle maximum loaded car weights of 286,000 pounds on all tracks. In 2024, the line moved just under 1 MGT, and shipment trends are generally stable. TXN employs about 25 people in the state of New Mexico, and locomotive maintenance and crews are based in Eunice, New Mexico.

Private Railroads

There are two private freight railroads in New Mexico which serve only the company that owns the lines and are not subject to Federal regulation as common carriers: Waste Control Systems and Navajo Mine Railroad.

Navajo Mine Railroad

A subsidiary of the Navajo Transitional Energy Company, the Navajo Mine Railroad is a 13-mile private railroad in the northwest corner of New Mexico, connecting a coal mine with an electrical power generating station, the Four Corners Power Plant. The Class III track has a 40-mph maximum operating speed. The railroad operates two General Electric Tier 4 locomotives, 20 100-ton railcars, and 20 120-ton railcars. The railroad was formerly electrified. There is no connection with the general railway system.

Waste Control Specialists Rail Line

Waste Control Specialists operates a rail line east out of Eunice NM to the Texas state line to serve their waste facility that stores and treats low level nuclear waste. The rail line connects with the Texas & New Mexico Railway at Eunice.

1.2.3 Rail-Served Industrial Parks, Transload Facilities, and Inland Ports

There are many freight facilities in New Mexico that are independent of railroads and offer shippers a means to access the national railway system. The facilities include industrial parks, transload facilities, and inland ports. The text below covers established sites as well as those under development. The movement of merchandise from a boxcar, covered hopper, tank car, or flat car to a truck trailer occurs at a transload facility, which differs from an intermodal facility where trailers and containers are lifted on and off rail intermodal cars and picked up or dropped off by trucks.

As railroads have reduced the practice of picking up and dropping off carloads at railroad-owned common user facilities (e.g., Team Tracks) for the customers to directly load or unload, the growth and transition to the use of independently-owned industrial parks, transload facilities, and inland ports allow New Mexico's less-than-carload shippers and shippers that don't have their own rail spur a means to access rail service. The advantages include lower transportation rates relative to trucks and seamless transfer between rail and truck for the customer.

Rail-Served Industrial Parks and Transload Facilities

The list of New Mexico facilities below describes a sample of rail-served sites and sites that potentially have relatively easy access to a rail line and is not intended to be a complete list of rail-served industrial parks and transload facilities. The listing notes facilities that are operational as well as those that are in the planning stage. While new shippers are locating in these parks due to the available track connections, many existing shippers are not part of an industrial park.

Central New Mexico Rail Park

The Central New Mexico Rail Park is a 1,420-acre planned regional, rail-served industrial park at Los Lunas. The site is large enough to accommodate multiple users. The site plan allows manufacturing, warehouse, and distribution companies to have rail sidings to their facilities in the park or to access a team track. There will also be transload and multimodal facilities. The development will be served with municipal water, sewer, and utilities available to each parcel. There is a BNSF rail connection to the Central New Mexico Rail Park, and the park is a BNSF Certified facility, i.e., rail-served industrial parks and facilities that meet BNSF's stringent readiness standards that are intended to minimize development risks that customers may face. There are currently no rail users at the park. The park has yet to be built out so no customers exist at the present time.

The rail park sponsor, Rio Real Estate Investment Opportunities, LLC, has multiple proposals out for prospective users for the rail park, and some are in negotiation. The Central New Mexico Rail Park is looking for, and negotiating with, prospective rail users and transload operators.

Clovis Industrial Park

The City of Clovis Industrial Park is located south of Clovis adjacent to U.S. Highways 60, 70, and 84, and is served by BNSF. The park is a BNSF Certified site. It contains approximately 240 acres and is currently subdivided into 25 lots, ranging in size from five acres to 20 acres with the option of combining lots to serve the tenant's needs. A Phase I Environmental Assessment has been completed with no adverse findings. The park has two rail users: a bio diesel firm and a livestock feed company.

The park has a master plan which includes expansion of rail lines within the park and additional park users. The park is talking to prospective users, and it anticipates consummation of agreements within the coming two to three years. Several prospective users are looking at transloading operations that will serve a local need.

EnergyPlex Park

EnergyPlex Park is located between Hobbs and Lovington and has more than 8,000 acres available. It is connected to TXN.

Gallup Energy Logistics Park

The Gallup Energy Logistics Park, LLC, is a rail-served 2,500-acre industrial park located in Gallup to serve the light manufacturing, storage, transloading, and logistics industries of northwest New Mexico, the San Juan Energy Basin, and the Four Corners Region. Phase I of the project was completed in February of 2017 and includes 11,000 linear feet of new rail line connecting to the BNSF Transcon. The park is located near Interstate 40, US 491, and NM 602. A 365-acre parcel of the property is one of the sites that have received certification as part of the BNSF Certified Site program. The park is managed by Gallup Land Partners, LLC, part of Roche Enterprises, Ltd. portfolio. The park has two users, one on each of the loop tracks. One track loads coal brought in by truck onto rail cars, while the other track transfers frac sand brought in by rail directly into trucks that take the material to oil and gas drilling sites.

Hatch Industrial Park

The Hatch Industrial Park contains 58.2 acres. It is located on NM 26, approximately six miles west of the Village of Hatch. The park is planned as a location for light industry and general manufacturing. A portion of the park is being used for a solar power generation facility. The park offers access to Southwestern Railroad, a Class III carrier which connects to both BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad.

Hobbs Industrial Park

The Hobbs Industrial Air Park is served by TXN and is the former site of an Army Airbase. It is a light business facility with a total of 3,000 acres, 1,000 of which are available for development. It is connected to the EnergyPlex Park, which is located between Hobbs and Lovington, via TXN.

New Mexico Terminal Services

New Mexico Terminal Services, LLC (NMTS), is a strategically located, rail-served industrial park, presently planned for development on Broadway (NM 47) just north of its interchange with Interstate 25 at the south end of the Albuquerque area. The NMTS zoning is suitable for a wide range of transloading, manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, office and other industrial operations. The NMRX Railroad Albuquerque Subdivision runs adjacent to the site where a track connection is being planned, and once constructed, will be served by BNSF. There is the potential for serving numerous business entities which require or could utilize rail service of this size and capacity.

New Mexico Transloading

New Mexico Transloading is an active independent transload company off the NMRX Railroad line in Albuquerque. It is served by BNSF and handles transloading of pipe, steel products, building materials, plastics, utility poles, aggregates, and bulk liquids. It has nearby access to Interstate 25.

Santa Teresa Gateway Rail Park

The Santa Teresa Gateway Rail Park is adjacent to the Doña Ana County International Airport and to the Union Pacific Railroad; it is within 10 miles of both Interstate 10 and the Santa Teresa International Port of Entry. This industrial park consists of 225 industrial-zoned acres with two million square feet of industrial space and over three million square feet planned for new development. The park is served by the Santa Teresa Southern Railroad, a short line railroad which is connected to the UP. The Rail Park is currently working on phase two of their development, breaking ground on 11 more lots in 2025. The active rail users at the park ship and transload corn sweetener, railroad ties, pepper mash, onions, plastics, sheetrock, feed stock, windmill components, biodiesel, cement, and metal scrap.

Industrial Parks and Transload Facilities with Proposed Rail Service

There are many industrial parks in New Mexico either in operation or in the planning stage. All of them have or can relatively easily have rail access. These facilities are very interested in attracting rail shippers. The overarching need of New Mexico's industrial parks is for more tenants but securing capital funding and regulatory permitting are hurdles for many areas.

Lordsburg Industrial Park

A rail-served industrial park has not yet been developed. Two sites are being considered. The intent is to have facilities on the site that would be served by UP.

McKinley County Inland Port

Inland ports can have elements of both transload facilities and intermodal facilities; they typically operate as centers for transshipment of sea cargo arriving in rail-borne containers and preparing those shipments for inland destinations. Inland ports are in part intended to reduce highway congestion in sea port areas and to address limited availability of land surrounding sea ports for expansion.

Conversely, an industrial park is an area zoned and planned for the purpose of industrial development. Several companies can be located at one industrial park. Rail-served industrial parks have rail spurs linking them to main line railroads.

In late 2019, McKinley County initiated and has since completed a market feasibility study to evaluate the feasibility and economic impact of a proposed inland port in McKinley County. A 2024 white paper for the Gallup/McKinley County Regional TradePort economic roundtable states that the McKinely County is moving forward with establishing a viable inland port[27] in partnership with the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation. They will also identify opportunities for leveraging access to two major east-west transportation routes, the BNSF Southern Transcon and Interstate 40, in attracting new businesses, taking advantage of the relative location for opportunities for transload facilities near Gallup.

Milan Industrial Park

The Village of Milan has 913 acres of land adjacent to the BNSF and within minutes of Interstate 40 that is under development. Improvements to grade crossings that provide access to the site are under design, and additional siding tracks are planned along the BNSF Southern Transcon to which industry tracks into the site would connect.

Peru Mill Industrial Park

The 1,420-acre Peru Mill Industrial Park site, located approximately four miles northwest of Deming, New Mexico, once housed a mill that processed zinc sulfide ore. When the remediation of the site was completed, the City of Deming annexed the property into the city limits and zoned it for industrial use. Peru Mill is an industrial park which has the potential to be rail-served. There are potential industrial park users that require rail connections. A full environmental assessment was done a few years ago, and a supplement is planned to update it. The park conceivably could be served by BNSF, Southwestern Railroad, Union Pacific, UP or all three.

27 https://www.gallupedc.com/media/userfiles/subsite_59/files/Resource_LIbrary/WhitePaper_SC-IP_Final_with_Appendix.pdf

Sunport Commerce Overlay Zone

Sunport Commerce Overlay Zone is an area in Bernalillo County adjacent to Albuquerque that was designated in 2019, located south of Woodward Avenue and Rio Bravo (NM 500). It's a large area with industry tracks already in place and may also include the proposed former Kirtland Air Force Base spur development. There is also a proposal for a logistics hub in this area which could serve to attract businesses that can capitalize on logistics advantages of the airport.

1.3 Rail Needs in New Mexico

Rail needs were solicited from a variety of stakeholders, including but not limited to railroads, railroad advocacy groups, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), Economic Development Districts (EDDs), Regional Transit Districts (RTDs), and members of the public. Needs can generally be categorized into one of four areas – freight rail, passenger rail, safety, or non-rail usage of railroad rights of way.

Some common rail-related needs were identified through stakeholder and public outreach:

- A common theme throughout the state is the need to promote economic activity tied to the state's railroads. This was expressed in many ways, including:
    - ensuring that existing railroad infrastructure is maintained to support existing businesses and passenger rail service;
    - developing new rail-served businesses adjacent to existing rail lines, including transload facilities; and
    - constructing new rail lines to serve communities that presently have no rail service.
- New passenger rail services and improvements to existing passenger rail services were identified.
- In the wake of the 2023 East Palestine derailment and release of hazardous materials in Ohio, there has been increased concern about preventing a similar event occurring in New Mexico.
- Amending the state's anti-donation clause to give the state and its political subdivisions more flexibility to fund railroad-related improvements was identified.
- Class III railroads noted that the state's right-of-way fencing requirements can be a financial burden, and that they sometimes spend as much money to comply with those requirements as they do to maintain the railway itself.
- Continue efforts to minimize collisions with trains at highway-rail at-grade crossings by upgrading passive crossings to active warning devices.
- Eliminate grade crossings through construction of grade separations or the consolidation of crossings.
- Implement quiet zones, where locomotive engineers no longer must sound train horns when approaching at-grade crossings, as a means to mitigate noise impacts in communities near at-grade crossings.

1.3.1 Freight Rail Needs

In general, the Class I railroad network in New Mexico is functioning well for the traffic it currently carries. Both Union Pacific and BNSF have continually invested in infrastructure improvements to increase capacity, reliability, and safety, and both have plans for more projects.

The shortline railroads, though, do not have the same level of available funding as larger Class I railroads. Track conditions vary from line to line, and some lines are not capable of handling heavier freights cars. These railroads are essential links from local shippers to the national network, and these shortcomings could ultimately limit their ability to perform that service.

The interaction of trains and roadways at grade crossings across the state can pose safety concerns. Cars, trucks, pedestrians, and bicyclists potentially can and do collide with trains at grade crossings, often resulting in serious injury or death.

A particular item of concern is the presence of parallel roadways in close proximity to adjacent railroad crossings. This results in limited storage distance between the intersection and the grade crossing, where trucks, buses, and trailers stopped on the track may be struck by trains while waiting to enter or cross these roadways. In locations with heavy train traffic, at grade crossings that may be blocked by stopped trains can also contribute to roadway traffic congestion and delays to emergency response vehicles. Grade crossing consolidations and grade separation projects help solve these issues.

General

- A common theme throughout the state is the need to promote economic activity tied to the state's railroads. This was expressed in many ways, including:
    - ensuring that existing railroad infrastructure is maintained to support existing businesses and passenger rail service;
    - developing new rail-served businesses adjacent to existing rail lines, including transload facilities; and
    - constructing new rail lines to serve communities that presently have no railroads.
- Several areas of the state that once had freight rail service desire to have this restored.
    - San Juan County lost freight rail service more than 50 years ago when the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad abandoned its narrow-gauge railroads in Colorado and northern New Mexico. More information about future rail service in San Juan County is in Chapter 4.
- Communities on Amtrak's Southwest Chief alignment in Santa Fe, San Miguel, Mora, and Colfax counties have not had local or through freight service since BNSF ceased operating freight over the Southwest Chief route 15 years ago.
- Communities and businesses along active freight rail lines, particularly the Class I freight routes, desire to leverage this proximity to develop or restore rail connections to promote local economic development. Several active or proposed rail-served projects are described in Section 1.2.3, but there are additional communities that also desire service.

In addition, in the *Empower and Collaborate: New Mexico's Economic Path Forward*[28] strategic plan, the New Mexico Economic Development Department identified actions and projects that would support economic development in the state. The document noted the following:

- Fund, support, and promote the development of industrial rail parks in both southern and central New Mexico as attractive manufacturing locations with easy rail access *(pg. 313).*

28 New Mexico Economic Development Department Five Year Plan for Strategic Economic Growth and Diversification, 2023 Update.

- Offer LEDA support to the City of Albuquerque for the creation of a warehouse and distribution district, located at the intersection Interstate 40 and Interstate 25, to capture cross-country freight activity passing through central New Mexico *(pg. 319)*.
- Identify federal grants and other funding sources for the proposed development of an international rail crossing west of the Santa Teresa Port of Entry. Complete Phase 2 of the Santa Teresa International Rail Study to determine funding sources and secure presidential permit approval for a bi-national rail bypass near the Santa Teresa Port of Entry *(pgs. 320-321)*.

Class I Needs

BNSF

While all of the BNSF Southern Transcon in New Mexico is now double tracked, the railroad is considering the need for future third tracks and allowing reserved space for those in new highway overpass bridge projects (a 10-mile segment of triple track already exists from Belen to Dalies). BNSF Railway reported needs for main line capacity expansion on both the Gallup Subdivision and the Clovis Subdivision to consistently meet customer expectations. The two subdivisions are the major components of the busy Southern Transcon main line through New Mexico.

BNSF is coordinating with NMDOT, county, municipal, and tribal entities on the following improvements at roadway crossings of the BNSF Transcon:

- In 2024, NMDOT completed the grade separation of the Jarales Road (NM 109) crossing of the Clovis Subdivision on the Southern Transcon just south of Belen. The project was funded by NMDOT and BNSF and was undertaken in conjunction with an expansion of the Belen Yard to address issues with roadway and emergency response traffic blocked by long and frequent trains, and to reduce potential conflicts with vehicles.
- In 2024, an FRA Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) construction funding grant award was announced to grade-separate the Allison Road grade crossing on the Southern Transcon in Gallup. BNSF is partnering with NMDOT and the City of Gallup to fund the non-Federal portion of this project. This project is currently in design.
- In 2024, an FRA Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) construction funding grant award was announced to grade-separate the US 70/84 grade crossing of the Southern Transcon at the Texas-New Mexico border and eliminate two additional grade crossings in Texico, NM. NMDOT, TxDOT, and BNSF are partnering to fund the non-Federal portion of this project. This project is currently in design.
- The City of Clovis received Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) funding to design a project that would construct a new overpass to eliminate an existing at-grade crossing on the Southern Transcon, improve other at-grade crossings, and improve integration of rail crossing signals into highway signals at intersections. Construction funding has not been obtained yet.
- In Cibola County, there are safety improvements, consolidations, and grade separations being studied, including 10 at-grade crossings for safety improvements.
- Gallup, in McKinley County, is working on a Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program for 2nd and 3rd street.
- In 2025, NMDOT began construction to replace one of the oldest bridges in the highway system, located on the former U.S. Route 66 near Laguna in Cibola County. The existing bridge currently allows BNSF a 2-track capacity. BNSF is contributing funds so that the new bridge will accommodate a future third track.

- The Pueblo of Acoma has completed design and NEPA approval for a new overpass that would extend Mesa Hill Road over the BNSF Southern Transcon. Construction funding was secured in July 2025. The project would not result in the closing of either of the existing grade crossings within the Pueblo, which limits the use of potential federal funding sources for the project.
- The Village of Milan is developing a new rail-served industrial Park northeast of the BNSF Transcon. The project will include conversion of an existing private crossing, Mill Road, to a public crossing and equipping it with lights and gates, plus the closure of one or more existing at-grade railroad crossings. This crossing would become the primary access gate into the facility.
- The Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments (NWNMCOG) is undertaking a study to develop roadway improvements to serve a proposed Prewitt Industrial Park. The proposed project would include a new grade-separated crossing on the Southern Transcon to replace the existing at-grade CR 19 crossing.

BNSF is also coordinating with NMDOT, county, municipal, and other entities on the following improvements located elsewhere in New Mexico:

- There are two separate studies on the Carlsbad line, looking at potential grade crossing closures, consolidations, and other crossing safety improvements. The study of the northern half of the line began in 2024, and the study of the southern half began in 2025. NMDOT is funding these studies through the NMDOT Section 130 program.
- The Village of Folsom is permanently closing an at-grade crossing using incentive funding provided by BNSF and matched by funds from the NMDOT Section 130 program.
- Several Section 130 crossing projects are currently occurring between Lamy and Raton on the Raton subdivision.

In addition to the projects identified by BNSF, regional authorities have noted recommendations and needs for BNSF:

- Provide a freight rail connection from the BNSF Southern Transcon to the Farmington area.
- Explore concerns regarding the rail activity at Socorro (perlite loading) and Rincon (the junction of BNSF Belen-El Paso line with Southwestern Railroad).
- Mesilla Valley MPO supports a freight rail connection to the West Mesa Industrial Park. This would be an expensive project, as the BNSF line is on the opposite side of the Rio Grande and the industrial park is several hundred feet higher than the river.

Union Pacific

Union Pacific completed extensive projects along its Sunset Route in recent decades, including adding a second main track all the way across New Mexico (1998 – 2006) and constructing the Santa Teresa intermodal facility and fueling tracks, which opened in 2014.

Union Pacific supports grade separation projects mentioned below and continues to respond to public road authority's needs. UP encourages New Mexico to establish a grade separation grant program that allows NMDOT to support grade separations in cities and counties that struggle with blocked crossings but lack funding to address the issue. Union Pacific has identified two locations where highway-rail at-grade crossing solutions are needed:

- Closing or grade separating the Center Street crossing in downtown Lordsburg (DOT #: 741981N) as Center Street bisects the railyard forcing UP to split trains at the crossing or to block the crossing for extended periods of time. UP changes crews and interchanges with the Arizona

Eastern out of the Lordsburg yard. A grade separation, with at least 24 feet clearance, would provide benefits for both UP and the community in Lordsburg.

- Doña Ana County has obtained Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) funds to construct a grade separation of Industrial Road (DOT # 741282N) in Santa Teresa. This road is used by heavy freight and commercial trucks traveling between facilities on opposite sides of the UP mainline. It is the first crossing east of the new UP yard, located within ¼ mile of the switch serving Santa Teresa Southern Railroad. A grade separation there will improve safety and eliminate delays during frequent crossing activations.

In addition to the projects identified by UP, regional authorities have noted recommendations and needs for the Union Pacific railroad:

- Provide access to the UP main line along Interstate 10 to encourage economic development.[29]

Class III Needs

Shortline railroads reported varying needs, generally focused on improving track conditions, rebuilding bridges, providing more capacity at yards and interchanges, and providing better connections to industries.

For the short line railroads that operate on Class I trackage, even for short segments at interchanges, a critical concern is that continued access will be contingent on using PTC-equipped locomotives, which short lines may not have or can afford. While the FRA allows exemptions from this requirement under some circumstances, individual track owners (usually Class I railroads) may impose more stringent requirements, and those exemptions can come with limitations on the number of trains they can operate. PTC for short lines is very costly, with a single installation on an older locomotive costing in excess of $100,000. Once locomotive PTC systems are operational, short lines will incur recurring costs for back-office services necessary to support PTC.

A recurring need of typically cash-strapped short lines is financing – either grants or low interest loans – for upgrading their infrastructure. Infrastructure needs typically consist of upgrades of track and structure for handling heavier loaded car weights, i.e., 286,000 pounds and more. As previously noted, the New Mexico Constitution's Anti-Donation Clause restricts NMDOT in terms of any investments in privately owned rail lines. New Mexico is not alone in this constraint. Other states, either by law or the disinclination of state legislatures, do not provide public funding for private railroads, including short lines. At the same time, some states direct their state rail planners to assist short lines in their quests for funding by helping with federal Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) and Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant applications. This avenue for support of the state's small freight railroads is open to NMDOT as no laws contradict it, and NMDOT is supportive of short line railroads applying for grants.

More detailed projects are in the Rail Service and Investment Program that follows in Chapter 3.

Arizona Eastern Railway

Arizona Eastern Railway (AZER) reported that constructing a new rail yard in Lordsburg would allow AZER to meet the needs of its growing traffic base and provide a more efficient interchange with Union Pacific Railroad.

29 SWRTPO, Southwest Regional Transportation Plan, June 2015

Santa Fe Southern Railway

Santa Fe Southern Railway identified the following needs for its freight services.:

- Find locations to establish transloading and additional sidings without being intrusive to the general public so that they can cultivate freight opportunities. A siding at Rabbit Road, at the beginning of the Eldorado subdivision, would be helpful so that trains can meet and pass between CP Hando and Lamy and transloading could occur.
- SFS is interested in serving rail freight customers on portions of the NMRX Albuquerque Subdivision north of Albuquerque if an agreement can be reached with BNSF, which retains a perpetual, exclusive, and assignable easement to provide rail freight service to all customers on the Albuquerque Subdivision. This could include creating a transload facility using a siding at or near Waldo or providing local rail freight service to rail-connected facilities north of Albuquerque.
- SFS has approached NMDOT about leasing a storage track at Lamy siding for its use.
- Replace the worn-out switch that was removed some years ago at Premier Distributing (a beer distributor) and restore rail freight service to the facility that was discontinued in 2008. Without this switch, Premier can't restore rail service that it used to have. Additionally, SFS has three freight cars that were stranded within the Premier facility when the switch was removed in 2019. Premier is one of the few potential freight customers north of Lamy, as most of the track is now surrounded by residential or future residential land use from Santa Fe to Lamy.

More SFS needs are identified in a separate section described under Sky Railway (Passenger Needs).

Santa Teresa Southern Railroad

Santa Teresa Southern Railroad has several projects that they are working on. Because of their timelines and quick turnarounds on projects, STS does not typically receive funding from the government for their track projects.

- Yard expansions with new track in Santa Teresa for new customers and existing ones who are experiencing staging issues. STS is always working on expansions, and they would like to get government assistance for their yard expansions.
- Santa Teresa Southern is working toward industrial park expansion. They currently own 1,100 acres of land and are working on phase two of their development, where they will develop 11 additional lots in 2025. They are working toward the approval of a Phase II development.

Southwestern Railroad

Southwestern Railroad reported some improvement needs to enable its customers to remain competitive, to reduce costs, and to ensure reliable rail service:

- Upgrade bridges on the Deming-Rincon line to eliminate the timber bridges and to improve the channel lining of steel structures ($5.0 million).
- Annual capital tie replacement and surface projects.
- Capital projects for bridges.

Specifically, Southwestern Railroad noted that all customers need to be able to ship railcars loaded to 286,000 pounds gross weight. The current limit of 263,000 pounds on 10 miles of their track places these customers at a disadvantage. SW explained that the current light weight of its rail (85 lb. rail) limits the speed of operation to 10 mph and imposes a high maintenance cost due to structural fatigue issues.

Frequent inspection and repair are required. This upgrade would require approximately 10 million dollars in funding but would be a long-term sustainable approach to their business and reduce risk on their lines.

Texas-New Mexico Railway

Texas-New Mexico Railway reported the need for crossing gates at Grimes Street in Hobbs, New Mexico. The railway noted some small project needs in the Hobbs area, where tie replacement and surfacing is needed. The Bender Street crossing in Hobbs is planned to be reconstructed soon with state funds since it is a state road. There are also some old crossing panels that need to be replaced at the Jack Gomez crossing in Hobbs. In addition, there is a planned project to add a traffic signal at the intersection of NM 18 and NM 128 in Jal that will be interconnected with new railroad crossing signals to be installed at the NM 128 crossing adjacent to this highway intersection. NM 128 will also be widened which will result in reconstructing and widening the grade crossing surface at the NM 128 grade crossing in Jal. This crossing is immediately adjacent to the intersection of NM 128 and NM 18. Design is complete and will be proceeding to construction in 2025. NMDOT is coordinating TXN on this project.

City of Hobbs is working with TXN to improve the Business Park Blvd grade crossing as part of its project to realign College Avenue to intersect with Business Park Blvd at NM 18.

City of Jal is also working with TXN in the design of a new railroad crossing for a proposed bypass highway around the north side of Jal.

1.3.2 Passenger Rail Needs

Maintaining New Mexico's current passenger rail system requires continued investment in infrastructure. This is particularly true for Amtrak, which operates using old historic station facilities, as well as the two tourist railroads in the state who also use aging historic facilities and old tracks.

While commuter rail infrastructure is modern and in good condition, additional tracks and other improvements would make Rail Runner service more reliable and allow for additional trains.

General

- At a minimum, maintain existing intercity passenger rail and commuter rail levels of service. Provision of additional service, especially on Rail Runner, is desirable.
- Reduce service delays caused by the shared use of the NMRX line by Rail Runner, Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*, and BNSF freight trains between Belen, Albuquerque, and Lamy.
- Improve connections between passenger rail, local transit, and pedestrian and bike modes in urban and rural areas.
- Increase areas served by passenger rail by developing new passenger rail services or extending the service area of existing passenger rail services.

There have been many suggestions for providing new passenger rail services in New Mexico or extending the service area of existing passenger rail services such as Rail Runner over the past several decades. Of these, only one passenger rail project has proceeded as far as a formal feasibility study since Rail Runner development commenced two decades ago – the proposed Las Cruces to El Paso commuter rail line, for which a feasibility study was completed in 2017. Some of the other suggested passenger rail services include:

- Since Rail Runner service to Santa Fe began in 2008, there have been several proposals to study extensions of Rail Runner or a similar commuter rail operation to new communities such as Taos,

Gallup, Las Cruces, Raton and Las Vegas. In most instances, the travel times to the proposed communities would exceed what could reasonably be served by a commuter rail service. Additionally, significant and costly engineering challenges exist that must be overcome to serve certain communities, such as the need to avoid interfering with the BNSF Southern Transcon for service extensions south of Belen and the absence of any existing rail infrastructure to certain locations such as Taos.

- Multiple suggestions have been made for conventional intercity passenger rail service connecting all or some of El Paso, Albuquerque, and Denver. In 1994, NMDOT conducted a study of a possible Amtrak service connecting the three cities. In 2009, NMDOT unsuccessfully applied for FRA planning funds to evaluate a potential high-speed passenger rail service connecting El Paso, Albuquerque, and Denver.
- FRA conducted the Southwest Multi-State Passenger Rail Study in 2014 which suggested an intercity passenger rail service connecting Phoenix and Denver that would use the same alignment as the Southwest Chief in New Mexico. A 2024 FRA Long-Distance Service Study in 2024 included a potential El Paso – Albuquerque – Denver – Cheyenne – Billings service among the potential new routes considered.
- The 2024 FRA Long-Distance Service Study also included three other possible routes that pass-through New Mexico in addition to the El Paso to Billings service noted above. A possible San Francisco to Dallas route would use the same tracks in New Mexico as Amtrak's Sunset Limited. A possible Phoenix to Minneapolis / St. Paul route would use the BNSF Southern Transcon tracks through New Mexico through Gallup, Belen, and Clovis. A possible Houston to Denver route would use the BNSF Twin Peaks Subdivision in New Mexico through Clayton. However, the FRA Long-Distance Service Study was not a feasibility study of these potential routes, but rather an attempt to identify possible routes for future consideration that would provide Amtrak service to new cities or directly connect city pairs not currently connected by Amtrak services.
- A Las Cruces to El Paso commuter rail feasibility study, undertaken in 2017 by the South Central Regional Transit District, recommended continuing work to develop a commuter rail service utilizing the BNSF El Paso Subdivision between the two cities. The study recommended as a next step establishing a partnership between governmental institutions in Las Cruces and El Paso for the development of the passenger rail line. However, while the passenger rail line was identified as a long-range goal in the Mesilla Valley MPO long-range plan, it has not been identified in the El Paso MPO long-range plan.

Rail Runner Needs

Rio Metro, which operates the Rail Runner Express commuter service on behalf of NMDOT, is focused on continuing maintenance needs of its route between Belen, CP Madrid, and Santa Fe and between CP Madrid and Lamy. In Rio Metro's recent customer satisfaction survey, most riders cite the rail schedule as the reason they don't ride more often. In both the recent 2024 survey and in the prior 2015 and 2018 surveys, the most common complaint was about the schedule. Rio Metro customers, including Rail Runner riders, generally indicated they would like to see more frequency, reduced dwell times, more evening trains, and more weekend trains. Rio Metro has studied the corridor to see where additional sidings could provide the capacity for new headways and frequency. These opportunities also can help improve Rail Runner's flexibility with Amtrak and BNSF to increase everyone's on time performance. Rio Metro is also working on design and construction of improved maintenance facilities for the Rail Runner equipment. The fleet is in constant use with one set out of service for maintenance at any given time and one ready to fill in for emergencies. The need for new train equipment, both to expand the existing fleet as well as replacement purposes, will also need to be determined in the coming decades.

Safety and security on and around Rail Runner are an ongoing effort. Investments will continue to enhance grade crossing safety throughout New Mexico. Many grade crossings have been rehabbed in recent years and those that haven't already been eliminated have physical constraints that don't allow for full grade separation.

- Mid-Region Council of Governments noted the following:
    a. Supports strategies that will increase Rail Runner service frequency.
    b. Supports strategies to provide new connections to Rail Runner stations.
    c. Construct a new siding north of BNSF Belen Yard to eliminate delays to Rail Runner caused by BNSF trains awaiting permission to enter the Belen yard.
    d. Replacement of the Rail Runner bridge over the Galisteo River just east of the Kewa Station.
    e. Study, design, and implement flood control improvements for flood-prone arroyos to protect railroad infrastructure.
    f. Expanding yard capacity for Rail Runner equipment to support additional service frequency.
- SFMPO, *Metropolitan Transportation Plan*, May 2020, noted the following:
    a. Respondents to an online survey conducted as part of the MTP called for expanded weekday, evening, and weekend train schedule and faster express service between Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Amtrak Needs

Although Amtrak has many nationwide priorities, in New Mexico Amtrak is focused sustaining the Southwest Chief and the Sunset Limited, in addition to studying the needs to make the Sunset Limited a daily service. One major constraint for all Amtrak service right now is the availability of equipment. Amtrak consistently runs all of its equipment all of the time at maximum capacity. The lack of additional coaches, sleepers, diners, and other equipment is a significant constraint to their network. Amtrak's long-distance equipment is probably some of the most intensely used passenger rail equipment in the world because it is in service all of the time.

Many infrastructure improvements have been made in recent years, with funding provided by federal grants, state support, and contributions by BNSF and Amtrak.

Amtrak mentioned a need for continued improvements in New Mexico, including:

- Siding rehabilitation, signal improvements, and PTC installation to ensure reliability in train performance on the BNSF Raton Line between Lamy and the Colorado/New Mexico state line used for the *Southwest Chief*.
- Amtrak is currently the only user of the BNSF Raton and Glorieta Subdivisions. To maintain current levels of service, these lines require $12M per year in 2025 dollars for operating and capital expenses. There is currently no long-term funding source for these operating and maintenance costs.

Amtrak is also working on ADA improvements on all seven New Mexico stations, with more information in Chapter 4.

Service in the Raton section of Amtrak's line is also supported by the regional Transportation Planning Organization:

- NERTPO, *Northeast Regional Transportation Plan*, August 2015, noted the following:

a. Retain Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* service through Raton and Las Vegas to support communities through tourism and property taxes and offer shippers a rail transportation option.

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Needs

While the C&TS heritage railroad can cover regular operating expenses from ticket and merchandise sales, the line has recurring capital needs for its locomotive, fleets, and its trackage that rely on bi-state support to maintain it as a viable heritage railroad.

State funds are devoted primarily to:

- Establishing a well-ballasted and totally reconditioned track over its 64-mile length.
- Periodically rebuilding its fleet of historic locomotives as mandated under Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulations.
- Restoring and upgrading other physical assets, such as passenger cars and other rolling stock necessary to the operation of the railroad.

Santa Fe Southern (Sky Railway) Excursion Service Needs

SFS noted that one of their biggest challenges is scheduling their passenger services, since they share track with NMRX and there are a lot of Rail Runner trains per day. While they have a good working relationship with NMRX and coordinate well with them most of the time, sometimes train stacking does occur where multiple trains are queued behind each other. SFS also identified the desire to be able to use the main Rail Runner station platform in Santa Fe for Sky Railway boardings and alighting. Rail Runner trains sometimes dwell for long periods of time at the station, which means Sky Railway cannot use the platform. SFS has two alternative boarding locations on the west side of the yard on two tracks that SFS owns, allowing them to board and alight passengers regardless of Rail Runner scheduling. However, these locations of these platforms are inconvenient for passengers to find and reach.

Santa Fe Southern Railway also identified several projects as priorities:

- Relocate power switches on the NMRX mainline between mileposts 18 and 19 which give access to the NMRX storage tracks and the Premier spur which will effectively provide a 600-foot-long passing siding).
- Financial support for rebuilding timber bridges on the Eldorado Subdivision owned by NMDOT (primarily a bridge at milepost 9.4) to permit SFS to handle 263,000-pound railcars; the bridges are financially the responsibility of SFS to maintain under its operating agreement with NMDOT.
- Upgrade ground power availability to 480 volts and repair track at Lamy yard. This is where they do the bulk of their mechanical repairs and upkeep ($100,000 or more investment).
- Signal upgrades to grade crossings and advance warning beacons on U.S. Route 285. This is an ongoing project that SFS is working with NMDOT on. Most of their systems run on technology from the 1930s to 1960s.
- Redraw old hand-drawn signal circuitry plans in CAD. Accurate signal circuitry plans are required by FRA to be present in each signal bungalow. This project is also ongoing.
- Conduct bridge repairs. Bridges are inspected annually, but there are some that would require capital investment using additional funding sources to increase load capacity.
- Track repairs are ongoing as SFS increases its track use frequency. Track projects to eliminate locations of 5 mph slow orders on their track.

- Refurbish Lamy depot similar to how the City of Santa Fe refurbished Santa Fe Depot.
- Expand yard track capacity in Lamy.
- Develop additional storage for cars as a source of income in Santa Fe. SFS could store private vintage passenger cars.
- SFS has some regulatory concerns that would be costly if adherence became mandatory, such as if the PTC exception was eliminated or if proposed EPA requirements for tiered locomotive emissions are placed into effect. The Santa Fe MPO notes that refurbishing Santa Fe Southern Railway is a priority. That plan update predates the new ownership of SFSR and the restart of service in 2021.

New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society Needs

The New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society, operating as New Mexico Heritage Rail (NMHR), has restored the ATSF 2926 steam locomotive to operating condition and commenced non-passenger operations within Albuquerque. NMHR desires to begin passenger excursion operations and to expand its operating area beyond Albuquerque. There are three significant milestones that must be reached before this can occur:

- Obtaining liability insurance for passenger rail operations that meets the federal statutory liability maximum per incident, currently just under $323 million.
- Implementing Positive Train Control (PTC) on the ATSF 2926 to enable trips of more than 20 miles in PTC-equipped territory.
- There are no wye tracks[30] at or near potential excursion destinations with curvature large enough to allow the ATSF 2926 locomotive to turn around for its return to Albuquerque. The only location northeast of Albuquerque that has sufficient curvature is at French, 30 miles south of Raton and 80 miles north of Las Vegas.

1.4 Rail Safety in New Mexico

1.4.1 Ongoing Programs and Projects to Improve Safety and Security

Federal Railroad Administration's Office of Railroad Safety

Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Office of Railroad Safety promotes and regulates safety throughout the U.S. railroad industry. The office executes its regulatory and inspection responsibilities through a diverse staff of railroad safety experts. The staff includes 400 federal safety inspectors who operate out of eight regional offices[31]. Each regional administrator is supported by two deputy regional administrators, chief inspectors, supervisory specialists, grade crossing safety managers and safety inspectors for six of the safety disciplines focusing on compliance and enforcement in hazardous materials, motive power and equipment, operating practices, signal and train control, track, and grade crossing safety.

30 A wye track is a triangular joining arrangement of three rail lines with a railroad switch (set of points) at each corner connecting to the incoming lines that allows a locomotive or train to reverse direction.
31 FRA Region 5 in Fort Worth, Texas, has rail safety oversight responsibility for New Mexico.

Other functions include:

- Railroad safety and customer training (including state safety inspectors)
- Accident and employee fatality investigations and reporting
- Partnerships between labor, management, and the agency that address systemic initiatives
- Development and implementation of safety rules and standards

FRA has entered into a State Participation Agreement with NMDOT that enables two of NMDOT's positions to act in FRA's stead on safety inspections. Each inspector receives training from FRA in one of the safety disciplines that is agreed upon by FRA and NMDOT at the time of hiring. Presently, one of these positions is staffed by a hazardous materials specialist, and the other is staffed by a railroad operating practices specialist.

Operation Lifesaver

Operation Lifesaver is a nonprofit public safety education and awareness organization dedicated to reducing collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail crossings and trespassing on or near railroad tracks. The organization is active nationwide, and the statewide organization is New Mexico Operation Lifesaver.

Operation Lifesaver's network of authorized volunteer speakers and trained instructors offer free rail safety education programs in 50 states. Volunteers and instructors speak to school groups, driver education classes, community audiences, professional drivers, law enforcement officers, and emergency responders.

Operation Lifesaver programs are co-sponsored by federal, state and local government agencies, highway safety organizations and America's railroads. The programs promote the three E's – Education, Enforcement and Engineering – to keep people safe around the tracks and highway-rail at-grade crossings.

Positive Train Control

Positive Train Control (PTC) is a federally mandated railroad safety system that all passenger railroads and Class I freight railroads have implemented as of December 29, 2020[32]. PTC is a communication-based/processor-based train control technology that provides a system capable of reliably and functionally preventing train-to-train collisions, over-speed derailments, incursions into established railroad work zone limits, and the movement of a train through a main line switch in the improper position. All Class I railroad main lines that handle any poisonous-inhalation-hazardous materials and any railroad main lines over which regularly scheduled intercity passenger or commuter rail services are provided are required to implement PTC. Also, Class I main lines that exceed 5 million gross tons per year are subject to the PTC statute, even if no passenger rail service is operated or poisonous/hazardous materials traffic is carried.

New Mexico rail lines subject to statutory PTC implementation include the following, which can be seen in Figure 1-13:

- BNSF's Gallup, Clovis, and Hereford Subdivisions
- UP's Lordsburg, Carrizozo, and Tucumcari Subdivisions
- NMRX's Santa Fe Subdivision and Albuquerque Subdivision between Belen, Albuquerque, CP Madrid, and Santa Fe

Given the light train volume, permanent limited operations exceptions have been granted on the BNSF Glorieta and Raton Subdivisions, and the risk mitigation plan is expected to remain in effect indefinitely on

32 https://railroads.dot.gov/research-development/program-areas/train-control/ptc/positive-train-control-ptc

the NMRX Albuquerque Subdivision between Lamy and CP Madrid, although Amtrak and NMDOT are in discussions to install PTC between Lamy and CP Madrid under Amtrak funding.

A critical concern for short lines operating over Class I trackage equipped with PTC is that continued access will be contingent on using PTC-equipped locomotives, which short lines may not have. While the FRA allows exemptions from this requirement under some circumstances, individual track owners (usually Class I railroads) may impose more stringent requirements. PTC for short lines is very costly, with a single installation on an older locomotive costing in excess of $100,000. Once locomotive PTC systems are operational, short lines will incur recurring costs for back-office services necessary to support PTC.

State Legislative Initiatives

Federal statute[33] generally restricts States from adopting or continuing to enforce laws, regulations, or orders related to railroad safety once the United States Secretary of Transportation has prescribed a regulation or issued an order regulating the subject matter covered under the State requirement. States do have the ability to adopt safety laws and regulations in areas where the United States Secretary of Transportation has not acted. Additionally, States may adopt and enforce laws or regulations more stringent than that of Federal regulations where:

- The law or regulation is necessary to eliminate or reduce an essentially local safety hazard;
- The law or regulation is not incompatible with a Federal law, regulation, or order; and
- The law or regulation does not unreasonably burden interstate commerce.

In New Mexico, there has been interest in enacting safety statutes addressing safety concerns, although to date only one such bill has become law - a 2009 statute that requires trains to ring their bell while approaching grade crossings. The New Mexico State Legislature considered bills to require a minimum 2-person crew on all trains in multiple legislative sessions, but deferred action as FRA was developing its own regulation which took effect in 2024. In 2025, following the derailment of a train carrying hazardous materials in East Palestine, Ohio, a bill was introduced and debated that would require wayside detectors able to identify overheated bearings and dragging equipment at least every 10 miles within New Mexico.

1.4.2 New Mexico Rail Accidents and Incidents

FRA's Office of Safety Analysis maintains a railroad accident and incident database as part of FRA's oversight of safety on the national railroad system.

Table 1-17 shows FRA statistics for the total number of rail-related accidents in New Mexico over the past 10 calendar years. FRA assigns accidents and incidents to one of three categories: Train Accidents; Highway-Rail Incidents; and Other Incidents. Each category is defined and discussed in detail below.

Table 1-17: Total Rail Accidents/Incidents in New Mexico (2015-2024)

Accident/ Incident Type	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	10-Year Average
Total Accidents	102	90	86	71	76	102	90	86	82	62	84.7
Total Deaths	6	8	3	8	7	4	7	18	23	9	9.3
Total Injuries	64	63	70	49	41	38	30	48	55	33	49.1
Source: FRA Office of Safety Analysis											

33 49 USC, Section 20106

Train Accidents

Train accidents include train derailments, collisions, and other events involving on-track rail equipment that result in fatalities, injuries, or monetary damage above a threshold set by FRA. Train accident statistics in the state over the past decade are provided in Table 1-18 and Table 1-19.

Table 1-18: Total Train Accidents/Incidents in New Mexico (2015-2024)

Accident/ Incident Type	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	10-Year Average
Total Accidents	26	13	18	16	25	15	23	17	14	17	18.4
Total Deaths	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0.3
Total Injuries	1	2	4	3	0	3	1	0	0	1	1.5
Source: FRA Office of Safety Analysis											

Table 1-19: Train Accidents in Descending Frequency by Railroad (2021-2024)

	Multi-Year Total		Total Year Counts			YTD Counts Jan-Oct		% Change Over Time		
	Accidents	Pct of Total	2021	2022	2023	2023	2024	2021 to 2023	2022 to 2023	To Oct 2024
BNSF	55	75.3%	15	14	13	12	13	-13.3	-7.1	8.3
UP	10	13.7%	7	1	1	1	1	-85.7	.	.
AZER	4	5.5%	1	1	.	.	2	.	.	.
NMRX	2	2.7%	.	.	1	1	1	.	.	.
Amtrak	1	1.4%	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.
TXN	1	1.4%	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	
Total	**71**	**100.0**	**23**	**17**	**14**	**13**	**17**	**-39.1**	**-17.6**	**30.8**
Source: FRA Office of Safety Analysis										

Other Rail Incidents

Other rail incidents include events other than train accidents or crossing incidents that caused a death or injury to any person. Most fatalities in this category are due to rail trespassers. Other events which generally lead to injuries in this category include such activities as getting on or off equipment, doing maintenance work, throwing switches, setting handbrakes, falling, etc. Rail passenger-related casualties can include boarding or alighting from standing trains or platforms. Statistics for this category of rail incidents are shown in Table 1-20 below, which include deaths and injuries reported for trespassers.

Table 1-20: Other Rail Incidents in New Mexico (2014-2024)

Type	10-year average	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Incidents	10.6	9	10	9	7	11	11	4	12	16	15	13
Casualties	11.5	9	11	11	8	11	12	4	14	17	16	13
Fatalities	6.8	4	7	4	5	7	7	3	8	14	10	6
Injuries	4.6	5	4	7	3	4	5	1	6	3	6	7
Source: FRA Office of Safety Analysis												

Highway-Rail At-Grade Crossing Safety in New Mexico

The interaction of trains and roadways at grade crossings across the state poses safety concerns. Cars, trucks, pedestrians, and bicyclists frequently collide with trains, often resulting in serious injury or death. The presence of parallel roadways often results in limited storage distance between intersections and grade crossings, where trucks, buses, and trailers may be struck by trains while waiting to enter or cross these roadways. In busy locations, at grade crossings can also contribute to traffic congestion. Grade crossing improvements and grade separations help solve these problems.

In all, there are 1,238 at-grade highway-rail crossings in New Mexico. Of these, 711 at-grade crossings are on public roads with the remaining crossings considered private crossings. Public at-grade crossings in the state have various levels of grade crossing warning devices. Table 1-21 shows the type of warning equipment and the number of crossings equipped with each; the warning devices are shown in a decreasing order of warning effectiveness from left to right.

Table 1-21: Types of Warning Devices at New Mexico Public At-Grade Crossings

	Active Warning Devices			Passive Warning Devices				
Warning Device Type	4 Quad Gates	Gates	Flashing Lights	Stop Signs	Cross Bucks	Other	None	Total
Number of Crossings	40	303	54	37	255	8	14	711
Source: FRA Office of Safety Analysis								

These tables show that over half (56 percent) of all public at-grade crossings in the state have what are considered active warning devices such as gates and flashing lights, while less than half (44 percent) of crossings have passive, other, or no warning systems. Many of these crossings are on inactive track and/or on industry-owned track.

Highway-Rail At-Grade Crossing Incidents in New Mexico

Table 1-22 shows the number of highway-rail grade crossing incidents, fatalities, and injuries occurring at all at-grade crossings over the past decade. The grade crossing accident data are for public and private crossings combined. About 90 percent of reported accidents are at public grade crossings.

Table 1-22: Highway-Rail Accidents/Incidents in New Mexico (2014-2024)

Type	10-year average	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Incidents	11.9	15	12	16	13	8	7	13	8	13	7	19
Fatalities	2.5	5	1	6	2	1	2	1	0	4	0	5
Injuries	4.5	7	2	0	9	6	1	7	1	2	5	10
Source: FRA Office of Safety Analysis												

In 2017, NMDOT developed its New Mexico State Highway Safety Plan. The plan outlined four priority highway-rail at-grade crossing safety strategies for the state:

- Enhance safety for public at-grade crossings for motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.
- Implement measures that reduce trespassing incidents on railroad tracks and facilitate, with community involvement, channelization of pedestrians.
- Eliminate or upgrade at-grade crossings, where stopped trains frequently block the crossings for an extended time.
- Mitigate crossings where emergency vehicles that must cross the tracks have no viable alternative road access to the opposite side.

1.5 Non-Railroad Use of Railroad Property

Railroads needed to acquire the rights-of-way on which the rail lines are constructed, either as land grants, fee purchases, or easements, and generally have rights to permit other parties to utilize portions of these rights of way as long as such use doesn't interfere with railroad operations and maintenance. Railroads frequently license portions of their rights of way to utilities and communications firms for their infrastructure, for instance.

Most railroads, both nationally and in New Mexico, were constructed prior to World War I, before the automobile became the dominant form of travel. Many places that were undeveloped when the railroads were built are now developed, and there often is limited land available for further infrastructure expansion. In recent decades, as bicycle use has increased, public entities have identified railroad rights of way as potential locations for multiuse trails and approached railroads for permission to use these portions of rights of way for trails.

One way that railroad property may become available for alternative use is when there are no longer any local rail customers along a rail line and any through-traffic that uses the line is shifted to alternative routes.

Abandonments, Rail-Banking, and Rails to Trails

Federal law as codified in 49 U.S.C. § 10903 governs the filing and procedure for common carrier application to abandon or discontinue rail operations over any part of its railroad lines, as detailed in 49 CFR Part 1152. Abandonment or discontinuation requires a U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB)[34] finding "that the present or future public convenience and necessity require or permit the abandonment or discontinuance." Further, 49 CFR 1152.50 provides for exemption from the requirements for abandonment and discontinuance when the STB has found approval is unnecessary to carry out rail transportation policy

34 The STB has broad economic regulatory oversight of railroads, including rates, service, the construction, acquisition and abandonment of rail lines, carrier mergers and interchange of traffic among carriers.

of 49 U.S.C. § 10101, and the actions are of limited scope not requiring shippers be protected from abuse of market power.

The principal requirements for discontinuance or abandonment are that the railroad certify that no local traffic has moved over the line for two years, that any overhead traffic can be routed over other lines, and that no formal complaint is filed by a rail service user.

For example, BNSF filed for abandonment of a portion of the Defiance Branch from MP 14.50 through 19.61 in 2012 following the McKinley mine closure in 2010.

Rail-Banking

Under the National Trails System Act, 16 U.S.C. 1247(d), the STB is given an administrative role in assisting carriers who wish to rail-bank their corridors as an alternative to a complete abandonment of the line, thus preserving the rail corridor for possible future use. The railroad may form an agreement with any person, public or private, who would like to use the banked rail line as a trail or linear park until it is again needed for rail use. There has been no rail-banking of rail corridors to date in New Mexico.

Rail-banking under the 1983 National Trails System Act is not an option once a railroad has completed the abandonment of a rail line. Railroad rights of way acquired through land grants or easements will revert to the underlying adjacent landowner or underlying owner after abandonment, who is then free to develop the land. Many of the New Mexico railroad lines abandoned before 1983 have newer construction replacing significant parts of those rights of way, making reassembling the former railroad corridor for other uses problematic.

Rails to Trails/Rails with Trails

The establishment of multi-use trails within abandoned, rail-banked, and active rail corridors is growing in popularity. Rail trails require significantly less right-of-way than roadways, and offer pedestrians and bicyclists travel opportunities without conflicts with adjacent car and truck traffic. The term “rails to trails” refers to the establishment of trails within abandoned or rail-banked rail corridors. The term “rails with trails” refers to the establishment of trails within active rail corridors when this can be achieved without interference to railroad operations, or without hazard to trail users from railroad activity. NMDOT and BNSF are both concerned about the safety of trail users along Rail Runner, and both must approve any proposed trails along NMDOT-owned rail right-of-way purchased from BNSF. NMDOT requires new trails along the Rail Runner right-of-way have six-foot-high fences to provide a positive separation between the trail and the tracks. BNSF must approve designs for trails along the rail lines it formerly owned given that they still retain a freight easement on Rail Runner trackage. NMDOT and BNSF also requires a minimum 25-foot distance between the trail fence and the nearest track centerline where constraints may exist, although at least a 40-foot offset distance is preferred. However, BNSF typically does not allow trails on its own railroad property, similar to other Class I railroads.

New Mexico Rail Trails

Most rail trails in New Mexico are located on railroad property acquired by NMDOT for construction and operation of Rail Runner. NMDOT, with BNSF review and concurrence where BNSF also operates, has approved trails in each of the four counties served by Rail Runner. From south to north, these are the rail trail projects that have been built or are underway along NMDOT railroad property:

- The Village of Los Lunas has been constructing in stages a 3.6 mile north-south multiuse trail between the Rail Runner tracks and NM 314, which parallels the tracks to the west. The southern 2.4 miles of this trail, between Morris Road and Romeroville Road, has been constructed, and the

northern 1.2 miles from Romeroville Road to Griego Road, is under construction in 2025. The trail is largely constructed within railroad right-of-way south of Romeroville Road, and within a parallel highway right-of-way north of Romeroville Road.

- Bernalillo County, as part of a larger trail network, has constructed north-south multi-use trails west of the Rail Runner tracks from Rio Bravo Boulevard as far south as the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. The 2.5-mile segment of these trails between Desert Road and Rio Bravo Boulevard, completed in 2020, are partially within the railroad right-of-way.
- The City of Albuquerque, as part of its city-wide trail network, is developing multi-use trails that will connect the downtown area near the Alvarado Transportation Center (where both Rail Runner and Amtrak trains stop) to the Old Town area of Albuquerque. These trails will generally follow the Rail Runner tracks and the Sawmill Industrial Spur, although the specific alignment for much of the route has not been determined. In 2025, Albuquerque is in final design for two separate segments of the trail. One segment of 0.5 miles immediately north of the Alvarado Transportation Center will be within the railroad mainline right-of-way and will connect Central Avenue and Lomas Boulevard. A second segment of 0.6 miles will connect 12th Street to Bellamah Avenue using an abandoned industry track on the Sawmill Industrial Spur. The alignment between Lomas Boulevard and 12th Street has not been determined.
- The Town of Bernalillo in 2023 completed a 1.6 mile north-south multi-use trail within railroad right-of-way that connects Bernalillo's two Rail Runner stations and extends south as far as Avenida Lucero. It also provides for two new pedestrian crossings of the railroad tracks. This trail provides a safe north-south connection for Bernalillo residents who had for generations walked on or along the railroad tracks to get from one end of town to the other, sometimes with tragic results.
- The City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County are constructing two connected multiuse trails that follow the railroad right-of-way from Lamy to Santa Fe.
    - Within the city, the Santa Fe Rail Trail extends 4.7 miles from the city limits to Paseo de Peralta in the Santa Fe Railyard. South of Cerrillos Road, it is mostly located within railroad right-of-way, while north of Cerrillos Road it is located within the city-owned Santa Fe Railyard, formerly owned by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (ATSF) Railway. The final segment of this trail was completed in 2021.
    - Santa Fe County has been constructing the Santa Fe County Rail Trail southwards in multiple stages from the south city limits towards Lamy. As of the end of 2024, 9.8 miles of the trail extending to Spur Ranch Road has been constructed within railroad right-of-way, and final design was nearing completion to extend the trail as far as US 285. The Rail Trail will depart from the railroad right-of-way approximately mid-way between Spur Ranch Road and US 285. South of Spur Ranch Road, the trail will depart the railroad right-of-way. The alignment for the final extension of the trail from US 285 to Lamy has not been determined, but it is not expected to use the railroad right-of-way.

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2. New Mexico Rail: Funding, Agencies, and Coordination

2.1 The Institutional Structure of the New Mexico Rail-Related Programs

There are many state, regional, and local agencies that have a role in New Mexico's rail programs. No one entity has ultimate authority or responsibility for New Mexico rail programs. There are various state agencies with rail-related responsibilities:

- The New Mexico Department of Transportation performs rail planning and policy making for the state and owns 132 miles of mainline right-of-way and the New Mexico Rail Runner Express. Within NMDOT, these functions are managed by the Rail Bureau, part of the Transit and Rail Division.
- Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission oversees the operation of the C&TS, owned jointly by the States of New Mexico and Colorado.
- New Mexico Economic Development Department works to build a competitive environment to create jobs, develop the tax base, and provide incentives for business development in the state; the work may include promotive rail improvements.
- The New Mexico Border Authority provides leadership in the development of the state's international ports of entry, including the potential development of a new rail crossing at Santa Teresa.
- The Rio Metro Regional Transit District, which operates the NMRX Rail Runner Express service.
- Other state agencies with rail-related responsibilities include the New Mexico Tourism Department, the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, and the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

FRA's 2013 State Rail Plan Guidance requires states to identify proposed organizational, policy, legislative and program changes. This State Rail Plan does not recommend any changes to the Rail Bureau and the Transit and Rail Division duties, nor does it recommend the creation or abolition of any other agencies or authorities. No policy, legislative, or program changes are recommended.

2.1.1 Rail-Related Agencies

New Mexico Department of Transportation

The Railroad Planning and Projects Act[35] assigns NMDOT the responsibility for developing a coordinated rail freight and passenger transportation program with the United States Department of Transportation. NMDOT is authorized to enter into agreements with any bureau, agency, or department of the United States government for the planning of any railroad freight or passenger system for operation in New Mexico. NMDOT is tasked with maintaining programs of research, promotion, and development, with provision for

35 NMSA 63-3A-1 through NMSA 63-3A-3

public participation, and taking all practical steps to improve the quality of rail freight and passenger transportation services in New Mexico. NMDOT serves as the State Rail Transportation Authority, and the NMDOT Cabinet Secretary serves as the State Rail Plan Approval Authority.

NMDOT's Rail Bureau, part of the Transit and Rail Division, performs rail planning and policy-making for the state and participates in FRA inspections and investigations and for propagating safety rules and regulations. By virtue of the activities of the Rail Bureau, NMDOT is in compliance with 49 U.S. Code – Section 22102, which stipulates eligibility requirements for a long-established Federal Railroad Administration's rail freight grant assistance program pertaining to state planning and administration.

The NMDOT Rail Bureau has five principal areas of responsibility:

- Manages NMDOT-owned railroad assets, including 132 miles of right-of-way, and manages the agreement with Rio Metro for the operation of the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter service.
- Manages the statewide Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Improvement Program, also known as the Section 130 Program.
- Coordinates project design with railroads on highway projects that will have construction impacts on railroads to ensure that railroad requirements are addressed before construction contracts are awarded.
- Conducts statewide railroad planning, including development of the New Mexico State Rail Plan.
- Participates in FRA inspections and investigations under a Federal Railroad Safety Program State Participation Agreement with FRA to act in its stead on certain safety issues.

On July 1, 2024, all railroad-related responsibilities of the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (NMPRC) were transferred by statute to NMDOT, along with two railroad investigator staff positions. NMDOT has entered into a Federal Railroad Safety Program State Participation Agreement with FRA that enables these staff to act in FRA's stead on certain safety issues. NMPRC participated in this program under its own agreement with FRA from the 1990s until 2024.

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission

In 1970, New Mexico and Colorado established the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (C&TS) by purchasing the 64-mile narrow-gauge San Juan Line segment between Antonito, CO and Chama, NM from the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad. New Mexico and Colorado created the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission, a bi-state agency, to oversee the operation and assets of the C&TS in 1977. The Commission, made up of two governor-appointed members from each state, sets management policies for the C&TS. The Commission formed a Limited Liability Company (LLC) to handle the daily operation of the heritage railroad and to manage capital improvement projects.

New Mexico Economic Development Department

The mission of the New Mexico Economic Development Department (NMEDD) is to enhance and leverage a competitive environment to create jobs, develop the tax base, and provide incentives for business development in the state. Supporting the NMEDD in its mission is the New Mexico Partnership, a statutorily created public-private organization under contract to the NMEDD to market the state globally in order to attract new jobs and investment. NMEDD programs provide direct assistance to New Mexico businesses and communities, which may be rail-served.

The New Mexico Partnership website (www.nmpartnership.com) highlights service by BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad as competitive advantages attracting businesses to the state.

New Mexico Border Authority

The New Mexico Border Authority (NMBA) is an executive branch state agency that provides leadership in the development of the state's international ports of entry as well as serving as the Governor's advisor and point of contact for those interested in opportunities at the ports of entry. NMBA also facilitates new infrastructure, trade opportunities, job opportunities, job training capabilities, and many other activities that contribute to development of a productive economy along the New Mexico border.

New Mexico has three international ports of entry (POE): Santa Teresa, Columbus, and Antelope Wells. None of these border crossings involve cross-border rail operations. However, in 2014 UP opened its 2,200-acre Strauss Yard at Santa Teresa which handles truck-rail transfers of containers (1) to/from U.S. shippers or (2) via the El Paso POE or Santa Teresa POE to/from maquiladora plants in Juárez and elsewhere in Mexico.

NMBA is managing New Mexico's efforts towards establishing a new international rail border crossing to the Mexican State of Chihuahua. In 2016 NMBA completed a feasibility study that recommended establishing an international rail border crossing at Santa Teresa and is continuing planning efforts to develop the crossing, which is discussed more in Chapter 4.

2.1.2 Other State Agencies with Rail-Related Responsibilities

While no other agencies have a specific statutory role regarding rail planning and rail policy making, there are other state agencies whose responsibilities relate to rail. These include:

- New Mexico Tourism Department, which encourages visitors to come to New Mexico, including by rail.
- New Mexico Department of Public Safety, which exists to promote a safe and secure environment for the State of New Mexico, including at highway-rail at-grade crossings.
- New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, which leads the state's response to emergencies and disasters while providing for the safety and welfare of its citizens. Rail-related activities of the Department include responding to the release of hazardous materials from freight car derailments and mitigating risks associated with the criminal movement of illegal items by rail.

2.1.3 Regional Organizations with Rail-Related Responsibilities

Within New Mexico there are regional organizations that conduct transportation planning, develop economic development strategies, or provide public transportation services for specific parts of the state, and rail concerns form a part of these organizations' responsibilities. Every location within New Mexico is located within either a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO). Similarly, every location within New Mexico is within an Economic Development District (EDD). Groups of counties may also join together to form a Regional Transit District (RTD) for provision of public transportation services.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Metropolitan Planning Organizations are federally mandated and funded transportation policymaking organizations comprised of local government and transportation officials. The formation of an MPO is required for any urbanized area with a population greater than 50,000.

MPOs are required to maintain and continually update a Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) as well as a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is a multi-year program of federally funded and/or regionally significant prioritized transportation projects. Project information from each TIP is incorporated into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) administered by NMDOT. As MPO planning activities have evolved from focusing solely on passenger vehicle transportation to also addressing the movement of freight, it has become standard practice to consider multimodal connections and solutions including those centered on rail and rail-related issues. MPOs work cooperatively with area transportation stakeholders to understand and anticipate its area's travel needs and to develop required planning documents.

There are five MPOs wholly or partially within New Mexico:

- Farmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (FMPO)
  - Cities of Aztec, Bloomfield, Farmington, the Town of Kirtland and the urbanized areas of San Juan County
- Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization (SFMPO)
  - City of Santa Fe
- Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MRMPO)
  - Bernalillo, Valencia, Torrance, and Sandoval counties, as well as southern Santa Fe County
- Mesilla Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO)
  - Las Cruces, Mesilla and part of Doña Ana County
- El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (EPMPO), which is based in Texas but also includes parts of two New Mexico counties.
  - El Paso County, Texas, southern Doña Ana County, New Mexico, and a small portion of Otero County, New Mexico

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations

Federal law also authorizes states to establish and designate Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to enhance the planning, coordination, and implementation of statewide strategic long-range transportation plans and transportation improvement programs, including rail, with an emphasis on addressing the needs of rural areas. The state's RTPOs were established by NMDOT to develop an ongoing, cooperative process for multimodal transportation planning at the regional level. All parts of the state located outside the five MPOs are within an RTPO. Similar to the process used by MPOs to produce TIPs, RTPOs produce prioritized lists of projects known as Rural Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPRs), which are submitted for consideration and possible inclusion in the STIP by NMDOT.

The seven RTPOs in New Mexico are[36]:

- Northwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NWRTPO)
  - San Juan, McKinley, and Cibola counties
- Northern Pueblos Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NPRTPO)
  - Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, and Taos counties
- Northeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NERTPO)
  - Colfax, Mora and San Miguel counties
- Mid-Region Rural Transportation Planning Organization (MRRTPO)

[36] https://www.rtponm.org/regions

    - Torrance and Sandoval counties
- Southeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SERTPO)
    - Otero, Eddy, Lea, Chaves, and Lincoln counties
- South Central Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SCRTPO)
    - Socorro, Sierra, and Doña Ana counties
- Southwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO)
    - Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, and Luna counties

Economic Development Districts and Council of Governments

Economic Development Districts are multi-jurisdictional entities, designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, commonly composed of multiple counties and in certain cases covering areas which extend across state borders. They help lead the locally based, regionally driven economic development planning process that leverages the involvement of the public, private, and non-profit sectors to establish a strategic blueprint (i.e., an economic development roadmap) for regional collaboration.

In New Mexico, two districts are titled EDDs while five operate as Council of Governments, or COG. Councils of Governments are regional governing and/or coordinating bodies that exist throughout the U.S. COGs are normally controlled by their member local governments. COG members typically are drawn from the county, city, and other government bodies within its area. COGs can offer planning, coordination, and technical assistance to their members, administer programs at a regional level, and act as intermediaries between the local government members and the state or federal government. EDDs and COGs can consult and coordinate with state agencies like NMDOT on economic development and transportation projects.

Each EDD or COG administers the portions of each RTPO and MPO that exists within its boundaries. The seven EDDs/COGs in the state are:

- Eastern Plains Council of Governments (EPCOG)
- Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG)
- North Central New Mexico Economic Development District (NCNMEDD)
- Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments (NWNMCOG)
- South Central New Mexico Council of Governments (SCCOG)
- Southeastern New Mexico Council of Economic Development District (SNMEDD)
- Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments (SWNMCOG)

A primary responsibility of each EDD is to produce a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for its area. A CEDS is a strategic plan for regional economic development. Some EDDs in New Mexico have produced CEDS that include passenger and freight rail initiatives, objectives, and projects.

Regional Transit Districts

The Regional Transit District Act[37] allows the creation of RTDs, comprised of one or more governmental units within New Mexico, to provide regional public transit services. RTDs may finance, construct, operate or maintain regional transit systems within the boundaries of the RTD and may also provide transportation services outside the boundaries of the district. RTDs may also impose a regional transit gross receipts tax

37 Chapter 73, Article 25 NMSA 1978.

in all jurisdictions the RTD lies within, subject to a majority vote in a special joint election or a general election where the tax question appears on the ballot of all jurisdictions within the RTD.

There are four RTDs in New Mexico, two of which play an active role in the state's rail system.

- North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) comprises Los Alamos, Taos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe Counties, as well as six pueblos. NCRTD operates 24 fixed routes, some of which connect to Rail Runner, as well as demand response service. NCRTD receives funding from a Regional Transit Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) in its service area, a portion of which supports Rail Runner.
- Rio Metro Regional Transit District (RMRTD or Rio Metro) comprises Sandoval, Bernalillo, and Valencia Counties. Rio Metro operates the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter train, commuter bus, fixed-route local service that connects to rail stations, demand-response service in Valencia County and the City of Rio Rancho, and demand taxi service in Bernalillo County. RMRTD receives funds from its Regional Transit Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) in its service area, which support its bus routes, demand response, and Rail Runner. Rio Metro also funds some bus routes operated by other agencies.
- Southwest Regional Transit District (SWRTD) comprises Luna, Hidalgo, and Grant Counties. SWRTD provides service via Corre Caminos Transit, which operates a local bus route in Silver City, as well as paratransit service and three intercity bus routes.
- South Central Regional Transit District (SCRTD) comprises Doña Ana County, City of Las Cruces, Town of Mesilla, City of Sunland Park, Village of Hatch, Village of Williamsburg, City of Elephant Butte, and City of Truth or Consequences. SCRTD operates 8 fixed-route services spanning from Truth or Consequences to El Paso via Las Cruces. In 2017, SCRTD completed a feasibility study of a proposed commuter rail line linking Las Cruces and El Paso, TX, but no further active efforts are underway.

In addition to the transit service provided by regional transit agencies, some local governments operate their own service. While none of these operate or fund rail service, several (notably the City of Albuquerque and the City of Santa Fe) provide important connections to Rail Runner.

2.2 New Mexico Funding Sources

2.2.1 State's Authority for Rail Program Financing

Anti-Donation Clause

The Anti-Donation Clause in the New Mexico Constitution (adopted in 1912 as part of the original constitution) prohibits the state and political subdivisions of the state from directly or indirectly lending or pledging credit to or making any donation to or in aid of any person, association or public or private corporation or in aid of any private enterprise for the construction of any railroad. Certain exceptions are defined to this prohibition, including providing land, buildings, or infrastructure for facilities to support new or expanding businesses if this assistance is granted pursuant to general implementing legislation approved by the New Mexico Legislature.

The Anti-Donation Clause means that the state, unlike some other states, cannot make a grant to a railroad company to support that railroad's infrastructure or operations. However, it does not prevent the state from funding publicly owned railroad lines or owning railroad lines itself. It also does not prevent the state from

entering into contracts with private railroads such as a railroad paying to operate on state owned tracks or the state compensating railroads for costs incurred as part of a state road construction project.

Authority for Rail Investments

The New Mexico Legislature is the authority that establishes the annual budgets for state agencies and the capital outlays to political subdivisions of the state. Although there are not regularized state funding streams for rail, the State of New Mexico can issue bonds when authorized to do so by the State Legislature. In 2003, the Legislature enacted legislation that authorized the issuance of bonds by NMDOT that financed the development of Rail Runner as well as numerous highway projects throughout New Mexico[38]. The legislature may include capital outlay in annual appropriations that benefit rail.

The primary source of funding for NMDOT is the state road fund, which is funded by user fees, principally gasoline and diesel taxes. NMDOT may use the state road fund for all modes of transportation under its jurisdiction, including rail. Road fund revenues are being utilized to repay the bonds used to construct Rail Runner between 2006 and 2008. NMDOT also has the capacity to issue bonds without special authorizing legislation.

The state also has the ability to issue bonds for railroad projects through several mechanisms. Of course, bonds are not useful unless there is a revenue source (whether taxes or user fees) to repay them.

The Border Development Act authorizes the New Mexico Border Authority (NMBA) to initiate, develop, acquire, own, construct and maintain development projects along the international border between New Mexico and the Mexican State of Chihuahua. Eligible development projects include railroad switching yards, railroad stations, mass transportation systems, and freight transportation systems. NMBA may issue private activity bonds and revenue bonds to qualified entities for projects within the foreign trade zone, including the international ports of entry.

The New Mexico Finance Authority (NMFA) was created by the New Mexico State Legislature in 1992 to finance infrastructure projects for the state's counties and cities and certain departments of state government. The objective was to provide low-cost financing for borrowers who might not otherwise be able to access the tax-exempt bond market on a cost-effective basis. The 1992 statute created the Public Projects Revolving Fund ("PPRF") as the vehicle to accomplish this financing objective. As authorized by the statute, the NMFA issues tax-exempt PPRF bonds to obtain the funds it loans to New Mexico governmental entities. The 2003 Statewide Economic Development Finance Act (SWEDFA) also permits NMFA to issue loans to private, for-profit, and non-profit entities. The bonds used to finance Rail Runner development were issued by NMFA.

The Regional Transit District Act empowers Regional Transit Districts to issue bonds to finance the purchase, construction, renovation, equipping, or furnishing of a regional transit system project, pursuant to a resolution of the RTD board. Bonds must identify the revenue sources to be used for repayment.

38 House Bill 15, passed in the 2003 special session of the New Mexico State Legislature, created a bond program to fund transportation improvements in New Mexico, including commuter rail between Belen and Santa Fe, through the issuance of bonds. Proceeds from bonds authorized by the New Mexico State Legislature in 2003 were the primary source of funds for developing Rail Runner.

2.2.2 State Sources of Rail Funding

Legislative Appropriations

State funding for Rail Runner, along with funding for other State transportation projects, is subject to annual Legislative appropriations in the annual NMDOT budget or project-specific capital outlays. At the present time, there are no dedicated funding sources for railroad projects in the New Mexico statutes.

The New Mexico State Legislature may appropriate, for the Governor's signature, funds for rail through the capital outlay process, either from severance tax bond proceeds or from annual General Fund appropriations. Capital outlays were used to fund Rail Runner development as well as the establishment of quiet zones at many highway-rail grade crossings from Belen to Santa Fe. Legislative capital outlay appropriations provided $24.6 million when Rail Runner was developed.

In recent years, the only state-level rail-related capital outlays have been for the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (C&TS).

State Road Fund and Bonds

The State Road Fund, the principal local funding source for all NMDOT projects, is responsible for repaying the principal and interest on bonds used to finance Rail Runner development. The original bonds were refinanced to eliminate two cliff payments of principal due in 2024 and 2025. The refinanced bonds, at fixed interest rates, will be paid in full in 2030.

New Mexico Match Fund

The New Mexico Match Fund[39] is a non-reverting fund in the state treasury established in 2024 to provide matching funds for local entities on federal grants and to offset higher project costs incurred to comply with federal requirements. Administered by the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration, funding can be cited as the local match in grant applications, although disbursements from the Match Fund are contingent on the award of the federal grant for which the matching funds are sought. The Match Fund assisted San Juan County in its 2024 application for project development funds to undertake preliminary engineering and develop documentation for a NEPA decision on the proposed San Juan County rail line. This CRISI grant has now been obligated.

2.2.3 Local Sources of Rail Funding

In 2004, the New Mexico State Legislature granted Regional Transit Districts (RTDs) the authority to levy a gross receipts tax (GRT) to support public transportation projects. The tax must be approved by a majority of voters in an election within the RTD's jurisdiction. Funds may be used to finance any part of RTD, from administration to operations and capital. Two of the existing RTDs, North Central and Rio Metro, have successfully passed gross receipts tax initiatives.

Rio Metro Regional Transit District (RMRTD) Gross Receipts Tax

Rail Runner relies on dedicated local public financing for a significant portion of its operating and recurring capital expenses. By an approved ballot initiative, RMRTD receives a 1/8-cent GRT from the three counties

39 NMSA 6-9-20

in its region, half of which is dedicated to Rail Runner and the remaining half of which is for general transit operations.

North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) Gross Receipts Tax

By an approved ballot initiative, NCRTD receives a 1/8-cent GRT from the four counties in its region. While none of these funds are dedicated to Rail Runner under the initiative, NCRTD and RMRTD entered into an agreement[40] wherein NCRTD contributes 50% of the GRT revenue it collects in Santa Fe County to RMRTD for Rail Runner, a percentage that equals the percentage of Rio Metro's GRT dedicated to Rail Runner. This amounts to 1/16-cent of Santa Fe County's GRT contributing to Rail Runner.

2.2.4 Federal Sources Dedicated to Rail Funding

There are a number of Federal funding sources that can support rail initiatives, shown in Table 2-1 with the agencies that administer them. These include the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the National Surface Transportation and Innovative Financing Bureau (NSTIFB), the U.S. Department of Transportation, and other agencies.

NMDOT often works together with other entities like counties and municipalities for the non-federal match for grants.

Rio Metro receives Federal FTA Section 5337 State of Good Repair Grants Program and Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Funding. These two funds, in addition to the local GRT funds, make up the majority of Rio Metro's Rail Runner operating budget.

The State of New Mexico is served by two Amtrak long-distance routes, the *Southwest Chief* and the *Sunset Limited*, which are the financial responsibility of Amtrak and Congress to fund. By federal law, federal funding can support long distance routes but any routes under 750 miles long must be financially supported by states. While 17 states fund such state—supported corridors, New Mexico never has. The anti-donation clause in the New Mexico constitution restricts the ability of the State or any of its political subdivisions to contribute funding to support Amtrak as it is a private corporation.

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40 North Central Regional Transit District Resolution 2008-11

Table 2-1: Federal Funding Sources for Rail Projects

Agency	Program	Program Type	Last Year Funded
FRA	Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (49 USC 22907)	Competitive Grant	FY2026 *
FRA	Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (49 USC 24911)	Competitive Grant	FY2026 *
FRA	Restoration and Enhancement Grants (49 USC 22908)	Competitive Grant	FY2026 *
FRA	Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program (49 USC 22909)	Competitive Grant	FY2026 *
FTA	Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grants (49 USC 5309)	Competitive Grant	FY2026 *
FTA	Urbanized Area Formula Funding Program (49 U.S.C. 5307)	Formula Fund	FY2025
FTA	State of Good Repair Grants Program (49 USC 5337)	Competitive Grant	FY2025
FHWA	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) (23 USC 149)	Formula Fund	FY2026 *
NSTIFB	Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) (23 USC Chapter 6)	Loan	FY2020 #
NSTIFB	Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) (49 USC Chapter 224)	Loan	FY2022 #
NSTIFB	Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highway Projects (23 USC 117)	Competitive Grant	FY2026 *
USDOT	Grants for surface transportation infrastructure projects with significant local or regional impact (TIGER, BUILD, or RAISE)	Competitive Grant	TIGER FY2017 BUILD FY2020 RAISE FY2025
USDOT	National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program (MEGA) (49 USC 6701)	Competitive Grant	FY2026*
FHWA	Railway-Highway Crossing Program, a.k.a. Section 130 (23 USC 130)	Formula Fund	FY2025
Other	U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration	Competitive Grant	FY2025
Other	U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Programs	Grants and Loans	FY2025
Source: NMDOT			
*FFY 2026 funds appropriated in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58) # This is a loan program that does not require annual appropriations			

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI)

The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements program, known by its acronym CRISI, is the broadest source of federal funding for railroads. CRISI funds are used to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of passenger and freight rail systems.

The CRISI program is a competitive grant program established under the FAST Act of 2015 that funds:

- safety technology projects such as positive train control implementation
- grade crossing improvements or grade separations, and anti-trespassing measures
- rail line relocations
- projects that enhance multimodal connections or service integration between rail and other modes
- rehabilitation of rail infrastructure
- rehabilitation or procurement of locomotives
- rail research projects

The program operates on an annual appropriations basis and includes eligibility criteria that require matching funds and compliance with federal safety standards. Eligible activities include a wide range of capital, regional and corridor planning, environmental analyses, research, workforce development, and training projects. Due to the broad scope of projects competing for CRISI funds, several of these areas have been funded under other, more targeted programs.

Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail

Authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, this program supports the development, improvement, and expansion of intercity passenger rail service. It funds both new corridor development and improvements to existing services, including planning and construction. Projects are selected competitively and must meet specific criteria related to economic and operational feasibility.

Restoration and Enhancement Grants

Created under the FAST Act of 2015, this grant program helps restore or enhance previously discontinued or diminished intercity passenger rail services. The grants are competitive and intended to support routes that demonstrate long-term viability. Applicants must show how the service will sustain itself financially over time as grants are limited to three years of operating assistance per route and may not be renewed.

Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) Grant Program

This program, established by the IIJA of 2021, aims to improve safety and reduce motor vehicle delays by eliminating or upgrading at-grade railroad crossings. Grants are awarded competitively to projects that offer significant safety benefits, reduce vehicular congestion, and demonstrate engineering and financial feasibility. Funding is limited and appropriated annually.

Several projects in New Mexico have been selected for funding through the RCE program:

- In 2023, Doña Ana County was awarded $31.17 million to construct a highway overpass of Industrial Avenue over the Union Pacific Railroad line east of its Santa Teresa railyard.
- In 2025, NMDOT was selected to receive up to $44,890,094 to construct a highway overpass of Allison Road over the BNSF Railway west of its Gallup railyard.
- In 2025, the City of Clovis was selected to receive up to $1,040,000 to grade-separate one grade crossing and improve a second grade crossing near the BNSF Clovis railyard.
- In 2025, McKinley County was selected to receive up to $3,312,000 to conduct planning, alternatives analysis, and conceptual pre-engineering for the potential grade separation of 10 at-grade crossings in McKinley and Cibola counties.
- In 2025, the Texas Department of Transportation was selected to receive up to $73,061,388 to undertake right-of-way acquisition and construction of a project to grade-separate an existing crossing on the Texas-New Mexico border and eliminate two other grade crossings in Texico, NM.

Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grants (Section 5309)

Authorized originally by the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, this program funds the construction and modernization of fixed guideway transit systems, including commuter rail and light rail. It includes new starts, small starts, and core capacity projects. Applicants undergo a rigorous evaluation and rating process, and funding is disbursed in stages based on project readiness and performance. The funds are administered by the FTA.

Urbanized Area Formula Funding Program (49 U.S.C. 5307)

This longstanding program provides formula-based funding to urbanized areas for public transportation systems, including rail. An urbanized area is an incorporated area with a population of 50,000 or more that is designated as such by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Created by the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, it supports capital, planning, and operations expenses. The allocation of funds is based on factors such as population size and ridership levels, and recipients must adhere to federal transit regulations. These funds are administered by FTA. Rio Metro is a recipient of funding from this program for Rail Runner.

State of Good Repair Grants Program (Section 5337)

Established by MAP-21 in 2012, this program provides funding to maintain and replace aging transit infrastructure that is at least seven years old. Targeted specifically at fixed guideway systems, including commuter rail, the grants help ensure systems remain in a "state of good repair." Recipients are selected based on asset condition and must meet performance and reporting standards to qualify. These funds are administered by FTA. Rio Metro is a recipient of funding from this program for Rail Runner.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)

CMAQ was introduced by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 to fund transportation projects that help reduce traffic congestion and air pollution. This program funds transportation projects and programs that improve air quality by reducing transportation-related emissions in nonattainment and maintenance areas for ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. Examples of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality-eligible rail projects include the construction of intermodal facilities, rail track rehabilitation, diesel engine retrofits and idle-reduction projects in rail yards, and new rail sidings.

CMAQ funds are disbursed to and within a state based on levels of pollution within an area, with the state or the region utilizing the funds to implement projects that reduce congestion or improve air quality. Projects must be included in MPO transportation plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs) or the current state transportation improvement program in areas without an MPO. The federal matching share for these funds is 80 percent.

The CMAQ program is administered by FHWA. CMAQ funds are eligible to support operating costs of new start transit services for the first three years of operations or of transit services that were eligible for CMAQ funding in FFY 2012. Rail Runner was eligible for CMAQ funding in FFY 2012 and does use CMAQ funds to support operating expenses.

Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA)

TIFIA, created by TEA-21 in 1998, offers credit assistance in the form of direct loans and loan guarantees for major transportation projects, including freight and passenger rail, with flexible repayment terms to projects of national and regional significance, including rail transit programs. The program is designed to leverage private and other public investment. Projects must meet eligibility requirements based on size, cost-effectiveness, and creditworthiness.

Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF)

This program, stemming from the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act of 1976, provides low-interest loans and loan guarantees for railroad infrastructure development. Eligible applicants include public and private railroads, state and local governments, and certain rail-related entities. Loans can be used for a wide range of projects but are subject to financial scrutiny and must be repaid over time.

Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highway Projects

Also known as INFRA grants, this program was authorized under the FAST Act of 2015 to support large-scale freight and highway projects of national importance. It includes eligibility for rail infrastructure if the project improves freight mobility and national economic competitiveness. Funding is highly competitive and targeted at projects with significant regional or national impact.

Grants for surface transportation infrastructure projects with significant local or regional impact (TIGER, BUILD, RAISE)

Originally established as TIGER in 2009 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and later rebranded as BUILD then as RAISE, and again as BUILD, this program provides funding for surface transportation projects with strong local or regional significance. Rail projects are eligible, especially those promoting safety, accessibility, and environmental sustainability. Funding is awarded through an annual competitive process.

These grants focus on capital projects that generate economic development and improve access to reliable, safe, and affordable transportation. They prioritize providing grants for capital investment in rail, highway, bridge, public transportation, and port projects and are awarded by U.S. Department of Transportation on a competitive basis. The USDOT awards competitive federal RAISE discretionary grants to fund capital investments in surface transportation infrastructure. The criteria used in each round of funding reflect the policy priorities of the Department of Transportation and the current administration.

National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program (MEGA)

This program, created by the IIJA in 2021, funds large-scale, transformative infrastructure projects that are nationally or regionally significant. It targets multimodal investments, including rail, with a focus on improving safety, efficiency, and climate resilience. Competitive selection is based on readiness, scope, and impact.

Railway-Highway Crossing Program (Section 130)

The Railway-Highway Crossing Program, often referred to as the Section 130 program, was created in 1978 to eliminate hazards at railway-highway grade crossings. Funding for this program has been included in each surface transportation bill as a set-aside from the Highway Safety Improvement Program, with funding appropriated annually that are apportioned to eligible states by formula. The New Mexico Section 130 Highway-Rail Safety Improvement Program, administered by the NMDOT Rail Bureau, is funded through this program and dedicated to the elimination of hazards at public highway-rail grade crossings to reduce risk to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The New Mexico Section 130 Program is a cooperative effort between the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, NMDOT, railroad companies operating within the State of New Mexico, and local municipalities or counties.

Annual Section 130 Program apportionments by FHWA to New Mexico fund approximately $2.3 million in safety improvements each year, which includes a 10% local match from NMDOT. NMDOT sometimes supplements this budget by utilizing other FHWA safety funding that is eligible to fund Section 130 projects. New Mexico's railroads may voluntarily contribute funding towards individual Section 130 projects. NMDOT Rail Bureau uses the funds to implement improvements aimed at reducing accidents and incidents at crossings.

This program requires NMDOT to prioritize and select crossings for inclusion. The FRA maintains a database of all train, vehicle, and crash data associated with railroad crossings. In order to receive funding, NMDOT uses a priority index related to accident prediction to list crossings. In addition to improving safety at grade crossings, Section 130 funds may be used to facilitate consolidation of crossings to permanently close one or more redundant crossings.

Not all grade crossing projects are eligible for funding under the Section 130 Program. Crossing projects that are not eligible include:

- Construction of new crossings
- Private crossing projects
- Crossing projects for station platforms
- Quiet zone applications
- Demonstration or pilot projects

Grade separations of existing at-grade crossings, while eligible for Section 130 Program funding, are not considered by NMDOT for Section 130 funding due to the magnitude of costs of such projects. Proposed highway-rail grade separations are instead considered under the Highway Safety Improvement Program, an FHWA safety program that is separate from the Section 130 Program but may be used to fund projects eligible for Section 130 funding.

U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration

The U.S. Department of Commerce provides Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants for projects in economically distressed industrial sites that promote job creation or retention. Eligible projects

must be located within EDA-designated redevelopment areas or economic development centers. Eligible rail projects include railroad spurs and sidings. EDA also provides disaster recovery grants. Grant assistance is available for up to 50 percent of the project, although EDA could provide up to 80 percent for projects in severely depressed areas.

Under the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs, EDA solicits applications from applicants in order to provide investments that support construction, non-construction, technical assistance, and revolving loan fund projects. Grants and cooperative agreements made under these programs are designed to leverage existing regional assets and support the implementation of economic development strategies that advance new ideas and creative approaches to advance economic prosperity in distressed communities.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Facility Program and Rural Development Program provide grant or loan funding mechanisms to fund construction, enlargement, extension, or improvement of community facilities providing essential services in rural areas and towns. Grant assistance is available for up to 75 percent of the project cost. Eligible rail-related community facilities include transportation infrastructure for industrial parks and municipal docks.

2.2.5 Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can generally be described as arrangements under which private entities (which can include freight railroads) and government entities both contribute resources that offers a mutually beneficial way to solve critical transportation problems. According to the Association of American Railroads (AAR), the North American freight railroad industry advocacy group based in Washington, DC, "Partnerships allow governments to expand the use of rail, including passenger rail, paying only for the public benefits of a project. Meanwhile, host freight railroads pay for the benefits they receive." It is important to note, though, that a PPP structure still requires an underlying funding source, which is usually either tax revenues, user fees, or financial contributions from private entities that benefit from a project. While the Anti-Donation Clause in the New Mexico Constitution places severe restrictions on the ability of the State and local governments to use PPPs to finance projects on privately-owned railroads, it does not place restrictions on using PPPs to finance publicly owned transportation infrastructure that serves these railroads and/or the shippers that use rail freight.

In 2025, the New Mexico legislature enacted the Trade Ports Development Act[41], which allows public partners to enter into PPP agreements to facilitate development of designated trade port districts by undertaking projects that create or modify infrastructure that support the functions of a trade port. This could include railroad infrastructure within the trade port or railroad infrastructure that connects the trade port to the national rail network.

41 https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/25%20Regular/bills/house/HB0019.html

2.3 Program Coordination

Integration with Other State Plans

This State Rail Plan is integrated with recent, major NMDOT planning efforts. NMDOT's long range transportation plan, the New Mexico 2045 Plan, identifies maintaining the state's passenger rail assets in a state of good repair as a priority. This priority is shared with the State Rail Plan. More information about the other New Mexico state plans is in Chapter 3.

Coordination with Neighboring States

As New Mexico shares rail corridors and services with other states, it is essential to coordinate with other states through both direct interaction and through comprehensive review and analysis of state rail plans prepared by other states in the region.

Many of the discussed projects in this Rail Plan will require coordination with other states, including planning for a potential commuter rail implementation between Las Cruces and El Paso, and ongoing multistate coordination for Southwest Chief route improvements. Other projects are largely confined to New Mexico or are far enough in the future that significant coordination with neighboring states has not begun.

Coordination with Federal Transportation Plans and Programs

NMDOT works with the FRA and other states in the region to ensure that the region's rail perspectives and issues are adequately addressed within the national rail planning process.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 directed the FRA to develop a National Rail Plan to address the rail needs of the United States. The Preliminary National Rail Plan, published in October 2009, provided objectives for rail as a means of improving the performance of the nation's transportation system, which included:

- Increased passenger and freight rail performance
- Integration of all transportation modes to form a more complementary transportation system
- Identification of projects of national significance
- Providing for increased public awareness

Since 2009, the concept of developing a federal National Rail Plan has evolved toward capturing state rail planning findings and reflecting the issues and priorities addressed in various state rail plans in a series of regional rail plans. The first such plan, the Southwest Regional Rail Plan, was completed in 2014. The states in the primary study area were Arizona, California, and Nevada. The states in the extended study area included Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico, and this regional plan did suggest passenger rail improvements that would impact New Mexico. These improvements are noted in Chapter 4. The Midwest Regional Rail Plan and the Southeast Regional Rail Plan were completed in 2021[42].

The federal government has also engaged in several planning efforts around passenger rail. The Federal Railroad Administration's Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study, required by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, was completed in January 2025. It outlined Preferred Options for restoring, enhancing, or expanding long-distance service, including daily service on the Sunset Limited and

42 https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2022-11/Final%20Report-MWRRP%20Appendices_PDFa.pdf

four new corridors that would pass through New Mexico. The IIJA also created the Corridor ID program, through which the FRA provided grants to states to study new short distance corridor service. One such grant went to Colorado to study service which could potentially be extended to New Mexico, though that is not within the scope of the current study.

In addition to coordinating New Mexico's State Rail Plan with a National Rail Plan process and the existing freight rail network, NMDOT will coordinate as necessary with the U.S. Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's Transportation Engineering Agency, which oversees STRACNET as discussed in Chapter 1.

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3. Impacts and Trends

This section discusses the economic, environmental, and community impacts of rail as well as the socio-economic trends at work in New Mexico. It describes current rail traffic in the state, intercity and commuter rail trends. Lastly, trends in fuel costs, rail congestion, highway and airport congestion, and land use in New Mexico are explored.

3.1 Economic, Environmental, and Community Impacts of Rail in New Mexico

3.1.1 Economic Impacts

In New Mexico, rail operations support three objectives:

(1) moving goods (freight);

(2) moving people (long-distance passengers and commuters); and

(3) serving tourists as attractions (historic/scenic rail).

Each of these functions is associated with economic activity in the state that can be quantified to describe the economic contribution that rail activity makes to New Mexico's economy. These impacts are generated through purchases of supplies and worker hiring to produce rail service as well as the spending by rail workers as it ripples through the economy. Collectively, these impacts are direct, indirect, and induced economic effects[43].

Economic impacts are also generated through the activities of other industries that purchase rail transportation services – a coal producer who ships by rail or an out-of-state tourist who arrives by rail and vacations in New Mexico, for example. It would be an overstatement to conclude that all of these "rail user" impacts are reliant on the provision of rail service and would disappear from New Mexico's economy if the rail service was discontinued. They do, however, illustrate the volume of economic activity supported by rail activity across the state. Rail passengers and shippers select rail because it provides them with an advantage over other modes. Absent the availability of rail, they would lose that value.

Economic impacts are measured in terms of employment, earnings, Value Added, and output. A snapshot of the findings is provided below. Value Added is the incremental amount by which a good's value is increased at each stage of its production, exclusive of inputs. Output, or gross state product, by contrast, is the total value of goods and services produced by an industry or economy.

When the employment associated with all parts of the rail industry are included, rail-related employment in New Mexico totals nearly 181,210 or about 20 percent of the state's 845,580 jobs as of May 2023, as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While this is a larger-than-average share for a state, it reflects the comparatively small size of the state's economy and the large role of the agriculture, energy, and mining industry in the state's economy.

43 Direct economic impacts are the initial expenditures related to the activity. Indirect impacts are the effects that stem from the input purchases required by the direct industry to produce its products. Induced effects stem from the spending of employee wages.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), New Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 was $110.3 billion, with mining, oil, and gas extraction amounting to $12.3 billion, a substantial increase from $6.5 billion in 2013. Agriculture makes up another $1 billion, steady from 2013, and manufacturing makes up $4.2 billion, up from $3.1 billion in 2013.

These impacts highlight the magnitude of freight rail use by the mining, agriculture, manufacturers, dealers, and others who transport materials by rail.

Trade and Economic Development

Both freight and passenger improvements can further economic development. More frequent and faster passenger trains can increase mobility options for intercity travelers, commuters and people who are transit-dependent. More efficient access to the freight rail system, such as with new intermodal facilities and improved short lines, can lower transportation costs for shippers. Benefits resulting from passenger and freight rail investments can thus enhance the competitiveness of the state and the region. These benefits will serve to help retain existing work forces and businesses and attract new ones, thus bolstering economic development.

Congestion Mitigation

Generally, trains have a cost advantage relative to trucks; average shipping rates for a rail carload in constant 2014 dollars was 4.7 cents per ton-mile, versus 14.6 cents per ton-mile for truck, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO)[44]. The numbers make sense, as trains can move more tons with less labor cost and fuel cost than trucks. For example, a single 100-car train, with each car having an average load of 200,000 pounds, can haul far more cargo than 100 trucks can, each with an average load of 40,000 pounds. Diminishing this advantage, however, are train transit times and overall service quality, which commonly are not as good as trucks can provide. That noted, capital improvements in the freight rail system can encourage shifts of traffic from truck to rail, particularly if these improvements result in faster, more reliable transit times, and in so doing serve to mitigate highway congestion.

One example of an improvement that can have these results is eliminating rail bottlenecks to allow for more fluid rail operations and thus faster and reliable transit times. Such improvements would include adding sidings to a busy single-track configuration, allowing trains moving in opposing directions to more easily pass each other. Double tracking a heavily used single-track line segment can also be a solution to rail line congestion.

Rail Runner Express operations also impact highway congestion, particularly on Interstate 25 between Belen, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe. Assuming a factor of between 1.1- and 1.2-persons per car for a commuter car trip, the nearly 600,000 annual Rail Runner passengers would equate to about 720,000 annual car trips removed from the interstate and connecting roadways. The NMDOT Transit and Rail Division's January 2025 Fact Sheet estimates that Rail Runner removes an estimated 18.7 million vehicle miles of travel (VMT) from our busiest highways during busiest commute hours.

The above being noted, motor vehicle congestion in New Mexico is generally not significant, with the exception of Albuquerque where the river crossings in the metropolitan area, portions of the interstate, and arterials carry large amounts of commuter traffic[45].

44 Pricing Freight Transport to Account for External Costs, Congressional Budget Office, July 2016.
45 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for Albuquerque ("Futures 2040").

Safety Impacts

The rail mode is also one of the safest modes of transportation. Rail transportation on a per passenger-mile traveled basis has lower death rates than automobiles. reported by the National Safety Council, in 2022, According to the National Safety Council 2022 data, the fatality rate for the automobile was 0.54 deaths per 100 million passenger-miles compared to 0.03 per 100 million passenger-miles for passenger rail.

External costs associated with freight transportation include accidents. The CBO estimates accident risk for trucks (between 0.8 to 2.3 cents per ton-mile) at about eight times higher than for rail (0.1 to 0.25 cents per ton-mile).

3.1.2 Environmental Impacts

Air Quality

Transportation is the largest source of national nitrogen oxide (NOx) emission and the third largest source of fine particulate emissions ($PM_{2.5}$) pollutants that are harmful to human health[46]. Of these amounts, trucks and trains, powered by diesel fuel, are responsible for 20 percent of national NOx emissions and 3 percent of $PM_{2.5}$ emissions. Concern over the impacts to human health from NOx and particulate emissions drove the Environmental Protection Agency in 2008 to implement a three-part program that dramatically reduces emissions from diesel locomotives of all types -- line-haul, switch, and passenger rail[47].

Any shift in freight traffic from truck to rail improves air quality. While trucks move more tons in total, rail is more fuel efficient. Trucks average about 1,200 Btu per ton-mile, whereas freight trains average about 300 Btu per ton-mile. That is, rail is about four times as fuel efficient as trucks, according to the Energy Collective[48]. By replacing up to 25 percent of current truck freight transport with rail transport, the total U.S. intercity freight transport mix could become 24 percent truck and 46 percent rail. This shift would reduce carbon emissions by 68 million metric tons per year.

Land Use

Land use patterns near railroads can have significant impacts for both freight and passenger rail services. Shippers of commodities transported by rail want easy access to rail to haul their goods to markets across the county and may choose to locate their facilities near rail yards. Passenger rail commuters want easy access to their commuter railroad and may choose to reside near stations. Accessibility to rail transportation – either freight or passenger – can have a transformative effect on adjacent land uses.

Rail-served industrial clusters (a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions) and transit-oriented development (communities designed to provide convenient access to high-quality transit services) are evidence of a fundamental link between transportation and development. It follows then that improvements that will enhance accessibility to transportation can

46 Emissions and Air Quality Impacts of Freight Transportation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012 Dissertation developed by Erica Bickford, Ph.D.
47 Regulations for Emissions from Locomotives, EPA, https://www.epa.gov/regulations-emissions-vehicles-and-engines/regulations-emissions-locomotives
48 https://www.energycentral.com/c/ec/can-switching-heavy-duty-trucks-rail-transport-reduce-carbon-emissions

increase development density and thus spur economic activity. Development densities in both Santa Fe and Albuquerque have increased over the past decade due to redevelopment and other incentives; this land use trend is likely to continue.

While rail may enhance economic development, existing land uses can constrain rail development. New rail services often require new rail facilities, including rights-of-way (ROW). However, in established urban environments, where commercial, residential and industrial land uses surround the rail ROW, expansion of ROW width to add track accommodating new services may be difficult if not impossible to achieve. There are also many areas of land adjacent to railroad property that are becoming lost to residential or entertainment development that once had potential for industrial development by industries needing rail access.

Energy Use

Numerous sources indicate that rail transport saves energy and is more cost efficient than highway transport. According to the U.S. Department of Energy's Transportation Energy Data Book (Edition 40)[49], cars, personal trucks, and motorcycles used 13,512.8 trillion Btu in 2019 whereas transit used 89.5 trillion Btu– a fraction of the energy use.

There are several estimates of how much more fuel-efficient rail is than trucks. As previously noted, one source estimates that rail is four times more efficient on a ton-mile basis than trucks. But there are other sources that have come to the same conclusion. The FRA reported in 2009 that, when compared to trucks in similar routes and distances, rail is between 1.9 and 5.5 times more fuel efficient. The estimate is echoed in a 2007 report, A Modal Comparison of Domestic Freight Transportation Effects on the General Public, by the Texas Transportation Institute, which found that railroads are almost three times as efficient as trucks, hauling one ton of cargo 412 miles on a gallon of fuel, as opposed to 155 miles for trucks.

The NMDOT Transit and Rail Division's January 2025 Fact Sheet estimates that Rail Runner served to reduce gasoline consumption by 255,000 gallons with trip diversions from car to rail.

Resilience to Climate Change Impacts

As previously noted, rail transportation provides substantial benefits in the fight against climate change. These include the reduction of emissions and energy savings. Passenger rail can reduce dependence on motor vehicle travel, thus mitigating auto emission. Shipping by rail is inherently more fuel efficient, resulting in both fuel savings and emissions reductions.

In the 1950s through the 1970s, railroads faced numerous challenges in moving people and freight – most notably declining profits. These challenges paralleled the rise in the interstate highway program and air travel, which provided people and shippers more flexible and less expensive transportation options. Amtrak was initiated in 1971 as an attempt to relieve freight railroads of their obligation to run passenger trains and help ensure their survival.

But the railroads' fortunes began to change in the 1980s with the Staggers Act of 1980, which largely deregulated how railroads could charge for their services (tariffs were replaced by contracts). More individualized transportation options were presented to shippers that lowered their costs and spurred the diversion of track traffic to rail. The rise of rail intermodalism can be traced to this period.

49 https://tedb.ornl.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TEDB_Ed_40.pdf

On the passenger side, Amtrak and states partnered to initiate several intercity rail corridor options. The 1980s and 1990s saw many commuter rail options commence throughout the country. The commuter rail trend continued in the century with the start-up of Rail Runner in 2006, the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) commuter system north of San Francisco in 2017, and Orlando to Fort Lauderdale service (Brightline) beginning in Florida in 2023.

Rail is positioned to move people and freight with less impact on the environment than other modes.

3.1.3 Community Impacts

Passenger and freight rail can deliver positive impacts to local communities, improving the general quality of life. To the extent that it moves people and goods through communities safely and without negatively impacting the surrounding environment, rail transportation makes life better in the communities. The benefits of rail are often more broadly dispersed than the impacts.

Air Pollution

Diesel-electric locomotives burn diesel fuel, generating power as well as carbon emissions that are harmful to human health. Residents who live adjacent to rail lines and rail yards are more affected by these emissions than residents further afield. Furthermore, diesel-electric locomotive technology has been getting cleaner in response to federal mandates whose goal has been to reduce carbon emissions by 80 to 90 percent. Railroads are working on cleaner burning alternative fuels, including liquefied natural gas and biodiesel, and are beginning to implement cleaner fuel alternatives on a limited basis as part of their testing.

Train Horn Noise

Federal statutes require that trains sound their horns as they approach public grade crossings. The sounding of train horns increases safety at these crossings. However, train horn noise can be problematic for adjacent residents, particularly during nighttime hours.

An increasingly common solution to train horn noise is implementation of quiet zones. A quiet zone can consist of one or more at-grade highway rail crossings where a locomotive engineer is not required to sound the train horn when approaching the crossing. The procedures whereby a community can implement a quiet zone are specified by the Federal Railroad Administration. Typically, improvements need to be made at the crossings to enhance safety at the crossings. Improvements can include four-quadrant gate arms, medians on approaches along with gate arms at the crossings, or street closures. Once the improvements have been implemented in accordance with FRA regulations, a quiet zone can be established.

Passenger Rail and Sustainable Communities

Passenger rail service on the general rail system – Amtrak long-distance trains, regionally sponsored corridor services, and commuter trains – provide mobility options, enabling people to consider transportation modes other than planes, buses, and cars for travel between A and B. All these rail modes come together at stations, which, given the foot traffic, have the potential for becoming magnets for development including new commercial centers, entertainment venues, and transit-oriented development.

Freight Rail and Sustainable Communities

Overall, in the U.S., freight rail transportation accounts for 40 percent of freight-ton miles. Freight rail is indispensable to the national economy, but the impact of rail can be felt most powerfully at the community level. Because transportation by rail is more cost effective than trucking, rail shippers can sell their goods competitively in markets thousands of miles away. Successful shippers in turn can add jobs which will spur the development of supporting industries. As economic activity accelerates, so will increasingly diverse commercial, residential, and even recreational opportunities. Similar to passenger rail, freight rail can be a catalyst for creating more livable and sustainable communities.

Enhancing Safety

Numerous articles in recent years have pointed out how passenger trains are safer than cars or buses for passengers. In terms of the number of people killed per million miles (1.6 million kilometers) of travel, motor vehicles fatalities lead train fatalities by about 20 to one, according to Ilan Zarembski, professor at the University of Delaware and director of the Railroad Engineering and Safety Program[50]. PTC implementation has further increased the safety of rail travel. Diverting truck traffic to rail will serve to reduce the potential for highway accidents and thus enhance safety. However, it is worth noting that the major cause of rail-related deaths is from people trespassing on rail rights-of-way. Since 2005, over three-fifths of deaths in rail incidents have been pedestrian trespassers[51]. Action by railroads and local governments to seal ROWs as much as possible will help mitigate the death toll. There are routinely about 500 deaths a year related to trespassing on rail facilities each year[52].

3.2 Demographic and Economic Growth Factors

New Mexico's population is growing and is forecasted to continue growing through 2035, according to estimates from the University of New Mexico. However, the growth rate is slowing down and is expected to become negative between 2030 and 2040, meaning the population would begin to decline.[53]

Most of the state's population lives in urban areas, with close to one third of the state's total population living in Bernalillo County, which includes Albuquerque. In 2024, the four counties directly served by Rail Runner contained 50 percent of the state's population. Census Bureau estimates of county level population growth from 2020 to 2024 indicate the three highest percent growth counties in New Mexico are adjacent to Bernalillo County – Torrance County (6.2%), Sandoval County (5.7%), and Valencia County (5.6%).

Only 11 of New Mexico's 33 counties had population increases from 2020 to 2024. These include the counties hosting some of the state's largest cities (Doña Ana, Santa Fe, Sandoval), which are also some of the state's largest counties by population. However, the Census Bureau estimates show the population of Bernalillo County, New Mexico's largest county which includes Albuquerque, decreasing by 0.8 percent.

Employment in New Mexico is also trending upward, surpassing pre-COVID levels and continuing to grow. Of these occupational groupings, production and construction/extraction are those that include higher percentages of freight-rail-related employment. Between 2014 and 2023 employment in the construction industry grew 18 percent, but employment in the extraction industry dropped 10 percent, according to the

50 https://science.howstuffworks.com/transport/engines-equipment/should-be-jittery-about-train-travel.htm
51 Trespassing: The Leading Cause of Rail Related Fatalities, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IN10753.pdf
52 https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/railroad-trespassing-fatalities-u-s-reach-10-year-high-n852881
53 Miller, J. (n.d.). Population projections for New Mexico, 2023-2050. https://gps.unm.edu/assets/documents/census/gpsprojectionslides_v2024.pdf

US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Agriculture, forestry, extraction of oil and minerals, mining, quarrying, and manufacturing are the economic activities that are most impacted and dependent upon rail transportation.

Figure 2-8: New Historical Total Nonfarm Employment (2019-2025)

Source: New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions

3.3 Freight Demand and Growth

A considerable amount of freight traverses New Mexico's rail infrastructure annually, including finished goods, materials, and supplies. New Mexico has three BNSF certified transload facilities, many industrial parks, and a large amount of industry such as manufacturing, mining, and distribution including new car shipments and other intermodal shipping facilities, indicating potential for additional growth.

3.3.1 Commodity Movements

Coal is New Mexico's biggest import and export commodity by volume across all transportation modes. Between 2017 and 2019, coal accounted for an average of 27 percent of all rail tonnage entering or leaving the state[54], and other forms of mining are also significant generators of rail freight. In 2022, New Mexico ranked 13th in the nation for the production of coal, 3rd in the nation in copper production, and 1st in potash production.[55] However, coal has been declining due to reduced demand, in part causing mine closures in the state. This mirrors the national trend of reduced coal production as electric power generation shifts to natural gas and renewables. The Lee Ranch mine and the Escalante, San Juan, and parts of the Four Corners coal plants have closed since 2014, greatly reducing coal movements in New Mexico. However, copper is still a significant extraction industry in the state and is growing. Demand for copper has increased due to greater production of electric vehicles and electric power infrastructure. In 2022, copper demand was projected to increase from 25 million metric tons (MMt) to about 50 MMt by 2035.[56]

Fracking for oil is also booming in the southeast corner of New Mexico, and it contributes to growth in the movement of barium sulfate (frack sand), drilling mud, hydrochloric acid, and waste material. Because of this boom, freight movement in the southeastern part of the state is primarily driven by oil.

Agriculture and local freight also contribute to the freight movements in New Mexico and generally remain steady. New industrial park development that draws new industries can increase local freight shipments.

54 https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2023-12/New_Mexico_Freight_Plan_Update_March_2023.pdf
55 https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/resources/minerals/impact.html#:~:text=New%20Mexico's%20mineral%20production%20in,0.6%20million%20tons%2C%20%24412.9%20million)
56 New Mexico Legislature, "The Future of Copper".

Intermodal movements are determined largely by national intermodal trends, population, and the economy. National trends and the economy drive the market share of goods that are shipped by rail or by truck. The state's total population and population centers impact where consumer products are shipped; the more people who live in Albuquerque and in the El Paso area, the more consumer products are shipped there. This fluctuates based on the economy.

3.4 Travel Demand

3.4.1 Vehicle Miles of Travel Forecast

Travel demand within and to/from the state will continue to grow in the future. Forecasts indicate daily vehicle miles traveled (DVMT) will grow by around 26 percent (from 77,201,862 DVMT in 2023 to an estimated 104,962,194 DVMT in 2043), based on NMDOT's 2024 HPMS report to FHWA. DVMT (Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled) describes the level of travel demand on a roadway system. VMT is a measure of travel calculated by multiplying the number of vehicles on a roadway segment by its length.

3.4.2 Intercity Rail Ridership Forecast

Rail ridership in New Mexico is limited by the amount of service Amtrak operates and the capacity of Amtrak's trains. Amtrak regularly sells out spaces on sleeper cars, indicating that there is more demand than capacity. There are many potential trips that Amtrak does not capture because of the timing of the trains. Although both routes operate through New Mexico during reasonable daylight hours, the Southwest Chief runs only once per day and the Sunset Limited only runs on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday (eastbound) / Saturday (westbound), which limits how easy and convenient it is for riders to travel between cities and prevents this from being a good commuter option. Amtrak could see small growth in ridership with the current service, but any significant growth will be dependent on capacity and the service provided, rather than demand. More discussion of Amtrak service is in Chapter 1.

3.4.3 Rail Runner Express Ridership Forecast

While there is no formal forecast of Rail Runner ridership, Rio Metro anticipates the potential for growth is rooted in additional service and infrastructure improvements that will increase reliability and capacity. Ridership has returned to about 80% of pre-pandemic levels as Rio Metro runs more midday and weekend service. Further discussion of Rio Metro service is in Chapter 1.

3.5 Fuel Cost Trends

Fuel cost has been a major driver of Rail Runner ridership. Trends in fuel costs over the last 10 years are shown in Figure 3-1. Fuel costs peaked in 2022, which correlates to a rise in Rail Runner ridership, but have fallen significantly since then and continue to decline.

Figure 3-1: Gasoline Price Trends from 2014 to 2024

Source: GasBuddy.com, accessed October 2024.

3.5.1 Rail Congestion Trends

While no railroad cited rail congestion as a problem, both BNSF and UP have worked to build capacity on their mainlines through the state and have completed most of their major projects, including double tracking their lines through the state, adding or extending sidings, and upgrading their lines with PTC.

Tonnage volumes on the NMRX line are light, but there are train-on-train conflicts to note. Rail Runner operates over a single-track main line with passing sidings about every 10 miles, and the need for carefully scheduled meets increases travel times. During peak periods short delays to one train can have repercussions to trains throughout the peak period. For example, the impacts of a late-arriving westbound Southwest Chief on the line can significantly impact Rail Runner evening peak service, as noted earlier. Additionally, BNSF trains moving from Albuquerque to Belen must sometimes wait for clearance to enter Belen Yard. When this occurs, this can cause delays to Rail Runner trains. More information about Rio Metro's work to reduce delays is in Chapter 1.

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4. The Future of Rail in New Mexico

This chapter discusses the New Mexico 2045 Plan and the vision and goals for rail in the state. It also includes a discussion of funded projects and proposed projects that help accomplish these goals.

4.1 State Rail Vision, Goals, and Objectives

4.1.1 Vision

The State of New Mexico's vision for rail is:

> New Mexico's rail network is a fully integrated and safe multimodal rail system that provides efficient and competitive passenger services to, from, and within the state that are competitive with other modes of travel; provides a competitive option for New Mexico shippers; is a vital component of the national transportation network; and supports sustainable, inclusive economic development statewide.

The vision was presented to MPOs, RTPOs, and other rail stakeholders during meetings in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces between the spring and fall of 2017. The vision was also shared with the general public through an online survey hosted on the NMDOT website between June and September 2017; the survey was advertised through the local press and on social media. The rail vision remains the same as that presented in the 2014 New Mexico State Rail Plan.

4.1.2 Goals and Objectives

The rail vision is supported by four goals, which comprise a distillation of the key elements of the state's rail vision. Each of these goals in turn is supported by multiple objectives which point the way to concrete steps needed to advance the vision and goals. The vision, goals, and objectives are the foundational basis for the RSIP and its investments through Year 2045. The goals and their supporting objectives are listed in Table 4-1. As with the state rail vision, the goals and objectives were presented to the general public via the online survey 2017. Many comments received tended to confirm the original 2014 goals and objectives.

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Table 4-1: Goals and Objectives Supporting New Mexico's Rail Vision

Goals	Objectives
Support economic growth and development	Increase capacity and efficiency of long-distance freight corridors
	Develop and promote local freight connections and industrial sites
	Promote rail-related tourism
Improve railroad safety and security and reduce impacts	Link rail investments to strategies that support economic development
	Develop and implement mandatory safety-related measures
	Improve highway-rail grade crossing safety and reduce impacts of rail crossings on local mobility
	Improve rail security
Maintain railroad assets in a state of good repair	Improve the conditions of the state's Class III short lines
	Maintain/improve the conditions of the NMRX rail lines
Promote efficient and competitive passenger rail service	Improve passenger rail options in New Mexico as part of a multimodal transportation system
	Improve Rail Runner Express operations

4.1.3 Related Plans

New Mexico 2045 Plan

The 2021 New Mexico 2045 Plan (2045 Plan) is NMDOT's long-range transportation plan and serves as the overarching planning document for transportation in New Mexico. The 2045 Plan is a federally required systematic analysis of the current and future performance of major transportation modes and was an update to the 2040 Plan.

The 2045 Plan identifies maintaining the state's passenger rail assets in a state of good repair as a priority. The Plan identifies annual ridership as the primary performance measure for New Mexico Rail Runner Express. Developed simultaneously with the 2045 New Mexico Freight Plan, the Plan discusses the importance of rail in meeting both New Mexico's and the nation's freight demand and needs.

Importantly, the plan outlines NMDOT's vision for multimodal transportation in the state, which supports the rail-specific vision:

A safe, sustainable, and resilient multimodal transportation system that meets New Mexico's current and future mobility and accessibility needs.

The preceding 2040 Plan identified New Mexico's rail network as a key asset in attaining this vision.

Supporting this vision are New Mexico's five transportation goals:

- Operate with transparency and accountability.
- Improve safety for all system users.
- Preserve and maintain New Mexico's transportation assets for the long term.
- Provide multimodal access and connectivity for community prosperity.
- Respect New Mexico's cultures, environment, history, and quality of life.

2025 New Mexico Statewide Public Transportation Plan

The 2025 New Mexico Statewide Public Transportation Plan, Connect New Mexico, is a statewide strategic public transportation plan, focused primarily on rural and intercity public transportation service that was completed after the 2045 Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan. The plan has two purposes: Identify public transportation usage, demand, and needs; and to provide clear and concise public transportation performance measures to identify and prioritize projects across the state. The plan discusses the role of New Mexico Rail Runner Express as the "backbone" of public transportation services in New Mexico. The emphasis on the ensuring the viability of Rail Runner, and thus the public benefits of enhanced mobility for residents of New Mexico that it provides, is a major tenet of this State Rail Plan.

2045 New Mexico Freight Plan

The 2045 New Mexico Freight Plan (NMFP) is a federally required systematic analysis of New Mexico's freight system that captures the current state of freight in New Mexico and looks ahead 25 years to 2045. The NMFP reviews freight movements by highways, railroads, air carriers, and pipelines, focusing on areas in the state with high traffic and the areas where NMDOT has the most active role; i.e., in freight movement by highway and rail.

The NMFP is aligned with the New Mexico 2045 Plan, which discusses freight movements in the state; but the NMFP provides additional information/data on freight issues and concerns. Per the FAST Act, states must update their Freight Plans at least every five years. The plan, most recently updated in 2023, cites the following needs, which are reflected in this State Rail Plan's goals and objectives:

- The need to maintain the state's existing railroad infrastructure in a state of good repair.
- The need to comply with federal safety mandates (i.e., the successful implementation of Positive Train Control on the Rail Runner).

2025 Strategic Highway Safety Plan

The 2025 New Mexico Strategic Highway Safety Plan adopts a Safe System Approach (SSA) model, with five SSA categories aligned with the US DOT: Safer People, Safer Vehicles, Safer Speeds, Safer Roads, and Post-Crash Care.[57] This plan was last put out in 2021 and will be updated in late 2025.

In addition to the above plans, the State Rail Plan is also coordinating with the Target Zero NM effort underway at NMDOT to improve transportation safety across all modes.

4.2 RSIP: Rail Service and Investment Program

Below is the proposed program of projects for New Mexico's Rail Service and Investment Program (RSIP). The projects proposed include improvements to Rail Runner, Amtrak, and railroad crossings across several railroad lines. Generally, freight rail projects are not included unless they were identified as potentially utilizing public funding.

Amtrak and Rail Runner play a critical role in the extensive and diverse New Mexico transportation network, overall mobility, tourism, access to job opportunities, and energy efficiency. Projects improving reliability

57 https://www.transportation.gov/safe-system-approach

and passenger rail service increase the likelihood of the service being useful to more people, alleviating traffic on the State's highway network.

The benefits of freight rail improvements involve increased transportation competition resulting in lower cost to shippers, less highway congestion and damage, and reduced environmental and energy impacts. New freight lines will allow New Mexican shippers to reach distant domestic and international markets. Better rail service will also attract new employers to the state.

By their nature, grade crossing improvement projects, such as grade separations, will enhance transportation safety.

This section identifies a short-range and long-range list of projects. The short-range projects have been limited to projects that are expected to be completed within five years. Many of these already have funding identified or committed. Long-range projects include projects that will take more than 5 years to complete but potentially have enough interest or importance that they may be completed within 25 years.

Table 4-2 and Table 4-7 provide a summarization of New Mexico's Rail Service and Investment Program. It lists projects by category (passenger, freight, and safety improvements) and time frame (short-range, from 2025 to 2030, and long-range, from 2031 to 2045).

4.2.1 Short-Range Rail Investment Program (2025 - 2030)

New Mexico's short-range RSIP projects are projects that are expected to be completed by 2030 and can be seen in Table 4-2. They have been identified by the state's freight railroads, passenger railroads, and NMDOT. The Rail Runner projects were identified by Rio Metro in its 2017 *Draft Budget and Capital Plan* for SFY2026 – SFY2032.

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Table 4-2: Rail Service and Investment Program – Short-Range (2025 - 2030)

Short-Range Projects and Studies	Status	Funding level
Passenger Rail Projects – Commuter Rail (Rio Metro)		
Automatic Passenger Counters		$ 250,000
New Rolling Stock		$ 22,500,000
Base Station Relocations to Public Land	Unfunded	$ 200,000
Cerillos Rd/St Francis Dr Crossing	Unfunded	$ 1,500,000
Los Lunas Siding	Unfunded	$ 8,000,000
CP Ross Extension	Unfunded	$ 10,000,000
Bridge AB0864.78 Design	Funded	$ 1,000,000
Operations and Maintenance Facility	Phase 1 Funded	$70,509,808
Grade Crossing Imp/Quiet Zone Support	Unfunded	
Passenger Rail Projects – Long Distance Inter-City (Amtrak)		
Restoring Amtrak Bus Connections		
Daily Sunset Limited		$ 109,000,000 – $ 122,000,000
ADA Improvements / Station Projects		
Sole-Use Territory Projects		
Safety Grade Crossing Improvements		
Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad – Historic Excursion		
Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Improvements		
Freight Projects		
Four Corners Railroad Study: San Juan County Freight Rail Line	Study funded	$ 4,000,000
Drainage/erosion study in BNSF/NMDOT corridor		
Safety Projects: Proposed Short-Range Crossing Eliminations		
US 70/84 Grade Separation, Texico	Funded for construction	$ 73,061,388
Allison Road Grade Separation, Gallup	Funded for construction	$ 44,890,094
Industrial Avenue Grade Separation, Santa Teresa	Funded for construction	$ 37,100,000
Clovis Grade Separation	Funded for design	$ 1,040,000
Clovis to Loving Grade Crossing Study with BNSF		
Mesa Hill Road bridge BIA	Funded for construction	
Prewitt Overpass		$60,000,000
Northwest New Mexico Initiative		
Railway-Highway Crossing Program (Section 130)		$ 9,125,765

Proposed Short-Range Passenger Rail Projects – Commuter Rail (Rio Metro)

Rio Metro annually updates its short-range capital needs for Rail Runner as part of its annual budgeting process. The short-range projects included in the State Rail Plan for Rail Runner are from Rio Metro's Budget and Capital Plan for state fiscal years 2026-2032.

Rio Metro is responsible for funding Rail Runner service and has stable long-term funding sources for both operating and capital maintenance needs. The major funding sources are local GRT collected by the four counties Rail Runner operates in, FTA Section 5307 formula grants, and FTA Section 5337 formula grants. More information about Rio Metro's financing is in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

There are no plans for opening additional stations or for extending Rail Runner service beyond the existing 97-mile corridor. The capital investments in the *Short Range Transit Plan* are designed to maintain existing service in a state of good repair, improve safety, and improve service and/or operations within the existing Rail Runner corridor.

Inter-service Ticketing

Agreements can be made between providers/agencies to provide a more seamless experience between modes. This is a topic that was discussed in some comments on the Draft Plan. In New Mexico, most major bus providers (ABQ RIDE, RMRTD, and NCRTD) are fare free. Santa Fe Trails is free with a Rail Runner ticket. These cover the primary inter-service transfers that happen for passengers in New Mexico on transit.

Amtrak and Rio Metro could work together to create a similar agreement to those they do in other cities—providing free transfers from Amtrak to regional transit service (including regional commuter rail). One example of this is the 2-Hour Free Transfer Window that SEPTA (operating in the Philadelphia, PA area) honors with any Amtrak ticket.

NMRX Additions to Rolling Stock

Automatic Passenger Counters

The FTA requires Rio Metro to send ridership data and other performance metrics to the National Transit Database (NTD), data that is used to calculate how much funding Rio Metro receives each year. While Rio Metro has historically counted ridership manually by the train crew, placing automated passenger counting devices above each door to gather this information is being considered to relieve train crews of this responsibility.

New Rolling Stock

The Rail Runner fleet consists of nine locomotives, nine cab cars (passenger cars that have a small cab where the engineer operates the train from the front when the train is being pushed by a locomotive in the rear), and 13 passenger cars. On weekdays, Rail Runner operates six train sets, with a spare set in reserve, meaning that at most only two locomotives or cab cars can be out of service for maintenance on any weekday. Procuring additional rolling stock would improve the spare ratio to help with maintenance efforts and would also support potential increase services in the future. Rio Metro has identified an additional two locomotives, one cab car, and one passenger car as desirable in its capital plan.

NMRX Fixed Guideway

Base Station Relocations to Railroad Right-of-way

Base stations are communication towers that are used by Rail Runner's signal system to transmit information from the dispatch office to the infrastructure. Many of these stations are located outside of Rail Runner right-of-way on private or tribal land. This project would relocate those towers to Rail Runner right-of-way.

Cerrillos Road/St Francis Drive Crossing

This project would improve a crossing signal system that sometimes malfunctions and activates without a train being present, often during heavy rain or snow. The cause of this malfunction is salt from roadway snow clearing operations during the winter that has worked its way into the ballast and subgrade beneath the crossing and built up over time. The salt conducts electricity and short circuits the crossing. This project would clean and protect the affected parts of the system to correct this issue.

Los Lunas Siding

The Los Lunas siding project would create a 4,000-foot siding south of the Los Lunas station. This would provide Rail Runner with an additional location where trains can meet on the 30-mile section of single track between Albuquerque and Belen, which would give Rail Runner much more capacity and flexibility in scheduling its trains. Additional sidings between Albuquerque and Belen would also help alleviate congestion and delays for Amtrak, BNSF, and Rail Runner trains on this section of track.

CP Ross Extension

BNSF operates multiple freight transfer runs each day between Belen yard and Abajo yard in Albuquerque. Trains enter and depart the BNSF yard through CP Ross, located adjacent to the Belen Rail Runner Station. Trains headed for Belen are dispatched by NMRX based on the BNSF yardmaster's notice that there is room for them to enter the BNSF Belen yard when they arrive at CP Ross. However, sometimes there is no room to enter Belen yard when trains arrive at CP Ross 30 minutes after being dispatched, forcing the trains to be held on the main Rail Runner track and blocking Rail Runner trains from entering the station. The CP Ross extension would relocate CP Ross about a mile further north and add an additional track for Rail Runner trains to access Belen Station, reducing delays on the Rail Runner.

Bridge AB0864.78 Design

A replacement for Bridge AB0864.78, over Galisteo Creek near Kewa Station, has been identified as a need for some time. Annual inspections have shown that the deck is in poor condition and the superstructure, substructure, channel protection, and approach are all in need of major rehabilitation or replacement. The bridge was built in 1899 and underwent improvements in 1926, but it is approaching the end of its useful life. Rio Metro has committed funds to design either a single replacement bridge or twin bridges that would extend the Domingo siding and enable seamless Rail Runner meets at Kewa Station. Design will begin in SFY2026. Construction funding will need to be identified.

NMRX Facilities

Operations and Maintenance Facility

The current Rail Runner yard dates to the 1950s and was constructed for supporting intercity passenger trains. The track and structures were not designed to support high frequency commuter rail operations. Rolling stock maintenance activities occur outside, where maintenance staff are exposed to the elements. In 2022, Rio Metro completed a facility master plan conceptual design report for a new Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF), to be developed in two phases, that would provide the needed space and facilities to fully support existing operations as well as potential future service expansion. The OMF will include a high-bay shop, parts storeroom, and fueling, sanding, lubrication, waste dumping, and water filling stations. Rio Metro is acquiring eight acres of land adjacent to the Rail Runner yard on which the OMF would be built and has initiated design. Phase one of the OMF is funded through several federal, state and local grants. Phase two is not yet funded.

Proposed Short-Range Passenger Rail Projects - Amtrak

Restoring Amtrak Bus Connections

As noted in Chapter 1, Amtrak's has discontinued Thruway bus connections between El Paso and Albuquerque and between Denver and Raton, attributing this to changes in Greyhound's structure rather than a lack of demand. These bus connections provided mid-route capability for passengers to connect between the Southwest Chief and either the California Zephyr or the Sunset Limited. The El Paso to Albuquerque to Denver corridor has also been identified, both locally and by FRA-funded intercity passenger rail studies, as part of potential new long-distance intercity passenger rail routes. Several additional Amtrak corridors have been proposed, including connections between El Paso and Albuquerque and Albuquerque and Denver. These projects are longer term projects that will take years to study and implement. In the short range, restoring north-south Thruway bus connections between these long-distance routes would allow Amtrak to gauge demand and serve more passengers.

However, additional bus connections are more possible in the short term. In October 2025, NMDOT launched a new intercity bus route that connects Albuquerque with Durango, CO, with stops in Bernalillo, Cuba, and Farmington[58]. This service was identified in the Statewide Public Transportation Plan and serves as a precursor for potential future passenger rail service. NMDOT can use "bus-bridges" in phases to grow passenger demand and use these as precursors for future rail service.

Daily Sunset Limited

Amtrak recognizes that providing daily Sunset Limited service is one of the projects that would make the most difference. In 2021, Amtrak conducted a Daily Long Distance Service Study, under direction from Section 22214 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, which estimated that adding daily service along this route could result in 103,000 new riders annually and provide important connectivity to the passenger rail network and greatly improve service. However, in order to provide daily service on this line, Amtrak would need an additional 4 trainsets. This study provided conceptual information that requires additional study to determine specific strategies for providing daily service on the Sunset Limited. The Sunset Limited was selected for inclusion in the Corridor Identification and Development Program, which

[58] https://www.dot.nm.gov/blog/2025/10/10/nmdot-and-greyhound-partner-to-expand-bus-operations/

may provide some funding for additional study of the line, but no other funding is currently available for additional study of providing daily service.

The future of the Sunset Limited in New Mexico will largely be driven by factors outside of New Mexico. In Arizona, there is interest in having the Sunset Limited directly serve Phoenix (it presently comes no closer than Maricopa, about 50 miles south of Phoenix).

ADA Improvements / Station Projects

Amtrak operates seven stations in New Mexico, some of which are still not updated with ADA standards, and some of which also lack real facilities. The facilities and ability for anyone to board the train at these stations has a big impact on ridership and will become much more important when Amtrak begins operating daily on the Sunset Limited line.

Amtrak has been working to upgrade stations through its ADA Stations Program (ADASP), funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and has identified station upgrades that ensure compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The Albuquerque station is accessible. Upgrades were identified for other stations and some of these projects are underway:

- Deming Station: A new 300-foot side platform, signage, lighting, and parking are in design and expected to be completed in July of 2027.
- Gallup Station: A new 1000-foot side platform, signage, lighting, and accessible walkways are in design and are expected to be completed by September 2026.
- Lamy Station: Phase 1, which included adding accessible walkways, station entrances, signage, and detectable warning replacements, is complete. Phase 2, which includes upgrades to the stations interior bathrooms and waiting rooms, is expected to be completed in September 2026.
- Las Vegas Station: A new 730-foot side platform, signage, lighting, and accessible pathways are in design and is expected to be completed in June 2027.
- Lordsburg Station: A new 450-foot side platform, signage, lighting, ADA parking stalls, and accessible walkways are in design and expected to be completed in September 2026.
- Raton Station: Phase 1, which included accessible walkways, is complete. Phase 2, which includes a new 850-foot platform, access walkways, signage, and lighting, is in design and expected to be complete in September 2026.

Sole-Use Territory Projects

Following the closure of the York Canyon coal mine in 2002, BNSF gradually stopped providing local freight service to customers on the Raton Line, and BNSF also rerouted through-trains from the Raton Line to other lines that avoided the mountain grades on the Raton Line. Since 2010, neither local nor through freight service has operated between CP Madrid and the Jansen coal mine just south of Trinidad, CO, a distance of 220 miles, of which 207 miles are within New Mexico. Amtrak's Southwest Chief is the sole user of the Raton railroad line, with one train per direction per day. Because there is no freight or other passenger rail service, Amtrak is responsible for 100% of the line's maintenance costs, which suffered from the effects of deferred maintenance between CP Madrid and central Kansas as freight business declined.

With funding from federal sources such as TIGER and CRISI, a 2018 congressional earmark, Amtrak, BNSF, the States of Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico, as well as local communities along the Southwest Chief alignment, this deferred maintenance backlog has been greatly reduced since 2014. Within New Mexico, there are two separate projects under development to further reduce the deferred maintenance backlog.

- In 2020, Amtrak applied for and was selected to receive a CRISI grant to fund the rehabilitation of bridges and conduct rockfall mitigation work on the BNSF-owned line, implement continuous welded rail on the NMDOT-owned portion of the line, and undertake tie replenishment programs on both portions of the line. Environmental clearance for the rockfall mitigation was received in 2024, and the obligation of funding for the project is pending with the Federal Railroad Administration.
- Amtrak has requested NMDOT, at Amtrak's expense, implement Positive Train Control (PTC) on the 24 miles of sole use territory between CP Madrid and Lamy, and expects this will be completed by the end of 2027. Due to the limited use of this line, FRA granted a waiver allowing it to be included within the territory where PTC was required to meet the statutory deadline at the end of 2020. Amtrak is working with host railroads to implement PTC on 100% of its nationwide route mileage, even where limited use exemptions have been granted.

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Improvements

The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad has recurring capital needs of the for its locomotive and revenue car fleets and upgrades of its 64-mile route. The locomotive fleet and the existing revenue fleet have recurring needs for heavy maintenance needs. Track upgrades like ballasting, tie replacement, and rail resurfacing is ongoing as well. It is anticipated that New Mexico will continue to fund the C&TS capital needs.

Proposed Freight Rail Projects

Four Corners Railroad Study: San Juan County Freight Rail Line (Phase 1)

The Four Corners Railroad Study is an effort by San Juan County, the Navajo Nation, and the FRA to study the economic feasibility of freight rail service and railroad alignments between the Four Corners region and the Interstate 40 corridor. The San Juan County freight rail line is a proposed new connection to the BNSF freight rail network that would serve the Four Corners region by linking Farmington to the BNSF Southern Transcon for the movement of oil and gas, coal, fly ash, and agricultural products. This would lower shipping costs into and out of the Farmington/Four Corners area, reduce wear and tear on existing highways, and contribute to long-term economic growth in the Four Corners area. San Juan County, the Navajo Nation, and NMDOT completed a feasibility study in 2025 for the rail line, and San Juan County has been awarded a five-million-dollar grant to move forward with the environmental study.

Drainage/erosion study in BNSF Railway/NMDOT Highway corridor

There are multiple examples of places along the rail corridors in the state where flooding and heavy rain events cause drainage and erosion issues where they can equally impact both rail and highway road facilities. There is a broad concern from NMDOT and BNSF about flooding, erosion, and silting issues, especially in the corridor from Church Rock to Gallup. BNSF and NMDOT have experienced severe flooding and silting in this area. Upstream control of flooding could help reduce delays and increase safety on NMDOT and BNSF facilities.

A joint cooperative drainage study could help both parties and increase the ability of the rail and road infrastructure to withstand increasing weather events. This study would likely require a grant application for funding.

Safety Projects: Proposed Short-Range Crossing Eliminations

While the elimination of at-grade railroad crossings has considerable safety benefits, most grade crossing elimination projects require more than five years to develop as alternative means for traffic to get from one side of the railroad tracks to the other must be provided. This is particularly true when a grade-separation is necessary to maintain connectivity. The projects listed here are considered short-range efforts because they are actively being pursued and, generally, have funding in place.

US 70/84 Grade Separation, Texico/Farwell

NMDOT is working with TxDOT and BNSF to eliminate the existing US 70/84 grade crossing on the Texas/New Mexico state line between Farwell, TX and Texico, NM. A grade-separated crossing of the BNSF Southern Transcon will be constructed over BNSF west of Texico, and a new alignment for US 70/84 south of the BNSF to just east of the state line. Two additional grade crossings in New Mexico will be eliminated by the project. The project is fully funded for construction through the Railroad Crossing Elimination program. It will need to go through a design process over the next two to three years to be able to start construction within five years.

Allison Road Grade Separation, Gallup

In 2024, an FRA Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) grant award was announced to grade-separate the Allison Road grade crossing of the BNSF Southern Transcon in Gallup. BNSF is partnering with NMDOT and the City of Gallup to fund the non-Federal portion of this project. The design for this project is essentially complete, but the start of construction will be delayed due to unforeseen complications with FEMA.

Industrial Avenue Grade Separation, Santa Teresa

Doña Ana County has obtained Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) funds to construct a grade-separation of Industrial Avenue in Santa Teresa. This road is used by heavy freight and commercial trucks traveling between facilities on opposite sides of the UP mainline. It is the first crossing east of the new UP yard, located within ¼ mile of the switch serving Santa Teresa Southern Railway. A grade-separation there will improve safety and eliminate delays during frequent crossing activations. The project is nearing completion of the design phase.

Clovis Road Grade Separation, Clovis

The City of Clovis received Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) funding to design a project that would construct a new overpass to eliminate the existing Martin Luther King Boulevard at-grade crossing of the BNSF Transcon, improve the Norris Street at-grade crossing, and improve integration of rail crossing signals into the highway signal network on US 60/70/84. Construction funding has not yet been obtained.

Clovis to Loving Grade Crossing Study

In 2024, BNSF and NMDOT initiated a study using Section 130 funding to identify safety improvements at public at-grade crossings on the BNSF Carlsbad subdivision between Clovis and Lake Arthur, including potential candidates for elimination or consolidation. Outreach to local governments on potential eliminations and consolidations will begin in 2025. A second study, to identify grade crossing safety improvements, including potential grade crossing eliminations or consolidations on the BNSF Carlsbad subdivision from Lake Arthur to Loving, is beginning in 2025.

Prewitt Overpass

The Prewitt Overpass is a proposed grade-separation project over BNSF's tracks at Interstate 40 Exit 63, where Interstate 40 parallels BNSF. This project would replace and permanently close the existing McKinley County CR 19 at-grade crossing and enhance safety, connectivity, and operational efficiency at this location.

The right-of-way needed for the project is currently not owned by NMDOT. Since NM 412 and CR 19 intersect at this location at Interstate 40, it is unknown yet if the overpass will be a part of NM 412 or a part of CR 19. The 2025 study identified two options, and the overpass will impact between four and six parcels. The project will address structural deficiencies in the existing I-40 bridge as well as geometric and operational deficiencies in the existing interchange. It will also create better connectivity for area destinations like the Baca/DloAY Azhi Community School, Baca Chapter House, and industrial facilities along CR-19.

Northwest New Mexico Initiative

The Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments (NWNMCOG) has been awarded funding from the Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) program to identify how grade crossings of the BNSF Southern Transcon in McKinley and Cibola counties can be eliminated, including options for getting traffic from one side of the BNSF Transcon to the other once the grade crossings are eliminated.

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Railway-Highway Crossing Program (Section 130)

The FHWA Railway-Highway Crossing Program, commonly referred to as the Section 130 program, is primarily used to design and construct grade crossing safety improvements that can be developed and implemented more rapidly than most FHWA highway projects. Shown below in Tables 4-3, 4-4, 4-5, and 4-6 are yearly totals for the Section 130 grade crossing safety projects identified for the next four years by NMDOT.

Table 4-3: Section 130 Identified Projects - 2025

Fiscal Year	Project Phase	Location	Expected obligation	Description
2025	Construction	USDOT crossing 013626S Mora County Road C-24, Levy	872,222	Add railroad crossing flasher lights and gate arms and replace and widen the grade crossing surface
2025	Construction	USDOT crossing 245628W Wall Street, Folsom	100,000	Close crossing
2025	Construction	USDOT crossing 013602D NM-555, near Raton	660,179	Upgrade active warning devices and add gate arms
2025	Construction	USDOT crossing 245626H NM-72, Folsom	433,453	Add railroad crossing warning flasher lights and gate arms
2025	Preliminary Engineering	Railroad crossing assessment BNSF Carlsbad line Phase II, Lake Arthur to Loving	417,329	Evaluate corridor railroad crossings for safety improvements
			3,055,183	

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Table 4-4: Section 130 Identified Projects - 2026

Fiscal Year	Project Phase	Location	Expected obligation	Description
2026	Construction	El Pueblo Road in Albuquerque - USDOT crossing 013798A	178,000	Replace crossing surface and align trail to eliminate skew. El Pueblo Road NE between Lorraine Court and Jefferson St NE
2026	Preliminary Engineering	Lawrence Ranch Rd and East Jackson Rd, Lake Arthur, crossings 019963D and 019964K	159,167	Construct new roadway connection from Lawrence Ranch Road to East Jackson Road, install lights and gates at East Jackson Road, and close Lawrence Ranch Road crossing
2026	Construction	Montaño Road, Albuquerque, crossing 013786F	1,000,000	Replace railroad crossing surface and transition approaches
2026	Construction	Maloney Avenue, Gallup - USDOT 024957K	800,000	Upgrade existing active warning signal system to include a new shoulder and median masts and gates
2026	Construction	US-285, near Lamy - USDOT crossing 013802M	500,000	Relocate active advance warning signals, crossing signal upgrade
			2,637,167	

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Table 4-5: Section 130 Identified Projects - 2027

Fiscal Year	Project Phase	Location	Expected obligation	Description
2027	Construction	USDOT crossing 019537V at Farm Market Road near San Antonio	450,000	Add lights and gates
2027	Construction	Marland Blvd, Hobbs - crossing 864675M	465,000	Install new concrete crossing surface on main track, eliminate industry track crossing and upgrade existing crossing warning signal system
2027	Construction	Lawrence Ranch Rd and East Jackson Rd, Lake Arthur, crossings 019963D and 019964K	435,915	Construct new roadway connection from Lawrence Ranch Road to East Jackson Road, install lights and gates at East Jackson Road, and close Lawrence Ranch Road crossing
2027	Preliminary Engineering	USDOT crossing 596233T Quay County Road AD, near Tucumcari	30,000	Add railroad crossing flasher lights and gate arms
2027	Construction	Pueblo Road, Wagon Mound - USDOT 013631N	400,000	Construct new railroad crossing warning flasher lights and gate arms
2027	Construction	El Morro Road, Grants nm - USDOT 024856Y	100,000	Upgrade existing MUTCD signage and pavement markings
2027	Construction	3rd St, Gallup - USDOT crossing 024951U, 3 tracks	520,000	Pedestrian and roadway safety improvements, including new warning devices, reducing travel lanes at grade crossing, fencing and signal improvements.
2027	Construction	NM-610 (2nd St), Gallup - USDOT crossing 024950M, 3 tracks	520,000	Pedestrian and roadway safety improvements, including new warning devices, reducing travel lanes at grade crossing, fencing and signal improvements.
			2,920,915	

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Table 4-6: Section 130 Identified Projects - 2028

Fiscal Year	Project Phase	Location	Expected obligation	Description
2028	Construction	Golf Course Rd, Tucumcari-USDOT crossing 741601E	350,000	Construct new railroad crossing warning flasher lights and gate arms
2028	Construction	Airport Road, near Tucumcari-USDOT crossing 596229D	350,000	Construct new railroad crossing warning flasher lights and gate arms
2028	Construction	Quay County Road AD - Crossing 596233T	350,000	Construct new railroad crossing warning flasher lights and gate arms
2028	Construction	3rd St, Gallup - USDOT 024951U, 3 tracks	395,000	Pedestrian and roadway safety improvements, including installing warning devices, reducing travel lanes at grade crossing, fencing and signal improvements.
2028	Construction	NM-610 (2nd St), Gallup - USDOT 024950M, 3 tracks	767,500	Pedestrian and roadway safety improvements, including installing warning devices, reducing travel lanes at grade crossing, fencing and signal improvements.
			2,212,500	

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4.2.2 Long-Range Rail Investment Program (2031 - 2045)

New Mexico's long-range RSIP projects were identified by the state's freight railroads, Rio Metro, Amtrak, County-led studies, and NMDOT. The improvements will address passenger and freight rail needs and crossing safety. These projects, shown in Table 4-7, are expected for the years from 2031 to 2045.

The long-range program includes two large freight projects – the Farmington Line and the Santa Teresa border crossing.

Table 4-7: Rail Service and Investment Plan Summary – Long Range (2031 - 2045)

Long-Range Projects and Studies	Status
Passenger Projects	
NMRX Rolling Stock Replacement	
NMRX Increased Service and Timesavings: Sidings and Platforms	Unfunded
NMRX Track and Structure Improvements, Other Unfunded Capital Projects	
NRMX Electrification Feasibility Study	
Amtrak Southwest Chief Route Improvements	
Intercity Rail Corridor Studies	
New Mexico Heritage Railway Improvements	
Freight Projects	
Four Corners Railroad Study: San Juan County Freight Rail Line (Phase 2)	
EnergyPlex Development Recommendation, Lea County	
Improvement to Texas New Mexico (TXN) Near EnergyPlex	
Santa Teresa Rail Border Crossing	
Santa Fe Southern Railway Bridge Improvements	
Southwestern Railroad Track and Bridge Improvements	
Safety Projects and Grade Separations	
Spaceport America Rail Spur	
Section 130 Crossing Improvements	
Grade Separations	
Texas and New Mexico Crossing Improvement in Hobbs	

Proposed Passenger Rail Projects

Long-range passenger projects include unfunded Rail Runner capital projects for implementation between 2031 to 2045, proposed Amtrak route and station improvements, Improvements to the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad, and two proposals for intercity corridors.

NMRX Rolling Stock Replacement

Rail Runner's rolling stock was purchased between 2005 and 2008 and is approaching the midpoint of its life cycle. The Rail Runner cars, coaches, and locomotives travel many miles per week and have been for almost 20 years. It is likely that in fifteen to twenty-five years a new fleet will need to be procured. The equipment replacement will be a major expense for Rio Metro, given that costs for new rolling stock have risen faster than prices for most goods and services. If the entire fleet were replaced today, the expected cost would exceed $150 million. Fleet replacement can often take over a decade from procurement to delivery. Potential future electrification should be considered when new rolling stock is procured.

NMRX Fixed Guideway

Increased Service and Time Savings: Sidings and Platforms

In 2022, Rio Metro completed a study[59] that identified capacity improvements to enable more frequent Rail Runner service. The scenarios under consideration ranged from providing hourly service throughout the day in the Rail Runner corridor to operating trains at 15-minute headways within Albuquerque. Providing hourly service would require adding multiple new sidings for timed meets, while 15-minute headways would require lengthening the double-tracked section within Albuquerque and constructing additional platforms at several stations. Some of the additional sidings are included among the short-range improvements listed earlier in this chapter. For increased service between Albuquerque and Santa Fe, which many people and organizations commented on in response to the Draft Plan, a conflict with freight poses significant challenges. As shown in the 2022 study, there are specific projects identified to help the system run more efficiently and potentially add trips per day to support more frequent service.

The possibility of express service was also mentioned frequently by people who commented on the Draft Plan. Express runs, with four or less stops, could create more time-competitive trips between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. However, additional sidings may be necessary to facilitate these trips.

Electrification Feasibility Study

Electrification of the NMRX mainline rail system is a future project worth considering but likely has many tradeoffs. A feasibility study of the cost and maintenance impacts is a first step in the undertaking of track electrification. One major benefit is the reduced emissions that the Rail Runner would produce. The visual/aesthetic impact of catenary could be a potential concern on the landscape. Electrification can also improve start and stop times and reduce noise in addition to emissions.

Amtrak Southwest Chief Route Improvements

Beyond the improvements stated above, Amtrak supports continued improvements to the 700-mile Southwest Chief route segment between Dalies, Isleta, Albuquerque, CP Madrid, Lamy, Raton, and Trinidad, Colorado, and Newton, Kansas, to enhance the train's performance reliability and modernize the track and signals.

[59] Double Track Study (2022) https://www.riometro.org/381/Rio-Metro-Publications

Intercity Passenger Rail Expansion

There have been many new intercity passenger rail services proposed over the years that would serve New Mexico. Many of these have been identified in national or regional multi-state studies as potential routes to consider if there is a large-scale expansion of the intercity passenger rail network, but as these expansions did not materialize, further consideration of routes serving New Mexico also did not occur. For instance, four of the fifteen intercity passenger rail route options identified in the FRA's *2025 Amtrak Long-Distance Study* pass through New Mexico. Other proposals are variations of passenger rail service within a single corridor, such as the El Paso to Albuquerque to Denver corridor. Some intercity passenger rail proposals have been for high-speed rail rather than conventional rail. There are two major intercity passenger rail corridors proposed by federal planning studies and rail advocacy groups: Albuquerque to Flagstaff and Phoenix, and El Paso north to Albuquerque and Denver. Given existing resources, it is likely that these studies will be conducted in the longer term rather than within the next four years.

Las Cruces to El Paso Commuter Rail

The Las Cruces to El Paso line is a proposed commuter rail service that would be similar in length to the Rail Runner corridor between Albuquerque to Santa Fe. A feasibility study was completed in 2017. Overall, the assessment of feasibility was positive and worthy of further study. It was projected to relieve congestion on I-10/I-25 during the morning and afternoon/evening commute periods as well as provide a mobility enhancement to New Mexico residents seeking access to El Paso.

The 2017 study envisioned eight to ten rounds trips on weekdays only between Las Cruces and El Paso Union Station on the BNSF Railway's El Paso Subdivision, a route that parallels I-25. Stations would be located at Las Cruces, Mesilla Park, Berino/Vado, Anthony, Canutillo, Montoya, Sunland, and El Paso Union Station. The commuter trains would share El Paso Union Station with the Amtrak Sunset Limited service and Amtrak Thruway motor coach service. The trip would take about 1 hour and 13 minutes.

No further efforts have been made to move the project forward. As of the 2022 update, El Paso MPO has not identified the proposed El Paso-Las Cruces commuter rail line in its long-range plan, even after receiving a formal comment/request from Mesilla Valley MPO to do so that does appear in the comments to their 2018 update. Before the project can move forward, both cities would need to be on board with the project. While the service itself is a long-range project, in the short-range, El Paso can adopt the project as a long-range project and begin working on a framework for development.

El Paso north to Albuquerque and Denver

There has long been interest in establishing intercity passenger rail service connecting Albuquerque to El Paso and/or Denver. The proposed route between El Paso, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Denver would be primarily on BNSF trackage, but would also include NMDOT-owned track between Belen and Lamy and Union Pacific track south of Denver. This concept was the subject of the 1994 El Paso-Denver Amtrak Study[60] that concluded this was a feasible corridor for Amtrak service. In 2009, NMDOT applied for, but did not receive, federal planning funds to study high-speed rail connecting these cities. The 2014 Southwest Multi-State Rail Planning Study recommended for further study a Phoenix to Denver passenger rail connection that would include Albuquerque to Denver service as part of it, and the *2025 Amtrak Long-Distance Study* included an El Paso to Albuquerque to Denver to Cheyenne, WY to Billings, MT service among its route options.

[60] 1994 Analysis of Amtrak Service Among the States of Texas, New Mexico and Colorado, and Providing for Railroad Passenger Service for Selected Communities

For funding purposes, all intercity passenger rail routes outside of the Northeast Corridor of less than 750 miles in length are considered state-supported routes, ineligible for federal funding to support operations. Routes of 750 miles or longer are considered long-distance routes within Amtrak's national network, which Congress supports directly through appropriations. The distance by rail from El Paso to Denver is approximately 700 miles, less than the threshold for passenger rail service terminating at these cities to be considered long-distance service. An intercity passenger service north from El Paso that continues north of Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming or Billings, Montana would meet the long-distance threshold for federal operating support.

There are two passenger rail services under consideration that, if completed, would create passenger service in portions of this corridor. If both projects are completed, the amount of rail line that would need to be upgraded to provide passenger rail service from El Paso to Denver would be reduced by about half.

The first of these proposed passenger rail services is the Front Range Passenger Rail service in Colorado, which would connect Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins in its initial development. The Front Range Passenger Rail District is presently developing a service plan as a precursor to moving forward into the NEPA process, final design, and construction. Future expansion northward to Cheyenne (in cooperation with the State of Wyoming) and southward to Walsenburg and Trinidad may be explored once the initial development is completed.

The second proposed passenger rail service is a commuter rail line connecting El Paso and Las Cruces. In 2017, the South Central Regional Transit District completed a feasibility study that recommended further steps be taken to develop the service. The BNSF line between El Paso and Las Cruces serves many freight customers, so commuter rail development would need to include improvements such as additional sidings and double-track segments to avoid disrupting BNSF service in addition to improvements such as positive train control required for passenger rail operations. The cities of Las Cruces and El Paso and their respective metropolitan planning organizations have not taken additional steps towards developing this service since the 2017 feasibility study.

Albuquerque to Flagstaff and Phoenix

This concept first appeared in the FRA's 2014 *Southwest Multi-State Rail Planning Study*, which examined passenger rail improvements, including high-speed rail, serving the states of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico, although the study mainly focused on California, Arizona and Nevada. The study included a proposed rail service connecting Phoenix, Flagstaff, Albuquerque, and Denver operating at up to 90 mph on host freight railroad lines. Within New Mexico, this proposed service would operate on the same route used by Amtrak's Southwest Chief, with maximum speeds the same as currently exist for the Southwest Chief. The sole capital improvement within New Mexico for this service as proposed was to add a station stop in Grants.

The FRA's 2025 *Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Study* included a passenger rail connection between Phoenix and Minneapolis/St. Paul as one of the preferred route options. The proposed alignment for this route connects Phoenix to Albuquerque via Flagstaff and Gallup and then continues the service east from Belen along the BNSF Southern Transcon through Clovis and Amarillo, TX.

New Mexico Heritage Railway Improvements

The long-term objectives of the New Mexico Heritage (New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society) are to provide passenger excursion services and to expand its operating area. NMHR is currently authorized to operate within 20 miles of downtown Albuquerque due to the absence of positive train control (PTC) on the ATSF 2926. In order to achieve both goals, they would need to:

- Obtain liability insurance for passenger rail operations that meets the federal statutory liability maximum per incident, currently just under $323 million.
- Implement PTC on the ATSF 2926 to enable trips of more than 20 miles in PTC-equipped territory.
- Identify or construct a wye track northeast of Albuquerque where the train can turn around. The only wye track between Albuquerque and the Colorado state line with a turning radius large enough for the ATSF 2926 locomotive to turn around for its return to Albuquerque is at French, 30 miles south of Raton and 80 miles north of Las Vegas.

While it is possible that NMHR could meet each of these improvements within the five-year window for short-range improvements, it is expected that one or more will require more than five years, so these are identified as long-term improvements.

Proposed Long-Range Freight Rail Projects

The long-range freight rail projects have been identified by the state's freight railroads, including bridge and improvements on several lines, new freight connections, and a new border crossing. Specific timelines and funding sources have not been identified.

Four Corners Railroad Study: San Juan County Freight Rail Line (Phase 2)

Once the environmental study for the San Juan County freight rail line is completed, long-range tasks for project implementation include final design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction. Funding for each of those phases will need to be identified before the project can progress to each phase. Due to the size of the proposed San Juan County freight rail line, it is likely that federal financing from sources such as MEGA or INFRA would be sought to support development.

EnergyPlex Development Recommendation, Lea County

The Economic Development Corporation of Lea County (EDCLC) is leading the development of EnergyPlex Park on nearly 9,600 acres northwest of Hobbs. This is a large development site adjacent to the Texas-New Mexico Railway, and it is currently served by TXN and connects to UP in Monahans, TX. In 2023, EDCLC conducted a study to understand the rail needs in the southeast portion of the state, including the industrial park. The study found that a new, 35-mile line to connect the EnergyPlex Industrial Park with the existing BNSF rail line outside of Carlsbad would be beneficial. The rail study considered rail expansion to the east and found that it was cost prohibitive.

Improvement to Texas New Mexico (TXN) Near EnergyPlex

The 2023 Economic Development Corporation of Lea County (EDCLC) study's second recommendation is the improvement to the existing TXN short-line rail, operated by Watco, which currently has one spur into the Hobbs Industrial Air Park. These improvements could include installing new, heavier rail to accommodate higher carload weight and/or increasing rail speed. They may also include surfacing and tie work for upgrading the track.

This project, in addition to the 35-mile line connecting EnergyPlex Industrial Park with the existing BNSF rail line, would connect the two major parks to Class I rail operators.

Santa Teresa International Rail Border Crossing

There has long been interest in creating a new international rail border crossing in the greater El Paso area that would either relieve rail congestion at the existing crossing between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez or replace it altogether. Developing a new international rail border crossing involves coordination among many entities – two nations (United States and Mexico), three states (Texas, New Mexico, and Chihuahua), three Class I railroads (Union Pacific, BNSF, and Ferromex), and local landowners and industries. Various proposals have been made over the past several decades to establish new international rail crossings either in New Mexico near Santa Teresa or in Texas east of El Paso.

The most recent effort in the 2010s was a coordinated effort by the states of New Mexico and Chihuahua to establish an international rail border crossing a few miles west of Santa Teresa. To support this, each state conducted its own study to examine the feasibility of connecting its respective rail network to the proposed border crossing, with the 2015-2016 *Santa Teresa International Rail Study* (STIRS), conducted by the New Mexico Border Authority (NMBA), serving as New Mexico's study. The STIRS study proposed rail connections from the border to both the Union Pacific and BNSF rail lines in southern New Mexico, while the State of Chihuahua's study proposed connecting with Ferromex south of Ciudad Juárez. 2015-2016 studies concluded the line was feasible, but development of the rail crossing has not progressed beyond these studies.

Following the feasibility study, the next step in developing a new international rail border crossing would be for the states of New Mexico and Chihuahua to submit separate applications to the United States and Mexico for permission to establish a new international rail border crossing. In the United States, this application takes the form of a Presidential Permit Application submitted to the State Department, which coordinates the reviews by other federal departments that have a role in the approval process. The Presidential Permit process requires a significant quantity of project details be completed beforehand, including securing funding commitments for the construction of the railroad infrastructure needed to connect the border crossing to the national rail network. The STIRS study estimated construction costs in New Mexico at approximately $500 million, but no funding commitments were identified either in the study or during discussions following its publication. Additionally, local objections were raised to the proposed alignment that would connect the border crossing to the BNSF El Paso subdivision.

There has been no significant activity towards developing a new international rail border crossing since shortly after completion of the STIRS study. Improvements at the existing El Paso-Juárez crossing have increased its capacity somewhat, and many of the at-grade crossings within Ciudad Juárez have been replaced with grade separations, reducing the negative impacts of stopped trains blocking access from east to west within the city. Also, industries in the Ciudad Juárez area that need access to the U.S. rail network use trucks to cross the border before transloading in New Mexico or Texas, reducing the immediate need for a rail crossing to serve these industries. However, if local conditions change, this project could come back into focus. Due to the size of the proposed Santa Teresa international rail border crossing, it is likely that federal financing from sources such as MEGA or INFRA would be sought to support development.

Santa Fe Southern Railway Bridge Improvements

Santa Fe Southern is interested in resuming freight service to customers on the rail line connecting Lamy and Santa Fe. Among the issues that would need to be addressed for this to happen is that some of the bridges on that line would require capital investment to improve their load ratings before freight service can be restored. The bridges, which are inspected annually, have load ratings sufficient for SFS' excursion service.

Southwestern Railroad Track and Bridge Improvements

Southwestern Railroad identified the Deming-Rincon Bridge as one of several capital projects for bridge repairs that would help them remain competitive, reduce costs, and ensure reliable freight rail service for their customers. The proposed upgrade to the Deming-Rincon Bridge would include eliminating the timber and channel lining of the steel structure. Southwestern also identified the need for additional capital tie replacement and surfacing projects to allow rail freight customers to load cars up to 286,000 gross pounds. This upgrade would require 8.5 to 9 million dollars in funding but would be a long-term sustainable approach to their business and reduce risk on their lines.

Spaceport America Rail Spur

Spaceport America is a commercial spaceport facility located between Albuquerque and Las Cruces and near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. The 2025 Spaceport America Master Plan notes a future need for rail service to the facility. BNSF Railway's Belen to El Paso mainline runs parallel to Upham Rd and is near the entrance to the Spaceport site[61]. A new rail spur would have to be constructed to connect the facility with the BNSF Railway mainline to provide rail service directly to the site to deliver and retrieve cargo. It is noted in the Master Plan that a spur would facilitate the delivery of bulk commodities, removal of bulk waste, and potential future employee/visitor transport. The Spaceport America organization has recently applied to the USDOT Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program for a "Rail Spur and Roadway Improvements Project."

Proposed Long-Range Rail Safety Projects

NMDOT is committed to improving grade crossing safety and utilizes various strategies to achieve this objective. Safety improvements for existing grade crossings are continuously identified, developed, and implemented under the Section 130 program, for instance, although only four years' worth of projects are typically identified at any given time. NMDOT collaborates with railroad companies during the development of highway projects that may impact railroad grade crossings, incorporating safety improvements whenever feasible. The most effective method to improve safety at a grade crossing is through eliminating the grade crossing altogether, either by consolidating multiple crossings or by constructing a grade separation to cross the railroad.

Grade Separations

The short-range program included proposed grade separation projects for which funding has either been identified or is actively being sought. It is anticipated that additional grade separation projects will be identified in the future, either as a result of studies funded in the short term, such as those in Cibola and McKinley counties, or along the Clovis to Loving rail corridor, or through other sources. The cost associated with individual grade separation projects typically exceeds $20 million, and the duration from project

[61] Spaceport America Master Plan

identification to completion can span over several years. The projects identified below are not intended to be the only potential future grade separation initiatives.

The Pueblo of Acoma is pursuing funding to construct an overpass structure over the BNSF Southern Transcon to better connect the principal Pueblo, situated south of the Transcon, with Interstate 40 to the north. Currently, there are two grade crossings of the Transcon located at the eastern and western boundaries of the Pueblo, however, these may be blocked for extended periods of time when trains are disabled or when an incident requires all rail traffic on the line to stop. Acoma Pueblo has not expressed a desire to close either of the existing grade crossings in conjunction with this project, which restricts certain Federal funding sources, such as the Railroad Crossing Elimination program, from being used to fund the project.

In Lordsburg, the vertical clearance on the US 70 underpass beneath the Union Pacific Sunset Route is 13' 8", requiring many trucks to use a nearby at-grade crossing on Center Street to cross the tracks. Center Street is located at the western end of UP's Lordsburg Yard, so the crossing can be activated by switching movements. The crossing has enough of a hump that lowboy trailers have damaged the crossing panels on multiple occasions, leaving metal exposed that could damage freight or passenger trains on the main line. Additionally, the limited vertical clearance for highway crossings of the *Sunset Route* also occurs for US 180 in Deming, with the result that there is no highway crossing of the *Sunset Route* from the Arizona state line to Santa Teresa near the Texas state line that can accommodate taller trucks or oversized vehicles. Union Pacific has identified Center Street as a candidate for closure, but an overpass that provides adequate clearance for trucks that cannot use US 70 may address both UP's concerns and truckers' needs.

Figure 4-1: Recently completed grade separation of the Jarales Road (NM 109) crossing of the Clovis Subdivision just south of Belen

Photo taken by Huitt-Zollars.

4.2.3 Public and Private Benefits of Rail Program Implementation

Passenger Rail Element Benefits

Improvement projects for Rail Runner comprise the largest share of investment dollars in the short-range program. The service generates significant public benefits. The NMDOT Transit and Rail Division estimates that in FY2024 Rail Runner riders reduced traffic by 18.7 million vehicle miles on New Mexico roads and reduced gasoline consumption by 255,000 gallons. The monthly savings for Rail Runner commuters between downtown Albuquerque and Santa Fe is estimated at $1,490.

Rail Runner rolling stock is nearing the midpoint of its useful life, and it is likely that in 15 to 25 years a new fleet will need to be procured to ensure the continued viability of the service, which provides a reliable transportation alternative to the automobile for half the state's population. When it is time for a new fleet, that may be an opportunity to switch to one of the alternative fuel technologies currently being developed and tested on other railroads.

Amtrak long-distance services also contribute important public benefits. As an example, a 2014 NMDOT analysis of *Southwest Chief* impacts in northeastern New Mexico estimated that in 2013 service to Lamy, Las Vegas, and Raton provided $1.51 million in direct cost savings to New Mexico residents that boarded at these three stations, versus making the same trip by other modes. The same study estimated that total direct expenditures by *Southwest Chief* riders that visited New Mexico in 2013 were $13.8 million. In 2013, 271 full-time jobs were created by *Southwest Chief* service to New Mexico, and the additional value added to the New Mexico economy from the *Southwest Chief* was estimated at $13.8 million.

Freight Rail Element Benefits

The public benefits of freight railroad investments – either in the railroads themselves or in rail-served industrial parks – include the transportation-related economic and socio-environmental benefits (e.g., road accidents avoided, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and fuel cost savings) involved in providing competitive rail service. They also include preservation and protection of state's existing rail network, which can serve both to attract new rail shippers to New Mexico and to encourage existing shippers to remain in the state.

The aforesaid *Farmington-Thoreau Railroad Study* indicated that the construction and operation of the proposed Farmington Line would have a transformative impact in terms of providing a low-cost transportation option for shippers in the Farmington area. Rail transportation would link the area with domestic and international markets. A direct result of the line will be new employment opportunities, as shippers move to take advantage of new, efficient market access enabled by the line.

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4.3 Beyond the Rail Service and Investment Plan

4.3.1 Future Passenger Service

As noted above in the Short Range Rail Investment Program, Thruway connecting bus service can be a useful and more cost-friendly way for NMDOT and others to provide accessible and convenient intercity service. In addition to the newest route launched with Greyhound, additional routes could be phased, such as Roswell-Artesia-Carlsbad, El Paso-Clovis, El Paso-Albuquerque, Gallup-Albuquerque, and Clovis-Albuquerque. Many people gave comments on the Draft Plan that intercity service is a high priority for people in New Mexico. Organizations with membership across the state can advocate for these services.

While Rio Metro and NMDOT are not currently studying Rail Runner expansion, extending service to Raton or to Las Cruces was mentioned by those commenting on the Draft Plan. Additionally, there were comments on the Draft Plan regarding future Rail Runner spur lines to serve various events, such as Balloon Fiesta, NM United games, and Zozobra. Increased coordination between the Rail Runner and the City of Albuquerque's transportation department, ABQ RIDE, could provide useful connections to facilitate large numbers of people getting to and from these events. Similarly, the best option for public transportation to the Sunport Airport is express bus service to and from Alvarado Transportation Center, where the Rail Runner stops in Albuquerque. Agreements could be reached with the Sunport to help operate the bus route in coordination with ABQ RIDE. However, unlike other options like shuttle service or a rail extension, the express bus could be integrated into the existing public transit network to provide quality service for anybody regardless of whether they are starting their trip on Rail Runner or on the ABQ RIDE network. A rail extension to the Sunport would prove difficult. A rail line once existed that served an Army air base where the Sunport is now located. However, that track was removed when the Army base closed. The old rail grade still exists in some locations, but other portions of the old rail grade have been redeveloped.

4.3.2 Rail Advocacy

Advocacy groups with membership in New Mexico which could prove to be catalysts for moving passenger rail initiatives forward include such entities as:

- Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc.
- New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historical Society (NMSL&RHS)
- Rails, Inc.
- Rail Passenger Association (RPA)

These groups work to inform policymakers and the public of the benefits of investments in intercity, commuter, and heritage railroads, thus helping to galvanize support for improvement projects. For the most part, these advocacy groups are more focused on improving service on existing passenger rail than on requesting additional services or service extensions.

In addition to advocating for their heritage railroad, many members of the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad volunteer each summer to repair right-of-way, rebuild and paint structures, and do other helpful tasks in keeping the C&TS steaming. Their focus is on increasing ridership, providing new passenger services that respond to passenger demand, and keeping up with the maintenance required to operate a historic train on historic tracks through difficult terrain.

New Mexico Steam Locomotive & Railroad Historic Society is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving New Mexico's railway history. They have restored the former Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe "Northern" steam locomotive 2926, built in 1944. They are concentrating their efforts on getting the restored locomotive out onto the rails for rail safety and education events and are working toward the ultimate goal of providing passenger excursions.

The Rail Passengers Association is a national rail advocacy group with over 28,000 members nationwide and 125 active members in New Mexico. Their primary efforts in New Mexico are focused on improving public perception of Amtrak and improved Amtrak service, advocating for better connections from the Colorado Front Range to New Mexico, and improving connections within New Mexico. They would support and advocate for a Las Cruces to El Paso connection.

Rails, Inc. is an organization that focuses on advocating for desired services, even if they are not immediately feasible. They are currently focused on advocating for: future public ownership of all major tracks to create a "rail interstate"; restored long-distance service between El Paso and Shelby Montana; Doodlebug or Rail Runner service from Belen to Socorro; and the general benefits of modern passenger rail beyond tourism and commercial redevelopment.

There exists potential for coordination with advocacy groups that are focused on transit service, although none is happening at this time. One such group active in New Mexico is the New Mexico Transit Association.

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5. Coordination and Review Appendix

5.1 Coordination with Railroads

All railroad entities mentioned in the plan were consulted as part of this plan effort and provided opportunity to comment on the Draft Plan.

5.2 Coordination within New Mexico

Presentations were made to all MPOs and RTPOs in the State as part of this plan effort and given time to comment on the Draft Plan.

5.3 Public Comments

The following public comments were received during the Draft Plan comment period between August 29, 2025, and November 30, 2025, following an online public presentation and meeting on September 16, 2025, and presentations to all MPOs and RTPOs in the state in September, October, and November 2025. The online public meeting was advertised on the NMDOT website, and comments were accepted via rail.plan@dot.nm.gov.

Comment	Response
I ask that electrification be explicitly mentioned and prioritized in the long-range investment program of the State Rail Plan. We should not only include but prioritize electric passenger rail when talking about alternative fuel technologies given its many proven benefits. Not only does electrification improve start and stop times (ideal for passenger rail), but it makes the trip much more pleasant fcf vor riders and the surrounding communities due to the elimination of noxious exhaust fumes and much quieter operation. The Rail Runner and other passenger rail would greatly benefit from electrification. Let's get electrification explicitly mentioned since we generally know when new rolling stock needs to be replaced. With this foresight, this is a perfect time to set electrification as a goal/priority. I'd like to add to my previous comment by emphasizing - electrification via overhead catenary line. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this.	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. NMDOT updated the State Rail Plan to reflect a future study of Rail Runner electrification.
Thank you for having the zoom meeting the other evening. I am a big supporter of expanding rail in New Mexico. I would like to see rail expand from Denver to El Paso. Expand rail runner service for the Rail Runner from Raton to Las Cruces. Dollar for dollar, expanding rail would go further than road construction and maintenance. It would be a safer and lower cost transportation method for me and my community. Expanding rail is an investment that will pay the community back by providing economic opportunities. It has the potential to take cars off the road, improving air quality and lowering the chance of motor vehicle collisions. Thank you for your time and efforts	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. NMDOT updated the State Rail Plan to reflect interest in Rail Runner expansion and intercity passenger service.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft State Rail Plan. I appreciate the comprehensive overview and the recognition of rail's importance to New Mexico's economy and environment. That said, the plan needs far more urgency and ambition when it comes to passenger rail. The Rail Runner does not currently run frequently enough or fast enough to be a truly viable alternative to driving. It takes about 1 hour 40 minutes from downtown Albuquerque to Santa Fe, compared to roughly an hour by car, and the schedule makes day trips difficult. For example, if I don't take the 6:40 PM train back, the next one isn't until 9 PM, and that's the last one. With such long gaps and slow service, it's no surprise ridership remains limited. Demand will only rise when service becomes genuinely competitive with driving. Meanwhile, the state is spending hundreds of millions expanding sections of I-25. A fraction of that investment could make a transformative difference for passenger rail, improving speed, reliability, and frequency. Rail costs less to expand and maintain, is better for the environment, and doesn't lock us deeper into the cycle of sprawl and induced demand. Even shifting a small percentage of trips from car to rail would ease congestion, reduce emissions, and strengthen downtown Albuquerque, and reduce the need for harmful highway expansions. New Mexico should take bold, forward-looking action: Pursue high-speed, non-stop or limited-stop service between downtown Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Begin planning for a regional high-speed corridor extending from El Paso, through Albuquerque, to Denver. Invest in rail electrification and other technologies that make passenger rail cleaner, faster, and more reliable. The moment calls for vision. As our state grows, doubling down on highways is a short-term fix with long-term costs. Building a robust, modern rail network is how we create a sustainable, connected New Mexico.	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. We have updated the NM Rail Plan goal to indicate that passenger rail should be competitive with other travel options. We also added more details about Albuquerque to Santa Fe service and what types of projects could help create timesavings in that segment.
I'm a Business Development Coordinator here at Spaceport America. We were recently made aware of your Rail Plan and are interested in learning more and how we can collaborate. Your goals and objectives to support economic growth and development are in alignment with our goals. Our Master Plan - Spaceport America includes a recommendation for a railroad spur on our site. The project we have in mind will establish a direct rail link between the existing BNSF mainline and the Spaceport's Horizontal Launch Area (HLA) in Sierra County, New Mexico. It will also reconfigure internal roadways to enhance logistical efficiency and support the operations enabled by the new rail spur. This link will provide first- and last-mile rail connectivity to improve logistics for bulk commodities and debris transport. It will position NMSA as a multimodal proving ground for aerospace, defense, and advanced manufacturing industries. We'd like to meet via MS Teams at your convenience to discuss further.	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. The Spaceport Rail Spur was added to the Short Range Improvement Plan.
Love the support for passenger rail in the state the NMDOT provides, especially the Rail Runner. I would love to see changes in the coming years like going fully electric, higher speeds outside of Albuquerque City limits, express	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. We have updated the NM Rail Plan goal to indicate that passenger rail should be

trains from downtown ABQ to downtown SF to compete with driving times, better connection to Rio Rancho and Los Alamos. Outside of the rail runner it seems wild that with so many of our states major cities being along i25, you cannot take a train from the southern border direct to the northern border with Colorado or straight to Denver. High speed passenger rail with stops Las Cruces, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Raton before going on to Colorado Springs and Denver would be an amazing alternative to driving and flying. Appreciate all the work you do to keep NM Rail running smooth	competitive with other travel options. We also have identified ways to advance the effort of electrification of the Rail Runner and that there is significant interest in north/south passenger rail connections.
I would prefer to take the train more frequently. However, it doesn't make sense to buy a train ticket when driving is cheaper (I get good gas mileage) and significantly faster. I hate driving on I-25 for safety and environmental reasons, but the train just hasn't made the benefits outweigh the costs at this point. If the frequency was greater, I would consider it more. But it's hard to have to plan around the sporadic schedule and plan an entire day to go to Santa Fe from ABQ. I wish it was faster. It could be done by electrifying the train (and better for the environment, since we have solar panels and nearly unlimited sunshine here). The infrastructure is there, we just need to improve on it. And, believe me, there's demand! Please consider updating the RR to meet the needs of the people, and I believe ridership will go up.	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. We have updated the NM Rail Plan goal to indicate that passenger rail should be competitive with other travel options. We also have identified ways to advance the effort of electrification of the Rail Runner.
I was sent the Rail Plan by Kelly Benavidez for review and comment. While there is a ton of information to be read and understood, I believe the following is (somewhat) a good summary and what I believe are the next steps according to the information presented. If so, good work. However there may be an item or two in this summary that could be beneficial. The following are suggestions. Aggressively pursue competitive federal grants (like those available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law/IIJA) to fund the NMRX rolling stock replacement and the major Class III short line repair initiatives. These are essential, in my opinion for maintaining the existing network in a State of Good Repair, which is and should be a key goal. Prioritize locations where rail activity heavily impacts community mobility (bottlenecks) and those with the highest collision risk, with the long-term goal of grade separation or crossing consolidation to improve safety, enable quiet zones, and reduce vehicular congestion. There have been numerous incidents where people have been involved with train accidents, and it did not go well for them. Please see next. March 2024: A 90-year-old man died when his pickup truck went under a crossing arm and was hit by a Rail Runner train on Osuna Road NW in Albuquerque (Bernalillo County). September 2023: A pedestrian was killed by a train near Prosperity Avenue SW and the rail tracks in Bernalillo County. 2016: A 44-year-old man was hit and killed by an Amtrak train in Bernalillo while walking on the tracks. 2013: A 16-year-old boy, Jose Angel, was killed by an Amtrak train in Bernalillo, prompting family calls for safety improvements. 2001: A car crash with an Amtrak train at Alameda and Second Street killed three people who drove around crossing barriers. Data compiled from KOAT, KOB, KRQE and Parnell Law Firm.	

3.Expedite planning and environmental review studies for the major long-range freight projects, specifically the Santa Teresa International Rail Border Crossing and the San Juan County Freight Line. Securing "shovel-ready" status for these projects will position New Mexico to receive large, amounts of federal funding once those programs open (hopefully). This links rail investment directly to the plan's goal of supporting trade and economic development. Rails lines are more important than people think. 4. Beyond existing rolling stock replacement, begin the planning and design work for capacity enhancements (sidings, signaling) as noted in number 2 above needed to support more frequent Rail Runner service, as outlined in the long-range program. Increased frequency is critical for making commuter rail a truly competitive and effective alternative to vehicle travel in the ABQ-Santa Fe corridor. I realize some of these suggestions may seem repetitive from the draft but I hope it was worth the read.	
[COMMENTS ATTACHED AS PDF] Representing members of the Rail Passengers Association in New Mexico, I am pleased to submit our comments for the 2025 State Rail Plan. This document was developed by six volunteer members of the Association in our state, and we thank the NMDOT for including us in the planning process.	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. We have updated the NM Rail Plan goal to indicate that passenger rail should be competitive with other travel options. We also have identified ways to advance the effort of electrification of the Rail Runner,
[COMMENTS ATTACHED AS PDF] Thank you for your work on the Rail Plan. Please find attached my comments on what I would like to see the State and other relevant players consider for the future of new and existing passenger rail in New Mexico.	Thank you for your comments and interest in the State Rail Plan. We have updated the NM Rail Plan goal to indicate that passenger rail should be competitive with other travel options. We also have identified ways to advance the effort of electrification of the Rail Runner, as well as additional information about express service.