

# ABQ TRANSIT



Public transit systems are a critical part of sustainable cities. Public transit helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependency, improve short-term and long-term air quality, and increase city-wide social mobility. Albuquerque's sprawl, car dependence, and gaps in neighborhood-to-neighborhood equity are challenges for a vibrant transit system. Opportunities to improve the sustainability of Albuquerque's public transit largely revolve around efforts to increase ridership and technological innovation.

ABQ Ride consists of a bus system and Sun Van paratransit service. Twenty-six of the city's forty bus routes are currently operational, serving all four quadrants of the city with varying service hours, frequency and capacity. The Sun Van service operates throughout the city and most of Bernalillo county, offering service to riders who cannot ride city buses due to impairment.

Unlike larger, light rail-boasting cities, Albuquerque's transit system is likely to remain bus-based for the foreseeable future. While a light rail system was considered as a potential transit innovation for the city, the idea was ultimately eclipsed by the Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART) system due to issues of cost and logistics. Aside from pursuing new or improved transit routes, increased transit ridership can be accomplished through cultivating transit's reputation as reliable, safe, and efficient.

Electrification of the city's bus fleet is another approach to achieving significant strides in transit sustainability using a bus-based system. Currently, the city's fleet uses diesel-electric hybrid and compressed natural gas fueling systems. However, Albuquerque has a pilot project underway to purchase five electric buses in 2021, and is investigating hydrogen fuel-cell electric buses as a future option. The linking of certain pollutants to both COVID-19 mortality and emissions for diesel vehicles like buses amplifies calls for a zero-emissions fleet.

Fare-free transit, is an increasingly discussed idea meant to jointly addressing concerns of equity and ridership in transit. Eliminating fares presents a significant additional cost (\$3.5 million in FY19), and, if that money can be identified, spending it to offset free fares may mean not spending money to improve service. In considering free fares, a robust conversation is necessary to weigh the potential pros and cons. Taxes, such as gas or payroll, and private investment are potential means of navigating free transit costs.

## Sources\* and Recommended Reading:

- [Climate Action Manifesto](#), The International Association of Public Transport, Sept. 2019
- [Should Public Transit be Free? More Cities Say, Why Not?](#), New York Times, Jan. 14, 2020.
- [Evaluating Transit Equity](#), Victoria Transport Policy Institute, Jun. 5, 2020.

\*Full source list easily available upon request.

## ABQ Ride and COVID-19

While Albuquerque's buses are still offering vital transportation services in current COVID-19 conditions, the pandemic has affected bus ridership. Bus and Sun Van ridership in August 2020 was down 58 and 67 percent, respectively, as compared to August 2019.