

CHAPTER 5:



Transit

Transit

Public transit can work to benefit the social and economic well-being of individuals in a community. Riders of public transit are an expanding segment of the transportation system and should have increased access to this form of transportation. Appropriate measures should be made when further developing existing public transit to improve overall accessibility and efficiency.

Vista Transit Center (2015)

Benefits of accessible and efficient public transit include:

- ❖ Offers convenience and easy access
- ❖ Increased savings - Reduced transportation costs
- ❖ Strengthens communities – Improves livability
- ❖ Improved health – Reduced air pollution
- ❖ Less congestion on roads

Vista Transit

The Sierra Vista region currently has one public service operator, Vista Transit, overseeing the bus network. Established in 1994, Vista Transit initially operated within Catholic Community Services on a passenger service request basis. Today, Vista Transit operates throughout the city limits of Sierra Vista and Fort Huachuca with five local fixed routes and a sixth Saturday route providing service to Fort Huachuca. Vista Transit contains an extensive network of bus stops and its assets include a fleet of 13 buses as well as a centrally located Transit Center built in 2007. Each of the existing routes is radial in design with one stop respectively occurring at the Transit Center for transfers to other routes. Transit in the SVMPO region is characterized by connecting residents to major activity centers within the city.



Per 2010 U.S. Census Data, 7,042 or 41% of Sierra Vista households have only one or zero vehicles available.

Bus Stops

Vista Transit oversees close to 60 different bus stops throughout the City of Sierra Vista and Fort Huachuca. Bus stops are the primary infrastructure that facilitates transit routes and pick-up operations. Amenities for the bus stops such as continuous sidewalk access, compliant ADA (Americans with Disability Act) infrastructure, benches, proper lighting for safety, and access to shade during peak daytime hours increases the likelihood of transit use by the public.

Most bus stops in the City of Sierra Vista can be found in the northern half of the city's residential and commercial areas with higher business, and population density. Bus stops are not located in the southern parts of the city except several retail locations. Vista Transit currently does not have defined standards for bus stop spacing and placement.

A transit analysis study report will provide an inventory of existing bus stops and identify potential locations for the installation of future bus stops based on the primary factors such as accessibility, population, consistent spacing, and placement.

Bus stop on Avenida Cochise (2015)

Routes

Transit routes are currently designed to link residents to major activity centers within the city. Major activity centers include key places such as grocery stores, health offices, the public library, the mall, and colleges. Access to these locations provides for the livelihood of transit-dependent residents and improves the quality of life for the community.

Bus Stop at the Mall of Sierra Vista (2015)

Table 5-1: Transit Routes & Stop Counts

Route	Number of Stops
Westside	11
Eastside	9
Central Shopper	7
North	13
South	5
Saturday	9

Currently, each route is centered around a particular section of the city with pick-ups happening in a radial pattern. A lack of bus pull-out infrastructure throughout the SVMPO region means that transit stops are usually located within commercial zones, mainly in parking lots. Travel corridors tend to occur on non-major roads to avoid heavy traffic. While these characteristics of the transit system provide a level of convenience for transit users, they introduce the possibility of uncertain travel

times causing delays and overall inefficiencies. Route names and stops are illustrated in **Figure 5-1 Vista Transit Routes**.

External Partnerships

Serving the broader region of Southeastern Arizona and the SVMPO region are various private and public transportation entities. Participating transportation services work to provide greater mobility for communities in the larger region. Each agency’s general services, fleet size, and other pertinent information is made available in the coordination plan by the SouthEastern Arizona Governments Organization (SEAGO). For illustrative purposes, Table 5-2 shows a list of transit providers in Cochise County.

Table 5-2: Cochise County Transportation Providers.

Provider	Service Area	Annual Ridership
SV Vista Transit	City of Sierra Vista, Fort Huachuca	186,242
CCS Douglas Rides	City of Douglas, Elfrida Area	41,511
Douglas ARC	City of Douglas	36,495
Agency for the Handicapped	Clients Within Cochise County	28,000
Mary’s Mission	Private: SEAGO region	24,000
Bisbee Bus	City of Bisbee, Naco Area	23,563
City of Benson	City of Benson, St. David Area	6,750
Northern Cochise Community Hospital	Greater Willcox Area Inc. Bowie, San Simon, Sunsites	6,432
Huachuca City	Huachuca City to Sierra Vista Vista Transit Center	1,140
Women’s Transition Project	Client Services in Bisbee	931
Volunteer Interfaith Caregiver Program	Cochise County, based in Sierra Vista	250/500
Wynne Chapel	Richland	144/300

Transit ridership is calculated base on the numbers of trips that are taken (e.g. one person taking a trip to the store, exiting the bus, and then later taking a trip to another location is considered two trips).

A complete list of transportation providers is available at www.seago.org.



SEAGO Transportation Coordination Plan

Completed in April 2014 - 2015, the goal of the study was to coordinate the efforts of both public and private transit providers in the SEAGO region for policy development, decision-making, and investments needed to create greater efficiencies, build capacities, and address gaps in service.

The study identified connector services between communities in the region as a crucial general public transit need, specifically between Sierra Vista and

Douglas, Bisbee, Huachuca City, and Tombstone. As Sierra Vista continues to grow as the main service center of the region, it is anticipated transit needs between communities will increase.

Vista Transit Developments

Ridership Growth & Demographics

Since data collection began in the fiscal year 2003, ridership has grown in Sierra Vista on a quarterly basis. In FY 2015, Vista Transit ridership totaled just over 173,096 riders.

The most transit-dependent population in the Sierra Vista region includes people age 60 and over; individuals with disabilities; and individuals living in poverty. The Sierra Vista Transportation Efficiency Study, conducted in 2013, estimates the 2012 transit demand for these population groups in the Sierra Vista – Douglas Metropolitan area is 503,060 passenger trips annually and could increase to 722,670 passenger trips annually in the next 20 years (Source: Sierra Vista Transportation Efficiency Study, March 2013).

Fort Huachuca



The U.S. Army Post, Fort Huachuca is incorporated into the City and located immediately north and west of the city. Annexed by Sierra Vista in 1971, Fort Huachuca is the largest employer in the SVMPO region, and as such, it is the primary driving economic force for the Sierra Vista region. The military recommends that students on Fort Huachuca do not bring private automobiles to the area. Therefore, this a very transit-dependent population, making the Fort an ideal area for expanded transit service to meet those needs. Currently, Vista Transit only operates on the Fort with its Saturday route when service members are most likely to travel to town for shopping, services, and entertainment. Partnering opportunities between Vista

Transit and Fort Huachuca could address issues of low ridership between the base and shopping areas in Sierra Vista. Competition from private taxi/shuttle services and lack of awareness about Vista Transit on the Fort are specific challenges to implementing new service.

Curb-To-Curb Paratransit Service

Vista Transit provides curb-to-curb service to individuals who are eligible per the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and cannot access the fixed route services offered. Three wheelchair accessible buses operate the paratransit routes on weekdays. The service operates on a 24-hour notice basis for prequalified residents. For some residents, curbside service provides their only method of effective transportation. This service results in improved quality of life for participating members across the entire community.



Curbside service accounted for 10,417 trips or just over 6 percent of the total ridership on the Vista Transit network in 2012.

Americans with Disability Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disability Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. Per Title II of the Act, paratransit service must be a complement to fixed route services. In addition to public transportation services, newly constructed bus stops and other transit facilities must be ADA compliant. When development occurs, accompanying infrastructure must be brought up to current ADA standards.

By creating a network of ADA compliant infrastructure in the form of sidewalks, curbs, multi-use paths and bus stops, a network of mobility for disabled individuals can begin to take shape. When planning for transit, whether it be bus stop placement or designing routes, these forms of existing infrastructure should be taken into consideration to give everyone equal access and choice.

Canyon Vista Regional Hospital

accessibility can be developed. Allowing transit planners to identify areas that are ADA accessible as well as places in need of improvement.

Using completed sidewalk and ADA ramp inventory data and pedestrian gap analysis with bus stop

Sierra Vista Transit Center

Opened in 2007, the Sierra Vista Transit Center began serving the public as the central hub for transit activities. The Transit Center is centrally located in Sierra Vista at the intersection of Coronado and Wilcox drives. All fixed routes stop at the Transit Center for timed transfers. At close to 300 rider's daily, average boarding's at the Transit Center consistently rank first of any stop across Sierra Vista, demonstrating the importance the transit center has for the community and public transportation.

West End Route Redesign

Vista Transit implemented a redesign of the Westside bus route starting in September 2015 as an effort to mitigate delays along its highest utilized route. The scarcely used Bartow/Carmichael and 2nd Street/Wilcox stops are being removed. The nearby Carmichael/Wilcox bus stop, which currently has moderate usage, will assume traffic for the area. The elimination of the two Carmichael Avenue stops allow the Westside route to operate in a more efficient manner without negatively impacting accessibility.

Marketing Efforts

In an attempt to promote Vista Transit, a variety of marketing strategies have been implemented. These include advertising services on the radio, banners on buses, and on the Vista Transit website at www.vistratransit.org. Further promotional and marketing efforts to underserved populations and improved "How to Ride" information with greater outreach will help spread awareness of the transit service and potentially increase ridership.

Regional Needs and Projects

The City of Sierra Vista Short Range Transit Plan identifies and provides a comprehensive list of transit needs. With limited available funding, projects to improve transit in the SVMPO region should be oriented towards those which:

- ❖ Increase efficiency of routes and timed transfers
- ❖ Provides greater access to current users of the transit system
- ❖ Expand transit services to underserved areas

Fry Boulevard

Fry Boulevard is the main east-west corridor in Sierra Vista. It facilitates the bulk of commercial activity and vehicular traffic within the city limits. While adequate pedestrian amenities exist alongside Fry Boulevard in the form of sidewalks, ramps, and crosswalks, the street is not considered ideal for transit due to its lack of dedicated bus lanes, turnouts, and stops. Currently, transit activity on Fry Blvd is mostly avoided due to the issues above, and most routes operate on secondary streets away from Fry Blvd. Routes that stop at businesses along Fry Blvd face challenges too as bus stops for these businesses are located within parking lots. Although stopping outside businesses provides convenience for passengers, the arrangement introduces many safety and travel time issues due to having to navigate compact parking lots.

Addressing the problems of Fry Boulevard and its current incompatibility with transit will involve considerable financial resources, research, and cooperation with businesses and property owners. Improvements to Fry Blvd. for transit will require significant alterations. As funding and private development opportunities present themselves, these various challenges should not be a barrier to transit improvements.

The Fry Boulevard Corridor Study

Currently, the SVMPO is developing the Fry Boulevard West End Corridor Study. The study will identify areas along Fry Blvd. in the West End where bus turnout construction would be ideal for future route operations along the street. The study and subsequent development of bus turnouts are the first phases of planning for efficient Fry Blvd transit service.

Bus Turnouts

Bus turnouts are needed to implement new routes along major roads in Sierra Vista. Traffic along the major corridors in Sierra Vista can be relatively heavy, and without bus turnouts, transit operations would only increase congestion in these areas.

Bus Passenger Shelters

Bus passenger shelters help make the transit system more comfortable and desirable, resulting in increased ridership.

Automated Passenger Counters

Since data collection began in 2003, ridership data has been manually collected from Vista Transit drivers. Introducing automatic passenger counters on each bus will allow for consistent and accurate data collections. This information is essential for effective future management, planning, and evaluation of transit service.

Stop Annunciator - Transit Center

A stop annunciator at the Transit Center will provide waiting passengers information about transfers and other transit developments as they occur. This system will improve operation efficiency at the Transit Center.

Allocated in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget, the following projects are considered the highest priority projects for Sierra Vista's transit system. **Table 5-3 Projects** illustrates two of the larger projects & cost.

Table: 5-3: Projects

Project #	Project	Location	Cost
1	Design two bus pullouts	East Highway 90	\$51,040
2	Implement automated counters	Transit Buses	\$48,000

Regional Plan and Policy Recommendations

1. Updated Routes

The current transit system could benefit from route modifications to improve efficiency. The existing system is composed of one-way loops that often provide out of direction service between major centers of transit activity. Several possible improvements include:

- ❖ Introducing direct and bi-directional routes to reduce travel times and improve simplicity for riders.
- ❖ Analyze increasing the utilization of main streets as a means of faster travel across town without stops.
- ❖ Create overlapping routes at key bus stops throughout the city to reduce transit center dependency. Making transit more desirable for potential riders who see the transit center as out-of-the-way and would find convenience in using a different crossover route to get to their destination.

1. Passenger Amenities

Passenger amenities will encourage more people to use transit. Allocations in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget include \$7,500 for a new passenger shelter. Expanding these funds in the future for more bus shelters, signs, information posts, benches, trash cans, lights, and other passenger amenities will further improve the comfort of waiting passengers and subsequently encourage the use of the transit system.

2. Bus Turnouts

Bus Turnouts are needed to open the main corridors in the city up to transit service and improve route efficiency. The current Fiscal Year 2015 budget includes \$51,040 for two bus turnouts to be designed on E. Highway 90. Constructing additional bus turnouts on the other main roads apart from Fry Blvd. over the next 25 years will allow Vista Transit to develop more efficient routing using faster, transit-oriented roads.

3. Vista Transit App

In today's digital age, bus riders should be able to text or call to find out when the next bus is coming to their stop. With most routes taking 30 minutes to cycle through, an app that tracks bus movement using GPS technology could allow riders to plan their lives around daily transit conditions better. This

type of system would encourage more people to use Vista Transit as a result of increased convenience and predictability of the use of technology.

4. Bus Stop Placement & Accessibility

The current placement and spacing of bus stops throughout Sierra Vista do not follow any particular pattern. Accessibility is also a concern with some bus stops lacking adequate pedestrian amenities leading to them. Implementing standards for bus stop spacing and placement would result in a more predictable and user-friendly system for passengers, pedestrians, and even vehicles operating in the vicinity of the buses across the entire street grid.

Funding

Revenue sources are anticipated to total \$1.4 million for the fiscal year 2016. Vista Transit obtains funds through the following sources:

- ❖ Fare box revenues
- ❖ City of Sierra Vista general fund
- ❖ FTA grants
- ❖ Other income, such as advertising sales

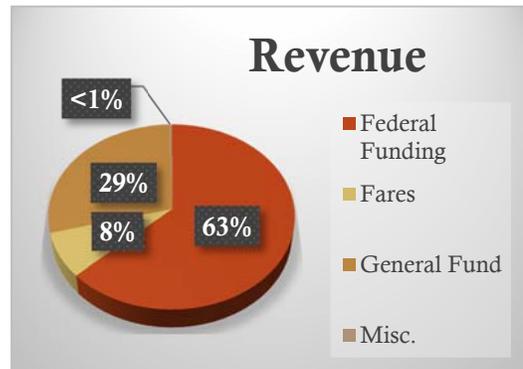


Figure 5-2: Revenue. Source: Sierra Vista 2016 Budget

Planning Funds

The Sierra Vista MPO receives transportation planning funds annually to administer the MPO and for the development of planning studies and policies to include transit.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

The Community Development Block Grant program is a flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a broad range of community development needs to include improving transit infrastructure which directly supports CDBG program areas.

Objectives and Performance Measures

Transit Goals	Objectives / Performance Measures
Promote transit as an alternative transportation choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Increase regional transit service area coverage ❖ Increase annual transit ridership ❖ Coordinate with regional transit providers to increase service between communities

Figure 5-1 Vista Transit Routes
 SVMPO 2015 – 2040 Regional Transportation Plan

