



Arizona



Overview

Arizona is experiencing rapid population growth in urban and rural areas. Throughout the State, transit is increasing in popularity with new interest in diversifying transit options, according to a former Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) official and an Arizona Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) study. Arizona's large counties,¹ long geographic distances, and rapid growth in population and economic development are seen as both challenges and opportunities for transit. ADOT has focused on virtual outreach strategies and on supporting communities that are urbanizing rapidly to implement transit systems. Local governments, including Tribal governments, play a key role in rural transit in Arizona.

Context

Rural Transit

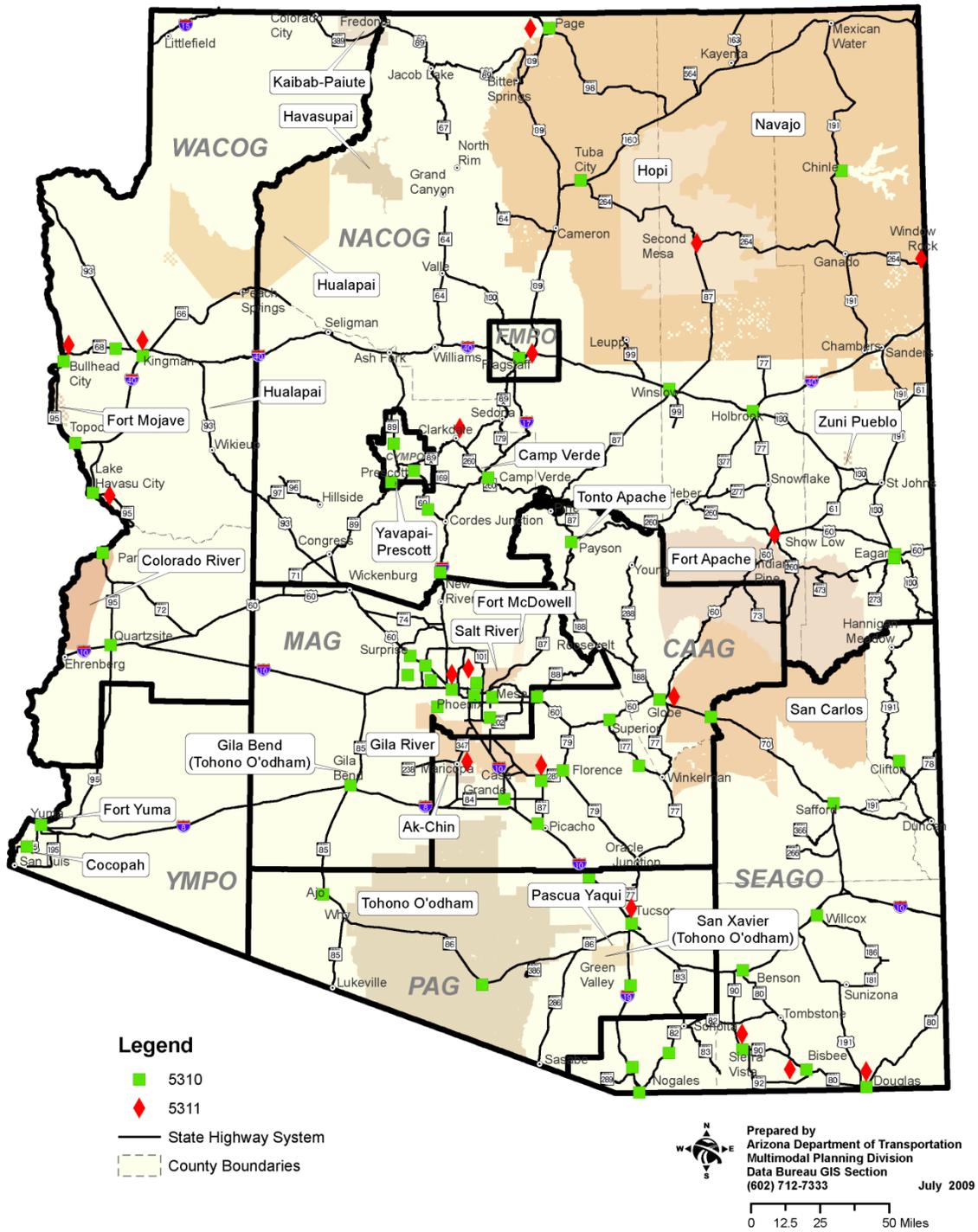
City or town governments are the primary leaders in transit-related planning activities in rural Arizona, as opposed to regional or metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and are also significant operators of transit as approximately half of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 (Formula grants for other than urbanized areas) grant recipients are public works departments.² Non-urbanized providers – as defined by Section 5311 and Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities) grant recipients – are shown in Figure 1. The exceptions to the predominantly local rural transit management are the Northern Arizona Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority in the greater Flagstaff area; preliminary efforts by the Western Arizona Council of Governments to develop a tri-city connector; and planning by Pinal County and the Central Arizona Association of Governments for regional transit services. These are discussed in more detail later in this case study. ADOT's [Public Transportation State Management Plan](#) (2008) describes roles and responsibilities, funding, and other details of the State's transit programs.

¹ Arizona has the second highest average county size in the U.S. at 7,600 square miles on average for its 15 counties (Alaska has the highest). Source: US Census.

² Out of the 18 AZ Section 5311 recipients, 11 are cities/towns, 3 are Indian tribes, 2 are nonprofits, 1 is a transit agency, and 1 is a county.

Figure 1: Non-urbanized Section 5310 and Section 5311 Recipients in Arizona (2009)

Arizona Transit Operators



Source: ADOT

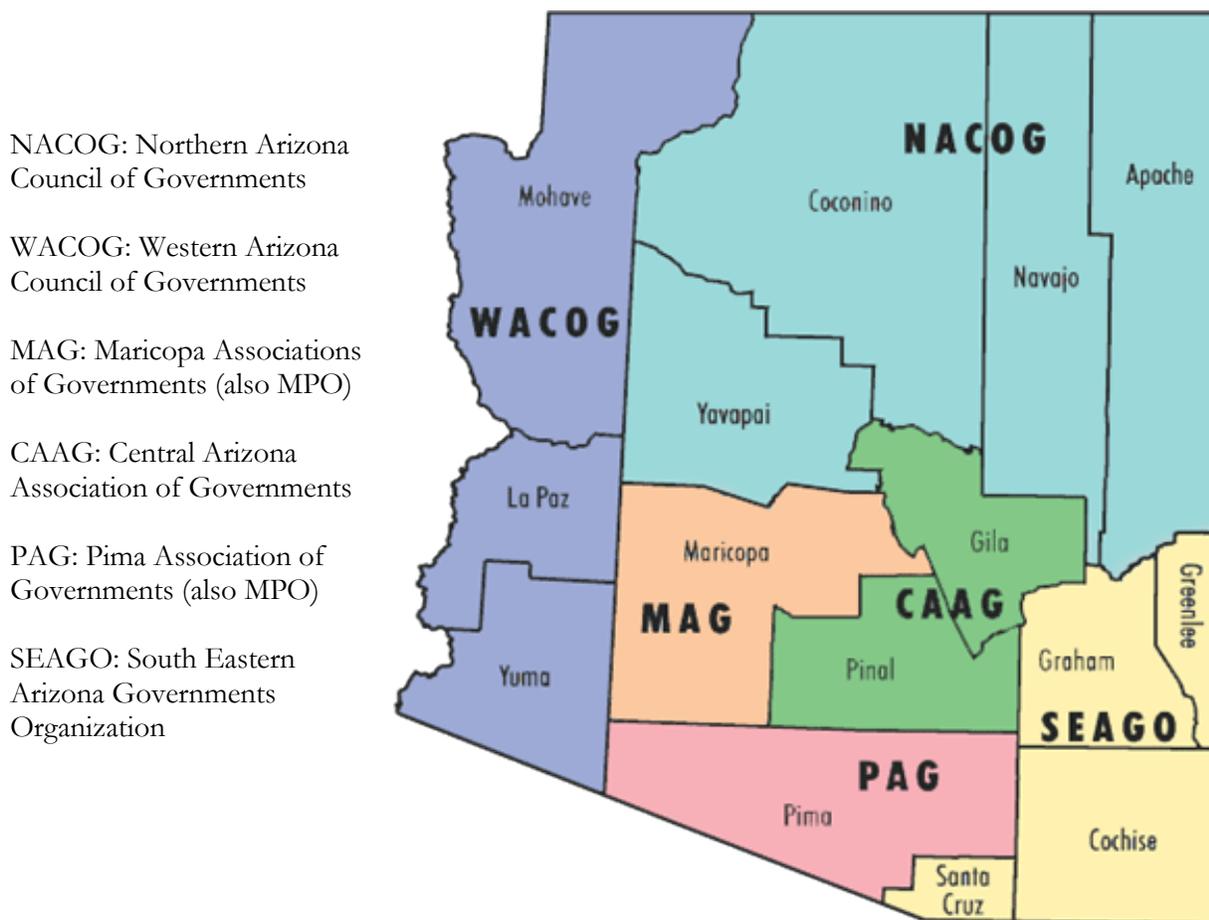
Developed by the US DOT Volpe Center on behalf of FTA

Institutional Structure

ADOT’s [Multimodal Planning Division](#), under the Planning and Policy Department of ADOT, manages planning for aeronautics, rail, and transit and administers transit initiatives and programs, including FTA-funded programs. These Federal programs have increased substantially in Arizona in the past five years. The Division provides technical assistance to transit and generally ensures a multimodal approach to mobility, congestion, and air quality issues. The Division is a result of a recent reorganization in which the Public Transportation and Transportation Planning divisions merged.

Arizona has six Councils of Governments (COGs), voluntary associations of cities and counties that manage regions established by the State in 1970 (see Figure 2). Two of the COGs, the Pima and Maricopa Associations of Government, also function as MPOs, but all six perform planning and direct service functions in transportation, environment, and social services for the non-MPO regions. The COGs cover all areas of the State except for the areas covered by MPOs, of which there are three (Flagstaff, Yuma, and Central Yavapai) that operate independently from COGs.

Figure 2: Arizona Councils of Governments



Source: [Arizona Councils of Governments](#) website.

Funding

Table 1 and Table 2 summarize Federal and State funding for transit in the State. According to ADOT officials, once a Section 5311 program has become established, ADOT gives it priority in future funding and does not reduce its budget unless there is a reduction in service. Funding has been able to keep pace with new Section 5311 systems to date but ADOT is expecting a funding gap for year 2011 due to the increase in new transit systems, in part related to the rapid population growth in the State. The FTA Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute) and Section 5317 (New Freedom) programs are viewed favorably by all those involved in statewide transit planning in Arizona; there is a sense that those programs emerged in response to State and local needs that were communicated nationally and that such programs, when combined with sections 5310 and 5311, have the potential to provide more cost-efficient and extensive service. For example, fixed route public transportation services can be offered that deviate upon advanced request so that service can provide door-to-door service for medical patients and others that require it as well as general public services.

Table 1: Federal Transit Funding in Fiscal Year 2009 (in millions)

Funding Program	Operating	Capital	Planning
Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas)			
Rural	\$4.1	\$8.4	
Tribal Transit		\$2.2	
Intercity bus	\$ 1.8		
Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities)		\$2.5	
Sections 5303/4 (Metropolitan and Statewide Planning)			\$2.1
Section 5307 (Urbanized Area Formula)	\$ 175.0		
Section 5309 (Bus and Bus Facilities)	\$ 217.9		
Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute)		\$0.9	
Section 5317 (New Freedom)		\$0.4	
STP Flex		\$6.5	
Federal Total		\$421.8	

Source: ADOT

Table 2: State Transit Funding in Fiscal Year 2009 (in millions)

Funding Program	Amount
State Transit Funding (LTAF II) (Operating)	\$9.0
State Planning Assistance for Rural Areas (PARA)	\$2.0
State Total	\$11.0

Source: ADOT

In addition to the FTA funds, ADOT flexes \$6.5 million from highway to transit from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Surface Transportation Program (STP); \$1.5 million is allocated to the Section 5310 program while sections 5311 and 5307 (Urbanized Area) programs receive funding based on population. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and, in particular, the [Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery](#) (TIGER) program provided ADOT with an opportunity to reach out to existing Section 5311 programs to solicit energy-related investment projects that would offset costs and reduce long-term operations costs such as solar panels, alternative fuel buses, and energy efficiency improvements for maintenance and administration buildings. Unfortunately, Arizona did not receive any TIGER grants.

In Arizona, State transportation funding is focused on highways and bridges with the revenue from user-related taxes and fees constitutionally restricted to funding highway projects only. Until 2010, State transit funding was primarily through the [Local Transportation Assistance Fund II](#) (LTAF II) administered by ADOT's Multimodal Planning Division. Originally based on vehicle license tax revenues, the fund most recently had been supported using annual Powerball lottery proceeds. When the State's Powerball proceeds reached a certain threshold, the excess revenue, up to a capped amount, was distributed to cities, towns, and counties for public transportation purposes through an application process that weighed need and purpose and relative population. Subsequently, funding varied by year. In addition, though LTAF II has been designated for transit for 10 years, it is under the stipulation that the Governor can use it for other purposes as necessary so it is not protected. As part of the [FY2011 budget](#), the legislature decided to permanently redirect lottery distributions as of February 1, 2010, from LTAF II and other programs to the General Fund. Unlike many Federal transit grants, LTAF II had few limitations on use. Use for capital, operations, and planning as well as local match for Federal programs were all permitted as long as the funds are spent on public or publicly endorsed "special needs" transportation. Also prior to the FY2011 budget, LTAF II provided funds for transit for cities and towns smaller than 300,000.

[Planning Assistance for Rural Areas](#) (PARA) is a program administered by ADOT's Multimodal Planning Division program that provides FHWA planning and research funds to non-metropolitan communities for the purpose of conducting multimodal transportation planning studies, which can include transit demand modeling and planning. Eligible applicants include counties, cities, and towns located outside the boundaries of Arizona's Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), Phoenix and Tucson, as well as all Tribal governments. ADOT funds 100 percent of the study process and in 2009 had \$2 million available, which was distributed to 13 communities, seven of which explicitly addressed transit needs and opportunities in their studies.

Participation of Rural Transit in Statewide Planning Process

State DOT

ADOT staff provide grant administration, training, and technical assistance to rural transit providers as well as enforce compliance with Federal regulations. Technical assistance includes assisting in the design, construction, and management of projects. Upon request, ADOT provides rural transit agencies with access to a marketing consultant to develop bus schedules, logos, and branding.

ADOT staff is active in the field in terms of working with local and regional transit operators to make the case for transit at city council and county board of supervisor meetings to achieve support and acquire local match. ADOT staff also help support transit providers to identify champions and opposition within each city or region. ADOT is often able to provide the wider perspective at local or regional government meetings such as presenting a rationale for a general public service, e.g., fixed route system, rather than a limited dial-a-ride program.

The activities described above require significant long-distance travel by ADOT staff. In an attempt to reduce the need for such travel, ADOT has increased its use of webinars and voice and email communications. ARRA was a good opportunity for ADOT to test its ability to send out comprehensive information to all regions at once. Additionally, ADOT has begun developing a network of certified trainers so that professional improvement courses and other transit training can be conducted locally, reducing travel by transit professionals to Phoenix or Tucson for training.

In response to the rapid growth that many rural areas of Arizona are experiencing, ADOT has been proactive in encouraging formation of new transit systems in non-urbanized areas that are approaching a population of 50,000. Starting a system before MPO designation allows the community to properly plan a new or expanded transit program, access operations funding available from FTA, and prepare for the additional requirements and funding opportunities that will be made available to the community once its population surpasses 50,000.

In the interest of continued support to local and regional governments, ADOT staff members are assigned to the State's COGs and MPOs as regional planners to serve as a liaison between ADOT and each region. One COG reported that ADOT has "an open door policy" and that Arizona is fortunate to have funding, encouragement, and technical assistance available from the State DOT. When the COGs, MPOs, and ADOT meet every other month, transit is a large part of the conversation.

Rural Transit Agencies

ADOT provides assistance to rural transit agencies to support day-to-day operations, program budgeting, FTA grant applications, and planning studies. One transit agency stated that "ADOT provides all of the technical assistance we could need." Information from rural transit agencies to ADOT is often communicated via the COGs, according to all three groups. Two common concerns currently being communicated are the needs for connectivity between communities, usually from small to large (similar to ADOT's existing rural transit service connectors), and for improving communication and streamlining the process for FTA grants. ADOT recently formed an advisory committee to address the latter.

Councils of Governments

Each COG conducts work for ADOT under an Overall Work Plan (OWP), which identifies tasks that the COG must perform to receive funding from ADOT that is drawn from FTA and FHWA funds.

Transit is only a small part of the overall scope. Transit-related tasks include site review of Section 5311 grant recipients, review of FTA grant applications, administration of FTA grant programs, collection and review of LTAF II applications, development of the human service coordinated plan and Five-Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), completion of local transportation studies, and organization of public outreach for the State’s long-range transportation plan (LRTP). The activities of each COG vary due to differences in staffing and regional objectives; some

One ADOT official described COGs to be an “extension of ADOT” and a “binding force” [connection] between town, cities, Tribes, and even counties, and the state.”

COGs have Transportation Technical Advisory Committees, which represent each COG member and ADOT, provide technical assistance, and make TIP and State transportation improvement plan (STIP) recommendations to the COG Regional Council. ADOT staff participates in activities directly when and where possible; for example, COGs schedule and organize FTA grant program workshops, at which the designated ADOT representative makes presentations. However, the COGs perform local legwork for ADOT that ADOT would otherwise be challenged to conduct due to distance and staff limitations. Thus, the COGs represent ADOT at the table and serve as a regional arm in many cases.

Each COG has a transportation planner who provides technical assistance and coordinates within the region, between regions, and between the region and ADOT. The COG staff also serve to provide a valuable broader perspective in terms of land use planning, economic development, and regional environmental goals. The planner is able to bring concerns, such as challenges to affording the 20 percent match required for capital purchases as well as operations funding issues, from transit agencies to ADOT. Interactions between rural transit agencies and COGs have benefited from the yearly coordination required to develop human service coordination plans, according to one COG, which conducts meetings fairly regularly with sections 5310 and 5311 programs. Rural transit agencies often invite the COG’s transportation planner to attend city council hearings on funding and new development and to discuss transit operations and needs within the region.

Within each COG, the “transportation planner is the catalyst for making sure everything happens” according to one such COG transportation planner.

Since 1999, the COGs and MPOs have held an annual rural transportation summit that is a networking and informational meeting for transportation planners, staff, and local elected officials. The summit features national, Federal, State, and local transportation speakers who address a number of issues, including transit. An effort is made to have each COG, MPO, and Section 5311 recipient represented.

Other entities

There are several other entities that play important roles in involving rural transit in statewide planning.

The [Arizona Transit Association](#) (AzTA) is a nonprofit statewide organization dedicated to improving public transportation in Arizona through advocacy and education. AzTA’s membership includes local governments, chambers of commerce, major employers, transit program operators, transit suppliers and

contractors, small businesses, non-profit community agencies, and transportation consultants. Its Board of Directors includes representation from ADOT.

In collaboration with ADOT, AzTA has participated in several training breakout sessions to promote transit education and technical abilities by Arizona's transit operators. Additionally, AzTA has collaborated with ADOT to conduct the State's first statewide Rural Transit Needs Study. Completed in 2008, the study evaluated the projected 10-year needs for existing and new rural transit services. The study has provided an important and necessary baseline for determining transit needs for Arizona in other studies conducted since its completion.

Finally, AzTA participates in the rural transportation summit, including sponsorship of vendor exhibits, and organizes a separate annual conference that features FTA and ADOT and is coordinated with ADOT training activities. New for 2010, the AzTA conference included the ADOT Rodeo, an opportunity for transit vehicle operators to display their skills through a variety of exercises, including an obstacle course designed to replicate everyday driving.

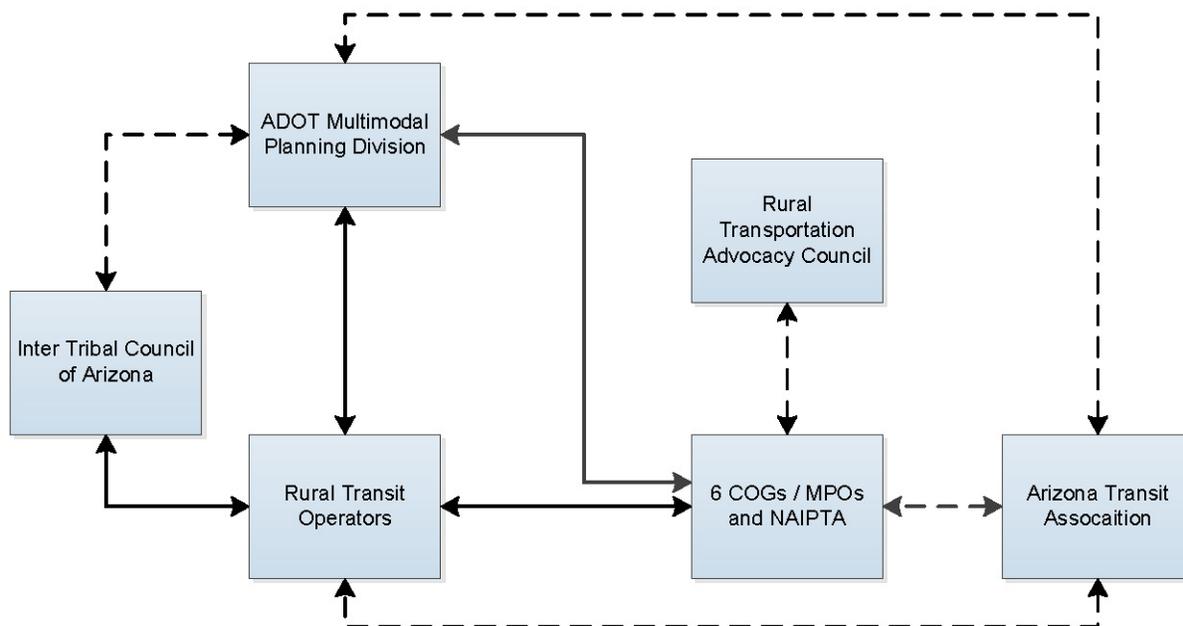
[Arizona Town Hall](#) is a nonprofit effort that brings together a diverse group of statewide representatives twice a year to discuss topics such as water resources, sustainability, and transportation. From April 19-22, 2009, the group held a meeting focusing on transportation called [From Here to There: Transportation Opportunities for Arizona](#).

The [Rural Transportation Advocacy Council](#) was formed in 2001 and is a consortium of the cities, towns, counties, COGs, and MPOs of rural Arizona, defined as those areas not located within the boundaries of the Phoenix or Tucson metro regions. The Council has a board comprised of elected officials from the COGs and MPOs and is staffed by a legislative liaison who communicates information and requests between the Council, Arizona State legislature, and ADOT.

Summary

Figure 3 shows the relationships and connections between agencies involved in rural transit and statewide planning in the State. There are fairly direct lines of communication among all entities.

Figure 3: Relationships between Agencies Involved in Rural Transportation Planning



Major Planning and Project Initiatives

ADOT has developed a number of plans and studies that are having positive impacts on the inclusion of rural transit in statewide planning efforts and has identified several State priorities for rural transit. In addition, several rural transit initiatives have been pursued at the local and regional levels with assistance from ADOT.

Statewide Plans

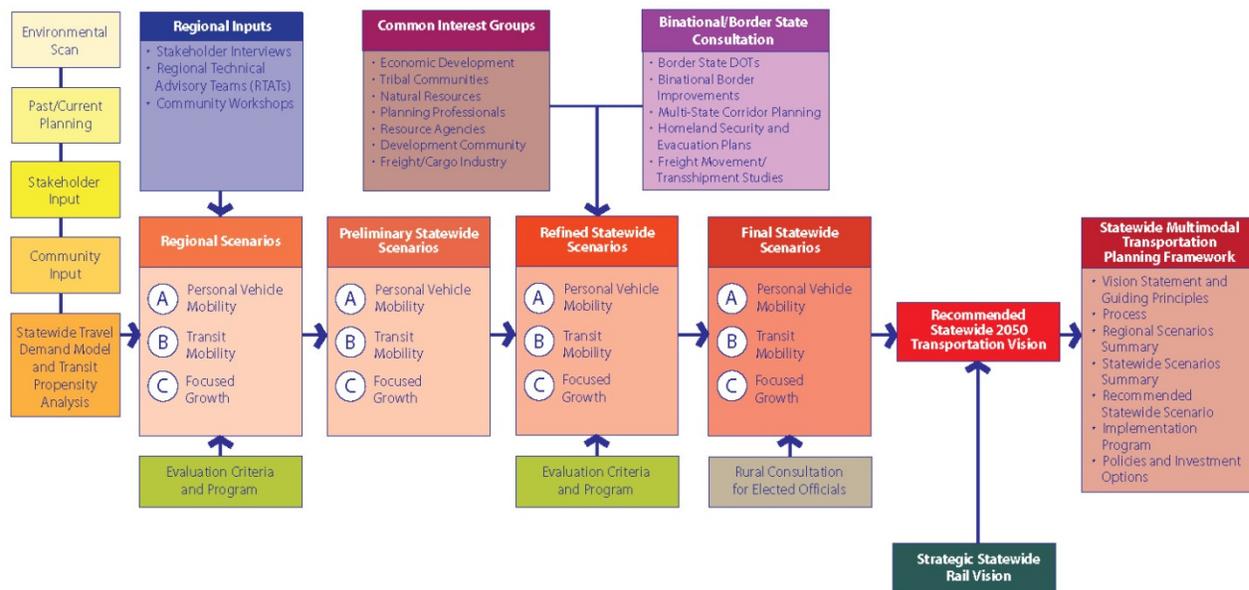
ADOT is currently working on two primary transportation planning efforts.

[Building A Quality Arizona](#) (bqAZ) has been a two-year effort (2007-2009; see Figure 4) to develop a [Statewide Transportation Planning Framework](#), which was finalized and accepted by the State Transportation Board in January 2010. bqAZ is modeled after a process used by the Maricopa Association of Governments and was informed by public involvement at various levels, a statewide reconnaissance study (2007), the [Arizona Rural Transit Needs Study](#)³ (2008), and regional plans (see

³ This study provides baseline transit information for 2005 and transit demand and need estimates for 2015 and identifies future gaps and priorities.

Figure 4). The resulting Framework provides a fiscally unconstrained, long-term vision and scenario⁴ for 2050 for transportation in Arizona, which will be the basis for investment decisions incorporated into the [State’s LRTP](#) and the [5-year Construction Program](#). The Framework described a number of objectives such as sustainability, Smart Growth, economic development, and multimodal balance and listed critical needs, including several rural transit needs focused on intercity connections by region.

Figure 4: Overview of Planning Process for bqAZ



Source: [Statewide Transportation Planning Framework](#) (Background)

[What Moves You Arizona? – A Transportation Plan for 2035](#) is the mandatory five-year update to the MoveAZ LRTP (2004) and is being supplemented by bqAZ, described above. The plan will be ADOT's principle strategic operating document that links long-range visioning, grounded in the framework process, together with cost-constrained planning that considers the reality of limited funding. The LRTP will define policies, programs, corridors for improvement, and transit investments to be accomplished during the next 20 years, accompanied by different potential funding opportunities to aid in decision making. Lastly, the LRTP will establish procedures for evaluating changing needs and projects for inclusion in future short- and intermediate-term programs. The LRTP will be submitted for adoption by the State Transportation Board by June 2011.

“Now that transit is at the table on the statewide plan, we expect to see a statewide plan with meaningful transit projects. Having transit at the table brings unaddressed issues to the surface; namely, how transit is and will be funded at the state level.” – ADOT official

According to ADOT officials, both bqAZ and What Moves You Arizona? are using an approach that is regarded as a “sea change” for Arizona because of its inclusion of transit and its consolidation of several

⁴ A hybrid scenario was developed from the first and third of three scenarios evaluated (Personal Vehicle Mobility, Transit Mobility, and Focused Growth).

regional plans and as a “shift in how we do business – moving to multimodal planning from highway-focused planning.” The 2004 LRTP only included a handful of transit projects statewide.

State Priorities

ADOT staff noted that State priorities have been evolving, as indicated in bqAZ and the LRTP, to place more emphasis on sustainability and livability, including energy, economic development, and climate change. One concrete application of such priorities on statewide planning for transit has been to increasingly focus on shifting commutes from rural areas to urban areas from highway to public transportation, especially in those areas that are experiencing high growth and leapfrog development. At the local level, there is a perception that greenhouse gas reduction and other priorities are “more of an urban thing” according to one transit agency; however, another transit agency reported incorporating solar panels into a new facility, and another agency has looked into alternative fuel vehicles although lack of infrastructure to support such vehicles has been a barrier so far. Several transit agencies agreed that a presentation of State priorities and issues and how it related to local transit that could be shown to city councils would be very helpful in advancing such priorities at the local level.

ADOT hopes for and anticipates changes in Federal regulations, such as the incorporation of Complete Street policies, which its State Transportation Planning Framework covers, and the consolidation of funding programs to solve current challenges in coordinating activities and flexing funding between related programs.

Local and Regional Initiatives

Local initiatives in Arizona focus on anticipating future State and Federal regulation. For example, currently the Section 5310 program requires minimal training of transit drivers; but transit agencies and COGs anticipate that training requirements will increase to match the Section 5311 program, so they have been providing equivalent training for drivers of both programs. One COG also reported working on integrating emergency management service with human service transportation coordination in anticipation of a future Federal requirement.

A number of regional rural transit initiatives have been undertaken throughout Arizona that benefit rural transit operations as well as planning; three such initiatives are described in the text boxes below. In terms of passenger rail, Arizona has a number of initiatives underway ranging from intra-region to intrastate and interstate. ADOT developed the [Statewide Rail Framework Study](#) as part of bqAZ. Regional entities throughout the State are conducting feasibility studies and creating implementation strategies for commuter rail proposals in existing and new rail corridors in both rural and urban areas. ADOT received a Federal Rail Administration (FRA) grant to conduct an environmental overview of eight conceptual rail corridors connecting metropolitan Phoenix with metropolitan Tucson as well as the dozen rural communities located within the corridors. Finally, in terms of interstate coordination, the Maricopa Association of Governments (the MPO for Phoenix) helped form the [Western High Speed Rail Alliance](#) with entities from New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah; and ADOT, in partnership with California and Nevada, is participating in a FRA-funded high speed rail study.

Tri-City Connector

The Western Arizona COG (WACOG) has proposed a tri-city connector that would connect Bullhead City, Kingman, and Lake Havasu City (all under 50,000 in population) by transit to serve both human service and employment transportation needs. ADOT hired a consultant to conduct a [transit feasibility review and implantation plan](#) with funding divided between ADOT (80 percent) and WACOG and the three cities (20 percent). The study was overseen by a Transit Advisory Committee, which included the rural transit providers from each of the three cities. The study has been completed; but at this time, the local governments have chosen not to move forward due to funding concerns.

Northern Arizona Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority (NAIPTA)

NAIPTA is a regional public transportation organization created by State legislation to coordinate the planning of public transportation services in Coconino and Yavapai Counties, including Northern Arizona University and the cities of Flagstaff, Sedona, and Cottonwood. NAIPTA’s boundaries include the Flagstaff MPO region as well as part of the jurisdiction of the Northern Arizona COG (NACOG). Although Flagstaff is an MPO, Cottonwood and Sedona both fall outside the MPO boundaries and are less than 50,000 in population. NAIPTA focuses on operations planning and the administration of FTA grants, primarily sections 5307 and 5310. It partners with NACOG to pursue sections 5316 and 5317 grants. NAIPTA operates the Mountain Line and Mountain Lift systems in Flagstaff, the Sedona RoadRunner in Sedona, and the [Verde Lynx](#) between Cottonwood and Sedona, which recently acquired new vehicles through ARRA. NAIPTA also coordinates services with Mountain Campus Transit at Northern Arizona University and Cottonwood Area Transit (CAT) in Cottonwood. NAIPTA and CAT partnered to build a new, 100 percent solar-powered facility using ARRA funds which NAIPTA was able to access. The new Verde Valley Transit Facility provides operations, maintenance and administrative facilities for CAT, the Verde Lynx and the Sedona RoadRunner.

Figure 5: VerdeLynx cutaway shuttle and new Verde Valley Transit Facility.



Source: [Verde Lynx](#) / NAIPTA News Release, November 9, 2009.

Pinal-Gila Council for Senior Citizens Pilot

In 2004, President Bush issued [Executive Order #13330](#), also known as United We Ride, which focused on improving coordination in human services transportation. In response, Arizona developed the Arizona Rides initiative with a council and requirements for regional coordination plans; the program is now known as [Mobility Management](#). Arizona Rides funded a pilot program with the Pinal-Gila Council for Senior Citizens in which ADOT provided funding for a consultant to assist with setting up routes and identifying vehicles. The pilot resulted in a [report](#) (2005) and the formation of a regional Transportation Coordination Advisory Council. The pilot has attempted several service models with moderate success but has had the most success with increasing collaboration across agencies to share training resources and activities. In 2009, the Council received a Section 5310 mobility management grant; and the Council and Pinal County are currently working with the Central Arizona Association of Governments (CAAG) on a regional transit feasibility study.

Observations & Challenges

Staffing and technical capacity

Both the COGs and local transit agencies reported challenges with staffing. For COGs, the ability of transit planning and projects to move forward successfully is viewed as completely dependent on the COG transportation planner in terms of his or her interest, background and expertise, and availability. The COGs also view time availability as difficult to determine because of the lack of guidelines on what transit tasks the position should cover and the ease in which the position can become overtaxed with other transportation priorities and requirements, even though the importance of transit is well understood. For local transit, having one manager who wears many hats results in the inability for that manager to be everywhere, including representing transit at regional and State meetings, and for that manager to be easily replaced. ADOT focuses on providing staff in the field as much as possible to support these staffing needs.

Geography

ADOT staff recognize distance as “an incredible barrier” for the State generally and for transit specifically. For transit, long distances result in increased operating costs, especially per passenger, and impact the transit agency’s ability to participate in State and regional meetings and to find skilled staff, such as mechanics and drivers. In addition, ADOT staff emphasized that transit needs vary throughout the State because of differences in terrain, population density, and demographics. ADOT is working to address such issues through its training programs and remote outreach strategies, such as webinars and teleconferencing.

Boundaries and borders

Transit agencies reported a need to expand service outside their jurisdictions, especially to unincorporated areas of the county, to serve areas that are often the most transit dependent and the least served by transit in a region. However, challenges to this include funding restrictions (e.g., city government does not want to fund services outside boundaries) and interstate restrictions (e.g., Bullhead City service into Nevada). ADOT staff commented on transit issues related to the border with Mexico; the [city of Douglas has transit](#), and the city of Nogales is a prospective applicant for the Section 5311 program for 2011. Other border areas have been less interested in public transportation in part because there are for-profit jitneys and vans that provide service already, primarily for shopping trips. There is one dedicated international planner on ADOT's staff.

Funding

Funding is regarded as a concern, primarily by the rural transit agencies. The lack of a dedicated, protected funding source for transit or any modes other than highway, for which roadway user fees are constitutionally protected, is problematic. The previous reliance on the volatile and vulnerable LTAF II was also viewed as challenging as it made it impossible to plan from year to year. The problem of funding is viewed as particularly acute for new systems and new small MPOs, as discussed in the next section. Local transit agencies have to rely on soliciting local governments for matches and other funds. Area Agencies on Aging do provide some operating funds for Section 5310 programs and can contribute to fares for Section 5311 services. Local transit agencies expressed interest in exploring the possibility of a regional transportation authority, with the power to assess its own tax, and accessing education or information on other funding sources, how other states approach the Section 5311 program, and other technical support assistance.

Population Growth

Population growth is leading to rapid transformation of communities, including Tribal communities, as small towns transition from direct responsibility for transportation to becoming members of new small MPOs. These communities often do not have the transitional support in place to prepare the local government for the additional transportation – and in particular transit – requirements and funding opportunities that come with being members of an MPO. According to projections for the 2010 Census and assuming the definition of an MPO will remain as it currently stands, Arizona will gain four to five new small MPOs. ADOT is hoping to address these transition difficulties by starting transit systems in places before they reach 50,000.

Tribal Transit

Within Arizona, there are 22 Federally recognized Tribes, which control nearly a third of the State's land and which are predominantly located in rural areas. Three Tribes have Section 5311 systems (Navajo Tribe, Hopi Tribe, and Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community), and several have been recipients of the [Tribal Transit Program](#) (Quechan Indian Tribe, Cocopah Indian Tribe, Havasupai Tribe, San Carlos Apache Tribe, and White Mountain Apache Tribe). However, most Tribal transit services are provided by the Elder Programs of each Tribe through the Section 5310 program.

The former ADOT Public Transportation Division Director firmly stated that Tribes are very important for Arizona, and the current ADOT Multimodal Planning Division Director clearly stated that one “cannot talk about rural transit in Arizona without talking about Tribal transit.” Other staff agree that Tribal transit is an emerging trend in Arizona and that it can operate as a “spring board for transit in the area.” ADOT has two staff positions dedicated to Tribal multimodal transportation planning.

One of ADOT’s main partners in working with the Tribes is [the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona \(ITCA\)](#), which was founded in 1952, and its partner entity, ITCA, Inc. which was incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 1975. ITCA’s purpose is to provide a united voice for Tribal governments located in Arizona and address common concerns and develop public policy. ITCA, Inc. provides technical assistance and training and assists Tribes in developing programs in a variety of areas, including community and economic development and health services. ITCA, Inc. has one designated transportation coordinator.

In June 1999, ADOT created the [Arizona Tribal Strategic Partnering Team](#), an interagency coordination effort to discuss State and Tribal-related transportation issues. Its participants include Tribes, several divisions of ADOT, the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) – Western Regional Office Division of Transportation, the Tribal Technical Assistance Program at Colorado State University, FHWA, and ITCA, Inc. The Team meets quarterly and holds an annual event, the Arizona Tribal Transportation Forum, to foster discussion and collaboration. The Team’s website includes a [Frequently Asked Questions page](#) with discussion of how the Tribes, BIA, and ADOT do and can work together to support and improve transportation.

According to the [Statewide Transportation Planning Framework](#), Tribal participation in bqAZ included the involvement of the Governor’s Tribal Policy Advisor, the ADOT Tribal liaison, and two Tribal representatives in the key committees, and the participation of individual Tribes in their respective regional framework plans. bzAZ was also informed by ADOT’s Report on Tribal Transportation Issues and Needs based on input from three Governor Tribal Summits and a 2008 Tribal Transportation Forum and Safety Summit. Most of the focus of such efforts was on highway improvements such as those outlined through the [Indian Reservation Roads program](#), jointly funded by FHWA and the BIA.

ADOT has also been involved with Navajo Transit, most recently in the planning for the [2009 National Tribal Transit Conference](#), for which ADOT provided speakers and other technical and administrative resources.

Even with these efforts, Tribal governments in Arizona face a number of challenges in working within the Arizona statewide transportation planning process, including access to funding and other resources via COGs and MPOs, staffing, and cultural differences.

Access to funding and other resources

Currently, ADOT asks Tribes to work through a COG or MPO to participate in the statewide transportation planning process, including to access funds. Tribes recognize that ADOT has an established a MPO/COG administrative process and that certain programs, such as the Transportation Enhancement Program and Safe Routes to School program, must go through COGs and MPOs. However, it is challenging for the Tribes to submit projects and be competitive. Tribal boundaries do not line up with COG or MPO boundaries (or at times, State boundaries); and Tribal land bases often can

fall into multiple COG and/or MPO districts or jurisdictions. To become full voting members, the Tribes must pay fees to the COGs so, typically, if the tribe chooses to join a COG, it joins the COG in which it has the largest land base. However, that leaves its other land bases without voting representation in their respective COGs. In addition, distance can often isolate a Tribe from its closest COG; for example, the San Carols Apache Tribe of Graham County recently joined the SouthEastern Arizona Governments Organization (SEAGO) but is located one and a half hours from SEAGO's offices so it has not yet connected in person with SEAGO staff.

In terms of funding specific to transit, Tribes do have the Tribal Transit Program. However, recipients of that program are not eligible for Section 5311 funding and do not have a similar program available. In the past, ADOT has participated with ITCA, Inc. in educating Tribal members about the process of planning transit programs and applying for Federal funding. Also, ADOT has sponsored transit planning and grant assistance workshops specifically for all Tribal governments statewide.

ITCA, Inc. and the Tribes support a Tribal COG in Arizona. They have been looking at this option for several years but have been stymied by the funding issue. ITCA, Inc. and the Tribes have also proposed to ADOT that the Tribes could apply directly to ADOT for Federal program funds rather than involving a COG or MPO.

Staffing

ITCA, Inc. observed that limited transit staffing, which is less than that of COGS, MPOs, or ADOT, negatively impacts the perception of Tribal involvement in transportation and transit, since “there is a sense if you are not there, you don't care or you don't think that the meeting is important” even though it is only a result of limited staffing. In addition, roads and transit compete for staff time as well as funding. The closest BIA regional office is the Western Office, located in Phoenix, which serves 47 Tribal governments in Utah, Nevada, and Arizona, excluding Navajo Nation, which has its own division of transportation and works with the BIA Navajo Regional Office located in Gallup, New Mexico. The BIA Western Office does not currently have transit planning staff and, subsequently, the focus is on roads, which translates to a similar focus on roads among the Tribes. However, several Tribes have been able to establish transit systems on their own or by working with ITCA, Inc.

Cultural differences

The Tribes' Elder Programs, which provide human service transportation, are not familiar with the statewide planning process and have expressed to ITCA, Inc. that they feel far removed from the language and policy of that process.

In general, the Tribes lack the relationships with ADOT, COG, and MPO staff that would help them understand the planning and funding process. This experience varies by Tribe, and there is a wide range of perceptions on how things are working or not. Although ITCA, Inc. assists Tribes to access the existing programs relating to transit, planning, and safety, it is a challenge for ITCA, Inc. because ITCA, Inc. is not eligible to apply for many of the transportation programming funds, prefers not to compete with its membership for funding, and has one transportation staff member.

Conclusions

- Arizona's bqAZ and LRTP reflect a strategic shift in how ADOT approaches transit by emphasizing regional and local participation, broader national and State goals, and multimodal strategies for both urban and rural communities.
- The statewide use of OWPs for each COG has proven to be a valuable planning tool to link State priorities to local implementation.
- Tribal transit is an integral part of rural transit in Arizona and has resulted in several statewide interagency partnerships and engagement efforts; but there are still opportunities to improve access to funding and technical assistance, coordination across jurisdictions, and development of relationships.
- LTAF II funding, before it was dissolved, was an example of innovative funding that used proceeds from the lottery and placed no restrictions on the use of the funding for operating, capital, or planning purposes.
- Other than funding, which has become an acute issue after the dissolution of LTAF II, distance, staffing, and rural population growth are significant challenges to rural transit participation in statewide and local transit planning that ADOT and its partners are working to address through a variety of means. For example, ADOT has had success with virtual outreach activities such as webinars and has prioritized providing staff in the field to support staffing needs. In addition, ADOT has focused on providing transitional support to rapidly urbanizing areas to encourage the introduction of transit while the community is still eligible to receive Federal funding for operations.
- The important and multifaceted role of key staff – namely, the COG transportation planner and the rural transit manager – in Arizona's statewide transportation planning provides both opportunities and challenges; these staff provide a reliable point person and champion but have limited availability and are difficult to replace.
- In addition to local rural transit, Arizona has made efforts on intercity passenger rail that would serve rural areas; for example, ADOT received an FRA grant to conduct an environmental overview for the Phoenix-Tucson intercity rail corridor, which will consider impacts on rural communities and connections to local transit.