

Last Spring, the City Council voted 7-2 to accept a \$69 million Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant to help serve New Mexico's most urban, central and vital region. I voted to enhance quality of life through greater transportation options, and to generate jobs while recirculating new dollars in our local economy.

I've heard from many constituents on this issue. I sympathize with their individualized concerns or preferences, but ART is exactly the kind of project that Albuquerque needs to evolve into a modern, thriving metropolis and continue to be a great place for another 300 years.

ART's design was publicized, developed, and submitted over 6 years. Unfortunately, many in the general public, the media, and opponents of the project seem to have not followed its evolution until recently – when it's on the verge of becoming reality. Dedicated transit lanes may not have been a requirement for funding, but they are a key tool for efficient, reliable transit that can bypass vehicle congestion in constrained rights-of-way. The majority of bus rapid transit systems in the U.S. and around the world employ center-lane design, which offers added benefits like traffic calming and improved visibility and security at stations.

Some volunteer transit designers came up with alternative plans that are perhaps no better or worse. They unfortunately didn't mobilize support for those in a timely manner, and the City submitted a refinement of the original plan, which was deemed by the FTA as worthy of funding. Instead of dealing with that reality, the people wanting to "make ART better" have done their best to kill it with misleading and emotional negativity.

Despite that doom and gloom from critics, the project is not devoid of support. In my observation many who support it are younger people, who are the future of Albuquerque and who understand the importance of having first rate transit along our most important corridor. This group needs to remain vocal in its advocacy of articulating the project's benefits. Our community in general would benefit from understanding that this is more for them – our kids and grandkids – than ourselves.

Notwithstanding my firm belief in the project, I wholeheartedly agree that the City initially did a poor job of outreach to businesses along the route, and to a somewhat lesser extent to the general public. But communication is a two-way street; the Journal and other popular media extensively reported on the project, which was part of the Mayor Berry's "ABQ The Plan." While outreach was clearly the responsibility of the Administration and its consultants, I'll take my own responsibility for apparently not better explaining my ongoing support and I've tried to remedy that.

Regardless, it's very late in the game for backpedaling on what took six years to develop. ART is primarily a question of what is best for our future, but it's also a question of whether we should turn down a \$69 million shot in the arm that any other city would gladly sign up to take in our stead and with which they would use to build a similar project to stimulate their own prosperous future.

After a very competitive process, the project finally received its grant from the FTA. Under this President we've had the most forward-looking transportation and infrastructure policy since Abraham Lincoln. (Honest Abe advocated for subsidized but efficient mass transportation in the form of canals and railroads.) I hope that our community will rally with an open hand to accept this federal aid so that we can share in the benefits of infrastructure reconstruction, instead of extending an angry fist.

My continued support of ART boils down to this:

- I support high quality mass transit for young, elderly, physically challenged, and working people - always have, always will.
- I support traffic calming and Complete Streets. Walkability, public transit, more pleasant sidewalks with street trees (as opposed to median trees), and bike lanes (and parallel bike routes where lanes cannot fit).
- I strongly support local small business, which prospers with Complete Streets and better transit.
- I respect and support younger generations that do not want to be dependent upon a car and want to live in walkable neighborhoods.
- I understand the realities and often insurmountable costs of public works construction, and that major transportation improvements don't happen without Federal assistance.

Despite having opposed most of "ABQ the Plan" and other ideas from the Mayor, I'll not join those who oppose a good project for political reasons. This issue represents a turning point for the City as a whole, a City that I love, and I'm sad to see so much acrimony over it.

Get the [facts about Albuquerque Rapid Transit here](#).

Isaac Benton

City Councilor for District 2 (2012-present) and District 3 (2005-2012).