



SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction and Background

This report summarizes the investigations, findings, and recommendations of the alternatives analysis phase of the Albuquerque Rapid Transit Project (RTP). The RTP is a multiphase project intended to identify and implement Albuquerque's first high capacity transit system, i.e., light rail transit or bus rapid transit, within the Central Avenue Corridor. The project is being undertaken by the City of Albuquerque in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and in collaboration with the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). The salient findings and recommendations of the alternatives analysis, including the basis for the recommendations, are provided in the following sections of this report and appendices.

The need for high-capacity transit service within the Albuquerque metropolitan area was established in an earlier phase of the project, known at that time as Middle Rio Grande Connections. Middle Rio Grande Connections was a systems planning study conducted by the Albuquerque Transit Department and New Mexico State Highway & Transportation Department in collaboration with the Albuquerque Public Works Department, Bernalillo County Public Works Department, and MRCOG. The Middle Rio Grande Connections study served to identify the high capacity transportation needs of the Albuquerque region and evaluate various potential high capacity corridors and technologies for their ability to serve local needs and conditions. The study concluded with the recommendation of a comprehensive and strategic high-capacity transportation system which included three major components: (1) a high capacity transit system for the Albuquerque urban area; (2) a primary freeway and expressway system in combination with potential lane management strategies for the four-county Albuquerque region; and (3) a potential commuter transportation system to serve intercity travel between Valencia and Sandoval Counties and Albuquerque. Figure 1 illustrates the overall high capacity transportation system developed by the Middle Rio Grande Connections project.

The high capacity transit system recommended by the Middle Rio Grande Connections study included seven corridors (see Figure 2). These include the Central Avenue Corridor as an east-west transit route and the North Valley corridor as a north-south route. Other corridors included in the high capacity transit system plan are routes that extend from the Central Avenue Corridor to the Uptown Area, South Valley, and Albuquerque International Airport. Routes that connect to the North Valley corridor include an east-west connection along Montgomery Boulevard and a northwest corridor that extends to the northwest portion of Albuquerque and to Rio Rancho. The high capacity system plan was adopted by the policy board of MRCOG in early 2002.

Subsequent to the adoption of the high capacity transit system plan, the Albuquerque City Council selected the Central Avenue Corridor (see Resolution R-02-66 in Appendix A) for further evaluation. The selection of the Central Avenue Corridor for further evaluation was based on four primary factors including: (1) the importance of the Central Avenue corridor to

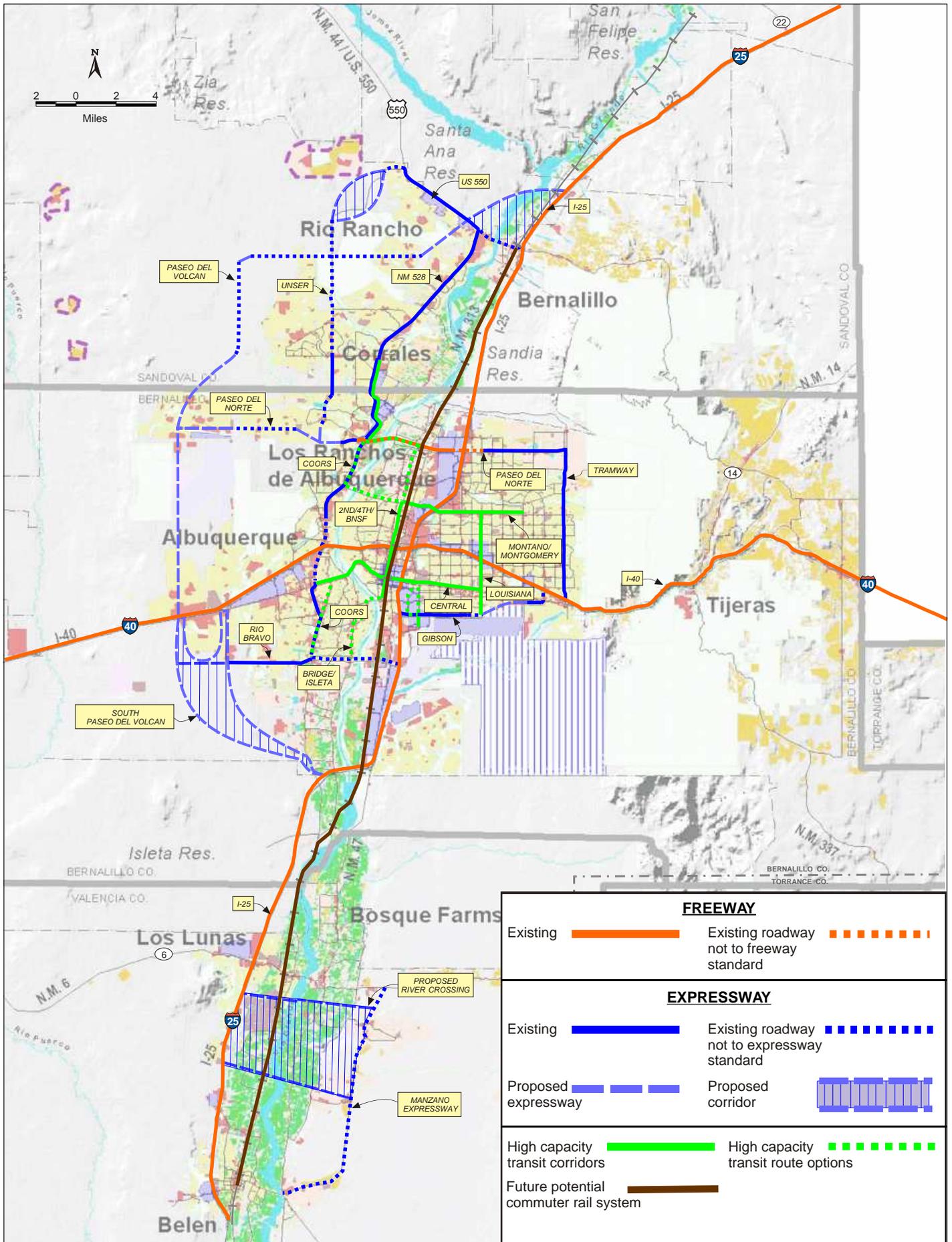


Figure 1: Comprehensive High Capacity Transportation System From MRG Connections

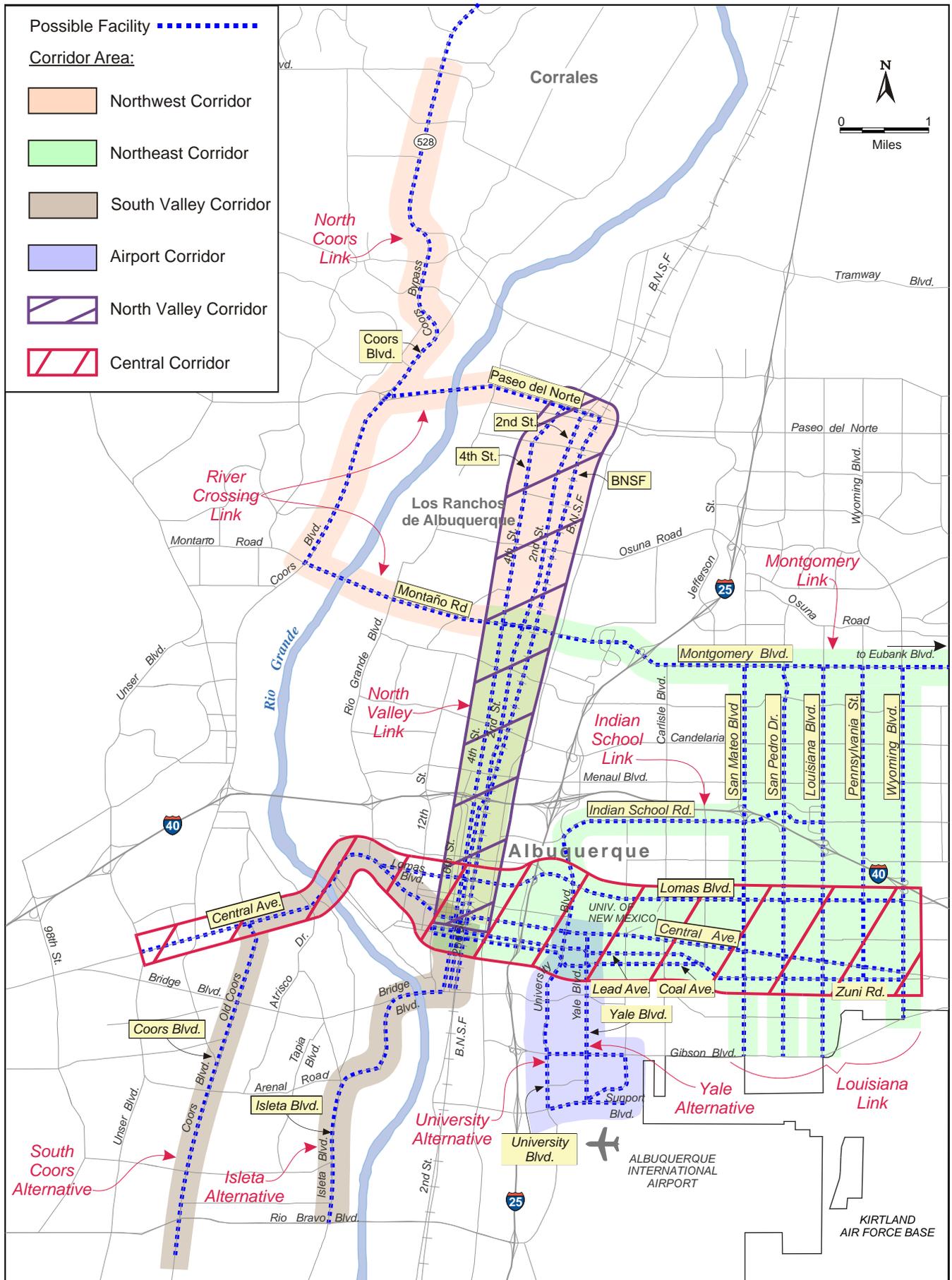


Figure 2: High Capacity Transit System From MRG Connections

the operation of the north-south corridors; (2) high existing transit ridership within the corridor; (3) existing land use and demographic characteristics found within the corridor; and (4) adopted City and County land use policies (i.e., Centers and Corridors amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, Planned Growth Strategy, and Council Resolution R-70) that emphasize the importance of connecting community and regional centers with major high capacity transportation corridors. These and other factors that support the need for a high capacity transit system and the selection of the Central Avenue Corridor as the priority corridor are discussed in Section 2 of this report.

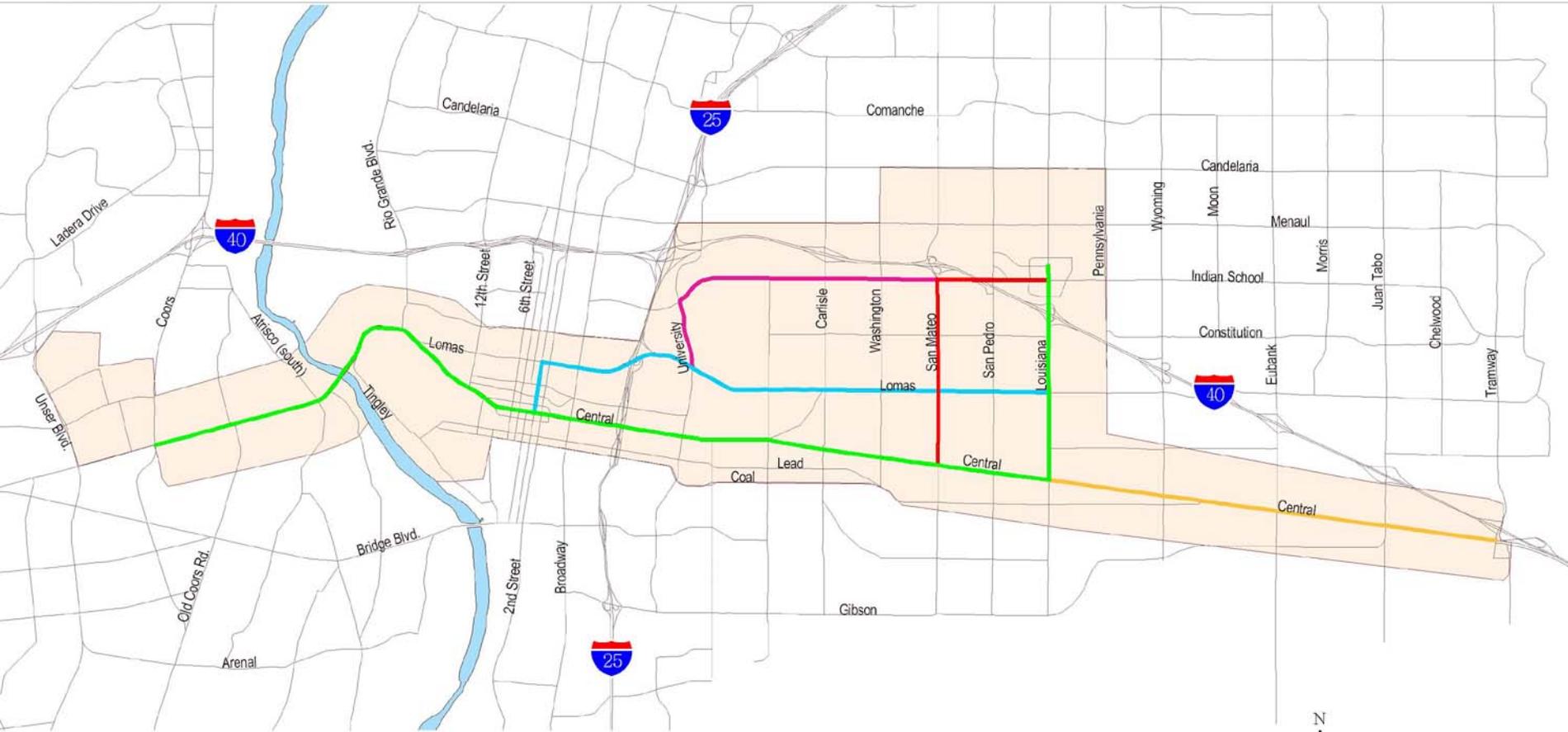
1.2 Central Avenue Corridor

The Central Avenue Corridor is located in central Albuquerque and traverses the Albuquerque urban area (see Figure 3). Along its east-west alignment, the study corridor begins in west Albuquerque at Coors Boulevard and extends to Tramway Boulevard at the eastern edge of the urban area. In the eastern half of the project area, the corridor includes a north-south subcorridor along Louisiana Boulevard. This northerly extension connects the Central Avenue Corridor to the Uptown area — one of Albuquerque’s largest employment and retail centers. While the corridor centers on Central Avenue and Louisiana Boulevard, it encompasses a broad area and includes several east-west and north-south arterial streets. Primary east-west arterial streets in the Central Avenue Corridor include Lead and Coal Avenues, Zuni Road, Central Avenue, Lomas Boulevard, Indian School Road, and Menaul Boulevard. North-south arterial streets included in the Louisiana Boulevard Corridor include San Mateo Boulevard, San Pedro Drive, and Louisiana Boulevard.

1.3 New Starts and the Alternatives Analysis Process

The City of Albuquerque intends to request federal funding assistance if the evaluation and public involvement process results in a recommendation to implement a rapid transit project in the Central Avenue Corridor. Accordingly, the RTP is being conducted in accordance with the FTA Section 5309 New Starts evaluation and selection process. New Starts funds can be used to assist metropolitan areas in the planning, design, and implementation of qualifying high-capacity transit projects. Potentially eligible projects include rail lines, busways, and exclusive facilities for buses and other high occupancy vehicles.

Projects seeking New Starts funding must follow a multimodal planning and development process completed in several phases: (1) systems planning which includes the preparation of an alternatives analysis, conceptual engineering drawings, and an environmental document (typically a draft environmental impact statement); (2) preliminary engineering which includes the preparation of preliminary design plans for the preferred alternative and the completion of the final environmental document and decision (typically a final environmental impact statement and record of decision); and (3) final engineering which includes the preparation of plans, specifications, and estimates of construction quantities and costs. FTA makes decisions on continued federal support for individual projects as they advance through this project-development sequence. In addition to being required for the New Starts process, the process is also consistent with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).



- Central Corridor Boundary
- Alignments
- ▬ Central Avenue/Louisiana Boulevard
- ▬ Central Avenue: Coors Boulevard to Tramway Boulevard
- ▬ Central Avenue/San Mateo Boulevard
- ▬ Lomas Boulevard/Louisiana Boulevard
- ▬ Indian School Road

Central Avenue Corridor



Figure 3: Central Avenue Corridor

The alternatives analysis phase, which is the current phase of the RTP and the subject of this report, is a broad-based assessment conducted to identify and evaluate potential alternatives, including alignment and technology alternatives. Major elements of the alternatives analysis typically include: (1) defining the transportation problem(s) to be resolved; (2) defining potential alternatives that can be used to address the identified problem(s); and (3) conducting an initial evaluation of the expected performance, benefits, general costs, and effects of each alternative. Because design details are limited at this stage, the findings of the analysis are considered preliminary. The most viable alternative(s), which are selected by local decision makers with input from the public, are advanced from the alternatives analysis to the next phase of the federal New Starts process, i.e., the preparation of an environmental document and conceptual engineering drawings.

1.4 Community and Public Involvement

Comments and input from project stakeholders was an important consideration in the alternatives analysis process and resulting recommendations. Input was sought regarding alignment alternatives, technologies, and evaluation criteria and methods, and to assist in the identification of issues of concern. Public and other stakeholder input was obtained using several methods:

- Community meetings were held to obtain feedback on the specific alignment and technology alternatives identified for the Central Avenue Corridor. The factors proposed to be used for the evaluation of alignments and technologies were also discussed at community meetings. In addition to the meetings conducted specifically for the RTP, action by the Albuquerque City Council on R-02-66 (see discussion on page 1) provided an additional opportunity to inform the public about the RTP.
- A technical study team was assembled to obtain input from the various stakeholder jurisdictions and interest groups with regard to potential alternative alignments and technologies and evaluation criteria. The technical study team was comprised of representatives from local and regional transportation and land use planning entities plus groups having a known interest in transit initiatives.
- Over the course of the alternatives analysis, briefings were provided to various elected officials including the congressional representative for the Albuquerque metropolitan area, the governor of New Mexico, and the Albuquerque City Council.
- A project website was maintained throughout the course of the alternatives analysis phase. The website provided information about the project and provided an opportunity for the public to submit comments to project staff.
- Information about the project was also made available through a 15 minute talk show segment taped and aired on local government cable television.