

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN NEVADA**

### **TRANSPORTATION IN SOUTHERN NEVADA**

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#### **Overview:**

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC) is unique as an agency. The RTC is responsible for the community public transit system, planning and funding major roadway projects and traffic management for the bulk of the community. Most transportation organizations divide up these responsibilities, however, the RTC is more efficient because of its unusual approach and it allows the agency to better serve our valley's residents and visitors.

#### **RTC Transit:**

The RTC has been providing public transit to the Las Vegas Valley since Dec. 5, 1992, making its transit system one of the youngest in the country. Today that system is also one of the most efficient and successful thanks to the many innovative approaches the agency has implemented at the direction of its Board of Commissioners. In 2008, the RTC was ranked the most efficient transit provider in the nation by the National Transit Database.

That commitment to excellence and efficiency continues today. In 2011 alone the RTC's system, which consists of 42 routes, carried more than 57 million passengers more than 15 million service miles. In addition, during this past year the RTC's system boasted an on-time performance rate of 97 percent. This on-time performance figure is based on more than 7.1 million timepoint departures that were measured in 2011 and is the broadest possible measurement of timeliness.

This past year was a busy and eventful one for RTC's Transit system. The agency's rapid transit lines (the Strip & Downtown Express, the Centennial Express and the Westcliff Airport Express) continued to lure drivers out of their cars and onto transit and the RTC celebrated the opening of two additional express service routes - the Henderson Downtown Express and the Boulder Highway Express in September 2011. Since the launch of the new routes, the RTC has doubled the number of passengers it carries along Boulder Highway.

The RTC also celebrated the groundbreaking of its newest premium service route - the Sahara Express - during 2011. The 12-mile route will travel from Hualapai Way to Boulder Highway, providing improved transit service to thousands each day who live and work along that key corridor. The Sahara Express line is slated for completion in early 2012 and the final design will feature "complete streets" elements, including enhanced landscaping, wider sidewalks for pedestrians, bike lanes for cyclists, and other amenities aimed at creating a corridor that all modes of transportation can use and enjoy. Service on the Sahara Express route will begin in May 2012. Funding for the construction was provided by a \$34.4 million Transportation Infrastructure Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) federal grant. The RTC was the only agency in the state chosen to receive funding through the TIGER program.

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN NEVADA**

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---

These innovative Express transit lines provide enhanced transit options for RTC passengers. They feature a variety of rail-like amenities including transit-only lanes for portions of their routes, comfortable and attractive transit shelters with ticket vending machines, level platform boarding and limited stops, which get riders to their destinations much more quickly than a traditional transit route.

#### **Transit Facilities:**

The RTC's system is complimented by a number of state-of-the-art transit facilities and park & ride locations, which make the system more efficient and more accessible for the 200,000 riders who utilize it daily.

One of those facilities, the RTC's Bonneville Transit Center (BTC), is located in the heart of Downtown Las Vegas on the southwest corner of Casino Center Boulevard and Bonneville Avenue. The 21,000 square-foot terminal was built, thanks in part, to federal American Recovery Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding and it is expected to receive a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building certification of Gold.

The RTC's Westcliff Transit Center and Park & Ride, which is located on the west side of the Durango Drive and Westcliff Drive intersection, features six transit vehicle bays, 141 parking spaces and a one-story building where riders can wait for their transit vehicles to arrive. It was built thanks in large part to Federal Transit Administration funding and debuted in December 2010. The facility currently services three residential routes and the RTC's Westcliff Airport Express commuter line.

The RTC's South Strip Transfer Terminal is the valley's southern transit hub and it was opened in 2004. It features a park and ride, indoor waiting areas for transit riders, a security counter, restrooms and other amenities. Since opening, the SSTT has been embraced by many locals as an excellent option for traveling to McCarran International Airport. Transit riders can park their cars in the lot, which features more than 200 spaces, for free. From there, the RTC's Route 109 takes travelers to the Airport in about 10 minutes.

#### **FAST:**

The RTC's Freeway and Arterial System of Transportation (FAST) is designed to both monitor and control traffic on valley freeways and roadways. Technicians analyze real-time traffic conditions on the freeways and major arterials through closed-circuit television cameras and traffic data. FAST partners with the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) in managing the valley's freeway system.

One of the first truly integrated Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) organizations in the country, FAST's traffic control is achieved through the use of traffic signals, ramp meters and dynamic message signs, which have been installed throughout the valley. In addition, NDOT recently completed the installation of new traffic cameras

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN NEVADA**

### **TRANSPORTATION IN SOUTHERN NEVADA**

---

and dynamic message signs on U.S. 95 from the Spaghetti Bowl north to the 215 Beltway providing motorists with information on traffic conditions, accidents and estimated travel times.

This year, new traffic cameras and travel time signs will be installed on the 215 Beltway in the southeast part of the valley, further improving FAST's network to help the valley's traffic flow more smoothly.

#### **Planning & Funding:**

The RTC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Southern Nevada, meaning that it is responsible for maintaining a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning process. The RTC is also responsible for dispersing federal, state and local funds for regional roadway projects. The RTC provides funding for roadway construction on the valley's major arterials, and included funding for the 215 Bruce Woodbury Beltway.

In 1990, the voters of Clark County overwhelmingly approved Question 10, a local referendum that provided new funding sources for transportation improvements. Voters approved the measure by a 64 percent majority. Question 10 called for new revenue measures to be dedicated to improving the region's transportation infrastructure. Those measures included a jet aviation fuel tax, a development tax, a resort corridor room tax, and a motor vehicle privilege tax. A one-quarter percent sales and use tax dedicated to bus service was included in this package.

With the funding from the sales and use tax, the RTC became responsible for planning, designing and implementing a new transit system for the valley in order to combat traffic congestion and improve mobility for the region. Today that system, which includes RTC Transit, MAX, Deuce and express transit services, is one of the most efficient transit systems in the nation and one that's consistently improving.

In 2002, the RTC presented the Fair Share Funding act to the public (also known as Question 10). This second Question 10 act would provide \$2.7 billion in funding for transportation projects including adding 425 high speed lane miles of roads, additional mass transit vehicles and routes, 70 miles of Intelligent Transportation Systems and better traffic signalization. It would also provide approximately \$327 million to Clark County for critical projects such as the 215 Beltway and other roadway projects.

Voters approved the 2002 Fair Share Funding Program advisory question with a 53.2 percent majority, asking for enabling legislation to allow Clark County to raise revenue for the program by increasing the development tax on the construction of commercial resorts, increasing the tax on jet aviation fuel and increasing the retail sales tax.

As a result, the RTC receives 1/8 cent sales tax for roadways. However, this funding source was originally scheduled to sunset (end) at \$1.7 billion or in 2028, whichever

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN NEVADA**

### **TRANSPORTATION IN SOUTHERN NEVADA**

---

came first, but in a 2010 special Nevada State Legislative Session, this sunset provision was eliminated with the passage of SB5. SB5 allowed the RTC to bond against those revenues immediately and to put projects out to bid in the private sector, thus creating private-sector jobs at a time when they were desperately needed. By removing the sunset provision the agency was able to bond \$169 million in projects, creating more than 2,000 jobs in Southern Nevada.

Today, the need for additional funding and jobs in Southern Nevada continues. Nevada's unemployment rate is 13 percent - one of the highest in the nation. In addition, despite the RTC's efforts that clearly supported the industry, construction employment shrunk by more than 50 percent over the past four years.

In addition, roadway funding is crippled by a compounded, yet unintended consequence of improved technology. As automobiles become more fuel efficient, consumers pay less and less in gasoline taxes, which directly fund roadway projects. However, these fuel-efficient vehicles still require roadway capacity.

#### **The Solution:**

In 2009 Washoe County successfully indexed its fuel tax rate to inflation - thereby ensuring that the amount of money generated to support roadway funding keeps pace with the growing demand.

If this was done in Southern Nevada, the RTC estimates that it could generate \$434 million in bonding over three years and \$781 million in bonding if it were to leverage it to gain more federal funding. This additional revenue would result in the direct creation of nearly 3,000 jobs over those three years and more than 4,300 jobs when federal funds are also utilized. By creating new jobs in Southern Nevada, the RTC would be in a position to move forward with a number of much-needed roadway projects and at the same time our economy would benefit from the influx of more than \$194 million in direct salaries and wages paid and more than \$304 million in total salaries and wages paid.

Another benefit to this approach is that the financial burden is relatively modest. In fact, it's estimated that the cost to the average residents would be as follows:

- 36 cents / week (year 1)
- 73 cents / week (year 2)
- \$1.11 cents / week (year 3)

In addition, the average cost per tourist in Southern Nevada would be less than \$1 per visit.

#### **2011 Legislative Actions:**

During the 2011 legislative session, the Legislature approved SB 506, a bill that required the RTC to establish a public private partnership demonstration project in

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN NEVADA**

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---

connection with the Boulder City Bypass. SB 506 also allows the RTC to execute public-private partnership agreements to facilitate the development of the project. Once constructed, the Bypass will provide an option for drivers who want to avoid stopping in Boulder City, Nevada, improving travel into and out of Southern Nevada and reducing traffic in Boulder City. The RTC is expected to choose a financial and engineering firm to help with the additional studies that are needed before the bypass is constructed.

Senate Bill 151 was also approved during the 2011 session. It called for the RTC to establish a Regional Rapid Transit Authority. The Authority's purpose is to study the issues concerning the development of a regional rapid transit system in Southern Nevada. Rapid transit has been a major area of focus for the RTC's MPO division and the agency is looking forward to the direction from the Rapid Transit Authority. The Regional Rapid Transit Authority has met twice and is continuing to study rapid transit options for the Las Vegas Valley.

#### **In Conclusion:**

The RTC has a proven track record of utilizing public funds quickly and efficiently and delivering much-needed transportation projects to the residents of Southern Nevada. For so many years the RTC was forced to play "catch up" as the Valley's growth boomed and more than 100 new cars were added to our roadways daily. Today it is true that the growth in the Valley has slowed, however, our transportation infrastructure remains in need of significant improvements. Now, while our unemployment climbs and our traffic congestion continues to frustrate residents and visitors, we are faced with an excellent opportunity. By indexing Clark County's portion of the gas tax to inflation, our community can improve its transportation infrastructure while invigorating our economy and the job market.

#### **Contact the RTC:**

For more information, please contact:

Jacob Snow, General Manager: (702) 676-1505, [snowj@rtcsnv.com](mailto:snowj@rtcsnv.com)

Tracy Bower, Director of Media & Government Affairs, (702) 676-1730,  
[bowert@rtcsnv.com](mailto:bowert@rtcsnv.com)

[rtcsnv.com](http://rtcsnv.com)