



## Transit Element

### INTRODUCTION

A primary strategy of the Transit Element is to reduce dependence on the private automobile in order to achieve multiple and interrelated goals including: increasing mobility, preserving and enhancing neighborhood character, improving air quality, and fostering compact development and a more walkable city. A greater reliance on public transportation will improve mobility by increasing travel options for residents, and by increasing the people-carrying capacity of the City's transportation system. It will also decrease the environmental degradation caused by the growing use of single-occupant vehicles. The intent is to develop a transit system that supports as well as leads the development of Surprise Land Use Character Areas as set forth by the Surprise General Plan 2035.

Surprise's development strategy combines transit supportive changes in the City's development pattern with a more complete and competitive multimodal transportation system. Achieving growth targets based on cores and corridors is an important element for the future development of Surprise. It provides more desirable investment in facilities and service delivery systems to support areas where growth will occur and reflects local decisions and neighborhood priorities. This shift may require some major investments in transit infrastructure and services as well as changes in priorities for street use.

### DISCUSSION

#### Regional Collaboration

The transit system in Surprise is affected by plans and programs that guide the development and management of the regional transportation system. The *Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP) adopted by the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) in July 2010 calls for a significant expansion of regional transit services into portions of Maricopa County which are currently underserved, including Surprise. Proposition 400, the funding measure to implement the RTP, was passed by voters in November 2004. This extended the one-half cent sales tax (approved through Proposition 300) for transportation an additional 20 years, through 2025. This funding is divided between freeway, arterial roadway, and transit projects.

Commuter express service from Surprise to downtown Phoenix via the Grand Avenue corridor began in January 2006. Regional transit service planned to be extended to Surprise through Proposition 400 funding (both frequent stop trunk line and limited stop express services) will not occur within the planned timeframe of the RTP due to shortfalls in sales tax revenues, which provide the funding for these planned services. It is likely that no future funding for regional transit service will be available to Surprise until such time as another Proposition is passed by the voters, or another funding source is instituted.

The levels of transit service provided for in the RTP are not adequate to accommodate demand given the projected rate of development in Surprise. [The City of Surprise completed its Transit Feasibility Study \(October 2018\).](#)

## Surprise General Plan 2035: Foundation for the Future

~~which made short-term and long-term recommendations for Surprise and its connectivity into the larger regional network. Short-term recommendations include creating a Surprise local circulator that provides access to many retail, commercial, educational, and institutional destinations along Bell Road and Greenway Road. The long-range transit service recommendation includes a new neighborhood circulator route on Bullard Avenue, additional trips on the Route 571, and a new local route on Litchfield Road. MAG published the Northwest Valley Local Transit System Study (June 2013), which made short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for Surprise and the rest of the Northwest Valley. Short-term recommendations include creating a Surprise local circulator that provides access to many retail, commercial, educational, and institutional destinations along Bell Road and Greenway Road. Mid-term recommendations include extending existing bus routes into Surprise and increasing service on local circulators as demand increases. Long-term recommendations include the implementation of high-capacity transit along the US60/Grand Avenue corridor and extending additional bus routes into Surprise.~~

~~The City of Surprise is currently working with Valley Metro on a Short-Range Transit Study to identify additional transit opportunities along US60/Grand Avenue corridor prior to the implementation of a high-capacity transit option.~~

During the public outreach effort for this Surprise Transit Feasibility Study, the public was able to provide comments on draft service routes/corridors and transit points of interest and desired connections to existing transit services and areas. Public feedback obtained helped the study team refine the draft network into a final transit service recommendation for the City of Surprise. General Plan 2035, citizens showed a preference for development

~~patterns concentrated around major transportation corridors. Surprise has no major transportation corridor more significant than US 60/Grand Avenue. Not only is this roadway part of the State Highway System, it is also immediately adjacent to the BNSF Railway.~~

In addition to the short- and long-range recommendations discussed previously, there are other service options available that can help the City of Surprise build transit supply. These options are further discussed in the plan but could include additional express routes, carpool and vanpool programs and emerging technologies and service modes.

MAG completed the initial phase of a regional commuter rail study, which shows support for passenger service in this corridor. In addition to the City's effort in planning and developing transit options for its residents, MAG and Valley Metro continue to perform and develop regional plans for regional commuter options. Recently MAG completed the Regional Transit Framework update (focused on high capacity transit), Regional Commuter System update (focused on commuter rail) and will be beginning studies for Regional Bus Rapid Transit and Commuter Bus Feasibility. Such service is not yet assured, and will, in any case, be years in the future. Until that time, concentrated rubber tired-transit services in the corridor can both demonstrate the demand for service and influence land use patterns in the corridor.

### Existing and Projected Levels of Transit

~~Valley Metro under the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) provides all of Surprise's transit service. Surprise is currently served by one Valley Metro express bus route to downtown Phoenix. Valley Metro also provides local Dial-a-Ride (DAR) service to Surprise through a regional cab contract. Express bus routes are meant to be suburb-to-suburb~~

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routes. Route 571 serves commuters travelling between Surprise and Phoenix. Existing transit service in Surprise consists of express bus and paratransit service. While there is currently no local bus service in Surprise, there are several routes that operate in neighboring communities. Valley Metro's vanpool program is another service available to Surprise residents. The City also has one designated park-and-ride facility. A park and ride facility at 13327 W. Bell Road serves transit users. The popularity of the Express Route 571 shows that there are important transportation needs in Surprise and the surrounding areas. Due to the success of these services, plans are progressing to implement a circulator route within the City, as well as regional high capacity transit such as commuter rail.

## **Commuter Rail**

Many consider commuter rail to be the missing element in the regional transportation system, and the BNSF line running along Grand Avenue is key to achieving the objective of implementing commuter rail services in this corridor. Commuter rail trains typically provide service between suburbs and urban centers. Service typically occurs at a lower frequency than light rail, serving primarily peak travel needs for commuters. Travel distance between a rail line's termini may range between 30 and 50 miles, with station spacing typically five to ten miles apart.

In 2010-2018 MAG completed an update to the Commuter Rail System Study, along with corridor development plans for each of the four corridors identified in the system study. The system study provides a detailed evaluation of potential commuter rail links to the West Valley by incorporating the findings of the Grand Avenue and Yuma West

Corridor Development Plans; and evaluation of potential commuter rail links to the East Valley. The system study calls for phased implementation of the commuter rail system based on a number of factors, including: development patterns, changes in travel demand, community support, potential funding sources and potential integration with the Phoenix/Tucson intercity rail.

By 2035 the Grand Avenue corridor is projected to experience a 41 percent increase in population and a 52 percent increase in employment. As a result of this growth, and even with planned roadway improvements and increased transit service, congestion in the Grand Avenue corridor is expected to worsen. Automobile congestion levels are projected to range from moderate to severe throughout the length of the project corridor. Commuter rail service would provide an opportunity to improve mobility, particularly for peak period trips, by reducing travel time and providing a reliable and consistent alternative to automobile travel in a congested roadway corridor.

The BNSF rail line currently carries seven to eight trains daily at an approximate speed of 49 miles per hour. Upgrades and changes desired for implementing commuter rail services on the BNSF line may include new signals, a second track, and reduced main track switching activity. Additional commuter rail implementation requirements include governance and administration, railroad cooperation and funding.

## **Trends in Transit Use**

The Surprise Transit Feasibility Study accepted by Surprise City Council on October 2, 2018 documented existing conditions in Surprise. This includes an analysis of the City's demographic trends, the identification of

activity centers and land uses, and a review of the City's existing transit services and facilities. The study additionally documented the existing travel markets in Surprise.

The commute is an important transit trip generator. The American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates show that Surprise has the lowest percentage of households with workers compared to Maricopa County and its peers. This can be attributed to the fact that 22 percent of Surprise's population is over 64 years of age compared to 14 percent countywide. According to the United States Census, more than 75 percent of Surprise workers used a car, truck, or van to commute to their jobs. Public transportation as a mode of commuting amounted to less than one percent.

Although the majority of Surprise workforce travels to jobs across the region, by personal automobiles, the data also show several potential internal transit markets. Potential service between large employment centers and retail, commercial, and residential areas of Surprise may circulate both internal work and non-work trips.

City of Surprise Dial-a-Ride (DAR) transit use has remained relatively flat for the last five years due to limited funding. In 2012 the City switched to contract service for DAR and began to use 2010 New Freedom grant funds available for this type of service. The City anticipates a 10 percent growth over the next three years in DAR service trips.

The City participated in a region wide reorganization of the express bus route system that was implemented in 2012. The 571 express route, which provides express commuter service from Surprise into downtown Phoenix, has experienced steady growth, and currently provides 4 morning inbound trips and 4 evening outbound trips.

According to the United States Census, more than 75 per cent of Surprise workers used a car, truck, or van to commute to their jobs. Public transportation as a mode of commuting amounted to less than one percent. Surprise has seen an increase in transit ridership in the past year. Valley Metro's annual transit report reflects a 9.33% increase in Route 571 ridership in 2015 from 2014, and 31.15% decrease in 2014 from 2013. The total decrease in 2014 was similar to those experienced throughout the valley and was partially attributed to the significant decrease in fuel prices.

The projected increase in population increases for Surprise will provide an opportunity to expand transit into new and growing markets, thereby extending its ridership base. To meet the continued needs and demands generated by development, it will become necessary to develop local public transit services. As environmental and capacity issues become more evident, transit's role will increase. Effective use of transit could make a difference in the level of congestion in certain corridors in the Surprise area.

### Surprise Transit Services

#### Express Bus

Express Route 571 is the sole regional transit service connecting Surprise to downtown Phoenix. As a direct commuter service, Route 571 operates Monday through Friday, making four inbound morning peak-period trips to Phoenix and four outbound peak-period trips back to Surprise. Route 571 operates from the Surprise Park-and-Ride to Downtown Phoenix via Grand Avenue in the inbound direction and Interstate 10/Loop 101 in the outbound direction.

#### Local Bus

At this time, there are no local bus routes

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servicing Surprise; however, Valley Metro Local Routes 83-83rd Avenue, 106-Peoria Avenue, and 138-Thunderbird Road provide service in the vicinity of Surprise.

## **Valley Metro Paratransit**

Paratransit service is a shared-ride, door-to-door service (mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) provided to people with disabilities who are not able to use traditional fixed-route transit service. Federal Transit Administration requires that, at a minimum, ADA complementary paratransit be provided within 3/4 of a mile of a bus route or rail station, at the same hours and days, for no more than twice the regular fixed route fare. In Surprise, seniors, certified ADA passengers, and income-qualified individuals are eligible to use Valley Metro paratransit services to book trips longer than 7 miles outside of Surprise for medical appointments and work.

## **RideChoice Taxi Service**

Valley Metro's RideChoice program provides discounted taxi service to qualified seniors, people with disabilities, and income-qualified individuals 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. To be eligible for the program, passengers must either be 65 years or older or be certified as ADA-paratransit eligible, and provide proof of residency within a participating community. Wheelchair accessible service is available at no additional charge.

In October 2018, Valley Metro launched an Enhanced RideChoice service for qualified participants. The redesigned program provides more service and more transportation options, including additional wheelchair-accessible vehicle providers and the rideshare provider Lyft.

## **Vanpool**

Valley Metro's vanpool program is another service available to Surprise residents. Under the vanpool program, Valley Metro provides a group of six to fifteen people with a van to use for commuting purposes. One qualified participant volunteers to be the driver, and each rider pays a monthly fare that covers the lease, fuel, maintenance, and insurance costs of the van.

## **Transit Supportive Land Use Planning**

In order for transit to be successful, the City of Surprise City Council approved the Transit-Oriented Development Strategic Plan needs to create a more "transit friendly environment" in which transit has a better opportunity to succeed. One ~~element of this strategy~~ is to provide for denser, mixed use developments that will support travel by transit. Another element is to provide the physical facilities that result in a better operating environment for transit, such as bus pullouts, park and ride lots, signal prioritization for transit vehicles and improved access to transit for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Implementation is dependent on the close coordination of land use and transportation planning. The relationship between transit and land use focuses development in concentrated rather than linear patterns adjacent to transit stops and stations. Transit investments are directed to link these transit supportive areas to provide people with an attractive option alternative to the single occupant vehicle. This will allow more people to live and work within walking distance of transit.

## **GOALS AND POLICIES**

### **Goal 1: Balanced Multi-modal System**

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Develop and maintain a balanced, multi-modal transportation system to ensure safe and efficient movement of people and goods in Surprise.

### Policies

1. Provide and expand transportation demand management strategies to help reduce traffic congestion and encourage alternative modes of travel.
2. Consider the needs of the entire community and the special needs of the elderly and people with impaired mobility in the planning, design, construction and maintenance of the City's transportation system.
3. Include transit planning as an integral component of long range plans and the development review process.

sistent with regional standards.

8. Collaborate with regional agencies to ensure increased transit service frequency, connectivity and availability in Surprise.

## Goal 2: Access and Alternatives

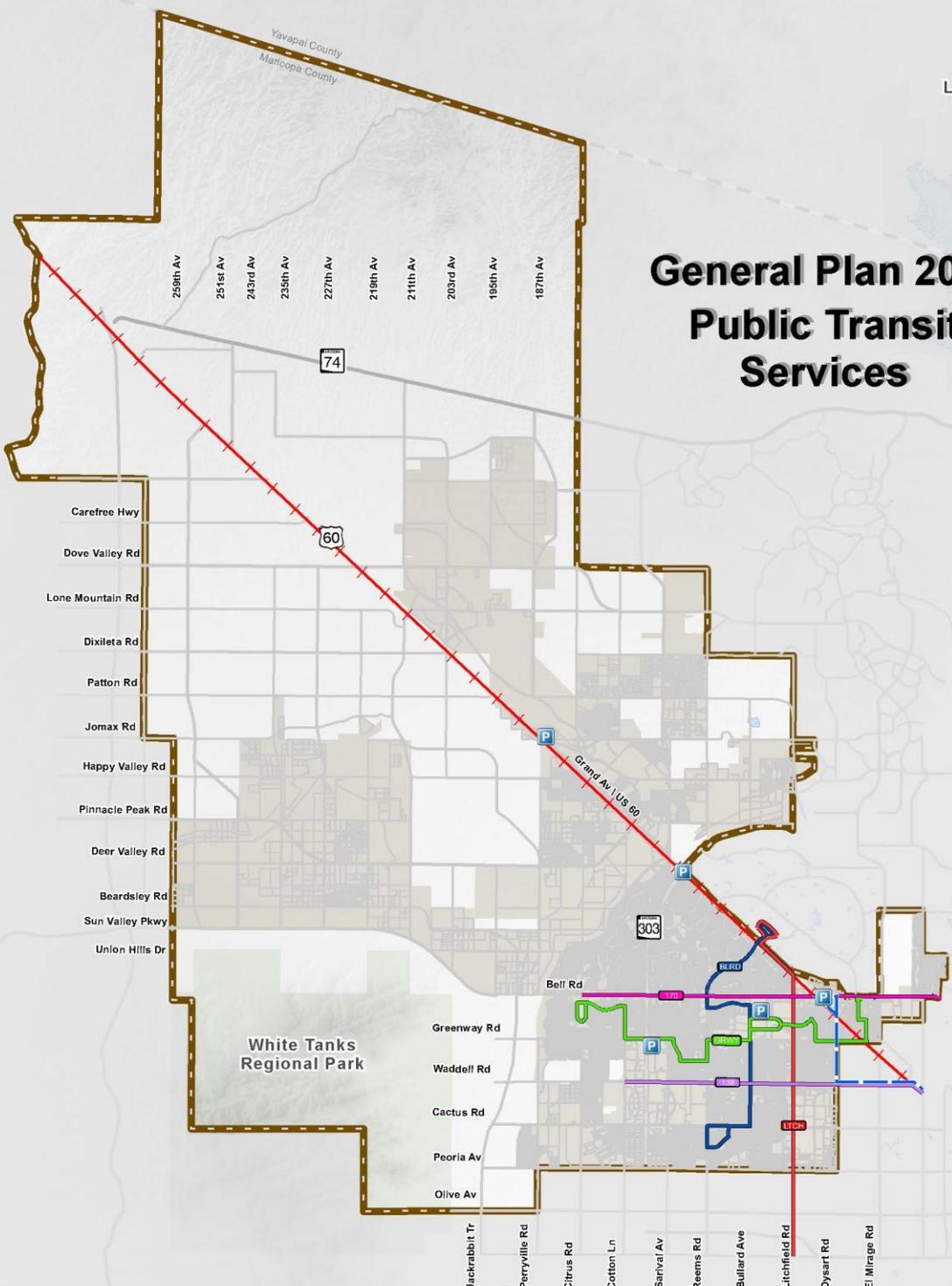
Provide attractive and convenient public transit services to, from, and within Surprise.

### Policies

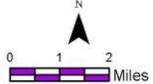
1. Pursue a Citywide local transit system that connects homes, businesses, schools, and employment centers.
2. Integrate the regional transit system with the Surprise local transit system.
3. Work with all appropriate agencies and interests to support the implementation of commuter rail service in the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway corridor adjacent to US 60/Grand Avenue.
4. Support the provision of high frequency transit service and capital investments to benefit high density/intensity areas.
5. Implement transit priority measures to ensure increased transit ridership.
6. Encourage transit services that address the needs of persons with disabilities, the elderly, young people, people with special needs, and people who depend on public transit for their mobility.
7. Develop transit fare recovery policies con-

Lake Pleasant Park

# General Plan 2035 Public Transit Services



Features		Boundaries	
Park-and-Ride	<b>Short Range Network</b>	Freeway	US Highway
Existing Express Route	138	Parkway	State Freeway
	170	Minor Arterial	State Highway
	GRWY	Major Arterial	
	<b>Long Range Network</b>		
	BLRD		
	LTCH		
	Commuter Rail		
		Planning Area	
		County	
		Surprise Corporate Limits	



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