



Gila County Transit Governance Study

Prepared for:
Central Arizona Governments in partnership with
Gila County

December 2020



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1. INTRODUCTION

Best practices and lessons learned regarding regional transit governance can be drawn from experience of other regions in Arizona and other parts of the country. In order to find the most comparable experience to Gila County, selection of peers focused on regions with similar population and area, and ideally with tribal presence. Geographically, candidates were selected from both within Arizona, which represent the same, existing institutional and legal environment that Gila County is in, and outside of the state, which may provide best practices that are yet to be implemented in Arizona but suitable for Gila County. Lastly, regional agencies for other public services within Gila County were also considered, which demonstrate experience of inter-governmental coordination and cooperation within Gila County.

Based on the abovementioned considerations, eleven agencies were identified as peer review candidates. The eleven candidates are:

- Sierra Vista Transit, AZ
- Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority, AZ
- Cottonwood Area Transit, AZ
- Hualapai Transit, AZ
- Tri-City Regional Sanitary District, AZ (within Gila County)
- Cobre Valley Institute of Technology, AZ (largely within Gila County)
- North Central Regional Transit District, NM
- Green Mountain Transit, VT
- North Central Montana Transit, MT
- Lincoln County Transit, OR
- Rogue Valley Transportation District, OR

The PMT reviewed and discussed the eleven candidates as a group and made the final selection of five peers for further detailed study:

- **Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority (YCIPTA).** YCIPTA was selected because it is an Arizona regional transportation agency, an example of an Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority (IPTA). An IPTA is one of several types of regional transportation agencies authorized by Arizona statute, a potential option for Gila County. YCIPTA has tribal representatives serving on its governing board.
- **Cottonwood Area Transit (CAT).** CAT was selected for its intergovernmental agreements with neighboring municipalities to provide cross-boundary transit service. Like Gila County, CAT's service area is mostly small-urban and rural area.
- **Cobre Valley Institute of Technology (CVIT).** CVIT was selected as an example of regional public service agency within Gila County. It serves the southern part of the county and a small part of Pinal County, providing vocational education for five unified school districts.
- **North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD).** NCRTD was selected as an out-of-state example of an independent regional agency that serves as the major transit



operator for a four-county region in New Mexico. It serves a mostly small-urban and rural area with eight tribes (pueblos) within its service area.

- **Lincoln County Transit (LCT).** LCT was selected as an out-of-state example of a county-wide transit operator. Similar to Gila County, Lincoln County, Oregon, has a mostly small-urban and rural demographic. LCT serves a tribe located within the county.

Section 2 of this document provides an overview of each of the five peers. Section 3 documents more in-depth findings from peer agency interviews and summarizes and compares the peers' experience in six aspects of their regionalization process. Section 4 is a summary of the key takeaways and lessons learned that are most relevant to Gila County.

2. GOVERNANCE PEER AGENCY OVERVIEW

After finalizing the list of five peers, the team analyzed the formal structure of the peer agencies, including historical information, development process, governing and operating structures, funding, and tribal participation. Desktop and internet research were conducted to gather information about each peer on the abovementioned areas. This section provides an overview of the peers.



2.1 YUMA COUNTY INTERGOVERNMENTAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY, ARIZONA

Table 2-1: Agency Overview – Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority

Jurisdictions Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cities of Yuma, San Luis, and Somerton • Town of Wellton • Unincorporated communities of Yuma County • Cocopah Nation and Quechan Nation
Population	195,751 (2018 NTD)
Service Area	5,522 Sq. Mi.
Year Formed	2011
Governance Model	Arizona IPTA (population 200K or less) (A.R.S. Title 28 Chapter 26 IPTA)
Board Structure	A nine-member board representing Yuma County, the Cities of Yuma, San Luis, Somerton, Town of Wellton, Arizona Western College, Northern Arizona University, the Cocopah Nation, and the Quechan Nation.
Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal (5307, 5311, 5310) • General revenue from Cities (NTD 2018) • Indian tribes (5311 (c) funding used to reimburse YCIPTA at \$49.10/op hour) • University and College
Tribal Participation	Cocopah Indian Tribe and Quechan Indian Tribe
Services Provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed route, vanpool and YCAT On Call demand responsive bus service throughout the service area, including Gadsden, Fortuna Foothills, and Ligurta • YCAT provides service into Winterhaven and El Centro, CA and on the Quechan/Fort Yuma Indian Reservation • Serves several colleges



2.2 COTTONWOOD AREA TRANSIT, ARIZONA

Table 2-2: Agency Overview – Cottonwood Area Transit

Jurisdictions Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cottonwood Area Transit (CAT) provides local transit services for Cottonwood, Clarkdale, Bridgeport and Verde Village • Verde Lynx - Direct bus service between Cottonwood and Sedona
Population	12,253 (2019, <i>US Census Bureau</i>)
Service Area	17 Sq. Mi.
Year Formed	2012 (Cottonwood-Sedona IGA first executed)
Governance Model	City department; Cottonwood-Sedona IGA (renewed 2019) (A.R.S. Title 40 Chapter 6 Article 5)
Board Structure	Cottonwood City Council
Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal (5311) • State • City of Cottonwood and City of Sedona
Tribal Participation	Not Applicable
Services Provided	<p>Fixed route service in Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Verde Village.</p> <p>Verde Lynx service connects central Cottonwood with the major employers in Sedona along 89A and northern portions of SR 179.</p>



2.3 COBRE VALLEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, ARIZONA

Table 2-3: Agency Overview – Cobre Valley Institute of Technology

Jurisdictions Served	Five unified school districts: Globe, Hayden-Winkelman, Miami, San Carlos, Superior, and Ray
Year Formed	2000
Governance Model	Career Technical Education District (CTED)
Board Structure	Board members are elected within the District
Funding Sources	About 90 percent of CVIT funding comes from the Arizona Department of Education through equalization aid, and approximately 10 percent comes from local property tax.
Tribal Participation	San Carlos Apache Tribe
Services Provided	Coordinates and funds delivery of career and technical education (CTE) course offerings to secondary students.



2.4 NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL TRANSIT DISTRICT, NEW MEXICO

Table 2-4: Agency Overview – North Central Regional Transit District

Jurisdictions Served	Los Alamos County, Rio Arriba County, Santa Fe County, San Juan County, Taos County, and Pueblos
Population	289,292 (2018 NTD)
Service Area	10,119 Sq. Mi.
Year Formed	2007
Governance Model	Regional Transit District (see N.M.S.A. 1978, Section 73-25)
Board Structure	One board member from each city, county, village, town, and pueblo (17 in total)
Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-County Transit Gross Receipts Tax • Tribal Transit • Federal Grant • Local match from member jurisdictions <i>(NCRTD website financial data tool, 2020)</i>
Tribal Participation	Pueblos and Nation: Ohkay Owingeh, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, Pojoaque, Santa Clara, Nambé, Picuris, Taos, and Jicarilla Apache Nation
Services Provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides free and premium fare-based bus transit connecting communities and pueblos throughout the counties of north central New Mexico including Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe and Taos • RTD Blue Buses provide connections to New Mexico Rail Runner, Santa Fe Trails, NMDOT Park and Ride, Los Alamos Atomic City Transit, Po' Pay Messenger Service and Red River Miner's Transit



2.5 LINCOLN COUNTY TRANSIT, OREGON

Table 2-5: Agency Overview – Lincoln County Transit

Jurisdictions Served	Lincoln County
Population	49,962 (2019, US Census Bureau)
Service Area	992 Sq. Mi.
Year Formed	2010 (five county partnership commenced)
Governance Model	County transportation service district; operates as a county department
Board Structure	County board of commissioners; Transit Advisory Committee for planning
Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal (5311) • State • Property tax assessed by the district (2018 TDP)
Tribal Participation	Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians
Services Provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides fixed-route and demand response service connecting the main communities in Lincoln County • Services consist of four intra-county routes - Newport to Yachats, Newport to Lincoln City and Rose Lodge, Newport to Siletz, and the Coast-to-Valley route from Newport to Albany • Two intracity loop routes in Lincoln City and Newport • Two Dial-A-Ride services that operate within Lincoln City and Newport



3. GOVERNANCE PEER AGENCY INTERVIEWS

Based on the desktop and internet research, the consulting team interviewed the leadership of all five peer agencies to better understand the motivations, process, and challenges in forming the regional governance structure and identify best practices and lessons learned in their experience. A peer interview guide was developed to support the interviewers. The guide includes questions in three major areas: governance structure, funding and cost allocation, and coordination with other transit operators in the region. The full interview guide is provided in Appendix A.

The interviews provided valuable insights into the experience of each peer agency. The key findings have been summarized and organized into six major aspects:

- Status of service provided before regionalization.
- Initiation and formalization of regional transit
- Regional governance structure
- Transit funding and cost allocation
- Tribal participation
- Coordination with regional partners

The remaining of this section will compare the peer agencies' experience in each of those six aspects.



3.1 STATUS OF TRANSIT BEFORE REGIONALIZATION

Table 3-1: Status of Service Provided Before Regionalization

Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority	The MPO owned and operated transit for the county.
Cottonwood Area Transit	Cottonwood is authorized to provide public transportation services and operates the CAT System. Provides local bus service in Cottonwood, Clarkdale, Bridgeport and Verde Village.
Cobre Valley Institute of Technology	No agency dedicated to providing vocational education in the region.
North Central Regional Transit District	Each County, and one of the eight pueblos, had their own transit service.
Lincoln County Transit	Initially was a transportation program for senior and people with disabilities. It evolved into a public transit operator. Five independent, county-owned rural transit operators in the region.



3.2 INITIATION AND FORMALIZATION OF REGIONAL TRANSIT

Table 3-2: Initiation and Formalization of Regional Transit

Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority	Motivated to form a governing board dedicated to transit to better address goals and priorities for transit and riders.
Cottonwood Area Transit	City of Sedona and City of Cottonwood first entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) in 2012 for the operation of an intercity commuter transit service, initiated by Sedona. The IGA was renewed in 2015 and 2019.
Cobre Valley Institute of Technology	CVIT is a Career Education District (CTED), created based on Arizona statute to provide vocational education. Several CTEDs existed in the state before CVIT. Several school districts saw the need for vocational education in the region and to take advantage of state funding for CTED. The CVIT was formed in 2000 with three or four original member school districts. Globe and Ray joined the CVIT subsequently.
North Central Regional Transit District	The regional economic development organization facilitated consensus building regarding goals and agency structure. The RTD was formed with a planning grant. 11 municipalities and tribes formed the RTD initially. An easy process for accepting new members was established.
Lincoln County Transit	Five transit operators jointly applied for a Department of Energy grant for regional transit projects. The five operators executed an IGA - one operator coordinates and submit grant applications for all; cost allocation arrangement formalized to get match funds from all.



3.3 REGIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Table 3-3: Regional Governance Structure

Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority	The board members are the city/town administrators, appointed by the city council and town council. None of the board members are elected officials.
Cottonwood Area Transit	Cottonwood manages and operates the Verde Lynx service, in consultation with Sedona, and with Sedona's financial support.
Cobre Valley Institute of Technology	Each of the six school districts appoints an elected official to the CVIT board. CVIT does not have a campus or employ any teacher directly. Instead CVIT executes an IGA with the member school districts and two community colleges to provide classrooms, labs, equipment, and CTE certified teachers.
North Central Regional Transit District	<p>Board members are elected officials appointed by their county/city/pueblo. Each member has an alternate who may not be an elected official. Some actions require vote from the elected officials.</p> <p>Board members have different voting power – each has a number of voting units depending on the population of the jurisdiction they represent.</p>
Lincoln County Transit	County Board of Commissioners is the governing body, with one commissioner focusing on transit. Five-county IGA governs the coordination of regional transit projects, e.g. bus stop improvement, regional fare passes, and grant applications.



3.4 TRANSIT FUNDING AND COST ALLOCATION

Table 3-4: Transit Funding and Cost Allocation

Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority	Funding shortfall is allocated to each locality based on population mainly.
Cottonwood Area Transit	Cottonwood applies for funding from ADOT. Any funds received by Cottonwood on behalf of Sedona and/ or the Verde Lynx system is credited to Sedona in the annual budgeting process for the CAT system. Cottonwood develops operating budget based on Sedona's desired service, including costs required and Sedona's share of funding contribution after grant funding.
Cobre Valley Institute of Technology	Mainly funded by the state. State funding is based on student enrollment (students do not pay tuition; books and lab equipment expenses are also covered by the program). Local school districts provide some funding from property tax as well. CVIT also receives some federal and state grants, too. CVIT can carry unspent funds over to subsequent years, good for maintaining a reserve fund for capital projects.
North Central Regional Transit District	Initially each member jurisdiction contributed funding until the regional tax passed (tax not levied in tribes). Tax revenue is allocated among RTD, and three other transit operators in the region. RTD can use the tax revenue for any service within the RTD regardless of the proportions levied in each jurisdiction. RTD makes tribal transit grant application on behalf of the pueblos and enter MOUs to transfer those grant funds.
Lincoln County Transit	State payroll tax (STIF) dedicated to transit started in 2018. The funds cannot be used to supplant pre-existing funding sources, so essentially additional funds for transit. Introduction of STIF created the need to decide how to use the additional funds, which motivated the local tribe to participate in the advisory committee, which advises the county board on transit issues. Other sources of funds include FTA funding through the state, tribal transit funds, state funds (STF) for paratransit, county property tax dedicated to transit, two cities' contribution (Newport \$90,000/year; Lincoln City \$35,000/year), and in-kind contributions.



3.5 TRIBAL PARTICIPATION

Table 3-5: Tribal Participation

Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority	Quechan and Cocopah nations are represented on the board.
Cottonwood Area Transit	Not Applicable
Cobre Valley Institute of Technology	San Carlos Unified School District is a member of the CVIT.
North Central Regional Transit District	<p>Six of eight pueblos are represented on the board. The other two chose not to join the RTD, but they can always join if they decide to. Reasons for not joining may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent turnover of tribal leadership • Requires more education/communication of the benefits of regional transit • Don't need to be a member to get service; tax dedicated to transit not levied in the tribes <p>MOU for funding transfer include provisions that stipulate adjudication will take place in tribal court system.</p>
Lincoln County Transit	<p>Even though LCT had always provided transit to Siletz, it took 10 years to build the relationship with the tribe, and eventually got the tribe's participation in the transit advisory committee. New state payroll tax for transit helped to get tribal participation in the committee to plan how to use the funds. The tribe pays fully for one route, about \$275,000/year of tribal transit funds. Tribal members with tribal ID can ride at no cost.</p>



3.6 COORDINATION WITH REGIONAL PARTNERS

Table 3-6: Coordination with Regional Partners

Yuma County Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority	YCIPTA, Quechan Tribe, and Imperial County of California formed a partnership to provide transit service in eastern Imperial County, operated by YCIPTA.
Cottonwood Area Transit	Sedona is planning to start its own transit service in 2021, but the Verde Lynx service will continue.
Cobre Valley Institute of Technology	The CVIT has a close partnership with its member school districts and two community colleges in the region to deliver courses. CVIT relies on the facilities and teachers of the school districts and community colleges. Itself plays a funding administration and course delivery coordinating role.
North Central Regional Transit District	A new maintenance facility under development, which may provide vehicle maintenance for other regional transit operators. A study is underway that considers merging with Santa Fe Trails.
Lincoln County Transit	The five-county partnership has developed and rolled out one website for all five systems, is improving pedestrian access for bus stops throughout the region and implemented a transit pass accepted by all five systems.



4. KEY TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Effective regional governance of transit is typically driven by shared policy goals among participating municipalities and tribes that may include, for example:

- Need for a new governing board dedicated to transit
- Increasing demand for regional transit service
- Effective use of additional dedicated funding for transit

Need for regional service, funding commitment, and governance structure are closely tied to each other. Governance structure should reflect funding commitment, which should be based on the need for regional service.

Service can be provided at a regional level through establishing an independent regional entity and/or executing an intergovernmental agreement (IGA). The two options are not mutually exclusive; for example, YCIPTA is an independent regional entity and maintains an IGA for service that serves parts of Yuma County and Imperial County. The two options are typically adopted to serve different purposes:

- An independent regional transit operator has been chosen where increasing demand for regional transit services requires ongoing joint decision-making at both strategic and operational levels.
- IGA has been used for specific cooperative purposes, e.g. operating one route that serves mainly commuters from one city to another, implementing a regional transit pass, establishing a regional brand, sharing facilities and staff, etc., but planning, management, and operations for most services remain independent.

Minimal institutional/legal barriers were found for tribes to participate in regional governance. Tribes were found represented on the governing boards of various types of regional agencies and technical advisory committees. Relationship building with tribes is key to productive tribal engagement and it takes time.



APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following interview guide is a reference tool for the interviewers of the peer agencies.



Interview Guide

For Gila County Transit Governance Study

Interview Questions	Interviewer Notes
1. Governing Structure	
Based on our research, we understand your agency is governed by ... Can you confirm or correct our understanding?	
How are the members of the governing body selected, and how can they be removed or replaced?	
If there are Indian tribes in your region, how do they participate in the governance of transit?	
What is your service delivery structure? Do you contract out any functions? Are your agency's employees represented by labor union(s)?	
Can you provide a brief history of your agency and its governance structure? What have been the difficulties to establish your agency and/or adopting the governance structure?	
Are there any plans or considerations to change the governance structure?	
2. Funding and Cost Allocation	
What are the sources of funding for your agency?	
Are there any challenges in mixing various sources of funding? E.g. conditions and requirements of various funding programs.	
How does your agency allocate operating shortfall and capital expenditures?	
3. Coordination with Other Transit Operators	
Are there other transit operators in the area that your agency serves? If so, how do you coordinate service and operations with them?	
Do you share any facilities, vehicles, or other equipment with other partners?	
Does your agency operate service for other agencies?	