

STAKEHOLDER
INTERVIEW
SUMMARY (DRAFT)



Gila County Transit Governance Study

Prepared for:
Central Arizona Governments in partnership with
Gila County

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder interviews were conducted by the consultant team to understand current transit services and ideas for potential governance opportunities and challenges. The study team conducted over fourteen interviews with a variety of stakeholders in Gila County, including elected officials, key agency leadership and staff, and transit agency staff directly engaged in the operation and management of public transportation services.

Each interview followed a similar format that included:

- Introduction of interviewers and a brief overview of the study and its objectives. For each interview it was noted that the study is intended to determine more effective and efficient management/coordination and will not look at the detailed operation of existing or future transit routes.
- Interviewers noted the team's interest in the interviewees' perspective on ideas and issues related to potential transit service organization and governance in Gila County.
- Interviewers also noted that that discussions are confidential. Findings will not be attributed to a single individual but rather will be collectively summarized for all stakeholders.

A list of individuals interviewed is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Stakeholder Interview List

Date	Agency	Participants
Elected Officials and City/Town Staff		
Sept. 16, 2020	Town of Hayden	Laura Romero, Town Clerk; Dean Hetrick, Mayor
Sept. 16, 2020	Town of Winkelman	Sylvia Kerlock, Town Clerk; Gloria Ruiz, Deputy Town Clerk
Sept. 17, 2020	Gila County	Woody Cline, District 3 County Supervisor
Sept. 17, 2020	Gila County	Tommie Martin, District 1 County Supervisor
Sept. 17, 2020	Payson	Sheila DeSchaaf, Town Manager; Tom Morrissey, Mayor
Sept. 18, 2020	Gila County	Tim Humphrey, District 2 County Supervisor
Sept. 18, 2020	Miami	Sammy Gonzales, Mayor
Oct. 1, 2020	Globe	Jess Letham, Councilmember; Terence Wheeler; Councilmember; Mike Pastor; Councilmember; Paul Jepson, City Manager; Shelly Salazar, City Clerk
Oct. 16, 2020	Gila County	Homero Vela; Assistance County Manager
Oct. 29, 2020	Gila County	James Menlove, County Manager
Transit Agency Staff		
Sept. 17, 2020	Payson Senior Center	Joanne Conlin, Michael Hernandez
Oct. 1, 2020	Nnee Bich'o Nii Transit	Bernadette Kniffin
Oct. 19, 2020	Copper Mountain Transit	Katie Dwoznik
Nov. 6, 2020	Fort Apache Connection Transit	Cassie Kenton-Garcia



2.0 INTERVIEWS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AND CITY/TOWN STAFF

The study team conducted ten interviews with elected officials and city or town managers. These interviews were conducted at the beginning of the project in order to obtain unbiased perspectives on the transit needs and potential governance models for the region. Appendix A contains the complete interview survey instrument. Questions asked included:

- Please describe how transit services have developed in your community. If your community does not have transit services, what challenges do you have to implement service?
- Do you expect public demand for transit services to increase over time?
- This study is evaluating different models and ideas for better organizing and governing transit services in Gila County. Do you have any ideas on how transit services could be better structured or organized?
- If there was a regional service, would you be supportive of being a financial partner in a regional service?

KEY FINDINGS

The following section summarizes comments collected from the interviews. Text in italics represents direct quotes or summarized comments.

- Elected officials and town/city staff were all supportive of public transportation services and felt that existing transit services were essential for each community. There was consensus among all those interviewed that public transportation is beneficial to each community and helps a wide variety of residents and visitors.
 - *The transit services provided in Globe-Miami, Payson-Star Valley, and through the San Carlos Apache Tribe and White Mountain Apache Tribe are used by a wide variety of people that need the service. Within each community these services are a necessity for those that can't drive or don't have access to a vehicle.*
 - *Payson Senior Center has a very active Transit Advisory Committee and extensive support from businesses and the Payson community.*
 - *Doing away with existing public transportation services would be devastating to communities.*
 - *Population in the county is older than other places; however, as we get more students, they are looking for increased public transportation options.*
 - *There should be a marketing push to capture younger riders that might not know that there are public transportation services available.*
 - *Public transportation provides a critical service for seniors that are unable to drive to access medical appointments.*



- *Copper Mountain Transit recently went through a rebranding and it has really revitalized the system by bringing awareness to the transit system. Prior to rebranding the system was often confused as a service only for the hospital instead of a public transportation service.*
 - *Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, On The Go Express and the Kearny Senior Center would provide regional transit services from Kearny and Winkelman to the Tucson metropolitan area.*
- All those interviewed commented that expanded regional transit service may be warranted but recognized the financial and operational challenges with creating regional transit connections. Many stakeholders commented that expanded transit services would require additional analysis and planning to determine ridership and potential routing solutions.
 - *In Navajo County, the county partnered with the community college to provide an AM and PM bus route between Pinetop to Holbrook. Public-private partnerships like this should be considered for long-distance regional trips.*
 - *The installation of broadband service will spur significant economic development and, in turn, may increase the demand for public transportation in communities.*
 - *Potential long-term connections may be needed to Tonto Basin, Wheatfields, Roosevelt, Winkelman, Hayden, Pine, and Strawberry.*
 - *The county should really be considered two distinctive areas, due to the physical differences and long-distances. Regional transportation services would be incredibly difficult due to the long distances.*
- Elected officials and agency staff were interested in learning more about potential transit governance structures. The majority of those interviewed commented that if there was an overarching governance structure, the structure would need to be fiscally beneficial for all agencies and that the specific local needs of each community would need to be accounted for to ensure equity of monies, resources, and above all services.
 - *Duplicate services in rural communities often stretches resources thin. The study team should evaluate how to maximize limited resource and eliminate duplicate services to lower costs.*
 - *I believe that a regional governance structure would work very well in the County to share information, for central maintenance, and to serve as a central reporting system. I do not think that it should focus on implementing regional service, but rather serve as a support system for local agencies.*
 - *If there were one governing body, it would need to be an agency that are good stewards of resources and has technical experience in coordinating services, staff, and transit operations.*
 - *I see a benefit of having one pool of employees, but I don't want to lose any of the funding available giving the size of the system. If there is a way of merging funds and coordinating services, that would be beneficial.*



- *As long as there is a stakeholder from each community to address each community's unique needs, I think a regional governance structure would work.*
- Some stakeholders interviewed noted apprehension towards developing a regional governance structure, noting the complex nature of the different agency types and large physical distances between communities.
 - *A regional governance structure would need to be controlled by a neutral body. If Payson led the governance it would be too Payson-centric, for example.*
 - *In my opinion, a regional governance structure would not work. I think we all have our own individual community needs and would love local control over our system.*
 - *It would be very difficult to develop a structure that truly meets the local needs and combines transit services from multiple cities and tribal governments.*
- Several of the interviewed stakeholders commented that if there was a regional transit provider, they would consider financially supporting the system if it were cost-effective and ridership warranted service.
 - *If there was regional transit provider and our community had enough ridership to support local service, then we would determine if there was a financial benefit to providing monies.*
 - *I don't think it would be a hard sell to the council to participate financially in a joint partnership, if the ridership is there. If another agency were to take it up, stakeholders would still be willing to provide the same level of funding, as long as the service levels and the quality of service are the same or better, and we are able to leverage the same/more amount of federal funding.*
 - *For another agency to take over a transit service, there would need to have a continued, annual funding source. Our community currently has difficulty maintaining our roadway network due to limited funds. We could help support the system; however, through limited staff support, technology assistance, office space, etc.*
 - *Our town has limited revenues, but we would be interested in being partners and a voice for the region.*
 - *Perhaps a transportation district could be developed to help create a larger funding pool.*
 - *Every year we approve the amount of budget for the system. If the local ridership demand is there, I would consider increasing financial support of the system.*
 - *I have concerns that if one agency were to take over another agency, funding resources would be limited.*
- Many stakeholders recognized the communities have made significant investments in public transportation. Stakeholders also frequently commented that current transit agency staff bring specialty, unmatched expertise in transit planning and operations and have



each developed thriving public transportation services. Several individuals mentioned that transit management is complicated, and it can be difficult to find someone with the skills, local understanding, and experience to operate a system.

- Elected officials were interested in hearing more about next steps in the project. Several stakeholders said they needed more information to help them evaluate potential governance structures.
 - *The most important aspect of this project should be that there is no lapse in service if systems were to merge or a regional governance structure is developed.*
 - *We are open to everything – we just need to find the right opportunity.*
 - *There will need to be a lot of discussions of funding, structure, and coordination needs and opportunities.*
 - *In the short-term, discussions should be had to at least develop one-central group to share best practices and pool resources.*



3.0 INTERVIEWS WITH TRANSIT AGENCY STAFF

The study team conducted four interviews with transit managers and individuals with transportation planning responsibilities or directly involved with the management or operation of transit services. Questions focused on existing transit services, needs for new or expanded services and ideas on how transit might be organized and structured in Gila County. An overview of key questions included:

- Understanding existing transit services, development over time and key markets
- Existing and future transit service needs, including local and regional needs
- Ideas and thoughts about how transit services could be organized and governed in Gila County

KEY FINDINGS

The following section summarizes comments collected from the interviews. Text in italics represents direct quotes or summarized comments.

- All agencies interviewed commented about the need for expanded local service and also saw a need for increased regional activity. Many agencies discussed long-distance regional needs to the Phoenix and/or Tucson metropolitan area for medical appointments and shopping.
 - *The need for regional access has been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, because of limited shopping opportunities.*
 - *There is currently a high demand for services from Payson to Globe for jury duty and to go to government buildings; however, there is a new government building being built in Payson that may reduce this demand.*
 - *As broadband services are installed, significant business and population growth may occur that will require increased public transportation services.*
 - *COVID-19 has increased the desire for Phoenix residents to move and visit our region. I see development increasing as more and more people permanently work from home and desire moving to the region.*
- Transit agency staff were interested in learning more about the pros and cons of different governance structures. Several individuals commented that pooling resources and having administrative support would be beneficial; however, several of those interviewed commented that there would probably still need to be local control over system operations (i.e., routing, scheduling, etc.).
 - *I would not like to lose control over transit services as I know the needs of individuals, understand political issues, and understand the ins-and-outs of the service.*



- *I like a hybrid model that allows me to still have control over local services, but with a regional partner that oversees the regional transit administrative components.*
- *A centralized dispatch center where we can coordinate calls among the agencies and for non-emergency transportation services would be beneficial.*
- *Payson Senior Center understands that the planning process and development of a governance structure and final implementation may take some time. We are committed to providing this essential service to the community until there is a proper agency to transition service to.*
- *I would be open to a regional transit service, if it meant that I would still be able to provide feedback on local needs or still run the system with the administrative support of the regional entity.*



APPENDIX A. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW GUIDE



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Understanding stakeholder perspectives about any future transit governance structure is a critical part of the Transit Governance Study. Each _interview will follow a similar format that includes:

- Introduction of interviewers and a brief overview of the study and its objectives. This study is intended to determine more effective and efficient management/coordination and will not look at the detailed operation of existing or future transit routes.
- Interviewers will note the team's interest in the interviewees' perspective on ideas and issues related to potential transit service organization and governance in Gila County.
- Interviewers will also note that that discussions are confidential. Findings will not be attribute to a single individual but rather will be collectively summarized for all stakeholders.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions focus on existing transit services, needs for new or expanded services and ideas on how transit might be organized and structured in Gila County

- 1) Does your community have transit services? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please discuss the following questions:

- a. How has the service developed?
- b. Do you think transit is essential to your community? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- c. Who are your primary transit users?
- d. How is transit currently funded? If you are familiar with transit funding, are you able to answer the following?
 - i. If local funding is available, what are the sources of local funding?
 - ii. What is the fare recovery ratio?
 - iii. Do you utilize contract revenue?
 - iv. Do you use in-kind match to maximize federal funds?
- e. How is transit currently governed?
 - i. How is fare policy set or changed?
 - ii. How is service level determined or changed?
 - iii. Is there any restriction of service area?
- f. What service expansion or enhancement plan do you have?
- g. How do you coordinate service with other transit providers in the area?



If no, please discuss the following questions:

- a. Do you see the need for transit services in your community?
 - b. Do you have any plans to develop transit services?
 - c. What challenges do you have to implement transit services?
 - d. If you could develop a transit system, what would it include?
 - e. How should the future transit service be funded? Please identify potential sources of funding.
- 2) In your opinion, is there a greater need for local transit services? Is there a greater need for regional transit services? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 3) Over time, do you expect increased demand for transit services for your community, for neighboring communities, and within Gila County? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 4) This study is evaluating different models and ideas for better organizing and governing transit services in Gila County, such as a coordinating agency that would perform certain administrative or planning functions, an umbrella agency that would coordinate and pass through funding, or even a consolidated operating agency. If there is a change, the new functions could be housed in the County, in CAG, or a new independent transit entity. Do you have any ideas on how transit services could be better structured or organized?
- 5) If there was a regional service, would you be supportive of being a financial partner in a regional service?
- 6) What transit agencies in Arizona or across the nation do you think are good models for Gila County to strive towards?
- 7) What is your measure of a successful transit program?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to share with the team?