

**Citizens Advisory Committee for the  
Board of the Mass Transit Department, City of El Paso**



**FISCAL YEARS  
2009 - 2010  
ANNUAL REPORT**



Presented to the Board of the Mass Transit Department, City of El Paso  
December 14, 2010

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*Dedicated to Mr. Walt Phillips for his service on  
the Citizens Advisory Committee,  
2008 – 2010*

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## **I. Introduction and Background**

Created in 1988 by the City of El Paso Mass Transit Department Board ("Board"), the Citizens Advisory Committee ("Committee") reflects the hallmark of public involvement in mass transit planning and operations mandated by the federal transportation legislation, The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). The Committee, by enabling resolution, is authorized to prepare and submit a report to the Board at the end of each fiscal year of the Board reviewing the operations of the Mass Transit Department. Such report may include recommendations to the Board of the Mass Transit Department regarding the operations of the Mass Transit Department that the Committee considers necessary and appropriate. This report covers the Committee work during fiscal years 2009 and 2010. On November 16, 2010 the Committee approved this report for submittal to the Board.

### ***A. Summary of Committee Enabling Resolutions***

Between 1988 and 2009 several resolutions were passed by the Board of the Mass Transit Department of the City of El Paso creating, re-establishing and amending the powers and duties of the Citizens Advisory Committee which governed the work of the Committee during the 2009 and 2010 fiscal years:

- **April 26, 1988**  
This resolution was superseded by Board Resolution dated December 1, 2009.
- **March 10, 1992**  
This resolution was superseded by Board Resolution dated December 1, 2009.
- **August 10, 1993**  
This resolution was superseded by Board Resolution dated December 1, 2009.
- **May 25, 2004**  
This resolution was superseded by Board Resolution dated December 1, 2009.
- **August 22, 2006**  
This resolution was superseded by Board Resolution dated December 1, 2009.
- **February 10, 2009**  
This resolution was superseded by Board Resolution dated December 1, 2009.

- **December 1, 2009**

This enabling resolution re-establishes the Committee for the Board of the Mass Transit Department and outlines its powers and duties to act as an advisory body to the Board, and supersedes all previous resolutions relating to the Committee by consolidating previous resolutions into one resolution.

The Committee is composed of nine regular members and three alternate members who are residents of the City of El Paso. Each member of the Board has one appointment on the Committee. The alternate committee members are nominated by the Committee to the Board and appointed by the Board as at-large members and are not limited to any particular area of the City of El Paso. Regular committee members and alternate members serve terms of two years; both may be reappointed and there is no limit to the number of terms a regular or alternate member may serve. When the term of office of any regular or alternate member expires, the member shall continue to serve until his/her successor is appointed or qualified, or until thirty days have passed following the expiration of the term, whichever event occurs first. Any holding over past the thirty-day period is prohibited, and after that time a vacancy on the Committee shall exist and the former member shall have no power to vote or participate in Committee proceedings as a member.

The Committee shall select from among its members a chair and a vice-chair and shall adopt, subject to approval by the Board, such rules and regulations for the conduct of its proceedings as may be deemed proper and not inconsistent with the Charter, this resolution, or any ordinances of the City or the laws of the State. Alternate members may not be elected to the positions of either chair or vice-chair. The chair and vice-chair shall be elected for one-year terms and may not succeed themselves. The chair shall preside over all meetings of the Committee. The vice-chair shall preside in the absence of the chair. In the absence of the chair and vice-chair the Committee shall, providing a quorum is present, elect a chairman pro-tem. A quorum shall consist of five members. The Committee shall meet on a regular basis at least once per month and at such times at the call of the chair as may be necessary. The Committee shall conduct its meetings in accordance with the Texas Open Meeting Act.

In the event the secretary of the Committee anticipates the absence of a regular member for any particular Committee meeting, the secretary shall notify alternate members, as necessary and on a rotating basis, and ask said alternates to attend the meeting in the place of the regular members. An alternate member sitting in the place of the absent regular or alternate member shall be granted all the privileges and benefits of regular Committee members, including but not limited to full voting privileges.

The Committee shall act as an advisory body to the Board and may advise the Board as to any matter over which the Board has authority. The Committee may recommend such general studies of existing Sun Metro facilities and operations as may be useful in keeping the mass transit system efficient and adequate to the needs of the city. It shall report the results of such studies to the Board together with any recommendations to the Board in respect to expansion, improvements and maintenance of Sun Metro facilities. The Committee shall submit a report to the Board at the end of each fiscal year of the Board reviewing the operations of the Mass Transit Department and shall make such recommendations to the Board regarding the operations of the Mass Transit Department as the Committee considers necessary and appropriate.

The Director of Sun Metro shall act as secretary to the Committee, without additional compensation, shall keep a record of all transactions of the Committee and shall provide the Committee with all information necessary for the proper performance of its responsibilities.

## ***B. 2009 - 2010 CAC Members and Alternates***

During fiscal years 2009 and 2010, the Committee was composed of nine members and three at-large alternates, all residents of the City of El Paso, with each city district having an appointment. Members and at-large alternates, all volunteers serving at the pleasure of the Board, included representation from senior, low-income and disabled residents of El Paso. Several members regularly used Sun Metro to meet some or all aspects of their daily transit needs. Others worked as advocates or agents for individuals who were dependent upon public transit for basic living

needs, including employment, education, medical services, shopping and recreation. The following individuals provided service to the Citizens Advisory Committee during Fiscal Year 2009 and 2010:

<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Membership Change</u>
Mayor John Cook	<i>Walt Phillips</i>	Deceased
District 1 Representative Ann Morgan Lilly	<i>Alexander Frank Catucci</i> <i>Suzanne Fabian*</i>	Resigned Removed
District 2 Representative Susie M. Byrd	<i>Ernst Erbe</i> <i>Daniel Estrada*</i>	Resigned Removed
District 3 Representative Emma Acosta	<i>Robin A. Roberts</i>	
District 4 Representative Carl L. Robinson	<i>Jane Ratcliff, 2010 Chair</i>	
District 5 Representative Rachel Quintana	<i>Suzanne Fabian</i> <i>Troy Hicks*</i>	Removed
District 6 Representative Eddie Holguin	<i>Ernesto Dominguez</i>	
District 7 Representative Steve Ortega	<i>Richard L. Sheldon, 2009 Chair</i> <i>Amy Lechuga*</i>	Term expired
District 8 Representative Beto O'Rourke	<i>Soledad Galvan</i> <i>Richard L. Sheldon</i>	Resigned Removed
Alternate at-Large	<i>Efrain Lozano</i> <i>Raul Zamarripa*</i>	Term expired Resigned
Alternate at-Large	<i>Suzanne Fabian</i>	Appointed member
Alternate at-Large	<i>Lawrence Harley</i>	

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\* Member filled a vacancy during report period

### **C. Meeting Dates Fiscal Years 2009 - 2010**

The Citizens Advisory Committee met on the following dates during Fiscal Year 2009:

September 12	No December meeting	March 17	June 23
October 21	January 20	April 21	July 21
November 18	February 17	May 19	August 18

The Citizens Advisory Committee met on the following dates during Fiscal Year 2010:

No September meeting	December 15	March 16	June 15
October 20	January 19	April 20	July 20
November 17	February 16	May 18	August 17

Committee meetings were held at the Sun Metro Conference Room, 700-A San Francisco Street and were scheduled at 2 p.m. Agendas and meeting minutes were posted on the City of El Paso website. All meetings provided for public comment.

## II. Highlights of the Committee Work, Fiscal Years 2009 - 2010

During Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, the Committee focused its work on Sun Metro operational and planning matters that would improve rider satisfaction and increase public transit ridership. During this period Sun Metro underwent a number of system changes aimed at improving transit service while also drafting a comprehensive transportation plan to meet the growing demands for public transit in the region. The Committee was an active partner in these efforts, providing oversight of short-term system changes and input into the long-term transportation planning. As the enabling resolutions dictate, the Committee conducted its business on behalf of the Board, periodically taking action and making recommendations to the Board directed at enhancing the public transit resources for the City of El Paso.

### A. Logistics

The Committee elected Richard Sheldon as the 2009 chair and Suzanne Fabian as the 2009 vice chair (partial term); Jane Ratcliff was elected as vice chair for the balance of Fiscal Year 2009. For Fiscal Year 2010, the Committee elected Jane Ratcliff as chair and Amy Lechuga as vice chair. In Fiscal Year 2010, the Committee developed, approved and submitted to the Board a set of bylaws for use in conducting its meetings. In February, 2009 a member orientation was provided for new and incumbent members and alternates.

### B. Sun Metro Performance

During Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, Sun Metro performance made significant strides in ridership, bus operations and paratransit services. The Mass Transit Department corrected many of the previous deficiencies cited in the management studies of the past, and has been forward-thinking in its planning for the growth of the region and the anticipated increase in demand for public transit. It effectively focused on building a system that is centered on meeting the needs of riders to make public transit an affordable and viable transportation option. The Department used a number of performance measures to manage service improvements. Included below are examples of measures of system performance over the past two years.

#### Performance Reports from Sun Metro for FY 2009 and FY 2010

Performance Measure	Fixed Route	Paratransit (LIFT)
Total Ridership FY 2009	12,867,000	208,266
Total Ridership FY 2010	14,175,000	206,197
Farebox Recovery FY 2009	17.18%	NA
Farebox Recovery FY 2010	20.11%	NA
Cost per Trip FY 2009	\$2.90	\$35.38
Cost per Trip FY 2010	\$2.74	\$37.31
Collisions per 100,000 miles FY 2009	1.7	2.0
Collisions per 100,000 miles FY 2010	1.9	1.0
On Time Service FY 2009	96.5%	90.1%
On Time Service FY 2010	95.2%	91.1%
Missed Trips FY 2009	.03%	0
Missed Trips FY 2010	.02%	0
Customer Complaints FY 2009	15 (per 100,000 passengers)	234
Customer Complaints FY 2010	14 (per 100,000 passengers)	251

*Data Source: Sun Metro, 2010; Program Years Run September through August*

According to these Performance Reports, over the past two years Fixed Route usage increased while LIFT ridership showed a slight decrease. Within the Fixed Route, Farebox Recovery increased and Cost per Trip decreased; Cost

per Trip increased for LIFT services. Collisions per 100,000 miles increased slightly for Fixed Route, while collisions in LIFT services experienced a 100% decrease. On Time Service for Fixed Route decreased but increased slightly for LIFT Services. Missed trips for Fixed Route decreased, whereas the LIFT enjoyed a two-year record for no missed trips. Customer Complaints decreased slightly for the Fixed Route but showed a small increase for LIFT services. Overall, while many improvements in Sun Metro have been made over the last two years, there are several service performance areas that should be addressed, particularly in the provision of services to individuals with disabilities, as seen in the performance data.

### **Operational and Service Enhancements and Recognition**

First Transit, management contractor for Sun Metro, assigned Jay Banasiak as the new director of the Sun Metro management team. As a part of the Sun Metro transit terminal network expansion, the Bert Williams Downtown Transfer Center and the Al Jefferson Westside Transfer Center were completed and opened; and construction began on the Glory Road Transfer Center and the Nestor A. Valencia Mission Valley Transfer Center. Planning and/or design continued on other transfer centers specified in the terminal expansion plan.

Two Smart 101 (limited express service) routes were initiated; both start at Bert Williams Downtown Transfer Center, one travels to the University of Texas at El Paso campus and the other to the intersection of Alameda and Zaragoza. The plan for the Bus Rapid Transit (or BRT, which is a modified light rail service on wheels) for both Mesa and Alameda corridors was approved by the Mass Transit Department Board. The Sun Metro Strategic Plan was developed. The Google Map trip planning (web-based) was launched and free wi-fi services were installed at transfer centers. Field-testing of the Interactive Voice Response (24-hour telephone service for riders with disabilities) reservation system was launched using a small group of LIFT riders, while the Customer Service telephone system was upgraded and enhanced to reduce long holds and dropped calls. Twelve new vans were ordered for the employment transit services ("Job Express") for low-income and disadvantaged jobseekers, and 8 new buses were ordered for fixed route service. Locations for the sale of Sun Metro passes were expanded throughout El Paso. Sun Metro applied for and was selected by Easter Seals Project ACTION as a site to facilitate a forum and year-long process to produce a plan designed to increase accessibility to Sun Metro. The fleet was enhanced with the installation of bus stop audible announcing and digital systems.

In the area of public involvement, numerous public hearings were held throughout the service area, covering such matters as service and route changes, proposed fare increases, new construction, and amenities at transfer centers. The format at these forums allowed for reaction to proposals as well as opportunities for general transit questions, which were answered at the meeting, or if more research is necessary, Sun Metro committed to contact the questioner within 36 hours of the hearing. Hearings primarily took place after work hours or on weekends. Attendance averaged about 8-10 at most meetings, while some had audiences of 30 participants. To increase public input, Sun Metro additionally set up booths at transfer points, including the effort to gather more public reaction to the proposed fare increase, during which some 100 people a day were briefed and interviewed at these locations. Other venues for providing information to the public and solicitation of reactions were presentations at meetings of civic groups and at senior centers. Overall, public input was positive, with many people remarking on service improvements since 2006. Over these past two years Sun Metro demonstrated a major commitment to the use of public involvement in the planning of improvements and other changes to the system.

Sun Metro received recognition for its exemplary safety record: in 2009, First Transit presented a gold award for the lowest collision rate per 100,000 miles; in 2010, Sun Metro received the silver award in the same category. Additionally, the South West Transit Association cited the Department for its marketing efforts: 2010 Third Place Spotlight Award (for Sun Metro passes); 2009 Third Place Award (for SMART 101); and 2010 Second and Third Place Awards in Print Media (for the employee newsletter and a collection of newspaper ads).

## **C. Recommendations to the Board during 2009 and 2010**

The Committee made recommendations to the Board during the report period. These include proposed names to recognize community leaders in the naming of the Downtown Transfer Center (Bert Williams), the Westside Transfer Center (Al Jefferson), and the Mission Valley Transfer Center (Nestor A. Valencia); reinstatement of the policy not to charge paratransit-eligible riders when using the fixed route; the implementation by the Metropolitan Planning Organization of quarterly reporting on the performance of contractors for the Job Access and Reverse Commute and

New Freedom services in the El Paso/Sunland Park area; the Mayor of El Paso to make an appointment to the West Texas/El Paso Coordinated Regional Transportation Planning Stakeholder Committee; a process and procedures for receiving nominations for naming new transit terminals for submittal to the Board for approval; requesting that Sun Metro work with all federal agencies in the area to promote and facilitate the use of the Federal Transit Benefit Program, particularly Fort Bliss; and the elimination of a reduced fare for military personnel due to the availability of the subsidy for all federal employees (including military personnel) when using public transit.

### ***D. Presentations and Updates***

The Committee received presentations and made suggestions on the Sun Metro 2010 budget; City of El Paso Strategic Transportation Plan; operational reports for the City of El Paso allocation of funds for employment transit services (Job Access and Reverse Commute) and special transit services for disabled riders (New Freedom) programs of the federal transportation legislation; the planning and building of the transit terminal network expansion; Sun Metro Passenger Assistance, Service and Safety (PASS) training for drivers to improve service to disabled passengers; new vehicle purchases and delivery status; upgrade of the Customer Service telephone system; proposed new Sun Metro logo; proposed public art for the Downtown Transfer Center; the new express shuttle service between Las Cruces, New Mexico and El Paso (including stops at selected Sun Metro terminals); bus shelter standards; plans to update bus stops and shelters; more mobility or travel training for disabled riders seeking to use public transit; the bike-share program in Washington, D. C.; a new Sun Metro route and schedule map; digital signs and audible bus stop announcement functions on buses and in terminals; plans for Bus Rapid Transit on Alameda and Mesa corridors; consideration of streetcar revival; Federal Employees Transit Benefit program; and expansion of transit pass sales locations and methods. The Committee also received numerous public comments on system problems, recommendations for improvements, fare increases and proposed route changes over these last two years.

## **III. Recommendations for the Future**

### ***Areas for Sun Metro Improvement***

Over the course of the last two years, the Committee made several recommendations to the Board aimed at improving Mass Transit Department operations and preventing some of the operational problems of the past. These are highlighted below for consideration by the Board of the Mass Transit Department in the immediate future. The recommendations center on the promotion of Sun Metro ridership among federal employees, improving services to increase ridership among disabled persons, the establishment of policies to provide for transfers between Sun Metro and other area public transit providers, expansion of hours of operations, and establishment of some additional express service routes and service for special events. As in the past, the Committee encourages the continued use of public involvement in the planning of these recommended improvements.

#### **1. Continue working with federal agencies in the area to promote the Federal Employees Transit Benefit Program**

The Committee urges the Board to direct the Mass Transit Department to work with all local federal agencies (including all branches of the military) in the area to promote the use of the federal transportation subsidy program that provides compensation in the current amount of up to \$230 a month for using public transportation to travel to and from work. The program, set in place by Executive Order in 2000, is designed to improve air quality, reduce traffic congestion, and conserve energy by encouraging employees to commute by means other than single occupancy motor vehicles. All federal employees (including military personnel) are eligible for this non-taxable subsidy provided they comply with their respective agency guidelines for its implementation. Use of the program could increase Sun Metro ridership among federal employees. Sun Metro should work with every federal agency in the area to determine the program guidelines for implementation and promotion of the program among employees, and coordinate strategies to facilitate the marketing of the program and use of Sun Metro services to commute to and from work.

## **2. Continue pursuing system modifications to meet ADA requirements and improve accessibility to public transit and rider satisfaction for individuals with disabilities**

The Committee urges the Board to direct the Mass Transit Department to continue to work closely with the City of El Paso Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, other departments, the City Accessibility Advisory Committee and advocacy groups to address the public transit deficiencies cited in the City of El Paso ADA Transition Plan. Sun Metro should continue to coordinate the Easter Seals Project ACTION Accessible Transportation Coalition through 2011, as specified in the award-winning grant, and should make every effort to coordinate planning and implement strategies in accordance with the accessibility plan to be developed over the next year by local members of the El Paso Easter Seals Accessible Transportation Coalition. Such cooperation with that plan should include development of measures to ensure that public transit is more accessible to all persons with disabilities and that customer complaints for the LIFT services are addressed to improve rider satisfaction.

## **3. Facilitate transfers across the various public transit systems in the area**

The Committee urges the Board to direct the Mass Transit Department to work with other public transit systems to establish agreements and procedures allowing for transfers by riders using Sun Metro in conjunction with these other services. Thanks to recent successful coordinated regional transportation planning, more providers are transporting riders into El Paso from outside the city limits, while enabling El Pasoans to travel outside the city limits using public transit, thus facilitating the concept of a regional transportation system. Policies aimed at promoting and facilitating the use of these systems in conjunction with Sun Metro will support the City of El Paso's goal to make our region less automobile-dependent. Coordinated planning by Sun Metro with these other systems should produce transfer policies that address ease-of-use and cost-reasonableness for riders. At a minimum, this coordination should provide for transfers by riders using Sun Metro, County of El Paso County Rural Transit and/or the Gold Bus services (between El Paso and Las Cruces, New Mexico).

## **4. Consider and test expansion of hours on some routes**

The Committee urges the Board to direct the Mass Transit Department to explore the expansion of hours of services on those routes with high occupancy and demand for late night and/or early morning service and that serve large employment centers within the city limits. Using public involvement techniques and ridership data, Sun Metro should determine if there are needs to change routes and expand hours of operation for those that are heavily traveled during weekends and evening hours. Further, to improve system efficiency, Sun Metro should review the routes for frequency of travel and ridership to determine possible needs for reduction, consolidation or elimination of service routes.

## **5. Consider and test more express routes throughout the system**

The Committee urges the Board to direct the Mass Transit Department to explore the possibility of implementing some level of express services along those routes that could benefit from more direct service and/or frequent service. Such services may be partial (e.g., during peak travel and passenger load times) and only on those routes where the demand for express service might exist, such as those to area businesses/worksites with large numbers of employees. These express routes may not warrant the complexity or scale of a BRT route but might include elimination of certain stops that are not heavily frequented during certain times and/or days of the week. As with the BRT, routes could initially be tested and, then using public hearings, reaction could be gathered to determine their feasibility for changes to the current schedule. Planning of such changes should include ample lead time and public awareness to reduce rider inconvenience. Express and other special service similar to current Sun Metro service for large sports events should also be planned when El Paso hosts conferences, conventions and other large meetings drawing El Pasoans, tourists and guests to key destinations throughout our community.