



Connecting the Dots

October - December, 2024



Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments

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A Note from the Director



This quarter, I was able to travel to New Orleans for the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for the Annual Training Conference with our Chairman Louie Bonaguidi and Board Emeritus Jeffrey Kiely to partake in the joint assembly of learning, networking, and southern hospitality. We also received an Impact Award and presented the Coal Avenue Commons project as a model of creative placemaking. I wanted to highlight some of the benefits we receive with our strategic partnership and investment in this national association – it is our equivalent of the National Association of Counties and National League of Cities.

NADO Benefits and Outcomes:

- Hosting Annual Training Conference
- Producing Industry Insights and a Compensation and Benefits Report
- Development of a new Strategic Action Plan for 2025-2030
- Expanding the Communities of Practice Network and Webinars on Best Practices
- Reauthorization of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) including the following improvements:

- **Increased Authorized Funding Levels:** Boosts funding for core EDA programs, including Public Works, Partnership Planning, Training, Research, Technical Assistance, Economic Adjustment Assistance, and Assistance to Coal Communities. In total, this bill will authorize more than \$3 billion in funding for EDA over the 5-year period.
- **Revise Cost-Sharing Requirements:** Increase the baseline percentage for EDA's federal share from 50% to 60% while reducing the local matching requirement. Small communities with fewer than 10,000 residents could see the federal share increase up to 100% of the total project cost.
- **Expand Eligibility to Economic Development Organizations:** Allow EDOs to access funding for capacity-building efforts, enabling them to enhance local economic development strategies and support community-driven initiatives.
- **Establish New EDA Offices:** Create an Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience and a new Office of Tribal Economic Development within EDA.
- **Broaden EDA Investment Scope:** Enhance EDA's ability to invest in broadband, disaster recovery, workforce training, and pre-development projects.
- **Strengthen Collaboration:** Improve EDA's capacity to work within federal economic development providers to deliver technical assistance and comprehensive economic development strategies.
- **Modernize Grant Authorities:** Empower EDA to award grants to public-private partnerships or consortia for high-speed broadband initiatives.
- **Reauthorize Regional Commissions:** Reauthorize existing Regional Commissions and establish new ones.

Water Planning Office

NMED Regionalization Contract Update

Under the contract agreement with the New Mexico Environment Department, RWPO continues to provide support and technical assistance for the Northwest New Mexico Utility Authority member systems (Gamerco Water and Sanitation District, Yahtahey Water and Sanitation District, and White Cliffs Mutual Domestic Water Users Association). The ultimate goal is to provide the necessary support to get the NWNMUA off the ground to be fully functional and operational. The NWNMUA held two board meetings in October and December.

Small Systems Support

The RWPO and standing partners with the NM Environment Department (NMED), the Rural Communities Assistance Corporation (RCAC) and the Southwest Environmental Finance Center (SWEFC) continue with regional water programming activities and developing planning and funding strategies.

Funding Support

The RWPO and standing partners continue to provide support and assistance with developing funding strategies for critical local infrastructure projects. The following have secured funding for projects that McKinley County will provide additional support.

- **Ramah Water and Sanitation District:** The district secured WTB funding for project design for water infrastructure replacements.
- **Catalpa Water Association:** The association secured WTB funding for project design for a new water supply project.
- **White Cliffs Mutual Domestic Water Users Association:** The association secured WTB and Capital Outlay funding for three separate projects: Water Storage construction, Metering Station construction, and planning and design for Natural Gas Line.

Water Commons

The RWPO held two Regional Water Commons meetings in November and December. Topics of discussions were on Infrastructure Capital Improvements Plan (ICIP), projecteering, funding programs, training opportunities and Capital Outlay. These meetings are held bi-monthly via Microsoft Teams. To be included in these meetings, contact Angelina Grey at agrey@nwnmcog.org.

American Relief Act

Passed by the US Senate just after midnight on Dec. 22, the newly adopted American Relief Act included a major provision for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project (NGWSP). Increasing the project's timeline by one year, the act also increased the funding from \$870 million to \$1.6 billion.



Water Trust Board

Water Trust Board

RWPO assisted the City of Gallup and McKinley County with the completion and submission of the 2025 Water Trust Board Project Applications. At the October 29th WTB board meeting, both entities were selected for the “Recommended for Legislative Authorization” list.

The City of Gallup is applying to fund a Water Storage project to construct Reach 27.12 that includes a 2-million-gallon storage tank, connecting lines and 2 pressure-reducing-valve stations.

McKinley County is applying to fund a Flood Prevention project to replace an aging drainage crossing with a culvert infrastructure.

Water Trust Board Applications: Bloomfield & Aztec

In 2024, the COG assisted the City of Aztec and the City of Bloomfield, with applications to the Water Trust Board for funding to support water and drainage infrastructure. Those applications have now been recommended for Legislative Authorization. As part of the next step in the WTB application cycle, the COG will be assisting both members prepare and submit their WTB’s 2025 Readiness Applications during the first quarter of 2025.

Both projects will benefit populations within the cities as well as the surrounding communities by directly addressing human health and safety through enhancements and upgrades to potable water related infrastructure. Additionally, the projects support future economic growth of the region by enhancing water security to promote sustainable economic development opportunities.



McKinley County: New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's Trails+ Grant Submission

During the fourth quarter of 2024 the COG assisted McKinley County with an application for a planning grant to the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's Trails+ Grant program. McKinley County was recently awarded funding for the project and will begin implementation in early 2025. The planning and design project will investigate opportunities to enable future open space preservation and recreational development in McKinley County to support regional economic development and natural resource conservation goals.



Northwest New Mexico Regional Solid Waste Authority: EPA - Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) Grant Submission

During the fourth quarter of 2024 the COG assisted the Northwest New Mexico Regional Solid Waste Authority (SWA) with an application to the Environmental Protection Agency's Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) grant program. The proposed project will reduce solid waste and enhance recycling infrastructure by enabling acquisition of critical solid waste management equipment by SWA to build a circular economy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create resilient and healthier communities in Northwest New Mexico. The EPA anticipates notification to successful applicants during the summer of 2025.



Economic Development Office

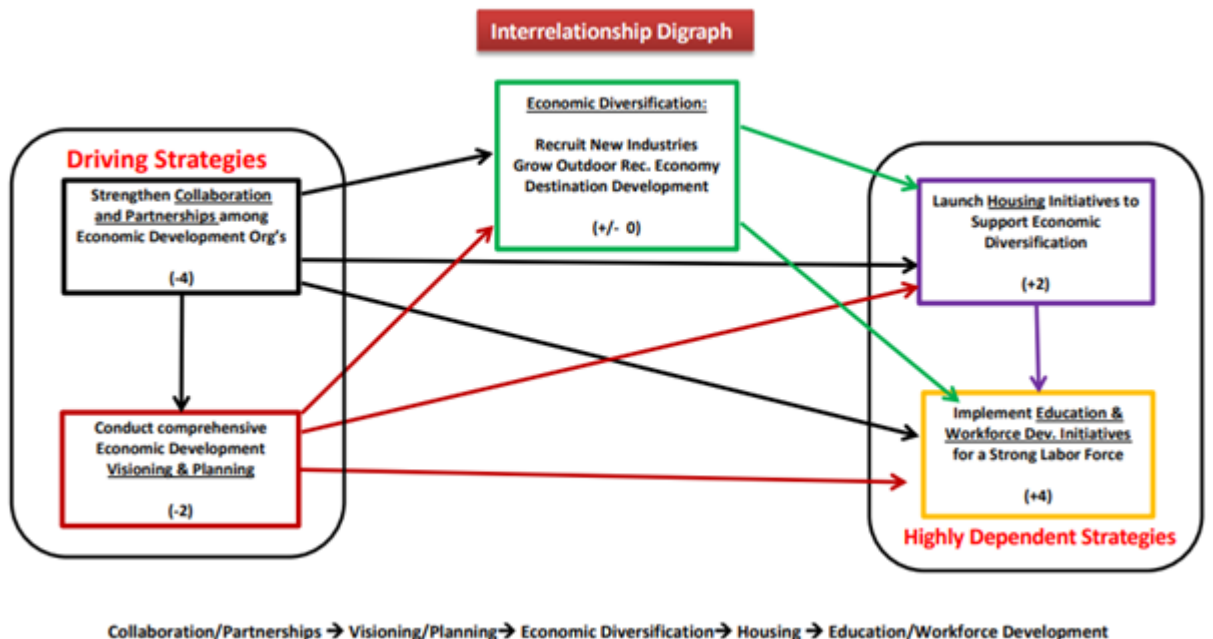
Economic Development Office Update

The Economic Planning & Development Office continues to focus on Strategic Planning as well as developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process. Next, the Office also is preparing for the second year of its Assistance to Coal Communities Program (#3). In the first year, the COG was able to support capacity at local economic development organizations with direct funding support of \$225,000. This year, we are targeting another round of about \$195,000 in direct support and a second opportunity for planning funds through our newly created “Plan and Partner for Prosperity” (P3) program. We have heard this need loud and clear from our partners that flexible planning dollars are needed to create a pipeline for site development, scaling, and readiness.

Strategic Planning

This quarter, our team was involved in several strategic planning initiatives to support organizations get clear and focus on strategic priorities for the short-term. This work included facilitation for the Northwest New Mexico Solid Waste Authority and McKinley County Electric Generating Facility Economic District.

Also, based on the Cibola Legislative Forum and at the direction of Senator George Munoz, the COG has worked to bring together a community leadership group to work on a community and economic development strategic plan to identify goals, priorities, and partnership models for moving forward and addressing key issues to support growth and development in the County. Below is a sample of an outcome from these workshops facilitated by Eduardo Martinez, with support from the New Mexico Economic Development Department and Deputy Cabinet Secretary Issac Romero.



Plan and Partner for Prosperity (P3) Program

In January 2025, the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments launched a new program and financial offering called the “Plan and Partner for Prosperity” (P3) program.

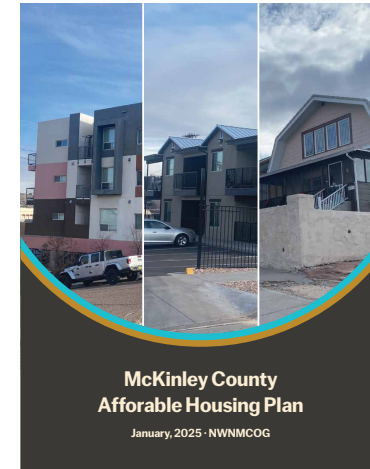
Vision of the P3 Program: Investments for planning grants to eligible entities that align with the diversification strategies of the region driven by our regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to help plan, prototype, test, seed, and scale initiatives and projects. For example, funding might support the development of a Growers’ Market in rural or tribal communities, provide a feasibility study for a catalytic tourism project like designating a National Recreation Area to support the outdoor recreation sector, or a target industry analysis for the budding hydrogen economy. We are encouraging proposals that support the development or expansion of the circular economy and create wealth that sticks by developing value chains based on the Wealthworks framework.

More information at: <https://www.nwnmcog.org/economic-development.html>



PLAN AND PARTNER FOR PROSPERITY (P3)

Moving from Boom-Bust to Robust



McKinley County Affordable Housing Plan

Beginning in October, 2024, the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments accepted a contract from McKinley County to develop an affordable housing plan, and with its anticipated adoption in February, 2025, all three counties in the region will have affordable housing plans.

Affordable housing plans are a critical piece of economic and community development, as they enables local governments to confront a significant roadblock to further economic development, namely the lack of affordable and quality housing options which frequently drives members of the workforce to seek employment in other regions. The adoption of such a plan allows for the establishment of local housing authorities, and for local governments to operate in exception to the state’s anti-donation clause, and thus use public resources to leverage necessary affordable housing development, such as through the use of grants or land donations.

With all three counties having adopted affordable housing plans, and an update to the CEDS on the horizon, the groundwork has been laid for a regional housing strategy, another brick in building our region’s economic vitality.

CEDS Update

The COG is currently working on its 2025 update of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that is the global, regional strategy for our three-county region in partnership with local economic development organizations (EDOs), our staff, and some consultants.

The first deliverable is to complete a review of the 7 goals and 21 strategies outlined in the plan to understand what get accomplished during this 5-year period of economic pivots, global pandemic, and energy transition. To accomplish this, the COG has set up a series of surveys to collect this information that will be rolled up into new CEDS 2025 framework, then over the next 12 months we will move that process into a full revision of the plan. These surveys are aimed at the EDO's and COG staff, but we could also use some knowledge Board members and managers input as well.

Surveys are up and open at: <https://www.nwnmco.org/economic-development.html>



NWNMCOG is updating the CEDS by capturing what happened with regards to each Goal and its Strategies. Help us with that by taking each of the following surveys.

- Survey #1: Entrepreneurial Promotion & Support
- Survey #2: Economic Infrastructure
- Survey #3: Workforce & Talent Supply
- Survey #4: Direct Job Creation
- Survey #5: Quality of Life & Place
- Survey #6: Participation in Prosperity
- Survey #7: Regional Integration & Leadership
- Survey #8: What's Missing?

Transportation Office

RTPO Update

While COG continues to search for and recruit candidates to fill the RTPO Program Manager vacancy, other COG staff have stepped in to ensure continued transportation planning and development services to all T/LPAs in the region. The following activities were conducted and completed within the 1st quarter of FFY2025.

Administrative Documents

During the December 11th JPTC meeting, the JPTC approved several annual administrative documents including the following:

- **Bylaws:** The bylaws are a set of written rules that establish the internal management of the RTPO and provides guidance to the Joint Policy & Technical Committee, the RTPO Program Manager and the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments.
- **Open Meetings Act Resolution:** Per state regulations, the NWRTPPO must approve an Open Meetings Act Resolution to provide the organization's acceptance to follow the Open Meetings Act [NMDA 10-15-4]. The Open Meetings Act requires that public business be conducted in full public view, that the actions of public bodies be taken openly, and that the deliberations of public bodies be open to the public.
- **Public Participation Plan:** The purpose of the PPP is to outline the State and Federal requirements for RTPOs. The plan is mandated to help organizations such as RTPOs foster continued cooperative and comprehensive (3-c) public participation.
- **Title VI Plan:** The Title VI Plan assures that no person shall on the grounds of race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity under any NWRTPPO program, activity, or service.

These approved documents will provide the framework for the RTPO and the JPTC to continue programming of activities and services for the calendar year.

Plan Development

The RTPO was able to successfully guide the Trail of the Ancients Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan to completion. The Corridor Management Plan is a written document that outlines the byway's goals and strategies to protect and enhance the intrinsic qualities. The plan provides an overview of the Trail of the Ancients Byway region, its people and cultures, landscapes, wildlife, infrastructure that facilitates the travel, work leisure, and learning that takes place along the byway. The plan serves as the guiding documents that supports the protection and develops the 6 intrinsic qualities that characterize the byway. The byway is a loop of transportation corridors in Northwest New Mexico that encompasses approximately 600 miles and passes through San Juan, McKinley, and Cibola counties. The Byway is part of the wider network of scenic byways throughout the four-corners region including two that share the TOTA name and branding in Colorado and Utah.

The COG and the RTPO will now work to stand up the TOTA Byway Association and begin implementation of the Corridor Management Plan strategies. For a copy of the plan please visit: <https://www.nwnmcog.org/trail-of-the-ancients-scenic-byway.html>



Funding Applications

An annual process conducted by the JPTC on behalf of NMDOT Transit and Rail Division, the RTPO held and conducted an evaluation of Federal Transit applications. The process included presentations from applicants who needed funding to enhance the mobility of seniors and individuals with disabilities (5310) and to continue and or expand rural public transit service (5311). Applicants for 5310 funding included Coyote Canyon Rehabilitation Center. Applicants for 5311 funding included Navajo Transit, Rockin 66 Express (Milan), A:Shiwi Transit (Zuni), Gallup Transit, and Shaa'srk'a Transit (Laguna).

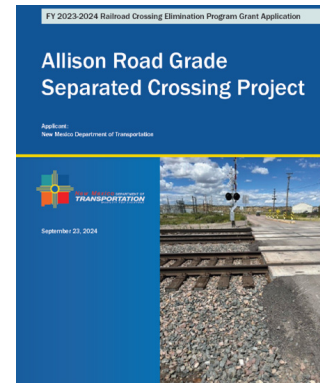
The JPTC was provided copies of the applications prior to the evaluation and presentations were provided to the JTPC. A total of 8 JPTC reviewed and evaluated applications and scores were tallied and sent to NMDOT Transit Division for review and use in the statewide application process.

Annual Report

The RTPO developed and submitted the Annual Performance and Expenditures Report (APER) to NMDOT and received approval. The APER serves as the RTPO's annual report and includes a year in review of the financials including budget and expenditures along with a narrative recap of the activities conducted and accomplishments during the year. The APER is posted on the COG website here: <https://www.nwnmcog.org/important-documents1.html>

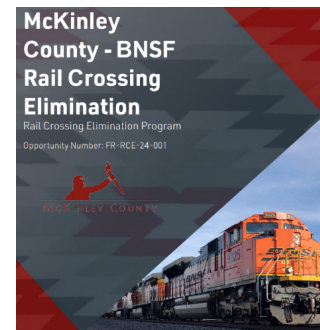
Funding Acquired

Last quarter, this office supported the submission of three grants: two Railroad Crossing Elimination grants, and the Reconnecting Communities Piolet Program. We are proud to inform our members that we have received all three, bringing nearly \$50 million of investment into the region.



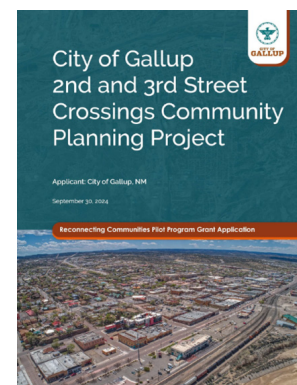
Program: Railroad Crossing Elimination

- Type: Construction
- Scope: To construct a grade separated crossing over the transcon line to complete the next phase of the Allison Corridor project.
- Federal Grant: \$44,890,094
- Match: \$5,000,000*
- BNSF (\$5,000,000)
- NM Road Fund (\$1,200,000)
- Partner: BNSF Railway



Program: Railroad Crossing Elimination

- Type: Planning
- Scope: To provide planning, feasibility, alternatives, and analysis of options to remove and/or improve ten (10) at-grade crossing In McKinley and Cibola counties.
- Federal Grant: \$3,312,000
- Match: \$828,000*
- Partner: BNSF Railway



Program: Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

- Type: Planning
- Scope: To provide planning, feasibility, alternatives, and analysis of options of a raised track or centralized underpass to eliminate the 2nd & 3rd Street Crossings in Downtown Gallup.
- Federal Grant: \$2,000,000
- Match: \$500,000*
- Partner: BNSF Railway

Legislative Update

Legislative Forums

During the 2nd Quarter, the COG initiated its annual Legislative Technical Assistance. To start the legislative season off, the COG coordinated two legislative forums: one for McKinley County and one for Cibola County. Both forums were well attended and both provided local governments, tribal entities, institutions, and other partner organizations with the opportunity to present individual legislative priorities to legislators. The intent of the forums is to obtain feedback prior to the start of the session to better position and develop the optimal strategy to succeed during the session.

The McKinley Area Legislative Forum was hosted by McKinley County and included presentations from McKinley County, City of Gallup, UNM – Gallup, Rehoboth McKinley Christian Hospital, McKinley County Electric Generating Facility Economic District, Gallup Chamber of Commerce, and GallupARTS.

The Cibola Area Legislative Forum was hosted by Cibola County but was ultimately held virtually due to weather and included presentations from Cibola County, City of Grants, Village of Milan, Ramah Navajo Chapter, Pueblo of Acoma, NMSU – Grants, Cibola General Hospital, Grants MainStreet, and Cibola Outdoors.

The following delegation attended one or both forums: Senator George Munoz – D4, Senator Angel Charley – D30, Representative Patty Lundstrom – D9, Representative D. Wonda Johnson – D5, and Michelle Abeyta – D69

Capital Outlay Recap

In conjunction with coordination of the legislative forums, COG staff supported the capital outlay request process with members, tribal entities, and special districts. COG supported these entities by conducting work sessions with managers and staff to identify and develop requests, set up submission meeting with tribal entities (mostly Navajo Chapters) and special districts such as small water districts, irrigation districts, and regional authorities such as the McKinley County Electric Generating Facility Economic District and the Northwest New Mexico Solid Waste Authority.

Prior to the December 13th deadline, COG supported the development and submission of 45 capital outlay requests for members governments along with 18 requests to the governor. For tribal entities and special districts, the COG supported the development and submission of 40 capital outlay requests along with 7 requests to the Governor. A total of 110 individual requests were submitted for consideration.

Session Preview

The 60-day legislative session begins January 21, 2025, at the New Mexico State Capitol. This period provides numerous opportunities for local governments, tribal entities and special districts of the state to advocate for capital projects, propose and support new and modified legislation, and to gain insight into future opportunities that would support their constituents. COG will continue to support our members and communities of Northwest New Mexico by attending portions of the session, sit in and/or watch committee meetings, meet with legislators to discuss projects, and attend forums such as the Gallup-McKinley County Day, Economic Roundtables, and other functions held in Santa Fe during the 60-day period.

For legislative assistance, please contact Brandon Howe, Planner at (505) 722-4327.



Return on Investment

The COG has continued to work towards meeting the team's internal goal of bringing \$128,500,000 of investment into the region. The FY2025 goal is a 28% increase from the previous year's goal. While the goal is substantial, COG has worked to position members for larger regional and catalytic awards (over \$20,000,000) and is now in a position to apply for and secure once-in-a-lifetime investment into the region.

FY2025 has started off slow but recent awards from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law contributed significantly to the team's goal of \$128M. During the second quarter, the COG was able to secure \$61,116,649 in grant funds for the region. With two more quarters to go, COG has its work cut out if we hope to get close to our goal. Fortunately, COG has approximately \$40M in grant requests pending, which would contribute mightily to our goal but more importantly, provide tremendous impact to our Northwest New Mexico community.

