



MAYOR & COUNCIL MEMORANDUM

January 21, 2026

Subject: Continued Discussion and Direction on Items Related to the
Regional Transportation Authority of Pima County (RTA) (City
Wide)

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Issue – Time has been set aside at today’s Study Session to provide the Mayor and Council with an update on delivery of the 2006 RTA program and the RTA Next Plan, with special attention to transit services funded by the RTA.

City Manager's Office Recommendation – No action is required at this time, but Mayor and Council are asked to discuss and provide feedback as appropriate. Specifically, staff requests input from Mayor and Council on the draft scenario for transit service levels if RTA Next is unsuccessful.

Background – This is a continuation of an ongoing discussion with the Mayor and Council regarding the delivery of the 2006 RTA plan and the RTA Next plan. This memorandum will summarize recent RTA Board activity and focus on an overview of RTA contributions to regional transit service and the impacts to service in FY 27 in the event that the RTA half-cent sales tax is not extended beyond June 30, 2026.

On December 4, 2025, the RTA Board met to discuss the completion of the 2006 RTA Plan and the RTA Next plan. During the meeting, two key Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) between the RTA and the City of Tucson were approved for the final year of funding provided by the 2006 RTA for regional transit services operated by the City:

1. Regional Transit Service Improvements
2. Fixed-Route Transit Services

The RTA Board also discussed delivery of the remaining 2006 RTA Plan projects and approved a revised RTA Administrative Code and Policies Objectives and Procedures (POPs) in preparation for RTA Next.

The RTA will continue working on final preparations for the election on March 10, 2026. The RTA has been leading a series of public outreach meetings throughout the region with support from jurisdictional staff.

The remaining timeline of activities leading up to the election is as follows:

January 9 | Contract with the County to utilize the services of the Elections Department and
Recorders’ registration list | RTA

January 19 | Final ballot proofs deadline | Pima County

February 1 | Voter publicity pamphlet mailed to registered voters | Pima County

February 9 | Voter registration cut-off

February 11 | Mail ballots to voters | Pima County

February 28 | Last day to request an early mail ballot

March 10 | Election

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The agenda packets for the RTA Board meetings can be found here: <https://rtamobility.com/get-involved/events/#calendar>

The next meeting of the RTA Board is January 29, 2025.

Present Considerations:

2006 RTA Plan Roadway Element Update

During the next RTA Board meeting, RTA staff will provide a comprehensive review of the remaining Roadway Element projects from the 2006 RTA Plan. Below is a brief overview of the status of remaining City of Tucson projects:

- **Downtown Links:** Construction is nearing completion with a ribbon cutting planned for early 2026.
- **22nd St Bridge:** A groundbreaking is planned for February 4, 2026. Construction will take 2 ½ to 3 years.
- **Grant Road Widening at the Union Pacific Railroad:** Expedited construction is planned to begin in mid-2026 with completion ahead of the opening of the new Casino Del Sol in fall 2026.
- **Grant Road, Phases 3 & 4:** Construction is ongoing with an anticipated completion of fall 2026.
- **Valencia Road, Kolb to Houghton:** Construction is ongoing with an anticipated completion of fall 2026.
- **Grant Road, Phases 5 & 6:** Right-of-way acquisition beginning in 2026.
- **1st Avenue, River to Grant:** Project is transitioning from the Design Concept Report to Preliminary design (30%) phase.
- **Houghton Road, 22nd to Irvington:** Utility relocation will be completed by July 1, 2026, with construction to follow.
- **Valencia, I:19 to Alvernon:** Design is progressing to 100% plans with construction planned for late 2026/early 2027.
- **Harrison Road Bridge at the Pantano Wash:** The project is being delivered as a Progressive Design Build project with contractor/consultant selection currently in progress. Construction planned to begin in late 2026/early 2027.
- **22nd Street, Camino Seco to Houghton:** Design will be 100% complete in 2026 with right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation to follow.
- **Silverbell, Goret to El Camino del Cerro:** Finalizing cultural and environmental clearances with construction planned to begin in late 2026/early 2027.

RTA Transit Element Update

The 20-year RTA plan was approved in 2006 and will expire on June 30, 2026, if not renewed by voters at the March 10, 2026 Special Election. The RTA plan is largely a capital investment program, except for its transit element, which funds both capital and operational expenses. If the RTA Next election is not successful, funding for transit operations will end beginning July 1, 2026. The purpose of this memorandum is to broadly explore the impacts on transit service with the potential loss of these funds.

RTA transit funds are provided to the City of Tucson for the operation of the Sun Tran, Sun Van and Sun On-Demand services. The RTA self manages the Sun Shuttle (fixed route) and Sun Shuttle Dial-A- Ride (paratransit) service which is operated by a contractor and largely provided outside the Tucson city limits.

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The City of Tucson operated system includes service areas outside the Tucson City limits, which are paid for by a combination of RTA funds and Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds contributed by Pima County and Marana through intergovernmental agreements. Prior to the formation of the RTA, the City of Tucson entered into individual agreements with Pima County and Marana for service, but since the RTA created the Sun Shuttle service in 2010, Tucson has provided these services through collective agreements with the RTA.

Annually, the City of Tucson works with the RTA to develop two IGAs for Transit Service:

1. An IGA for Projects 44-49 in the 2006 RTA Plan:
 - Project 44: Weekday Evening Bus Service Expansion
 - Project 45: Weekend Bus Service Expansion
 - Project 46: Bus Frequency and Area Expansion
 - Project 47: Special Needs Transit for Elderly and Disabled Citizens
 - Project 48: Neighborhood Circulator Bus Systems
 - Project 49: Express Service Expansion
2. An IGA for Regional Transit Service for:
 - Pima County
 - South Tucson
 - Marana

The FY 26 IGAs were most recently approved by the Mayor and Council on the December 16, 2025 Consent Agenda. The agreements provide RTA funding for transit service both inside and outside the city limits. It is also worth noting, the IGAs with the RTA include fare revenue credits. The RTA is not subsidizing fare-free transit for the City of Tucson.

Current Service

Today, Sun Tran operates a total of 1,985 daily trips on weekdays across 38 routes (which includes Express service on 11 routes), 1,124 daily Saturday trips, and 931 daily Sunday trips across 26 routes. Additionally, Sun Tran provides service in two On Demand Zones; Sun Van provides complementary paratransit service; and Sun Link provides streetcar service along a 3.9-mile route.

Based on the recently adopted IGAs, the total estimated costs for the transit service to be provided by the City of Tucson and funded by the RTA in FY 26 for transit services are \$21,795,600. Of that total, \$10,268,700 (47.1%) is allocated for service operated within the Tucson city limits, and \$11,526,900 (52.9%) is allocated for service operated outside the city limits. The IGAs also include a fare revenue credit. After deducting the fare revenue credit, the total value of the IGAs is \$19,104,120 as shown in the table below.

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Table 1 below provides a summary of the FY 26 City of Tucson operated transit costs expected to be covered by the RTA.

Table 1

FY26 Estimated City of Tucson Cost Covered by RTA IGAs											
Project	Description	CoT Cost	Non-CoT Cost	Pima County	South Tucson	Marana	Oro Valley	Pascua Yaqui	Revenue Credit	Total Cost	CoT %
P44	Extended Evening Service	\$ 2,113,600	\$ 1,492,000	\$ 975,900	\$ 21,100	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 495,000	\$ (550,000)	\$ 3,055,600	58.6%
P45	Extended Weekend Service	\$ 2,151,800	\$ 647,500	\$ 497,200	\$ 65,500	\$ 38,900	\$ 17,800	\$ 28,100	\$ (288,000)	\$ 2,511,300	76.9%
P46	Plugs and Expansion Service	\$ 2,923,500	\$ 142,800	\$ 121,600	\$ 14,700	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 6,500	\$ (543,000)	\$ 2,523,300	95.3%
P47	Special Needs Transit for Elderly and Disabled Citizens	\$ 1,866,700	\$ 2,704,300	\$ 2,324,700	\$ 191,900	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 187,700	\$ (231,820)	\$ 4,339,180	40.8%
P48	Neighborhood Circulator	\$ 457,100	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 457,100	100.0%
P49	Express Service Expansion	\$ 756,000	\$ 480,900	\$ 275,000	\$ 3,400	\$ 104,200	\$ 98,300	\$ -	\$ (203,450)	\$ 1,033,450	61.1%
N/A	South Tucson - Fixed Route	\$ -	\$ 661,400	\$ -	\$ 661,400	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (121,080)	\$ 540,320	0.0%
N/A	Pima County - Fixed Route	\$ -	\$ 5,287,100	\$ 5,287,100	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (730,830)	\$ 4,556,270	0.0%
N/A	Marana - Fixed Route	\$ -	\$ 110,900	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 110,900	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (23,300)	\$ 87,600	0.0%
RTA Funded CoT Operated Transit Services		10,268,700	11,526,900	9,481,500	958,000	254,000	116,100	717,300	(2,691,480)	19,104,120	47.1%

No RTA Next Funding Scenario

The attached maps and tables represent a draft scenario for city-operated transit in FY 27 without RTA funding. This draft scenario represents cuts that maintain the current service area and routes, both inside and outside the City limits, while reducing service hours and frequency of service to achieve cost savings commensurate with the loss of RTA revenue. However, maintaining any service outside of the city limits would require new agreements and additional contributions from affected jurisdictions (Pima County, Marana, South Tucson, Oro Valley, Pascua Yaqui). Currently, those jurisdictions provide either a maintenance of effort (MOE) contribution for transit (Pima County, Marana) or the RTA is covering the full cost of service (For example, City of South Tucson).

The draft scenario includes a reduction of 141 daily weekday trips across 26 non-express routes, a reduction of 205 daily Saturday trips, and 115 daily Sunday trips. These daily trip cuts represent reduced service hours on 21 routes, and reduced headway frequencies on 13 routes, with 5 of those routes having *both* service hours and frequency reductions on either weekdays or weekends. Additionally, On Demand and Express service would be cut entirely. This represents a total elimination of 34 daily weekday trips on 11 Express routes that are entirely RTA funded and the elimination of the two On Demand zones. The details of service impacts of removing these trips by route is shown in Attachment B.

Paratransit trips are federally required to be provided during the same span of hours as fixed routes and within a three quarters of a mile radius of the fixed route network. The reduction of the fixed route service hours and the potential removal of Sun Shuttle Express Route 450 would reduce the paratransit service hours and required service area. The City currently offers paratransit service beyond the required fixed route radius to include the entire City of Tucson limits, often referred to as "Optional Service Area".

The draft scenario illustrated in the attached maps and tables only reduces the RTA funded transit service and has not been vetted by the community. It is staff's recommendation that public outreach be conducted to determine the needs and priorities for transit service in the region. Also, many of the service reductions noted in the draft scenario constitute a Major Service Change. Per the Mayor and Council approved Major Service Change Policy, staff must conduct a service equity analysis, conduct public outreach, and hold a public hearing with the Mayor and Council before the final changes are approved.

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If RTA Next is unsuccessful in March 2026, Staff will immediately begin the process for major service changes to reflect the reduction in service. It is expected staff would return to Mayor and Council in April 2026 with a timeline and proposal for service reductions.

If RTA Next is successful, current service levels will be maintained and staff will proceed with the recommended service changes included in the 2024 Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA). The COA assumed the continuation of RTA transit funding. Any major service changes would include the same process mentioned above. This work would occur May-July 2026. The proposed service changes would take effect August 2026.

The RTA Next Plan includes \$726M of transit funding with the potential for that amount to increase to \$776M if the baseline revenue projections are realized. The breakdown of the funding allocation in the Transit Element is as follows:

RTA Next Transit Element		
Project 46	High-Capacity Transit Improvements (BRT)	\$70M
Project 47	Streetcar Operations	\$40M
Project 48	Expanded Weekday/Evening/Weekend Bus Service Hours and Expanded Paratransit Service	\$227M
Project 49	Bus Frequency/Route and Service Area Expansion	\$121M
Project 50	Express and Shuttle Fixed/Dial-a-Ride/Paratransit Services	\$192M
Project 51	Safety and Security of Regional Transit System	\$51M
Project 52	General Expansion of Transit Services Regionwide (Special South Tucson Allocation)	\$25M
Total		\$726M
Potential Additional Revenue		\$50M
Transit Element Total		\$776M

In addition to funding existing RTA-funded transit service, the plan includes funding for a high-capacity transit capital project (BRT), streetcar operations, safety and security of the transit system, and the expansion of transit service.

The RTA will allocate additional transit funding across the region using a data-driven and collaborative approach informed by input from the PAG Transit Working Group, PAG Transportation Planning Committee, Tucson Transit Advisory Committee, and other key stakeholders. The City of Tucson, together with Sun Tran, will also solicit public feedback and use the results of the COA to inform recommended investments to the transit system. This feedback will help prioritize investments that improve service frequency, reliability, and access while addressing regional equity, system performance, and community-identified needs. Staff will provide regular updates to the Mayor and Council throughout the process.

Impacts on Sun Shuttle and Sun Shuttle Dial-A-Ride

It is important to note that the RTA manages the Sun Shuttle and Sun Shuttle Dial-A-Ride services, which are provided by a transit contractor. The RTA created Sun Shuttle when it absorbed the Pima County Rural Transportation program in 2010, through a 5-year intergovernmental agreement, and

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annual extensions thereafter. The RTA expanded this program, with new routes in Oro Valley, Marana, Sahuarita/Green Valley, the Tohono O’odham Nation, and Pima County. While many of the existing routes are outside the City limits, there are some that operate in the City of Tucson. For example, Route 450, Southeast Tucson/Rita Ranch, operates entirely in the City limits between Pima Community College East and Rita Ranch. The local governments affected will need to determine if they can provide funding to perpetuate the services; alternatively, all expanded services could cease upon the end of the current RTA plan, with the Sun Shuttle transit contract reduced to pre-RTA levels.

Plan Tucson Consideration(s) – Based on *Plan Tucson Goal 13: Expand and Improve Access to High-Quality Transportation Choices, Enhance Safety, and Improve the Condition of City Streets and Other Infrastructure*, the following policies directly support the items discussed in this memorandum:

Transportation 4 – Develop safe, convenient, accessible, and connected transportation networks for walking, biking, and rolling that are in alignment with the Complete Streets Policy.

Transportation 5 – Support policies and initiatives to develop a coordinated multimodal transportation system that improves efficiency, safety, and reliability of transporting people and goods in and outside of the region.

Transportation 6 – Design future streets and rights-of-way, as well as retrofits, that are sized in a way and include amenities that will make multi-modal transportation choices convenient, attractive, safe, and heat resilient.

Transportation 8 – Improve road conditions and implement design features to reduce crashes and enhance public safety.

Transportation 9 – Develop and enhance transportation and other infrastructure to increase our community’s resilience to extreme heat, extreme drought, flooding, fire, and all emergencies.

Transportation 12 – Continuously evaluate transit service provision to identify opportunities to expand the Frequent Transit Network, increase and extend service hours, transit coverage, and invest in infrastructure that supports speed, reliability, and service quality.

Financial Considerations – In FY 26, the RTA is expected to contribute \$19.1M towards transit service provided by the City of Tucson/Sun Tran, for service inside and outside the City of Tucson. If RTA Next does not pass on March 10, 2026, the region must find additional financial capacity to maintain the current service levels; or reduce service levels to match the appropriate available funding. Based on the FY 26 IGAs, the total cost to the City of Tucson would be approximately \$10.3M in additional funding needed to maintain current service levels within the City limits.

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Legal Considerations – None at this time.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachment(s): A: Transit Service Frequency Maps, Current vs. No RTA Next
B: Transit Service Tables, Current vs No RTA Next