

**REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA
BOARD WORKSHOP**

FRIDAY

9:01 A.M.

March 13, 2026

PRESENT:

Board & Commissioners

**Alexis Hill, Washoe County Commissioner, Chair
Devon Reese, Reno Councilman, Vice Chair
Ed Lawson, Mayor of Sparks
Mariluz Garcia, Washoe County Commissioner**

**Bill Thomas, RTC Executive Director
Adam Spear, Legal Counsel
Tracy Larkin Thomason, Director of NDOT**

RTC Staff

**Dale Keller, Deputy Executive Director/Director of Engineering
Christian Schonlau, Director of Finance/CFO
Laura Freed, Director of Administrative Services
James Gee, Director of Public Transportation/Operations
Vanessa Lacer, Director of Planning**

Board Retreat Facilitator

Erica Olsen, OnStrategy

ABSENT:

Hillary Schieve, Mayor of Reno

The annual Board Workshop meeting was held at the Reno Sparks Convention Center, Rooms A3/A4, 4590 S. Virginia Street, Reno, and was called to order by Chair Hill.

**NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AT THIS WORKSHOP
EXCEPT TO APPROVE THE AGENDA, CONSENT ITEMS AND TO ADJOURN**

1. CALL TO ORDER

- 1.1 Roll Call
- 1.2 Pledge of Allegiance

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Hill opened the meeting to public input and called on anyone wishing to speak on topics relevant to the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) that are not included in the current agenda. There being no one wishing to speak, Chair Hill moved to Approval of Agenda.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

On motion of Vice Chair Reese, seconded by Commissioner Garcia, which motion unanimously carried, Chair Hill ordered that the agenda for this meeting be approved.

4. CONSENT ITEMS

4.1 *Engineering*

- 4.1.1 Approve a contract with Avenue Consultants, Inc., for Engineering Staff Services for the RTC Traffic Management Center through September 30, 2027, in an amount not-to-exceed \$300,000. *(For Possible Action)*
- 4.1.2 Approve a Regional Road Impact Fee (RRIF) Offset Agreement between RTC, TL Talus LLC, and City of Reno for offset-eligible improvements to the intersection improvements and roadway widening within the Talus Valley Town Center. *(For Possible Action)*
- 4.1.3 Approve an administrative settlement in the amount of \$62,995 authorizing RTC to acquire certain real property interests related to APN 086-390-32 from North Peak Owner NV LLC, for the Military Road Capacity and Safety Project. *(For Possible Action)*

4.2 *Executive, Administrative and Finance Department*

- 4.2.1 Acknowledge receipt of information related to the FY2027 coordinated regional approach to submitting Community Project Funding (CPF)/Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) and developing requests that are focused on neighborhoods where local streets need rehabilitation. *(For Possible Action)*
- 4.2.2 Approve an Interlocal Cooperative Agreement with the State of Nevada Department of Human Services Division of Social Services for reimbursement of the cost of bus passes for its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance programs (SNAP) not to exceed \$134,000. *(For Possible Action)*

On motion of Vice Chair Reese, seconded by Commissioner Garcia, which motion unanimously carried, Chair Hill ordered that the consent items for this meeting be approved.

5. WORKSHOP *(No Action Will be Taken at this Workshop)*

The purpose of the workshop is to discuss and possibly give general direction regarding policy and strategic objectives of the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County for the current Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2027, which may include, but not be limited to presentations, review, discussion and possible direction to the Executive Director and staff regarding:

5.1 WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS & STAGE SETTING

Chair Hill opened the workshop by welcoming Commissioners, staff, regional partners, and community stakeholders. She acknowledged participation from Storey County representatives and noted the collaborative nature of the discussions ahead. The Chair emphasized that Commissioners had engaged in advance one-on-one meetings as part of the strategic planning process, which informed the workshop

agenda and priorities. Chair Hill emphasized the importance of working through a full and ambitious agenda, noting that the workshop would cover several major policy areas, including transit, rail, and congestion.

Executive Director Bill Thomas provided context for the annual workshop, explaining that it is designed to allow deeper, more strategic discussion than regular Board meetings, which are typically focused on operational decisions and consent items. He stated that the purpose of the workshop is to evaluate progress made since the prior year, revisit key issues, and align policy direction for the upcoming fiscal years.

Staff highlighted that:

- The workshop integrates follow-up on prior Board priorities with new and emerging issues
- Major focus areas include transit planning, congestion management, and regional connectivity
- Two key topics: rail feasibility and the short-range transit plan (Move More) would receive more in-depth discussion due to their complexity and long-term impact

Mr. Thomas also provided a high-level overview of RTC's workload, noting that the agency is currently managing more than 60 active projects and approximately \$150 million in roadway investments, in addition to transit and planning initiatives.

The workshop facilitator, Erica Olsen with OnStrategy, outlined expectations for the session, emphasizing that:

- The workshop is intended to be interactive and discussion-driven rather than presentation-heavy
- Commissioners are encouraged to ask questions and provide input throughout, rather than waiting for formal comment periods
- No formal action would be taken, but feedback would directly inform the upcoming annual plan and future Board decisions
- Key outcomes include confirming strategic direction, identifying priorities, and providing guidance to staff

Ms. Olsen also provided logistical guidance, including timing expectations (with major topics scheduled throughout the day) and reminders regarding meeting participation.

5.2 FISCAL YEAR 2026 STRATEGIC ROADMAP UPDATE

Executive Director Bill Thomas provided an update on progress made since the prior year's Board workshop, focusing on key strategic priorities identified by the Board and how those initiatives have advanced over the past year.

Key updates included:

- **Youth Ride Free Program:**
Staff reported that the student transit pilot program has been highly successful, with strong ridership and positive community feedback. The program is approaching a future decision point regarding continuation or expansion.
- **Transit Facility Planning:**
RTC has advanced efforts to identify a replacement site for the Villanova transit facility. Three potential sites have been identified, with further evaluation and Board discussion anticipated.

- **Fleet Replacement Funding:**
RTC secured a \$21.5 million Federal Transit Administration grant to replace aging buses, including electric buses impacted by manufacturer bankruptcy. Approximately 19 replacement vehicles are planned, improving fleet reliability.
- **Neighborhood Network Plans:**
Two initial neighborhood network plans have been completed and approved, with implementation underway. Staff noted that coordination with local jurisdictions is ongoing, as this approach represents a shift in how multimodal improvements are planned and delivered.
- **Truckee River Corridor Efforts:**
Progress has been made on initiatives related to the Truckee River, a priority identified by the Board, with additional detail to be provided later in the workshop.
- **Congestion Management:**
RTC received national recognition for the Sparks Intelligent Corridor project. Additionally, a Transportation Operations Maturity Assessment was completed to guide future investments in traffic management and system optimization.
- **Regional Rail Study and Connectivity Efforts:**
Staff highlighted ongoing work on the Reno-Sparks to TRIC rail study and broader regional connectivity planning, including the Northeast Connector concept.
- **Safety Initiatives:**
A major safety-focused project on West 4th Street has been initiated in partnership with local agencies. Staff also highlighted successful collaboration with local jurisdictions to address emerging safety issues, including a school-related concern addressed through coordinated action.
- **Regional Funding Coordination:**
RTC led a collaborative effort with Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County to secure federal funding for local road maintenance. Funding was successfully obtained, and a second round of applications has been submitted, demonstrating a new regional approach to addressing maintenance needs.
- **Organizational Performance and Culture:**
Staff reported improvements in internal and contractor relations, including reductions in grievances, arbitration cases, and customer complaints (down approximately 10%).
- **Communications and Outreach:**
RTC significantly expanded its public outreach, reaching approximately 3.8 million viewers and increasing public awareness of agency initiatives.
- **Executive Director Outreach:**
The Executive Director reported progress on Board-directed outreach goals, including multiple presentations to community groups to improve public understanding of RTC programs and priorities.

Overall, the presentation emphasized that RTC has made measurable progress across strategic priorities while managing a substantial workload, including over 60 active projects and approximately \$150 million in roadway investments.

Board discussion was limited due to time constraints and the full workshop agenda. Chair Hill acknowledged the breadth of work completed and directed the meeting to continue to subsequent items.

5.3 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Jim Gee presented program outcomes, noting strong ridership, expanded mobility for students, and positive community feedback.

- Commissioner Garcia raised concerns regarding bus stop safety in high-use areas.
- Commissioner Larkin-Thomason discussed potential expansion to trade schools and workforce access.
- Chair Hill emphasized program origins and community need.

Move More (Short Range Transit Plan / TOPS Update):

Staff and consultants presented the “Move More” plan, the updated short-range transit plan (formerly TOPS), covering a five-year planning horizon (2026–2031). The plan builds on prior Board direction and incorporates technical analysis, ridership data, and extensive public and stakeholder input.

The presentation outlined a three-phase process:

- Phase 1: Data collection and public survey
- Phase 2: Development of draft recommendations (current phase)
- Phase 3: Refinement based on Board and public feedback, with final recommendations to return for approval

Survey results indicated that riders prioritize service frequency, reliability, and hours of operation over cost, with fares consistently rated as acceptable. Key service gaps identified included evening and weekend service, reliability, and geographic coverage, particularly for FlexRide and Access services.

Service Recommendations – Fixed Route (Ride Bus):

Staff proposed reallocating service to better match post-pandemic travel patterns, including:

- Increased evening and weekend frequency
- Standardized weekend schedules for simplicity
- Reduction of low-ridership late-night trips (generally fewer than 10 riders per trip) and reinvestment of those resources into higher-demand periods
- Route restructuring, including extensions (e.g., to Reed High School and retail/employment centers), consolidations, and minor realignments to improve directness and connectivity

Staff emphasized that many changes are cost-neutral, achieved by reallocating existing service hours rather than expanding overall service levels.

FlexRide (Microtransit) Recommendations:

To improve efficiency and expand access, staff proposed:

- Increasing response time standards from 20 to 30 minutes to allow better trip grouping and higher productivity
- Introducing advance reservations (up to three days) and standing trips for work and school commuters
- Implementing reduced fares for additional passengers traveling together to encourage ride-sharing
- Piloting co-mingling of FlexRide and Access riders to improve vehicle utilization

Staff noted that FlexRide functions as both a first/last-mile connector and a testing mechanism for future fixed-route expansion, using ridership patterns to guide investment decisions.

Access (Paratransit) Recommendations:

Given the high cost of Access service (approximately \$60 per trip), staff proposed several changes to improve sustainability and service quality:

- Transitioning from default door-to-door service to curb-to-curb service, with exceptions based on demonstrated need
- Increasing on-time performance standards and improving customer service response times
- Raising fares from \$3 to \$4, consistent with industry standards (approximately double fixed-route fare)
- Allowing Access riders to use fixed-route and regional connector services at no cost to encourage more efficient system use

Staff emphasized the need to balance service equity with financial sustainability while maintaining service for those with the greatest need.

Senior Mobility & Subsidy Program Recommendations:

Proposed updates included:

- Consolidating taxi, Uber, and Lyft subsidies into a single, more flexible program
- Allowing RTC to assist with trip booking for customers without smartphones
- Increasing the eligibility age for new participants from 60 to 65
- Introducing a 25% co-pay for higher-income users (above 200% of the federal poverty level)

These changes aim to better target resources while maintaining access for the most vulnerable populations.

Fare Technology & Policy Updates:

To modernize the system and improve efficiency, staff proposed:

- Transitioning toward cashless fare collection, including tap-to-pay with credit/debit cards
- Implementing fare capping to ensure riders automatically receive the best daily or weekly rate
- Eliminating onboard day pass sales to reduce boarding delays
- Introducing integrated fares for regional connector services
- Streamlining reduced fare eligibility through digital verification

Financial Context:

Staff and finance personnel emphasized that transit operations are primarily funded by sales tax, with fare revenue covering only approximately 10% of operating costs. Access service alone accounts for roughly 25% of expenses. Long-term projections indicate that operating costs may outpace revenue growth within 3–5 years, requiring careful prioritization and potential future funding decisions.

Board discussion focused on:

- Strong support for improving frequency and reliability
- Concerns about impacts of Access service changes on vulnerable populations
- Interest in expanding service to workforce and education destinations
- Recognition of financial constraints and the need for strategic resource allocation
- Support for pilot programs and data-driven decision-making

Commissioners emphasized the importance of monitoring impacts, particularly for Access and FlexRide changes, and requested regular updates during implementation.

5.4 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORTATION & REGIONAL INTER-CONNECTEDNESS

Director of Planning Vanessa Lacer presented an overview of previously identified Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) priority areas, reaffirming that Board-identified concerns from prior planning efforts were incorporated into the long-range transportation plan. These priority areas included the North Valleys, Sun Valley, the Truckee River corridor, Lake Tahoe, Verdi, and connectivity to the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (TRIC). The presentation demonstrated alignment between Board priorities and planned or programmed projects, including funded, future-funded, and unfunded needs.

Staff emphasized that regional transportation challenges are expanding beyond Washoe County boundaries, requiring coordination with neighboring jurisdictions, including Storey County, Lyon County, and the State of Nevada. A key focus was the increasing importance of regional interconnectedness due to employment growth at TRIC and associated travel demand along the I-80 corridor.

Executive Director Bill Thomas provided an update on the Northeast Connector study and broader regional mobility efforts. Public outreach efforts generated significant engagement, with over 700 comments received thus far, reflecting both concern and recognition of the need for solutions. Staff noted that the project is in early stages and that multiple alternatives including roadway, rail, and operational improvements are being evaluated concurrently.

Storey County representatives outlined ongoing collaboration and near-term strategies, including:

- Interim roadway improvements to alleviate congestion near TRIC
- Exploration of alternative routes and infrastructure enhancements
- Long-term land use planning, including housing and multimodal opportunities
- Potential partnerships with private industry to fund or accelerate improvements

They emphasized the scale of employment at TRIC, the regional dependence on Washoe County workforce, and the need for coordinated solutions that address both transportation and housing challenges.

Staff and regional partners also discussed broader system constraints, including limited roadway redundancy, increasing freight demand along I-80 (a major national corridor), and the need for long-term resilience and emergency response capacity within the transportation network.

Commissioners discussed the growing severity of congestion and its impact on workforce mobility, economic development, and quality of life. Key themes included:

- Recognition that the TRIC commute is a regional issue requiring multi-jurisdictional coordination
- Concerns about current and near-term congestion conditions, particularly during peak commute times
- Acknowledgment that projected job growth will significantly increase travel demand
- The importance of balancing short-term operational improvements with long-term infrastructure investments
- The need to plan for system redundancy and resilience, especially given limited alternative routes

Board members also noted differing public perspectives, including tension between growth-related transportation needs and community concerns about new infrastructure.

Rail Feasibility Study

Darwin Desen, Consultant with WSP, presented the findings of the workforce commuter rail feasibility study connecting Reno-Sparks to the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (TRIC). The study was initiated in response to significant and growing commute demand, particularly along the I-80 corridor, and concerns related to future workforce expansion and roadway congestion.

The analysis identified a strong and relatively concentrated ridership base, with approximately 2,000 peak-direction riders currently commuting during shift changes, with projections that demand could more than triple as major employers expand. This was characterized as a unique “captive audience,” strengthening the viability of a commuter rail solution.

Two primary implementation scenarios were presented:

- **Near-Term Service:**

A minimal infrastructure approach designed to initiate service quickly, consisting of three round trips in the morning and evening peak periods. This option includes new station locations in the Reno-Sparks area and at TRIC, along with a train storage and light maintenance facility. The estimated cost for this phase is approximately \$175 million.

- **Long-Term / Full Build System:**

A more comprehensive system extending rail service directly to major employment centers such as the Tesla Gigafactory. This scenario includes additional service frequency, a full operations and maintenance facility, and significant infrastructure upgrades, including double-tracking sections of the Union Pacific (UP) rail line. Estimated costs include approximately \$380 million for expansion and \$258 million for rail capacity improvements, bringing total long-term investment significantly higher.

The study emphasized that coordination with Union Pacific is a critical constraint, as freight operations take priority and limit available capacity. Any implementation would require detailed operational modeling and negotiation with the railroad to determine feasible service levels and necessary infrastructure improvements.

Additional considerations included:

- Potential station locations near I-80 access points to support park-and-ride and multimodal transfers
- Integration with bus or shuttle systems to complete first/last-mile connections
- Exploration of an intermodal freight facility to support regional industry needs
- Topographical challenges impacting alignment and construction feasibility

Board members acknowledged the scale and complexity of the project, particularly regarding right-of-way constraints and reliance on Union Pacific cooperation. Concerns were raised about the feasibility of securing track access and the difficulty of implementing passenger rail alongside freight operations.

Commissioners also emphasized the urgency of addressing current and future commuting challenges, particularly given projected employment growth at TRIC and increasing congestion on I-80. The

discussion reflected interest in rail as a long-term solution while recognizing that it would require significant investment, regional coordination, and phased implementation.

5.5 PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT OF CONGESTION

Dale Keller, RTC Director of Engineering introduced ongoing efforts to address regional congestion, highlighting recent progress and planned initiatives. Key updates included national recognition for the Sparks Intelligent Corridor project and completion of a Transportation Operations Maturity Assessment to guide future improvements. Staff noted that these efforts are focused on enhancing system efficiency, leveraging technology, and identifying strategies to improve traffic flow and reliability.

Board discussion emphasized the growing impact of congestion across the region, particularly in relation to economic growth, freight movement, and limited roadway redundancy. Commissioners acknowledged the need for both short-term operational improvements and long-term infrastructure planning, including coordination with regional partners.

5.6 CLOSE OUT & SUMMARIZE DIRECTION

Erica Olsen requested a final “temperature check” from the Board regarding the draft recommendations and overall strategic direction presented during the workshop. Chair Hill invited feedback, and Board members indicated general agreement and support for the direction outlined by staff. No substantive objections or alternative directions were raised at that time.

Discussion reaffirmed that the workshop was intentionally structured for feedback rather than formal action, and that Board input would guide refinement of policies, service changes, and capital priorities. Staff emphasized that comments received throughout the day including those related to transit service adjustments, funding considerations, congestion management, and regional connectivity would be documented and incorporated into the development of the upcoming annual plan and future

It was also reiterated that several items discussed, including transit service changes and pilot programs, would return to the Board at a later date for formal consideration and potential approval.


The session concluded with acknowledgment that the Board’s feedback supported continuation of the current strategic approach, with refinement based on stakeholder and public input. No formal motions, votes, or explicit directives to staff were recorded.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Hill opened the meeting to public input and called on anyone wishing to speak on topics relevant to the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) that are not included in the current agenda. There being no one wishing to speak, Chair Hill moved to Adjournment.

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.



ALEXIS HILL, Chair
Regional Transportation Commission

Presentation copies are available upon request. Contact mkraus@rtcwashoe.com.