

SUN METRO CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Annual Committee Report to El Paso City Council

August 1, 2026

Current Members

Scott White, Chair (Dist. 8)
Keith Andrews (Dist. 1)
Sandy Azcona (Dist. 4)
Angela Ochoa (Dist. 6)
Xavier Bañales (Mayor)

Bill Graham, Vice-Chair (Dist. 3)
Elisa Tamayo-Ochoa (Dist. 2)
Aziz Afravi (Dist. 5)
Sylvia Carreon (Dist. 7)

Staff

Anthony R. DeKeyzer, Director of Mass Transit
Joyce Garcia, Legal Representative

Karl Rimkus, Committee Liaison

History

Created by Resolution on April 26, 1988 as the “Citizen’s Advisory Committee”
Renamed by Resolution on October 11, 2022 as the “Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee”
Bylaws Amended by Resolution on September 3, 2025 to comply with Ordinance No. 019766

Purpose

To advise the Mass Transit Department Board on matters over which the Board has authority.



Meetings and Attendance

Member	July 9, 2025	Sept. 10, 2025	May 14, 2026	July 8, 2026
Afravi, Aziz	P	P	P	
Andrews, Keith	P	P	A	
Azcona, Sandy	P	A	A	
Bañales, Xavier	P	P	P	
Carreon, Sylvia	P	P	P	
Graham, Bill	P	P	P	
Ochoa, Angela	P	P	A	
Tamayo-Ochoa, Elisa	A	A	P	
White, Scott	P	A	P	

P = Present; A = Absent

MESSAGE FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

As the chairperson of the Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee, it has been my pleasure to both serve on and lead this advisory board. We have been working with Sun Metro staff to provide user-based insight and experience to aid in developing new tools and resources that we hope may benefit transit service in our region. We believe that in this capacity, we can support improved rider experience and user services that will inspire more people to take greater advantage of Sun Metro's services. I am proud to have been voted by committee members to a second term leading this committee and hope our recent visioning process will allow us to further refine and focus our energies in better serving and representing all those who rely on Sun Metro, and all their wonderful staff.

Scott White, Chair, Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MASS TRANSIT

As Director of Mass Transit, it has been my privilege to participate in Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee (SMCAC) meetings since 2023. Feedback and input on transit policy from committee members is a valuable resource to me and my staff in our efforts to achieve our mission of connecting our El Paso community through high quality transit services. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the valuable service to the community that committee members make in dedicating their time and to thank them for their commitment. I look forward to working with the Committee in the coming year and will continue to support the purpose of the SMCAC.

Anthony DeKeyser, Director of Mass Transit



SUN METRO ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Throughout the past 12 months, Sun Metro staff have kept the Committee apprised of progress on key programs that provide a more vibrant, accessible and fiscally responsible transit system. The Committee commends the diligent efforts of the Director and Sun Metro staff in their success in the following transit projects.

El Paso Streetcar Ridership

Increasing ridership on the Streetcar has been a priority of both City leadership and Sun Metro for the past two years. Emphasis on optimizing the operating hours and continuing to offer rides fare-free has had a positive effect in increasing ridership:

- **During calendar year 2025, total ridership reached 396,326 boardings, marking the highest annual total since the Streetcar service began in 2018**
- Calendar year 2025 saw an average of 33,027 boardings per month, compared to 22,953 boardings in 2024
- A 25.43% increase in ridership was documented from January to June 2026, compared with the same six-month period in 2025
- The Streetcar played a major role in Park and Ride efforts for two signature concert events that were held at the Sun Bowl on the UTEP Campus:
 - During the Coldplay two-day event (June 13 and 14, 2025), the Streetcar transported 20,797 concertgoers
 - For the BTS two-day event (May 2 and 3, 2026), the Streetcar transported 19,833 concertgoers

LIFT Paratransit Software Transition

Sun Metro and its contractor for paratransit services, MV Transportation, had to work through significant challenges for On-Time Performance (OTP) for paratransit trips, due to limitations of the software used for booking and aggregating rides for LIFT. Reduced OTP results in longer wait times for customers and more complaints received by Sun Metro/MV Transportation. To address this, Sun Metro secured a contract for a new paratransit management system (Rideco) and implemented it in July 2025, which led to a noticeable increase in OTP:

- **Monthly Average OTP Increase**
 - 83.6% in July 2025
 - **96.2% in June 2026**
 - 90.7% average for the past 12 months



Transition to Rideco has also resulted in additional benefits to paratransit customers and Sun Metro/MV Transportation:

- **Customers can now book rides via a mobile device app (Via Ride did not offer this option)**
 - 0.02% of bookings were made on the app at inception in July 2025
 - 4.8% of bookings were made on the app by December 2025
 - 7.2% of bookings are made on the app in June 2026
 - This correlates to 1,816 trips booked on the app and an average of 908 less calls per month
- **25% in contract cost savings this year has been achieved with Rideco, despite facing a persistent inflationary environment in the economy**
- **Use of Rideco has resulted in fewer complaints received by Sun Metro/MV Transportation**
 - Average of 7.26 complaints received per 10,000 trips during the last 12 months of Via Ride use
 - Average of 12.87 complaints received per 10,000 trips during the first two months of Rideco use
 - **Average of 5.55 complaints received per 10,000 trips during the past 10 months of Rideco use**

Grant Successes

Sun Metro has dedicated staff whose task it is to seek federal and state competitive grant funding opportunities, which has paid dividends in helping the Department provide better and more sustainable transit, while at the same time costing local taxpayers less. Some examples include:

- FY 22 Low/No Emissions Grant from Federal Transit Administration (FTA) (approximately \$11M total funding) – this grant, fully realized in Spring 2026, allowed Sun Metro to purchase 45 electric vehicles (EV) and Level 2 electric charging stations exclusively for LIFT paratransit service. The goals of this project include a reduction in carbon emissions from vehicle exhaust, reduction in vehicle maintenance cost, and elimination of fuel cost.
- FY 24 Low/No Emissions Grant from FTA (approximately \$33M total funding) – this grant allowed Sun Metro to order 35 new buses and plan construction of four 20,000 sq. ft. canopies for bus parking at the Sun Metro Transit Operations Center.
- FY 24 Community Project funded through Congresswoman Veronica Escobar’s Office (\$900k total funding) – this grant allowed Sun Metro to purchase four Micro Transit Vans to provide District 5 with first MicroTransit service in the vicinity of the Upper East Side Transit Center.



- Veterans Ride Free Grant from Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) since 2023 (\$320k total funding) – more details are provided in part three of the following Section.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

The Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee has been engaged with Sun Metro staff on several key projects during the past year, including the development and adoption of a vision statement for the Committee, tracking the progress of Sun Metro Rising, and following ridership trends and use of funds for the Veterans Ride Free grant program.

1. VISION STATEMENT FOR THE COMMITTEE

Beginning with the July 9, 2025 Committee meeting, the Committee worked closely with Julie Baldwin-Munoz, Chief Strategy Officer, and Roman Sanchez, Chief Innovation Officer, of the City Manager's Office, to collaboratively develop a vision statement for the Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee (SMCAC). Over the following meetings, Ms. Baldwin-Munoz and Mr. Sanchez led discussions and conducted interviews with committee members to identify key factors that resonated with each member regarding their understanding of the Committee's purpose. The result is the following vision statement, approved by the Committee at its May 14, 2026 meeting:

The Sun Metro Citizens Advisory Committee advocates for accountable, accessible, and strategically sustainable transit services to meet the transportation needs of our community.

Additionally, the following key priority areas were identified, to guide planning and agenda-setting activities with the Committee for in 2026 – 2027:

- Advocacy
- Accessibility
- Accountability
- Strategic Growth and Sustainability

Sun Metro will continue to coordinate meetings with Ms. Baldwin-Munoz and Mr. Sanchez and SMCAC to help guide committee activities in the coming year.

2. SUN METRO RISING



Sun Metro Rising began as a study that identified how Sun Metro could improve transit service for the community. This study included robust community engagement, including an on-board survey, virtual public meetings, and stakeholder discussions. Information gathered from these activities was used to develop a strategic plan to guide service improvements.

Sun Metro conducted a comprehensive study of its transit system and, guided by community feedback, identified key updates to make service more efficient, reliable, and better aligned with riders' needs. The changes will increase route frequencies, reduce travel times, and reshape service by streamlining existing routes, introducing new ones, and discontinuing routes with low or no ridership.

Recommendations from study:

- Restructure the route network to simplify and strengthen service
- Continue to restore Sunday service
- Interest in more frequent service
- Continue to maximize the potential of the Streetcar

Implementation

On June 14, 2026, Sun Metro launched Sun Metro Rising, which optimized the transit system from 52 to 39 fixed routes, successfully increasing average frequency times from 58 to 42 minutes. This transition was supported by system-wide updates to all bus stops and shelters, alongside an extensive direct rider outreach campaign at all transit centers from May through the post-launch phase. Additionally, within District 5, Sun Metro launched the on-demand pilot MicroTransit program, which links passengers directly to the Upper East Side Transit Center.

Future Goals

Sun Metro will realize long-term network efficiency by capturing post-implementation community input through outreach events, customer service channels, social media, and operator insights to shape ongoing service design. This feedback will be paired with ongoing route-level data reviews of ridership patterns, performance metrics, and travel trends across the restructured network. Ultimately, Sun Metro will use this combined community feedback and route data to implement future schedule adjustments and targeted route modifications.

3. TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION “VETERANS RIDE FOR FREE” GRANT

The Texas Veterans Commission is the state department of veteran affairs. Its purpose has been to act as the state-appointed advocate of Texas veterans as they attempt to secure the benefits rightfully earned in exchange for their service in our nation's armed forces.



Since 1927, the mission of the Texas Veterans Commission has been to advocate for and provide superior service to veterans that will significantly improve the quality of life for all Texas veterans, their families, and survivors.

The Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA or Fund) was created in the 79th Legislature to address the needs of Texas veterans and their families. The Fund is composed of money deposited under the Texas Government Code, the Texas Transportation Code, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Code, and provides for the awarding of grants related to veterans assistance.

Once grant awards are awarded by the Commission, grants are administered by the staff of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Through the Fund, the Commission has awarded **over \$359 Million Dollars** in more than 1,600 reimbursement grants since 2009.

Transportation is a critical need for many veterans. Lack of transportation is a barrier in getting to VA appointments as well as connecting with local services and resources. In the El Paso area, transportation has been identified as one of the top three needs by the TVC Veterans Needs Assessment Survey, conducted by Texas A&M Public Policy Research Institute.

Sun Metro and TVC are working together to address this need by offering the Veterans Ride Free transportation program to veterans, surviving spouses and their dependents. To date, TVC has awarded Sun Metro grants totaling \$320,500 (since 2023).

Funding Year	Funding Amount	Total Expended	Passes Issued	LIFT Tickets	Veterans	Surviving Spouses	Dependents	Unduplicated Veterans Served
FY 24	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	1,378	3,464	632	19	72	723
FY 25	\$113,500.00	\$113,500.00	2,876	10,888	782	18	64	864
FY 26	\$157,000.00	\$120,000.00	2,942	7,904	753	29	63	846 Served Grant ends Aug 31, 2026
FY 27	\$140,000.00	Pending	Pending	Pending	Pending	Pending	Pending	Grant begins Sept 1, 2026

