Building Communities + Enhancing Lives

A QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT
Important stories should be shared and passed on to future generations. One of those important stories is the impact the addition of 26 miles of light rail in Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa has had in the region.

Opening on December 27, 2008, the initial 20 miles of light rail was a vision realized for community members and city leaders who had a dream more than a decade earlier. Now, 10 years down the road from that celebratory opening day, it’s time to take stock. Has our system truly delivered as envisioned more than 20 years ago?

Today, more than 50,000 riders rely on light rail each day to take them to work, school and recreation. No doubt, light rail plays a role in attracting major events. It also provides an essential link between the downtown Phoenix and Tempe ASU campuses. We have expanded to serve a transit-reliant corridor along 19th Avenue and sparked new life into downtown Mesa. We are here to do more than serve, we are here to connect your community and enhance your life.

Our Quality of Life report examines progress in achieving that early vision, defined by four key goals:

Goal 1. Connecting Communities
Goal 2. Enhancing Customer Experience
Goal 3. Driving the Economy
Goal 4. Fostering Community Health

Using a decade’s worth of data and information from a variety of sources, this report documents changes in the Valley Metro Rail corridor, such as:

- Over 35,000 jobs created within 1/2-mile of light rail since 2008.
- Substantial increase in riders being able to reach their destination in a single trip.
- Improved access to education and over 5.5 million square feet of new educational facilities along light rail.
- 50% decrease in bicycle and pedestrian collisions in the light rail corridor.
- Greater affordability within the light rail corridor as compared to Maricopa County overall.

This report also identifies where we have opportunities to improve and expand upon what we’ve learned during our first decade. As a whole, the report sets the stage to understand public transit’s influence as we approach anticipated future demand and our ongoing role in supporting a vibrant, healthy and connected community.

“As we pitch Greater Phoenix’s value proposition to businesses looking to relocate or expand, transportation is always discussed. Whether that business is a high-tech startup or a global enterprise, they want to assure their employees have access to public transportation options. Valley Metro is a great partner to our economic development strategy and has been instrumental in strengthening our region and connecting people.”

- Chris Camacho, President & CEO, Greater Phoenix Economic Council

“Ten years of light rail has invigorated our economy and revitalized entire corridors – our system is truly an Arizona success story that should be celebrated nationally.”

- Mark Mitchell, Tempe Mayor

The First Decade of Light Rail...
Foreword

Local visionaries believed in the possibilities of what light rail could deliver to enhance the lives of our residents and better connect our communities. They believed a sleek and modern light rail system would attract riders who would not have otherwise tried transit. At the same time, it would bring in new businesses, employers and education facilities; reduce traffic congestion, support air quality initiatives and become a draw for major events. The Chair of Valley Metro Rail in FY19, Phoenix Mayor Thelda Williams, has been straightforward in how she sees the importance of rail serving the Phoenix community and the region.

"Light rail has been a major economic driver that has spurred more than $11 billion in capital investments along the tracks since it opened 10 years ago. It’s been a catalyst for positive change, connecting people to education and career opportunities and connecting neighborhoods. The regional transportation system has become integrated into the daily lives of thousands of residents across the Valley."

—Thelda Williams, Phoenix Mayor and FY19 Valley Metro Rail Board Chair

No doubt, one of the most visible changes to downtown Phoenix over the past 10 years has been the expansion of Arizona State University and the addition of the Downtown Phoenix campus. ASU President Dr. Michael Crow had a vision and saw the relevance of light rail to student life. Looking ahead, there will be even greater achievements over the next 10 years with 40 more miles of service that our residents can rely on to travel to their most important destinations. With population growth anticipated to double by 2040, a good investment in transit service should pay dividends for future generations.

"The introduction and continued expansion of Valley Metro Rail has been a game changer for ASU, our students and the broader community. Valley Metro Rail has become an integral part of our efforts to provide greater access to the university and connect students between campuses in sustainable ways. It also helps students to quickly, easily and affordably access all that the Valley has to offer such as events, amenities and employment opportunities."

—Dr. Michael Crow, ASU President
Bring people together through a seamless transportation system.

Connecting Communities means providing travel freedom for residents and visitors of all ages who travel the metropolitan Phoenix region, which spans more than 9,200 square miles. It links people and places through frequent, reliable transit service, improved walkability, bicycle connections, easy transfers and direct access to jobs, schools and other destinations across the region.

“Today, a dream for many becomes reality. Light rail is rejuvenating downtown Mesa, offering residents and visitors across the Valley an opportunity to travel to new destinations and discover Mesa.”

—John Giles, Mesa Mayor

“Before” & “After”
Provide customers with a safe, comfortable and reliable travel experience.

Valley Metro Rail is not just a vision of planners and politicians – it is a community vision, implemented by multiple voter-approved ballot initiatives. Enhancing the transit customer’s experience by improving reliability, comfort and efficiency is a key metric in fulfilling the community’s mandate for improved transit. Providing alternative transportation choices goes beyond serving the transit rider, it helps the community as a whole move more efficiently and effectively.

“I do depend on the train and it gets me from Point A to Point B. It is the most hassle-free way to get from where I live to downtown Phoenix, Tempe, Mesa and Sky Harbor International Airport!”

—Rob Freedman, Valley Metro Rail rider
GOAL 3
DRIVING THE ECONOMY

Promote livable, economically competitive communities.

Valley residents have expressed the desire that their investments in public transportation also benefit the economy. Community members including elected officials, residents, city and transportation planners and business owners worked together to link transit development to clear opportunities for economic growth, filling in vacant lots and creating new places in the community to live, work, learn and play.

“The Northwest Extension set the stage and momentum to attract new businesses and visitors. It brought people together and ignited an effort to capitalize on the revitalization rail brings to the community.”

—Shannon McBride, 19NORTH Executive Director
Improve individual health while supporting community prosperity and upward mobility.

Community health refers to a variety of factors elevating the health and vitality of individuals and communities as a whole, offering residents educational opportunity, affordability, diversity of housing choices and travel options that are safer, cleaner and less stressful. Benefits like these have clearly had a positive impact in fostering community health.

“We must be able to offer people a choice to go to any of the places people need. This extends the ladders of opportunities, leading to a better life. It’s really the embodiment of the American Dream.”

—Leslie T. Rogers, Former Federal Transit Administration Region IX Administrator
Thank you to key contributors for providing data used in the report, including:

Here’s to light rail’s past decade and the many more decades on the tracks ahead!

“One thing remains true, investing in light rail has improved the quality of life in our region. Its expansion will continue to be a catalyst for positive and exciting change for decades to come.”

—Scott Smith, Valley Metro CEO

Looking Ahead

It’s clear that building Valley Metro Rail has created many positive and sustained benefits for our community. As we reflect on the past 10 years, we celebrate successes, refine best practices and plan for the future.

We’ve celebrated the successes in transit service, ridership and financial investment. We’ve expanded opportunities and win-win local partnerships. Now, as the system matures from novelty to real life, we’re addressing current and future challenges such as system maintenance, the effects of significant economic development, rider behavior, safety and security, new technologies and changing financial and political environments.

With economic investment surpassing $11 billion and growing, we are focusing on how to involve everyone in the success of light rail. Maricopa County is above the national affordability index, while the area within the light rail corridor is below it. Leveraging that success, we continue to work closely with our city partners to maintain balanced housing options.

Respect the Ride, Valley Metro’s safety and security campaign, is based on our philosophy that all fare-paying passengers have the right to enjoy a safe and comfortable ride. It is focused on enhancing the rider experience and allows security and law enforcement to crack down on disruptive, intrusive, unsafe or inappropriate behaviors while riding Valley Metro Rail.

We believe high-capacity transit plays an important role in serving communities for decades to come. Innovative thinking is leading us to develop exciting ways for transit to complement and interface with other modes and new technologies. Valley Metro and Waymo recently joined forces, creating a partnership that will help drive the future of transportation.

Changing financial and political environments highlight the importance of continually assessing light rail’s role and impact.

The benefits are clear and substantial. We are committed to seeking out new ways to connect communities and enhance lives.

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