



# **State of New Mexico**

## *Office of the Governor*

### **Governor Bill Richardson, MRCOG Say Commuter Rail Project On Schedule**

For Immediate release

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February 12, 2004

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ALBUQUERQUE- Governor Bill Richardson announced today plans are moving forward for New Mexico's first commuter rail system. Governor Richardson, New Mexico Department of Transportation Secretary Rhonda Faught, and Lawrence Rael, Executive Director of the Mid Region Council of Governments (MRCOG), provided an update on the project at a news conference at the Alvarado Transportation Center in Albuquerque. Also attending were Governor Stuart Paisano from the Pueblo of Sandia, Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez, and officials from several municipalities that will be involved in the rail project.

The public and the news media were able to examine then ride on an actual commuter rail car, provided by Colorado Railcar of Fort Lupton, Colorado. The trip went from downtown Albuquerque to Bernalillo and back.

The first phase of the rail project, a commuter train running between Belen and Bernalillo, is tentatively scheduled to be operating by the end of 2005.

Governor Richardson gave these prepared remarks at today's news conference:

"How about this weather? This is a great example of why we need commuter rail in New Mexico! This is certainly a day when you could take the train, and not have to risk your life driving on icy, dangerous highways.

We're here to get a snapshot of the future of transportation in New Mexico. It's important for New Mexicans to know that the process to create a commuter rail system is well underway. After decades of talk, surveys, and planning, we're moving forward. We're working on the first stage of what ultimately will be the inter-modal transportation system of the future. And it is still my goal to have the first trains rolling, between Belen and Bernalillo, by the middle of next year.

This week I traveled to Washington to meet with Transportation Secretary Minetta and members of Congress to urge them to support and help fund our commuter rail project. I believe we have a good chance of receiving DOT funding. Part of this effort will be funded by my GRIP program, passed during the special session of the legislature last fall.

This project is a partnership. Together with Lawrence Rael and the Mid Region Council of Governments, we're working to lay the groundwork to get these trains on the tracks:

- We're talking with B-N-S-F railroad about securing leases for use of existing tracks,
- We're talking with the seven Indian Pueblos that the commuter trains will pass through,
- We're working to secure funding from many levels- federal, state, and public-private partnerships,
- We're beginning to look at trains, and other required equipment, and will soon be releasing R-F-Ps,
- We're supporting legislation, HB 231, sponsored by Representative Gail Beam, that will give the public a chance to vote to give Regional Transit Districts the authority to levy taxes to pay for the operation of the trains. I urge county governments to support these R-T-D's and get them moving.

**50% of New Mexico's population** will have daily access to this new system - residents of the Albuquerque region and Santa Fe who represent the economic engine of our state. There are now **30,000-50,000 vehicles a day** in the I-25 corridor, including at least 15,000 commuters each day traveling between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. These trains will reduce the traffic, and the risk for drivers. Just yesterday there was a horrible accident on I-25 north of Bernalillo that claimed two lives.

Commuter rail will help **reduce congestion and air pollution** - and it will create the basis for a **stronger regional economy.**"