RFTA

ROARING FORK TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

# 2019 STRATEGIC PLAN

DRAFT - AUGUST 2019

# LETTER FROM CEO

It is my pleasure to present the 2019 Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) Strategic Plan. This plan is our roadmap to achieve the vision of pursuing excellence and innovation in providing preferred transportation choices that connect and support vibrant communities. It clearly identifies objectives that support RFTA's seven key outcome areas: Safe Customers, Workforce, and General Public; Accessibility and Mobility; Sustainable Workforce; Financial Sustainability; Satisfied Customers; Environmental Sustainability; and High Performing Organization.

This plan reflects the priorities and values of our region as identified by our board of directors. In turn, the plan directly influences RFTA's annual budget development process, as well as our daily operations as we continually strive to improve the services we provide.

I sincerely appreciate the board of directors for their leadership, and RFTA staff for their hard work and commitment to this organization and the services we provide.

Sincerely,

Dan Blankenship
Chief Executive Officer

2019 Strategic Plan

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# INTRODUCTION

**The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA)** is the second largest transit agency in Colorado and the largest rural transit agency in the nation. RFTA operates a variety of public transportation services along the State Highway 82 corridor (Glenwood Springs to Aspen) and the Interstate 70 and State Highway 6 corridors (Glenwood Springs to Rifle); spanning 3 counties and 70 linear miles. RFTA currently has eight member jurisdictions that provide varying rates of dedicated sales, use and property tax revenue: Pitkin County, City of Aspen, Town of Snowmass Village, portions of Eagle County, Town of Basalt, Town of Carbondale, City of Glenwood Springs and the Town of New Castle. RFTA also maintains annual service contracts with the City of Aspen, Aspen Skiing Company, City of Glenwood Springs and Garfield County. RFTA currently operates 90 revenue vehicles, owns and co-manages the 42-mile Rio Grande Railroad Corridor (including the Rio Grande Trail) and employs approximately 380 employees in the peak winter season. In 2018, system-wide ridership reached an all-time record of 5.1 million passenger trips, boosted in part by transit services RFTA provided to help alleviate automobile congestion during the 85-day Grand Avenue Bridge Replacement project in Glenwood Springs.

RFTA's genesis began in the mid-1970's, when the City of Aspen and Pitkin County each implemented separate transit services. The City of Aspen focused on fixed-route services within the City, and operated skier shuttle services in cooperation with the Aspen Skiing Company. Pitkin County provided services to commuters residing in communities along the Highway 82 corridor as far "down valley" as El Jebel, in unincorporated Eagle County.

In 1983, the City of Aspen and Pitkin County merged their transit systems and formed the Roaring Fork Transit Agency, RFTA's predecessor. Between 1983 and 2000, the Transit Agency incrementally expanded its regional commuter transit services to accommodate growing numbers of commuters residing in more affordable down valley communities i.e. Basalt, El Jebel, Carbondale and Glenwood Springs. In 1992, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated the City of Aspen as a PM-10 non-attainment area. As a result, transit services were nearly doubled between 1994 and 1996 as part of the plan to reduce vehicle miles traveled and achieve acceptable airquality standards. Major transit service increases were also undertaken by RFTA in 2001 and 2004 in response to regional population growth and transit demand.

Train operations in the Roaring Fork Valley decreased in phases between the 1960s and the mid-1990s. In 1997, the Roaring Fork Railroad Holding Authority (RFRHA), a public entity created in 1994 by the towns and counties within the Roaring Fork Valley, purchased the Aspen Branch of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad right-of-way (33.3 miles from Woody Creek to Glenwood Springs) from the Southern Pacific Transportation Company for $8.5 million. Funding for the purchase sourced from a consortium of state and local interests, including: Counties of Garfield, Eagle, and Pitkin; City of Aspen, City of Glenwood Springs, Town of Snowmass Village, Town of Basalt, Town of Carbondale, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Program, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund (GOCO).

State of Colorado Rural Transportation Authority (RTA) enabling legislation, created in 1997, was the impetus for creating a more effective regional Transportation

## RFTA SERVICES

**RFTA provides the following transit services:**

- VelociRFTA Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service along the 42-mile SH 82 corridor from Glenwood Springs to Aspen
- Express and Local regional commuter service along the SH 82 Corridor from Aspen to the Town of Snowmass Village (via Brush Creek Rd.), and from Aspen to Glenwood Springs
- No-fare service between Aspen and Snowmass Village, partially subsidized by the Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC)
- Grand Hogback Route commuter service between Glenwood Springs and Rifle, along the I-70 and SH 6 corridors
- Municipal transit services under annual service contracts with the City of Aspen and the City of Glenwood Springs
- Public skier shuttle services under contract with Aspen Skiing Company
- Senior/paratransit transportation services under contract with Garfield County Senior Van/Traveler, and the Senior Van for Pitkin County
- Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area bus tours in partnership with the US Forest Service
- Coordinated first-last mile commuting options with WE-cycle public bicycle share services

## 2018 RFTA STATISTICS (estimated)

- 5.1 million system-wide passenger trips
- 5.3 million miles (est.) operated
- 380 employees during peak winter season
- A diverse fleet of approximately 90 revenue buses, including clean diesel, compressed natural gas (CNG) and near-zero emission battery electric buses to debut in 2019
- $38.3 million Operating Budget/$4.8 million Capital Budget/$4.7 million debt service
- Approximately $2.2 million in Federal/State/Local Capital grants and $1.3 million in Federal/State Operating grants
- 70-mile service region: Aspen to Glenwood Springs (40 miles) and Glenwood Springs to Rifle (30 miles)
- 9 major BRT Stations from Aspen to Glenwood, 14 park and rides and 160 total bus stops served
- Maintenance facilities and administrative offices located in Aspen, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs and Rifle
- Own and co-manage the 34-mile Rio Grande Railroad Corridor and Rio Grande Trail
- Named Large Transit Agency of the Year by the Colorado Association of State Transit Agencies (CASTA)

Authority structure. In November 2000, voters in Glenwood Springs, Carbondale, Eagle County, Basalt, Snowmass Village, Pitkin County and Aspen approved the creation of the RTA and dedicated sales/use taxes to support the ongoing operation and development of transit and trails programs in the region. Subsequently, over the next two years, the employees and assets of the Roaring Fork Transit Agency and RFRHA were merged into the present-day RFTA organization.

The Rio Grande Railroad Corridor is primarily owned by RFTA and co-managed with Pitkin County, Basalt, Eagle County, Carbondale, and Glenwood Springs. The Corridor has been preserved for trail use and future rail/transportation services pursuant to the federal railbanking provision of the National Trails System Act. Railbanking status protects the transportation corridor for future transportation/transit uses, thus limiting activities that might preclude re-introduction of rail or other mass transportation systems in the Roaring Fork Valley. The interim use is an extremely popular 10' wide paved trail, the Rio Grande Trail (RGT), from Glenwood Springs to Woody Creek. A soft service trail, owned and maintained by Pitkin County, connects Woody Creek with Aspen. The non-motorized trail sees an average of 85,000 annual users from near and far.

In 2004, voters in existing RFTA member jurisdictions approved additional sales taxes for the improvement of transit and trails, and voters in the Town of New Castle agreed to join RFTA and contribute revenue to support transit services.

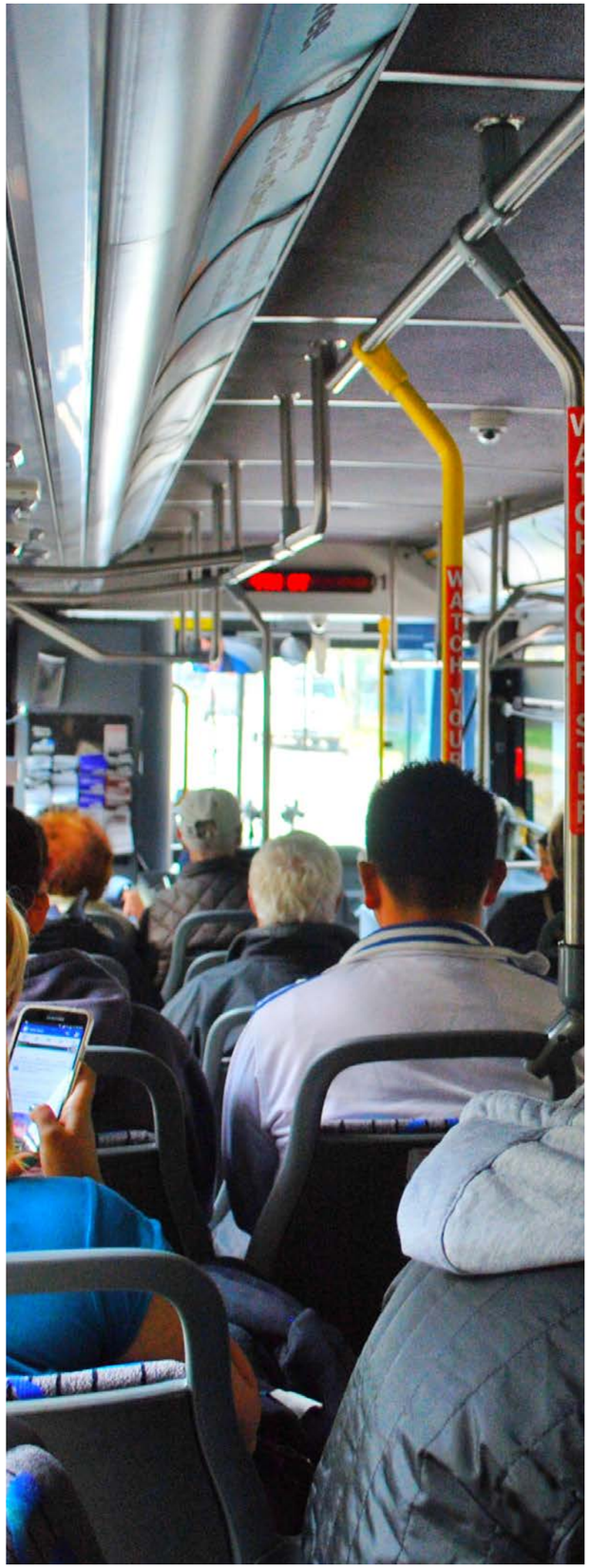
In 2011, RFTA received a $25 million Federal Transit Administration Very Small Starts grant to complete design, engineering, and construction of the $46.2 million BRT system.

On September 3, 2013, on time and on budget, RFTA began operation of the VelociRFTA BRT service; the nation's first rural BRT system. VelociRFTA BRT operates along the 42-mile SH 82 corridor from Glenwood Springs to Aspen, serving nine major BRT stations. Supported by transit signal priority in key locations and roughly 18 miles of bus-only or Bus/HOV lanes, BRT provides travel times that are competitive with the private automobile. Ridership reached a record-breaking 5.5 million in 2017; a 9% increase over 2016.

RFTA DESTINATION 2040
OUR FUTURE RIDES ON RFTA!

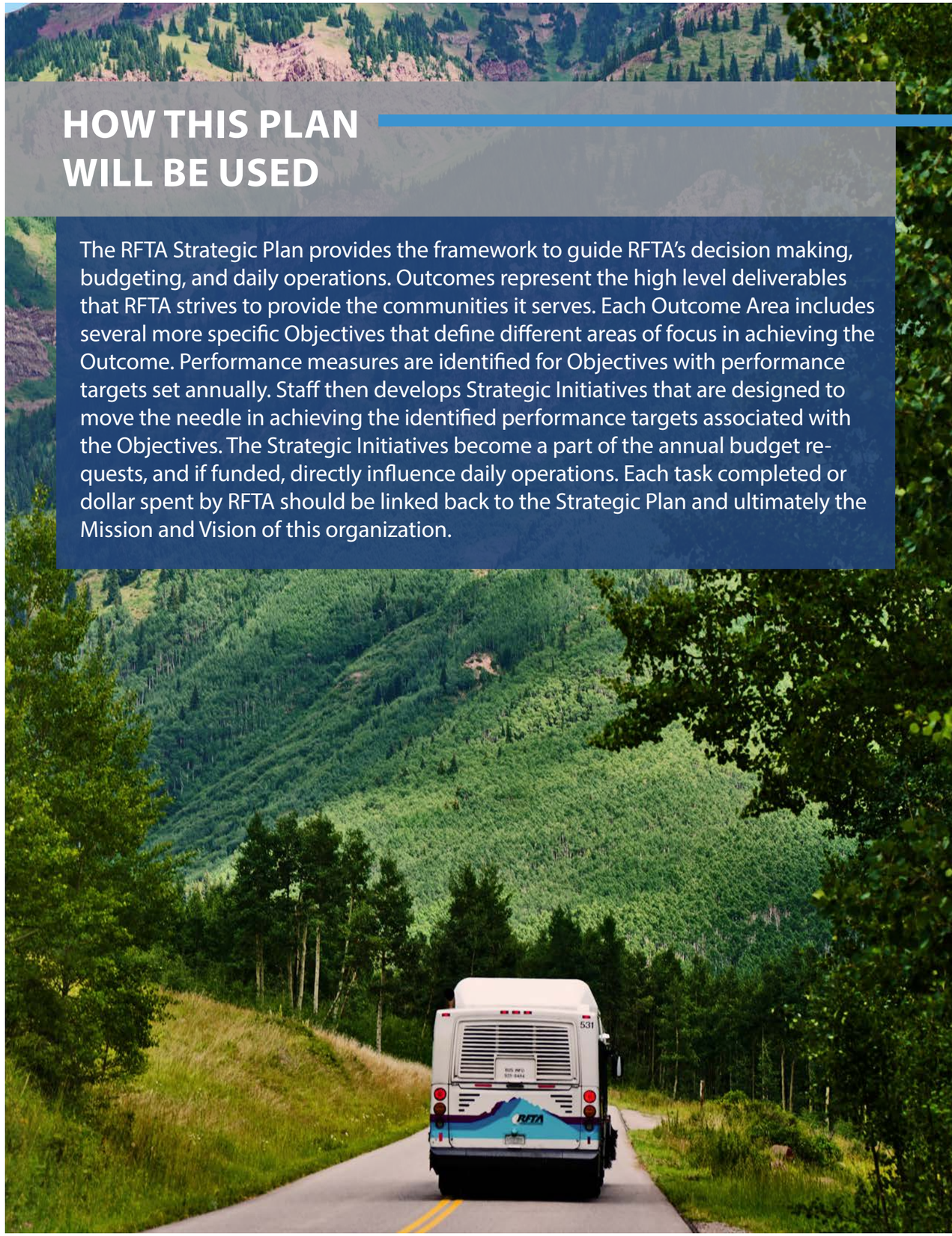
RFTA first started assessing regional transit/transportation needs in 2016 via the Integrated Transportation System Plan (ITSP) and Upper Valley Mobility Study (UVMS). In 2018, the ITSP planning process catalyzed a new public-friendly regional improvements package, branded as Destination 2040: Our Future Rides on RFTA. The RFTA Board and Staff, equipped with targeted polling and survey data, agreed to refer a 2.65 mill levy property tax question to regional voters in RFTA's eight member jurisdictions. On November 2, 2018, eligible voters approved Ballot Question 7A with 11,364 votes in favor and 10,362 votes against; an approval margin of 52 to 48 percent. As RFTA's first property tax revenue, the new revenue will add an estimated $9 million to RFTA's annual budget of $42 million.

The additional property tax revenue will help RFTA maintain and improve its services, infrastructure, and equipment, while reducing its reliance on inadequate and uncertain State and Federal grants. RFTA is confident that the Authority is now more resilient and better equipped to keep pace with current and future population and traffic growth estimates.



# HOW THIS PLAN WILL BE USED

The RFTA Strategic Plan provides the framework to guide RFTA's decision making, budgeting, and daily operations. Outcomes represent the high level deliverables that RFTA strives to provide the communities it serves. Each Outcome Area includes several more specific Objectives that define different areas of focus in achieving the Outcome. Performance measures are identified for Objectives with performance targets set annually. Staff then develops Strategic Initiatives that are designed to move the needle in achieving the identified performance targets associated with the Objectives. The Strategic Initiatives become a part of the annual budget requests, and if funded, directly influence daily operations. Each task completed or dollar spent by RFTA should be linked back to the Strategic Plan and ultimately the Mission and Vision of this organization.



**VISION**
RFTA pursues excellence and innovation in providing preferred transportation choices that connect and support vibrant communities

**MISSION**
Connecting our Region with Transit and Trails

**VALUES**
Safe, Accountable, Affordable, Convenient, Dependable, Efficient, Sustainable

# STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

Staff has identified strategic advantages and challenges. Advantages are those strengths and attributes that will enable RFTA to achieve the Strategic Objectives described later in this document. Challenges reflect those attributes that could impair RFTA's ability to achieve the Strategic Objectives. Each of the challenges described below are reflected in one or more Strategic Objective so that the challenges will be addressed by staff in future budget proposals.

## ADVANTAGES

### TALENT
- Experienced, dedicated and tenured management team
- Professional and courteous bus operators

### COMMUNITY/RELATIONSHIP
- Services meet the unique travel demands of this region;
- Dependable and reliable bus service, 24-7, 365 days per year
- Steadily increasing bus ridership and trail users
- High level of public trust in RFTA
- Dedicated sales and property tax revenues for long-term financial sustainability
- Favorable public response to all RFTA services, especially VelociRFTA BRT service
- RFTA Board of Directors provides regional support and influence
- Leveraging regional stakeholders for collaborative projects and grant project applications

### FUNDING
- Ability to secure grant funding for capital, fleet and operations; and to meet grant administration requirements
- Successful 2.65 mill property tax approval in member jurisdictions to plan and implement the RFTA Destination 2040 Regional Project List

### PHYSICAL ASSETS
- Fleet and facility capital assets are in a general State of Good Repair and are being managed with Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) practices
- RFTA-owned employee housing units
- Ownership and co-management of 34 miles of the Rio Grande Railroad Corridor and Rio Grande Trail, which is currently railbanked and being preserved for future transportation uses

## CHALLENGES

### COMMUNITY/RELATIONSHIP
- Operating across a vast rural region with diverse and demanding transportation needs
- Adapting to shifting national demographics

### TALENT
- Succession planning for a pending exodus of nearly all highest-level staff
- Attracting, engaging and retaining employees in a region with a high cost of living and a scarcity of affordable housing
- Difficulty of attracting and retaining bus operators that possess both driving proficiency and customer service skills
- Lack of a centralized, well-staffed customer service department
- Operations outgrowing support staff and supervisory capabilities
- Inadequate staffing to support existing and future technologies
- Maintaining affordable employee health care costs

### FUNDING
- Implementing projects from the RFTA Destination 2040 Regional Project List on time and on budget

### COMMUNICATION
- Fragmented staff communication due to dispersed regional facilities

### PHYSICAL ASSETS
- Creating "shovel ready" capital projects with unknown funding opportunities
- Developing adequate transit capacity during peak hours in peak seasons
- Meeting regional transportation needs and desires with a balanced budget
- Adoption of innovative, emerging alternative fuel technologies, without compromising service, efficiency, and budget
- Collaborative management and maintenance of the railbanked Rio Grande Railroad Corridor and Rio Grande Trail

# OUTCOME AREAS

The RFTA Board of Directors and Staff have agreed upon the following seven Outcome Areas: **Safe Customers, Workforce and General Public; Accessibility and Mobility; Sustainable Workforce; Financial Sustainability; Satisfied Customers; Environmental Sustainability; and High Performing Organization**. Each RFTA director/manager continuously assesses these themes and ties their departmental goals back to these guiding principles.

**SAFE CUSTOMERS, WORKFORCE AND GENERAL PUBLIC**

**ACCESSIBILITY AND MOBILITY**

**SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE**

**FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**SATISFIED CUSTOMERS**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**HIGH PERFORMING ORGANIZATION**

# SAFE CUSTOMERS, WORKFORCE AND GENERAL PUBLIC

RFTA will ensure the safety of its workforce, customers and general public through its safety first culture, systematic procedures, practices, and policies for managing risks and hazards.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

1.1 Customers are safe at RFTA facilities and riding RFTA services
1.2 The Public is safe and comfortable using the Rio Grande trail
1.3 Maintain and promote a healthy and safe workforce
1.4 The general public has a positive perception of the safety of RFTA services
1.5 Staff are well trained and safety focused

# ACCESSIBILITY AND MOBILITY

RFTA will provide accessible, effective and easy to use mobility options that connect our region for all user types.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

2.1 Rio Grande Railroad Corridor/Rio Grande Trail is appropriately protected and utilized

2.2 Trail and transit users move safely, quickly and efficiently

2.3 Increase alternative mode splits throughout the region

2.4 Provide increased first and last mile options for customers throughout service area

2.5 Ensure accessibility for youth, low income, seniors and disabled populations

2.6 Identify and reduce barriers to riding transit and accessing trails

2.7 Provide convenient connections to key activity centers in service area

# SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

RFTA will ensure organizational sustainability by enhancing its ability to continue to recruit and retain an engaged, well-trained, resilient professional workforce.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

3.1 Prioritize the hiring of local employees
3.2 Provide competitive compensation and benefit packages
3.3 Provide comfortable and affordable short-term and long-term housing solutions
3.4 Find ways to reduce the strain of commuting long distances on the workforce
3.5 Recognize and reward top performers
3.6 Ensure organizational resilience through thoughtful succession planning and workforce development
3.7 Find ways to increase employee engagement
3.8 Provide employees with the tools, space and equipment to maximize efficiency and safety

# FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

RFTA will ensure cost effective and responsible use of funding, maintain and monitor its short-term and long-term financial forecasts, seek funding partnerships and diversification of revenues.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

4.1 Ensure accurate budgeting and accounting
4.2 Develop a capital planning prioritization process
4.3 Preserve financial sustainability and maintain a structurally balanced long-range budget
4.4 Pursue financing opportunities to deliver better service and complete future capital projects
4.5 Optimize RFTA services and expenditures for more efficiency and/or costs savings
4.6 Promote fair and open competition in contracting opportunities to ensure fair and reasonable pricing.
4.7 Monitor, evaluate and present new revenue sources

# SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

RFTA will strive to exceed customer expectations by providing modern, courteous, safe, convenient, highly reliable, dependable, comfortable, sustainable, cost efficient, and affordable transportation choices to our residents and visitors.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

5.1 Transit and trail experiences are enjoyable
5.2 Transit services are affordable for all user types
5.3 Leverage technology to enhance customer experience
5.4 Provide easy, modern and reliable services
5.5 Conduct triennial on-board passenger surveys
5.6 Provide a centralized, user-friendly customer relationship management system
5.7 Provide clean and well maintained facilities, trails and equipment
5.8 Staff are well trained and customer focused

# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

RFTA will research and implement innovative, environmentally sustainable practices in all areas of transit and trails management.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

6.1 Trail and transit users enjoy environmentally friendly equipment and facilities

6.2 RFTA organization will strive for 100% renewable energy use

6.3 Maximize energy efficiencies within RFTA organization with cost-effective solutions

6.4 Provide alternative and innovative travel solutions to help slow the growth of vehicle miles traveled in region

6.5 Advance renewable/sustainable projects without sacrificing our existing services and responsible budget

6.6 Promote and support transit oriented land use patterns

# HIGH PERFORMING ORGANIZATION

With integrity, RFTA will deliver efficient, innovative, transparent, accountable, effective, and collaborative regional transportation services that reflect community values.

## SMART OBJECTIVES

7.1 Optimize the use of RFTA assets through capital improvement planning, preventative maintenance and asset management

7.2 Innovative technology will be leveraged to improve service and efficiency in all outcome areas

7.3 Proactively influence policy and legislative development at all levels of government regulation

7.4 Actively engage the public about plans, projects and service changes

7.5 Ensure appropriate transparency of all RFTA business

7.6 Actively plan for business continuity and resilience in the event of crisis

7.7 Continually seek ways to improve business process

7.8 Conduct triennial community survey

# PERFORMANCE MEASURES

## RFTA is committed to being a data driven organization.

Using quantifiable data and analysis, RFTA will track and measure success in achieving the Outcomes and Objectives defined in this plan. This includes identifying appropriate metrics related to both Outcomes and Objectives, establishing appropriate targets for each of these metrics, tracking the actual performance of each metric over time, and regularly reviewing.

## RFTA Dashboard

Staff will work in developing the RFTA Dashboard where each of the seven Outcome Areas has four to seven performance metrics that track, at a high level, RFTA's progress in achieving the desired Outcome. Every measure on the dashboard will be measured against a target. The RFTA Dashboard will be updated quarterly and can be found online at rfta.com/dashboard.