



Colorado River Subarea Plan

San Bernardino County Long Range Multimodal Transportation Plan

San Bernardino County, CA

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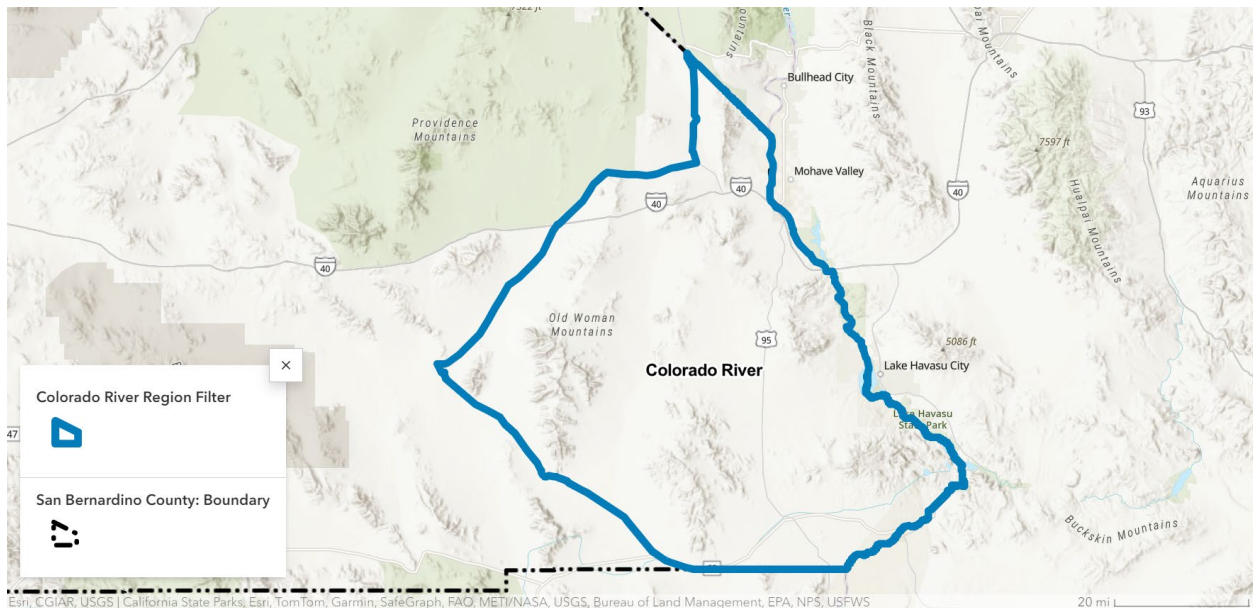
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1 Subarea Overview

As the largest county in the contiguous United States in land area, San Bernardino County is geographically diverse, and each subregion has unique needs. This is recognized in the county's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, Measure I, which allocates funding to six subareas. In developing the Long Range Multimodal Transportation Plan (LRMTP), the six subareas identified by Measure I were analyzed to ensure issues facing San Bernardino County's unique geographic areas are adequately addressed. This subarea plan focuses on the Colorado River subarea (Figure 1-1).

The Colorado River includes the City of Needles and the communities of Big River and Bluewater. The subarea had 2,974 households in 2019, which is projected to increase by 17 percent in 2050 (Southern California Association of Governments [SCAG] 2024). Additionally, the number of jobs in the Colorado River Subarea is expected to increase by 15 percent between 2019 and 2050 (SCAG 2024). In the SCAG region, the City of Needles is one of the top five growing jurisdictions in terms of percentage growth of households, and one of the top 15 growing jurisdictions regarding the percentage of employment (SCAG 2024). Given the rural nature of the subarea, the growth in jobs and households are likely to be concentrated in the City of Needles.

Figure 1-1. Colorado River Subarea



Source: Existing Conditions StoryMap

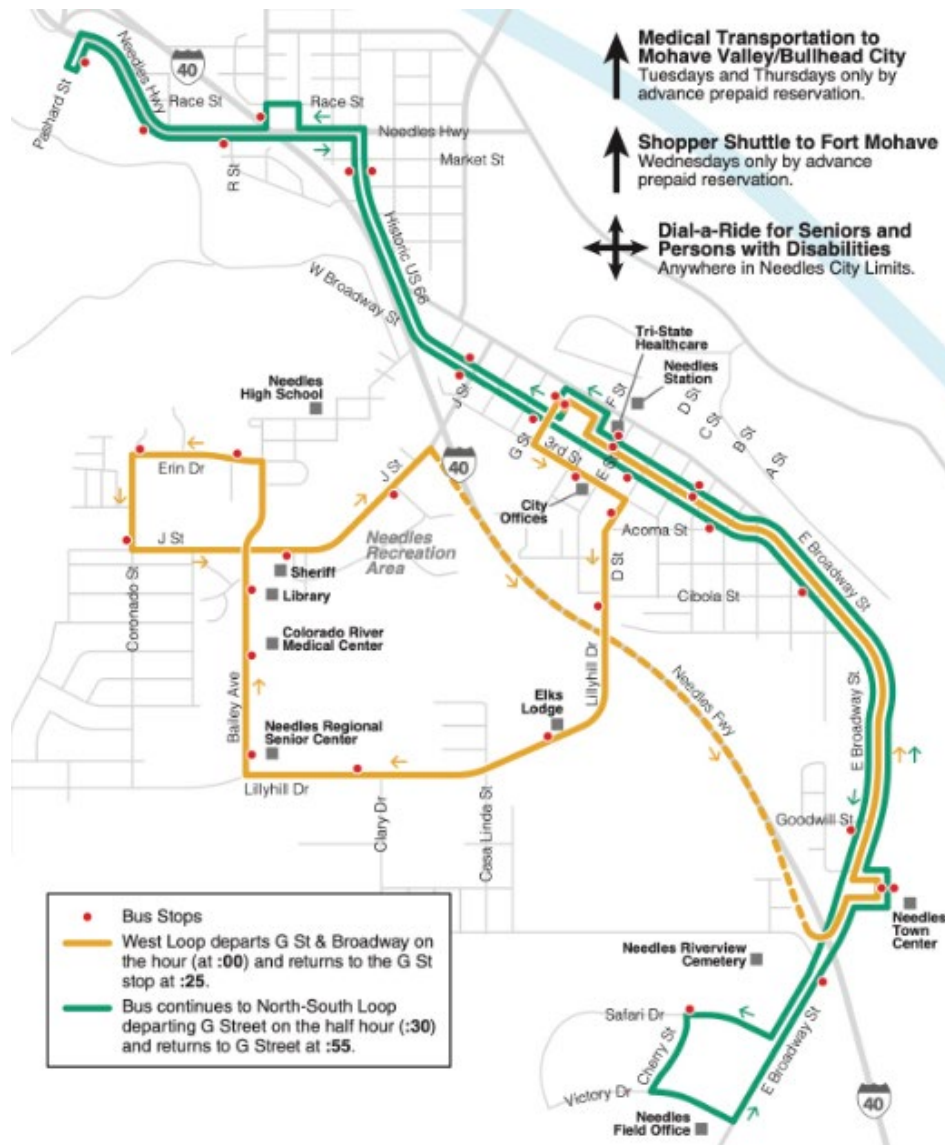
2 Unique Challenges

Long Commute Distances: Development in the Colorado Subarea is primarily focused in Needles, featuring single-family residential, commercial, industrial, and hospitality uses. As the easternmost community in San Bernardino County, residents often face long commute times when traveling to other cities in the county. Additionally, many trips involve crossing state lines into Arizona and Nevada.

Limited Transit Options: Needles Area Transit operates local fixed bus services and very limited shuttle service to medical centers and grocery stores in Fort Mohave and Bullhead City in Arizona (Figure 2-1). Amtrak’s Southwest Chief operates between downtown Los Angeles and Chicago, with a stop in Needles, Barstow, Victorville, and San Bernardino. Victor Valley Transit Authority operated Route 200 Needles Link, connecting Needles, Barstow, and Victorville, but this route was suspended due to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dependence on Key Arteries: Interstate 40 (I-40) and State Route 95 (SR-95) are the key arterials through the Colorado River subarea. Smaller arterials and local roads are primarily concentrated in Needles, as the rest of the subarea is undeveloped, with most of the land being preserved as part of the Dead Mountains Wilderness Area. I-40 provides regional access through the Mojave Desert to Needles and northern Arizona, and SR-95 provides access to Bullhead City and Fort Mohave in Arizona.

Figure 2-1. Needles Area Transit Routes



Source: Needles Area Transit

3 Strategic Priorities

In developing the LRMTTP, five areas of concern were identified throughout the county: mobility, goods movement, climate adaptation and resiliency, disadvantaged communities, and funding. The areas of concern are related to the goals and objectives of the LRMTTP. This section describes how these areas relate to the Colorado River subarea.

Mobility: As mentioned above, I-40 and SR-95 are the two key arterials in the subarea for local and regional travel. Paved local roads are very limited and concentrated in the developed areas of Needles, and SR-95 is the only road through Needles to connect residents in Needles to medical care and other services in the Arizona. The SR-95 and I-40 bridges across the Colorado River to Arizona do not have bike lanes or sidewalks. Improvements to Needles Highway in both the city and the County portions of the Subarea and the rehabilitation of the SR-95 bridge over the Colorado River are considered regional priorities in the Subarea.

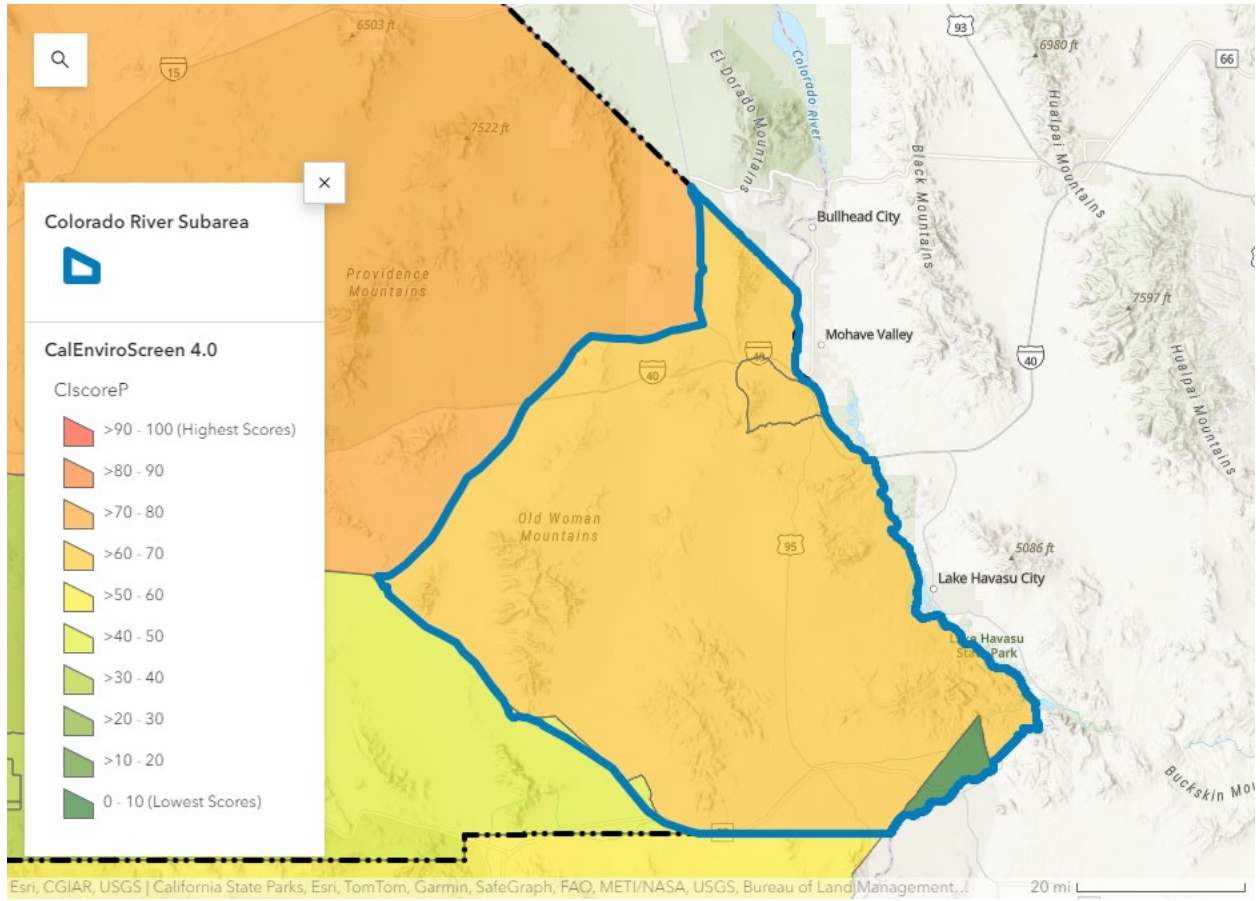
Goods Movement: I-40 is a designated truck route, which was identified to need more truck parking locations from the California Statewide Truck Parking Study. Truck routes should avoid conflicts with safe routes to schools, residential neighborhoods, and noise-sensitive uses. The BNSF Needles Subdivision runs through the northern portion of the Colorado River subarea. BNSF recently constructed a fourth main track through Needles for high-priority trains to pass slower trains at crew-change points.

Climate Adaption and Resiliency: The Colorado River subarea is expected to experience the highest increase of additional extreme heat days in the county. The eastern county borderline, near the City of Needles, is projected to experience an increase in wildfire risk. Extreme heat and poor air quality impacts riders waiting for transit and people who walk or bike.

Disadvantaged Communities: Census tracts in the Colorado River subarea have lower CalEnviroScreen scores compared to other subareas (Figure 3-1), suggesting a lower pollution burden and reduced vulnerability to pollution. Residents have a possibility of exposure to ozone pollutants, and sensitive populations in the area are at risk for asthma and cardiovascular disease. Census tracts in Fort Mojave Reservation, Chemehuevi Reservation, and Colorado River Indian Reservation are designated as disadvantaged by Senate Bill 535.

Funding: Funding issues are not restricted to one geographic area, however, securing funding to improve access and connectivity between Needles and Arizona or with county services in the Victor Valley and the Valley, improve active transportation options, and improving railroad crossings are priorities for the Colorado River subarea.

Figure 3-1. CalEnviroScreen Percentile for the Colorado River Subarea



Source: CalEnviroScreen 4.0

4 Strategic Priorities Action Plan

The final LRMTTP report identifies the projects being considered for the forthcoming San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) 2025 10-Year Delivery Plan, and presents projects listed for the “Baseline Level” of investment and additional projects at the “Aggressive Level” that can be considered with additional revenue for all subareas. Table I lists highway projects being pursued by local jurisdictions in the Colorado River Subarea over the next 10 years. Additional details are available in the SBCTA 2025 10-Year Delivery Plan. Needles is in the process of updating its short-range transit plan. The most recent plan can be found at: [Needles Transit Services Short Range Transit Plan 2020-2025](#).

Table I. Colorado River Subarea - Major Local Highway Program Projects Through FY 2033/34 (1,000s)

PROJECT	COST
① River Street from BNSF to North K Street*	\$569
② River Road from North K Street to 600' West of Jack Smith Park*	\$1,946
③ US 95/Havasu Lake Rd. Intersection Improvement*	\$1,173
④ Needles Highway Improvements, Segment 1C	\$8,900
TOTAL:	\$12,588

* Project is not fully funded.

Table II through Table VI summarizes the strategic priority and key actions for each of the issues described in the previous section.

Table II. Mobility Action Plan for the Colorado River Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Further develop the Core Transit Network	Existing Needles Area Transit service represent the backbone of transit mobility. The City's ability to deliver these services needs to be maintained.
	Continue to manage and improve other alternate mode initiatives, including vanpool, carpool, and active transportation modes.
	Invest in Needles Area Transit based on priorities in the respective Short Range Transit Plans
	Position the priority transit network to be competitive for additional state and federal funding
	Pursue operating funds for increased service using strategies described in key issue 5
Incremental transit enhancements in rural areas	Identify unmet or underserved needs, such as connections from Needles to Arizona for grocery and pharmacy access
	Secure funding to implement new/enhanced service to meet rural travel needs
Develop coordinated program of first/last mile improvements	Build on the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan to define an active transportation priority list and advance project development to position for funding
	Deliver priority improvements
	Build on current efforts by SCAG to develop design guidelines for a tiered mobility hub network that co-locates transit and active transportation amenities such as bike sharing
Invest in multimodal connectivity and customer experience	Actively promote fare integration and adoption of interoperable fare payment and trip planning technology across San Bernardino County and regional public transportation services and modes
	Invest in physical improvements at bus stops to improve rider safety and comfort, such as shelters, benches, and lighting
Promote strong vanpool, carpool, and transportation demand management (TDM) initiatives	Continue and expand partnerships with large and medium-sized employers to promote multimodal alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle commutes, including telecommuting
	Continue partnering with regional partners to share data and technology tools to support shared-ride opportunities for long-distance commuters
	Review transit fare structures and carpool/vanpool programs to provide flexibility that encourages hybrid workers to use alternative modes on days they must travel to an office

Develop vehicle miles traveled (VMT) mitigation bank

Promote awareness of mobility alternatives and communicate the quality-of-life benefits of bus and rail transit, vanpool, and carpool as alternatives to driving alone

Leverage existing plans and work on strategic priorities to identify multimodal projects that can reduce VMT

Implement the proposed “mode-choice based VMT mitigation bank” to incentivize commuters to reduce their VMT and make VMT credits available for purchase by proponents of highway and development projects.

Table III. Goods Movement Action Plan for the Colorado River Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Develop plan for designated freight corridors	Assist jurisdictions with guidelines for implementation of Assembly Bill 98, to include identification of corridors that may be designated as truck routes
	Identify improvements to improve safety and operational efficiency along these corridors
	Work with Caltrans and California Highway Patrol to enhance current incident management and monitoring systems to actively manage traffic along key freight corridors
	Coordinate with local jurisdictions on a set of guidelines and plans to incorporate proposed truck routes into their circulation elements as required by Assembly Bill 98
Collaborate with logistics industry to shift freight from truck to rail, where practical and cost-effective	Prioritize connections to intermodal facilities in development of designated highway freight corridor plan
	Collaborate with BNSF to address key bottlenecks in the freight rail network to increase rail capacity
Accelerate transition to clean trucks	Partner with logistics and zero-emission (ZE) charging/fueling companies to accelerate the transition to ZE truck operations and supporting infrastructure needs consistent with the California Transportation Commission’s Senate Bill 671 designated zero-emission corridors
	Partner with the private sector to seek grant funding for ZE trucks and charging/fueling stations
	Continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions and regional partners to build on goods movement decarbonization efforts such as the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario MSA Priority Climate Action Plan
Prioritize investments in high-volume highway freight corridors	Deliver key highway improvements in the Measure I 10-Year Delivery Plan

Table IV. Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Action Plan for the Colorado River Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Encourage redundancy across the transportation network and improve operational resiliency on major arterials	Implement recommendations from the forthcoming Emergency Evacuation Network Study (EENR)
Accelerate transition to clean trucks	<p>Partner with trucking and zero-emission fueling/charging companies to accelerate the transition to zero-emission in the Senate Bill 671 corridors and for local logistics operations. I-40 is one of those corridors.</p> <p>Seek grant funding for ZE trucking and transit</p>
Transition transit operations to zero-emissions	Implement transit zero-emission plans, taking advantage of lessons learned as agencies deploy new technologies
Prioritize state-of-good-repair on highways and arterials	Collaborate with Caltrans and local jurisdictions on criteria such as pavement condition index for prioritizing maintenance of alternate routes and need for incident traffic management and emergency evacuation
Establish emergency procedures	<p>Complete the Emergency Evacuation Network Resilience Study in cooperation with Western Riverside Council of Governments and partner to implement key recommendations of the study</p> <p>Aid transit agencies, where possible, during periods of emergencies due to extreme events such as fire and flooding, as they support evacuation of local residents (and their pets) to safe centers and evacuation shelters.</p> <p>Collaborate with local and state emergency service agencies to establish and maintain strong and clear communication pathways so that in times of emergency, San Bernardino County residents are knowledgeable about where to turn for immediate transportation-related information</p>

Table V. Disadvantaged Communities Action Plan for the Colorado River Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Continue to operate the local bus and demand-responsive transit systems that particularly serve residents without access to cars	<p>Analyze potential impacts of major transit investments on transit service to disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>Provide adequate maintenance, security, schedule information and cleanliness at local bus stops.</p> <p>Consider needs of all users as electronic fare payment systems are further developed.</p>
Take advantage of available funding focused on disadvantaged communities	<p>Deliver transit priorities identified in the LRMTF that particularly benefit disadvantaged communities</p> <p>Ensure that transit and TDM programs are highlighted at employment sites where lower-wage workers tend to be employed</p> <p>Take advantage of equity-oriented programs like the Reconnecting Communities Pilot</p> <p>Continue to leverage state greenhouse gas reduction fund sources such as Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) and Senate Bill 1 funds such as Trade Corridor Enhancement Program (TCEP) to accelerate the ZE transition</p>
Free and reduced fare programs	<p>Expand targeted programs to improve transit affordability for students, seniors, and low-income individuals</p> <p>Promote electronic fare payment options, particularly to support fare-capping, including for low-income individuals who otherwise pay more for successive trips than the cost of a monthly pass</p> <p>Communicate fare incentives to the public</p>
Prioritize multimodal improvements to improve mobility in disadvantaged communities	<p>In developing the Core Transit Network, prioritize corridors that connect disadvantaged communities to key destinations</p> <p>Invest in high-comfort off-street active transportation corridors such as the River Golf Trail</p> <p>Build on the Non-Motorized Transportation plan to deliver improvements in disadvantaged communities</p>
Prioritize inclusive communications	<p>Translate promotional materials, trip planning information, and other information on SBCTA programs into the most common languages for the targeted audience</p> <p>Develop target-group focused communications strategies – such as to seniors, to rideshare commuters, to potential transit users – that can promote mobility choices.</p> <p>Use the Public & Specialized Transportation Advisory and Coordination Council (PASTACC) to coordinate delivery of services to disadvantaged communities.</p>

Table VI. Funding Action Plan for the Colorado River Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Secure additional state and regional funding for transit operations	<p>Increase availability and flexibility of future Measure I funding for use in transit operations</p> <p>Lobby for greater predictability of state and federal transportation revenue streams and flexibility to use new and existing state and federal transportation funding sources for operating expenses</p>
Align future funding sales tax measures with the priorities of the LRMTF	<p>Ensure that a potential Measure I renewal or additional tax measure would allow the key actions for the strategic priorities as eligible expenditures, including capital investments for all modes and ongoing operating costs for transit</p> <p>Ensure that a potential Measure I renewal provides flexibility in future allocations to allow SBCTA and its partners to adapt to the uncertain future and changing investment needs</p>
Partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) and the business sector to build support for projects and promote alternatives	<p>Maintain relationships with CBO leaders and business sector partners</p> <p>Leverage CBO and private sector contact networks to disseminate information in a targeted manner and collect feedback from communities and businesses affected by projects</p> <p>Leverage CBO and business sector networks to disseminate information about new and existing multimodal services and incentives available to the public</p>
Support local agency grant pursuits	<p>Monitor grant funding opportunities at federal, state, and regional levels and connect collaborate with local partners on grant pursuits</p> <p>Provide technical support for local grant applications</p>

5 Conclusion and Next Steps

Priority projects to improve operations of the transportation network are identified in the 10-Year Delivery Plan. The Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, Points of Interest Pedestrian Plan, and the Regional Safe Routes to School Plan include projects to improve the active transportation network in Needles.

In 2019, SBCTA approved the Needles Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) 2020-2025, and includes the financially constrained scenario and a financially unconstrained scenario. The financially constrained scenario includes recommendations to expand service to Fort Mohave in Arizona, install bus shelters and amenities, and execute the Zero Emission Bus Rollout Plan. Recommendations in the SRTP that will require additional resources including initiating Sunday service, operating weekday service later than 7:00 p.m. and Saturday service alter than 5:00 p.m., initiating frequent service to Arizona, expanding Dial-a-Ride service hours, and improving service to Barstow and Victorville. Work is currently ongoing to update Needles Area Transit's 2019 Short Range Transit Plan.

6 References

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