

Statement from VIA/ATD Board Chair Hope Andrade

August 13, 2020

This is an important moment in VIA's history. Today, we will take this opportunity to do something transformative, with support from the voters. This action will have a real effect on our City, our Region, our transit agency, and most importantly, the community we serve.

For more than a year, and most especially during the most recent weeks and months, this Board has given a lot of thought to what we are trying to achieve.

We have often asked ourselves: How do we want to leave it better than we found it.

Today's action could help deliver dramatic improvements not only to the transit and mobility systems that keep San Antonio moving but to the lives of the now over 2 million residents—*and counting*—who live and work here, and rely on us to move people, every day.

When we began this visioning and planning process, we realized that by 2040, the population of our region is going to surpass 3 million and this growth could bring nearly 100,000 new jobs to the area.

This is a good thing. We want businesses to view San Antonio as a competitive place to invest in and expand. We want people to come here and enjoy the great quality of life that San Antonio offers. We want them to buy homes, we want them to work and raise families here.

We want business to come and create jobs so that we can continue to grow and be a city of opportunity.

These things are blessings, particularly at a time when so many are suffering without work or sufficient wages to make ends meet.

Social and economic growth brings great opportunities—*only* if we are able to strengthen and sustain our infrastructure, of which a key component is public transit.

If we do not, this level of unprecedented growth could overwhelm us and roll back the progress we've made and hope to continue as a city and region.

With this realization, our Board agreed: *we must do something*. We need to treat this moment as a challenge and an opportunity before it becomes a problem.

And we have a plan that does just that, exactly what it was named for: *Keep San Antonio Moving*.

This plan, by design, is adaptive.

Let me tell you how we got here. Our team of planners and partnering organizations, including the City, County, Alamo Area MPO, and others, have studied exhaustively where growth and density are occurring. Where job and residential growth are tracking. And where traffic and congestion are taking place on our roadways.

They delivered models and systems designed to address current scenarios and future projections—and be able to adapt to changing conditions, and still deliver on our goals, which are:

- Improve mobility and manage congestion
- Enhance connectivity and improve access
- Future proof the system with common-sense innovation
- Support both population growth and economic growth in our community
- Ensure a return on our investment

We believe it is a solid plan because it has a solid foundation. Let's focus for a minute on what we're building on: The system that VIA's 2,200-plus employees dedicate their expertise and service to maintaining, each and every day for the past 43 years.

We provide 36.6 million passenger trips per year. We have seven transit centers and eight Park & Ride facilities. We serve 92 routes to 14 member cities. We have 479 buses and 139 VIAtrans vans, 7,200 bus stops and we cover 1,213 square miles.

It's also important to acknowledge and appreciate how many people rely on VIA for transit.

We were serving up to 120,000 passengers a day, before COVID—a number we will see again and even increase as we continue to support our region's recovery.

In fact, we were tracking about 6% ridership growth, systemwide before COVID hit. And up to 30% growth on routes with investments in increased frequency and reliability. It's a positive path that was unexpectedly disrupted but that I'm confident we will get back to again.

Let me remind those who do not take transit, those who have or choose other options, that you also benefit from VIA because we're able to take vehicles off the road and reduce congestion that would otherwise occur.

People need transit to operate businesses, hospitals, restaurants, construction sites, schools, and so many others whose workforce needs an affordable reliable way to get to work.

Transit is the backbone of our local economy and will be most critical to its recovery in the years to come.

Like our CEO has said many times, *VIA moves people*. And indeed, VIA moves San Antonio.

The heart of our system is our bus service, our 1,200-plus operators, and the hundreds of hard-working team members who support our transportation operation.

We build on this in our Keep San Antonio Moving plan, with additions in frequent service and rededication of resources in areas where the most needs exist.

And though bus service is at our core, mobility is not one size fits all. Our plan builds on finding innovative and right-sized service delivery for different and specific needs.

We will work on expanding our VIA Link and on-demand service models, we will work closely with local employers to grow our vanpool and VIA Works employer-support programs, and strengthen our VIAtrans paratransit service—for elderly and disabled customers.

The reality is that as our population increases, we must be prepared for an increase in elderly and disabled passengers.

VIAtrans is an affordable, reliable, and trusted service in this community. We carry over 1.1 million passengers each year and our service is designed to complement fixed-route bus routes with amenities and programs that go well beyond what the ADA requires.

As Trustee Athalie Malone often reminds us, our VIAtrans riders also use this service to get them to their jobs.

We're also focusing on expanding mobility on demand model and strengthening core service benefits which will benefit VIAtrans and our elderly and disabled community.

We have learned a lot in the past few months about who we carry on our buses and vans, where they're going and why they ride VIA.

We know that our customers are making essential trips. Many travel to doctor's appointments, dialysis treatments, to get food and supplies, and be there for people they care for.

Basically, we carry essential workers to essential jobs. We are delivering the frontline.

Our riders are the people who drive our economy—before, during and after this crisis. They will see us through an economic recovery and help us return to prosperity, if we can give them the service they need and deserve.

So as we ask the voters to trust us to implement their community-driven plan to transform our region through transit—with no new taxes, I repeat, no new taxes—it is important to note that VIA is an outstanding transit system, often recognized with awards from all over the country.

More importantly, the public can trust VIA to make sound financial decisions that serve their interests.

- VIA is recognized with AA and AAA credit ratings from standard-bearing bond rating agencies.
- Our budget and finance teams are award-winning for their efficient and transparent reporting.
- We provide an online dashboard to show, in full transparency, performance on every route, how the cost per passenger is being tracked across the system, and how well we are doing as an agency in delivering the essential service our community counts on.

And since we're asking the public to support additional dedicated funding to make this transformation possible, let me take a moment to review at what we've have done with the limited funds we currently receive.

- We've established a funding and planning partnership with the City of San Antonio to increase frequency on key routes throughout the community, which have resulted in up to 30% ridership growth on some routes.
- We've implemented VIA Link—the app-based service model that provides transit-on-demand for more efficient service within designated zones at a cost savings to VIA and time savings to the customer.

- We continue the conversion of our fleet to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), helping to fulfill our commitment to using clean technology to move the community.
- We've implemented two new Primo routes to expand connections on the West Side and South Side.
- We opened the long-awaited Brooks Transit Center, to be the anchor of our Military Primo.
- We opened the Stone Oak Park & Ride, with direct access into the US 281 High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes.
- We're preparing for the first HOV lane to open in just a few weeks on I-10, which will be the first HOV lane in our region.
- And we celebrated our 40th anniversary in 2018—marking four decades of service and growth.
- A lot has changed in 40 years but sadly, dedicated funding for transit in San Antonio has not.

With voter approval of the additional 1/8-cent share of existing sales tax funding, we will finally secure a viable source of funding that was intended for transit.

The plan is to return transit dollars to transit use for our city to have an adequate, innovative transit system it deserves.

And we'll do that with our community-driven and community-focused plan that relies on smart investments, partnerships, and innovation to transform our region.

I'm a believer that when you know better, you must do better. The community has told us what we need to do to remain a thriving, vibrant and mobile city—we know we must do better to catch up and with this new funding we will be able to keep up with the growth we know is coming.

The Keep SA Moving Plan sets us up to continue connecting our community over the next 40 years. It builds on a strong foundation and moves us forward in new and exciting ways, using innovation and smart investments.

It preserves the lifeline that transit provides today and prepares us for a more mobile future. It begins to address the historic inequities that underfunding transit has created in our city and puts opportunity within everyone's reach, to uplift our community.

Again, I'll say that this is an important moment in our history—not just for VIA as an agency, and the team who has dedicated years to formulate this plan and this path—but for the people of San Antonio and Bexar County, who are the reason we are here today.

I must express my appreciation for our VIA Family, our partners, and members of the public who have contributed greatly to the plan's development.

Also, to our elected leaders from the City and County, to State and Federal offices—thank you for your continued support.

And our VIA/ATD trustees, the strongest, the most dedicated and passionate group of advocates and champions for a greater good in our community. I am honored to be part of the team who is delivering this to the voters.

Members, thank you and at this time, I will entertain a motion and a second then open it up for comments.