

Eastern Plains Council of Governments

Board of Directors Meeting

Minutes



Date 2025-10-08
Time 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Location The Eastern Plains Council of Governments
Present Fidel Madrid – Curry County; Helen Casaus – City of Clovis; Meadow Forget – Village of Melrose; Delbert Marquez – Village of Fort Sumner; Heather Dostie – City of Santa Rosa; Roman Garcia – Town of Vaughn; Cynthia Lee – Village of San Jon; C. Renee Hayoz – City of Tucumcari; Jo McVey – City of Portales; Clay Kiesling – Union County; Russell Lees – Town of Clayton; C. Wade Holdeman – Fort Sumner Irrigation District; Allen Moss – Mesalands Community College; Steve Farmer – City of Santa Rosa; Billie Jo Barnes – Village of San Jon; Sandy Chancey – Executive Director; Vincent Soule – Deputy Director; Raymond Mondragon – Government Services; Julie Surina – Economic Development; Celia Kirkland – Community Development; Branden Goebel – Planning; Kristen Holmes – Executive Assistant; Jose Guzman – Finance Officer.
Absent Village of Grady, Town of Texico, Guadalupe County, Harding County, Village of Mosquero, Village of Roy, Quay County, Village of House, Village of Logan, Roosevelt County, Village of Causey, Village of Dora, Town of Elida, Village of Floyd, Village of Des Moines, Village of Folsom, Village of Grenville, Arch Hurley Conservancy District.
Note Taker Kristen Holmes

Agenda

1 - Call to Order

The meeting of the Eastern Plains Council of Governments Board of Directors was called to order by Vice-Chair Cynthia Lee at 10:02 a.m.

2 - Pledge of Allegiance and Salute to the New Mexico Flag

Following the call to order, all attendees participated in the Pledge of Allegiance and saluted the New Mexico flag.

3 - Introductions

During the introductions, each board member and attendee introduced themselves.

4 - Approval of Agenda

Vice-Chairwoman Lee asked for any changes to the agenda. Hearing none, a motion was made to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion: Motion to approve the agenda was made by Clay Kiesling and seconded by Roman Garcia.

Action: Motion carried unanimously by roll call.

5 - Approval of Minutes

Kristen Holmes, EPCOG Executive Assistant noted minor grammatical revisions had been made to the minutes since the packet was distributed, with no substantive changes.

Members were reminded that when attending virtually, cameras must be on when making a motion or voting to comply with the Open Meetings Act revisions.

Motion: Motion to approve the August 13, 2025 meeting minutes was made by Clay Kiesling and seconded by Helen Casaus.

Action: Motion carried unanimously by roll call.

6 - Guest Speaker

6.1 - New Mexico State Rail Plan

Presenter: Kevin Olinger, Transit and Rail Division Director, NMDOT

Mr. Olinger presented an overview of the New Mexico State Rail Plan—an update required by the Federal Railroad Administration, last completed in 2014. The updated plan aligns with the New Mexico 2045 Statewide Transportation Plan and outlines short- and long-term investment priorities for the state's rail system.

Key highlights included:

- Overview of the rail network and ownership (BNSF, Union Pacific, NMDOT, and short-line carriers).
- 2023 freight density of 553 million gross tons and nearly 1 million passengers served by Amtrak and Rail Runner in 2024.
- Goals include supporting economic growth, safety, and system integration; promoting tourism (e.g., Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Sky Rail, and Amtrak routes); improving efficiency; and reducing crossing blockages.
- Ongoing Section 130 Program to eliminate or improve at-grade crossings.
- Discussion of the anti-donation clause limiting funding to private rail owners, requiring creative partnerships for infrastructure improvements.
- Planned upgrades for Amtrak stations, ADA accessibility, and rolling stock replacement for the Rail Runner.
- Draft plan open for public comment through November 30, 2025, with feedback link and QR code available for stakeholders.

Questions and Comments:

- Raymond Mondragon asked about continued collaboration with BNSF and ATSF regarding crossing closures; Olinger confirmed these efforts continue.
- Helen Casaus requested a presentation to the Clovis Railroad Committee; Olinger agreed.
- Clay Keasling (Union County) noted delays caused by trains blocking emergency routes; Olinger advised reporting all incidents using the blue FRA crossing signs to ensure data tracking.
- Discussion followed regarding similar issues in Clovis, where Olinger noted a planning study is underway to address crossing congestion.

Olinger will also present the plan at NERPO (October 29 in Tucumcari) and SERPO (October 22 in Carlsbad) meetings.

6.2 - Accessing Capacity Building Grant Funds

Presenter: Kristen Holmes, Executive Assistant at EPCOG

Ms. Holmes provided an overview of how municipalities and districts can access the Capacity Building Grant. She walked attendees through EPCOG's webpage, highlighting available resources, eligibility information, and the steps for applying.

Key highlights included:

- Use webpage (epcog.org/capacitybuilding) to access the capacity building funds to include sponsored training/conferences, on-call specialists, and upcoming EPCOG hosted training
- Download forms from the website and submit them to admin@epcog.org
- Contact Kristen Holmes at admin@epcog.org with any questions
- Members were reminded that current membership dues must be paid in full before accessing grant funds.

7 - Approval of Financial Reports

7.1 - Approval of Financials

Jose Guzman provided an overview of the financial statements, noting that expenditures and revenues are in line with the current fiscal year's budget. He highlighted ongoing grant reimbursements, administrative expenses, and project fund balances. No irregularities or concerns were reported.

Motion: Motion to approve the financial reports was made by Clay Kiesling and seconded by Roman Garcia.
Action: Motion carried unanimously by roll call.

8 - New Business

No new business was presented.

9 - Director's & Staff Report

Executive Director's Report – Sandy Chancey

- **Audit**
 - EPCOG is currently undergoing its annual audit with Fox, Garcia & Company.
 - This is the final year the firm can be used; an RFP will be issued next year for new audit services.
- **NewMARC (New Mexico Association of Regional Councils)**
 - EPCOG continues active participation in NUMARC.
 - The organization has been formalized and hired Executive Director Pascual Maestas, who is enhancing visibility statewide and with legislators.
 - EPCOG participated in New Mexico COG Day at the Legislature, which raised awareness of the state's seven regional councils.
- **Capacity Building Grant**
 - EPCOG received \$428,571 for the Capacity Building Grant and has one year to expend funds.
 - Budget adjustments will be made to reflect this award.
 - Contracted with Emerald Health Partners (Kate Bailey) for grant writing and healthcare funding support.
 - Emerald assisted Union County General Hospital in securing funding for a behavioral health program.
- **Staff Training & Development**
 - Staff (except Kristen) will attend the NADO Annual Training Conference in Salt Lake City next week.
 - Ongoing participation in webinars and state-led trainings to stay current on new programs.
 - Recently attended DFA Capacity Building Training in Roswell—covered CAPS/PARS systems and Open Meetings Act updates for hybrid meetings.
- **CDBG Projects**
 - Vaughn: Ongoing project administration.
 - Santa Rosa & Fort Sumner: Nearing completion.
 - Curry County: In closeout phase.
 - Tucumcari: Progressing; environmental review nearly complete.
 - Continued collaboration with Emerald Health Partners on community health-related funding initiatives.

Deputy Director's Report – Vincent Soule

- **GRO Projects**
 - EPCOG continues to administer multiple GRIL (Government Results and Opportunity) projects.
 - Two projects have been completed – the Mental Health Project and the Fort Sumner Project.
 - 71% of total grant funds have been expended to date.
 - Approximately 3,000 beneficiaries have been identified across the completed and ongoing projects.
- **Youth Homelessness Program**
 - EPCOG serves as the fiscal agent for the Youth Homelessness Program, in partnership with United Way of Eastern New Mexico.
 - The program recently launched and has served nine youth to date through transitional or rapid rehousing assistance.
 - Participants range in age from 17 (an emancipated minor) to 23 years old, including a pregnant female participant.
 - The program is operating successfully and addressing critical housing needs among youth in the region.

Program Manager Report – Celia Kirkland

- **HRSA Grant – Catch My Breath Program**
 - Completed this semester in Floyd, Melrose, Melrose House, and Fort Sumner districts.
 - Program is anti-vaping, delivered in partnership with the National Guard (Albuquerque).

- 20 facilitators trained to continue the program statewide if the National Guard cannot participate.
 - Remaining four districts will complete the program in the spring.
 - Submitted Year 3 HRSA data report and sustainability plan; moving into Year 4 of 4.
- **Wellness Together Conference**
 - Attended a youth mental health conference to learn strategies and network with other professionals.
 - Insights confirmed that mental health challenges are widespread nationally.
- **Back-to-School Outreach**
 - Distributed ~6,000 packets with resources for parents.
 - Participated in all resource fairs and back-to-school events across the four-county grant region.
- **Charity Tracker**
 - Hosting a lunch event for nonprofits, hospitals, and churches using the platform for resource sharing and referral management.
- **School Pulse Program**
 - Supports anti-suicide and behavioral health for middle and high school students.
 - Students can text for support, and teachers access a dashboard for program administration.
 - Program includes resources for substance abuse, bullying, and in-school suspension interventions.
 - Program information is linked on school websites in participating districts.
 - Working with state legislators to secure funding for School Pulse and REC6 counselors (currently funding two full-time counselors across four rural districts).
 - Founder of School Pulse, Yuri, to visit in November to engage schools and administrators for future funding and program sustainability.
- **Grant Submissions**
 - Submitted a proposal to the Centers for Disease Control for a youth drug use prevention program.
 - Federal funding applications are ongoing; updates will be provided as progress is made.

Governmental Specialist Report – Raymond Mondragon

- **Economic Development & Water Initiatives**
 - Attended a water conference in Roosevelt County and heard a presentation from AquaTerix, a company that locates water plumes in bedrock.
 - Coordinated a follow-up meeting with City of Clovis officials and Mark Huerto (EPCOR) regarding water issues in Portales.
 - EPCOR Water Company expressed interest in AquaTerix's services for Roosevelt County projects.
- **Military & Defense Engagement**
 - Serves as a Governor-appointed commissioner on the Military Base Planning Commission.
 - Recent meetings focused on rebranding the commission; Lieutenant Governor serves as chairman.
 - Planned Commander Summit for all wing commanders in New Mexico during Military Day in Santa Fe.
 - Participated in a New Mexico delegation trip to Washington, D.C., meeting Pentagon staff to advocate for state military installations
- **Economic & Workforce Development**
 - Serves on the Public Economic Incentive Board for the City of Clovis; continues to monitor ongoing projects and agreements.
 - Participated in Cannon Air Force Base Job Fair with Vincent Soule; ~40 vendors attended and referrals were made.
 - Attended the International Economic Conference in Detroit; discussions included global economic challenges and tariffs impacting trade.
 - Attended the Governor's Conference on Economic Development, hearing from World Bank representative Joe Phillips regarding U.S. and international economic concerns
- **Route 66 & Tourism Projects**
 - Serves as Vice Chairman of the Route 66 Centennial Working Group.
 - Attended ribbon cutting in Santa Rosa, supporting a \$121,000 grant for a welcome center sign.
 - Presented to the Route 66 State Commission on the Centennial Project in Clovis.
 - Supported grant writing for Santa Rosa and San Jose Route 66 initiatives.
- **Transportation & Infrastructure**
 - Attended Ports to Plains conference in Lubbock with Julie and Vincent Soule.
 - Conducted preliminary discussions with the state legislature and House Transportation Committee.
 - Secured a grant for an economic impact analysis for the Northeast region, related to the I-27 interstate designation by President Biden in 2022.

Regional Planner Report – Julie Surina

- **Outdoor Recreation & Grant Opportunities**
 - Attended the Outdoor Economic Conference in Gallup.
 - Discussed outdoor recreation grants and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Plus grants.
 - Deadlines for this year have passed; hope these opportunities will reopen next year.
- **Grant Writer Summit**
 - Planning to attend with Vincent, Celia, and Brandon to learn more about grant writing strategies.
- **Transportation & Planning Meetings**
 - TPF Subcommittee met in Roswell; discussions will carry forward to the October 22nd meeting in Carlsbad for approvals.
 - NERPO meeting scheduled for October 29th in Tucumcari; Julie will be in Baltimore.
 - Sandy will cover ICIP and CAP system questions.
 - Raymond will present 2026 legislative session updates and capital outlay projects.
 - Next meeting: November 19th in Angel Fire for transit rating and ranking.
- **Transportation Project Funding**
 - TPF awards announced for Districts 2 and 4; Julie distributed the complete awards list to all stakeholders.
 - EPCOG regions performed well:
 - NERTPO: ~\$17M
 - SERTPO: ~\$18–19M
 - Both regions secured substantial funding for projects.

10 - Community Updates and Public Comments

- San Jon School Carnival and Mesalands Community College Rodeo announced
- Legislative forum planned for December 16 in Tucumcari.
- Updates from Ben Salazar on federal shutdown impacts.
- Comments from Mayor Ramon Garcia on youth and community development.
- Discussion on childcare initiatives and collaboration with United Way and local colleges.
- Tucumcari Turkey Toss cornhole tournament announced.

11 - Adjournment

The meeting was officially adjourned at the end of the agenda. The chairperson thanked all attendees for their participation and contributions, marking the conclusion of the EPCOG Board Meeting. The next meeting date was confirmed, and attendees were reminded to submit any agenda items or reports in advance.