

# Metamorphosis: ECO Transit to Eagle Valley Transportation Authority

In November 2022, residents of Eagle County, along with the towns of Avon, Eagle, Minturn, Red Cliff, Vail, and the Beaver Creek Metro District, embarked on a visionary journey to transform their local transportation landscape. Through separate votes in each jurisdiction, they collectively endorsed the formation of the Eagle Valley Transportation Authority (EVTA) as a statutory Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and approved a new 0.5% sales tax dedicated to improving regional transit. This groundbreaking initiative seeks to enhance public transportation, foster collaboration, and better meet the diverse needs of the community.

## **A HISTORY OF REGIONAL TRANSIT IN EAGLE COUNTY:**

In 1980, Vail Associates launched regional bus services in Eagle Valley, primarily to transport skiers between Beaver Creek and Vail Mountain and to assist employees commuting between Edwards and Vail. This service soon stretched its arms to accommodate workers from as far as Leadville.

The mid-1980s saw Eagle County taking the reins of regional bus operations, initially through contracts with various transportation providers. However, by the winter of 1987-88, the town of Avon assumed full control, continuing this management via intergovernmental agreements until April 2001.

A pivotal moment came in 1994 when funding partners recognized the need for a dedicated funding source to cope with the region's burgeoning transportation needs. A County-wide mass-transportation sales tax of 0.5%, dedicated to transit and trails, emerged from this vision, securing voter approval in November 1995 forming what would eventually become the Eagle County Regional Transportation Authority/ECRTA (better known as ECO Transit) on January 1, 1996.

## **THE BIRTH OF EVTA: A VISION FOR TRANSFORMATION**

The emergence of the Eagle Valley Transportation Authority signifies a powerful shift in how the region intends to move forward with planning, funding, and managing its transportation infrastructure. As a true Regional Transportation Authority, EVTA is governed by a Board of Directors made up of one elected official from each of the seven member jurisdictions and its own

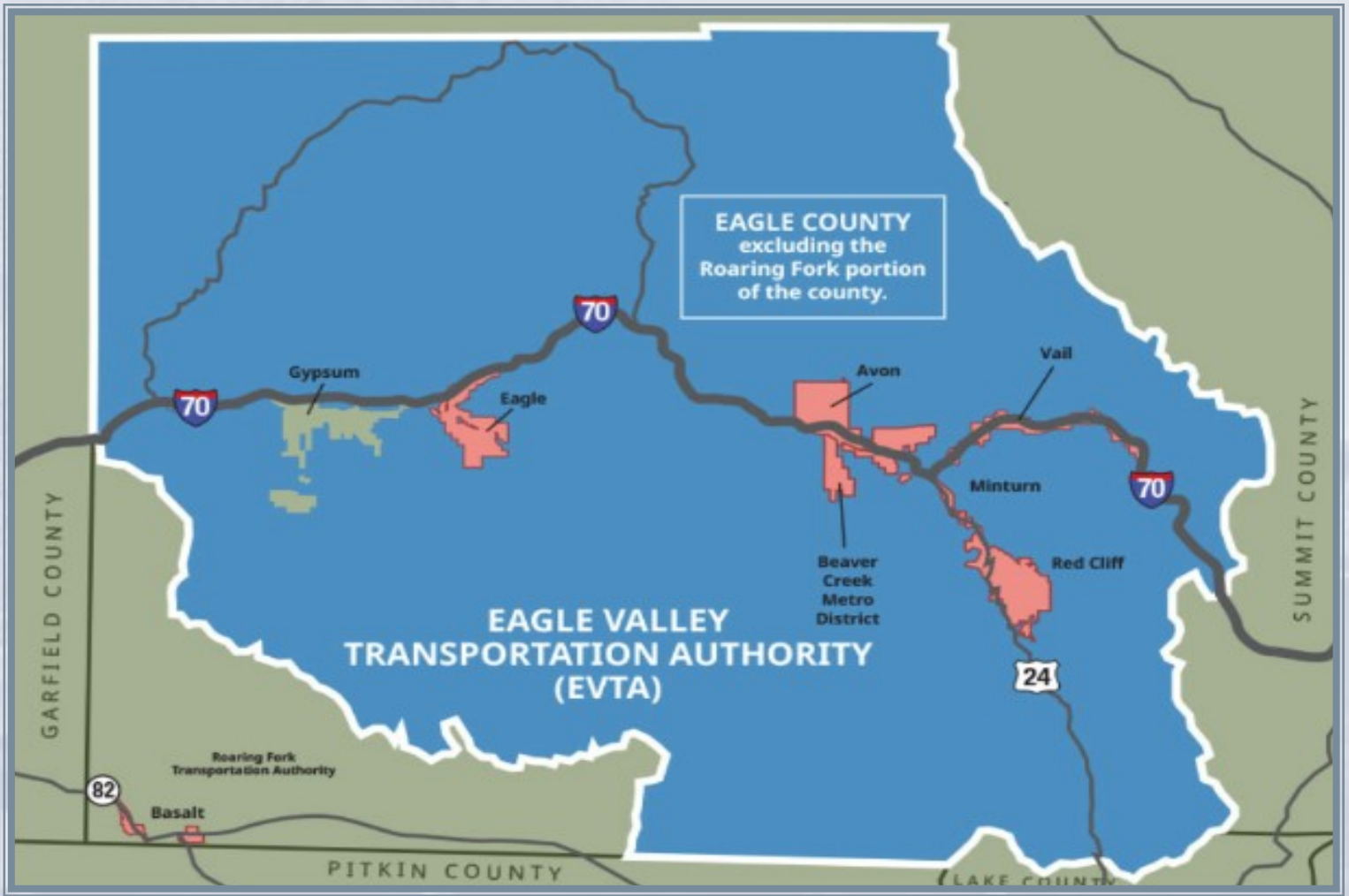
independent taxing authority. This brings the promise of not only greater funding, but also greater flexibility and a sharper focus on transit-specific improvements.

The core of EVTA's mission is to bolster regional transit services, i.e. services that connect one or more local jurisdictions. Notably, ECO Transit, the current regional transportation provider in Eagle County, will serve as the cornerstone of the EVTA. The current 0.5% County-wide ECO Transit sales tax will stay in place to support the existing level of service, with operations transitioning to EVTA during 2024. The additional 0.5% sales tax levied in EVTA member jurisdictions will be directed toward system enhancement and expansion. For passengers, this means the best of both worlds: for the immediate future, the well-established ECO Transit services and routes will continue to operate much as they do today. This will provide continuity and reliability as the operational transition and planned system improvements begin to take shape.

## **A VISION FOR AN ENHANCED TRANSIT EXPERIENCE**

The establishment of the EVTA brings forth exciting prospects for the entire community. Regional collaboration and cost-sharing will be at the heart of this transformation. The focus shifts squarely to the needs of transit riders, enabling more informed decisions and swift implementation of improvements. This newly forged forum allows stakeholders to come together as one, united in their commitment to advancing public transportation.

Important elements of the EVTA proposal include the creation of a fare-free zone, new express routes, increased support for air service, and an accelerated transition to zero-emission operations. These enhancements, mandated by the voters' approval, signal a commitment to improving the transit experience for everyone. The EVTA's immediate task is to devise a strategic plan that sets priorities for these enhancements, establishes timelines for implementation, and allocates available funding.



## A COLLABORATIVE PATH FORWARD

The introduction of the EVTA will not replace or alter the funding mechanisms for local in-town transit systems. Instead, town transit systems in Avon, Vail, and Beaver Creek will continue their operations within their respective jurisdictions, enjoying several benefits through their participation in the EVTA. This dynamic arrangement allows town transit systems to pool technical expertise, share project management and maintenance resources, coordinate technology and equipment acquisitions, access additional grant funding, and optimize regional route realignments to minimize redundancy, thereby freeing up local funding for other crucial initiatives.

Undoubtedly, there is an eagerness to see rapid results. The EVTA, endowed with a fresh stream of funding, is charged with delivering these transit enhancements. Sales tax collections, the primary source of funding, mean that resources for

these improvements will only become available from March 2023 onwards. However, the EVTA board is committed to expedient decision-making regarding fund allocation, and once the parameters are set, they will collaborate with ECO Transit and other partners to initiate service enhancements as swiftly as possible. The goal is to bring meaningful improvements that passengers can experience before the end of 2023.

As the EVTA embarks on this transformative journey, it is poised to become a model of regional cooperation and innovation, fostering a transit system that truly serves the needs of the community. The creation of the Eagle Valley Transportation Authority is a testament to the collective vision and determination of the residents, stakeholders, and authorities who have come together to elevate the future of transportation in Eagle County and its surrounding towns.

[Eagle Valley Transportation Website](#)