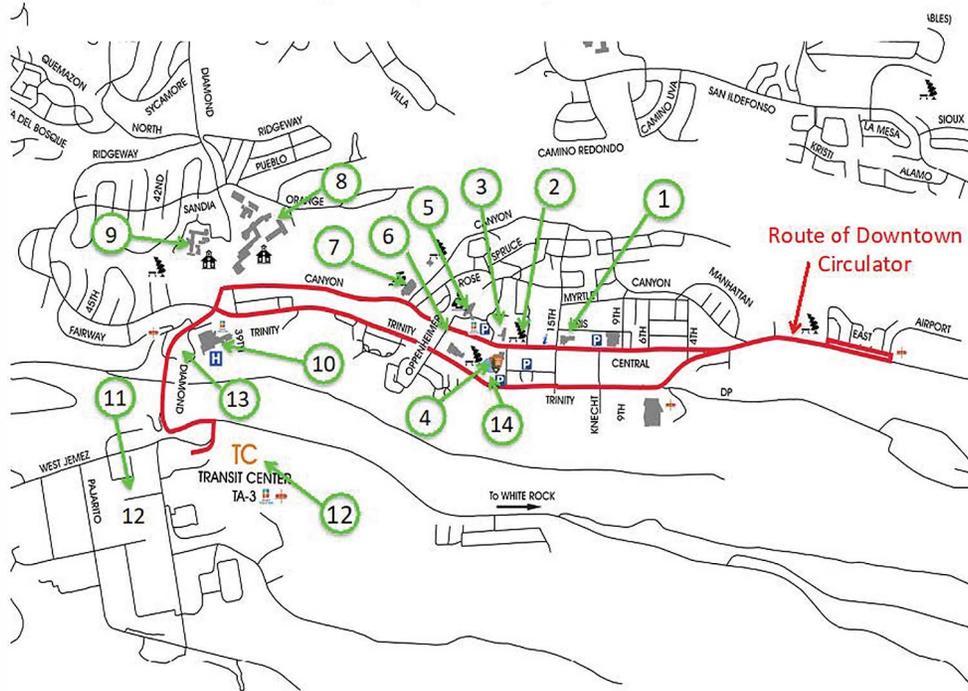


# Atomic City Transit Downtown Circulator Self guided Tour

Prepared by Atomic City Tours 8/17



Map courtesy Atomic City Transit

## Self-Guided Tour: DOWNTOWN CIRCULATOR to TA-3 and Back\*

**WELCOME to a 30-minute bus ride through Los Alamos, past and present.**

Developed by Georgia Strickfaden, [actour@atomiccitytours.com](mailto:actour@atomiccitytours.com) from **Atomic City Tours** in co-operation with the Los Alamos city bus system, **AtomicCityTransit.com**.

The **Atomic City Transit Route 1, called the Downtown Circulator**, loops to the **Main Tech Area (TA-3) of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL, aka the Lab)**. This trolley stops along Central Avenue at 30-minute intervals as it makes a circuit between downtown Los Alamos and the Lab. The bus ride is free, and you may get on and off as often as you would like, or transfer to other Atomic City Transit buses to explore other parts of our community including White Rock. **All buses have bike racks.** The transfer point is the Transit Center at TA-3 where Atomic City Transit and commuter buses meet.

***How to use this guide:** The sequencing of this guide starts and ends at the Bradbury Science Museum. Since you are aboard a city bus, the drivers, though interesting and helpful, are not tour guides. This pamphlet helps you to note points of interest along the route. Most historic sites are concentrated in the Downtown area, however, only snippets of the Los Alamos story are discussed here. Bus schedules are available at the Los Alamos Visitor Center and AtomicCityTransit.com. Learn more of the Los Alamos story at Los Alamos History Museum, Bradbury Science Museum, and Manhattan Project National Historic Park.*

**1 The Bradbury Science Museum** is the “Visitor Center” for Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and is named for Norris E. Bradbury, the first post-WWII director of Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory. After the Manhattan Project, Bradbury was key to the establishment of a permanent research and development national laboratory along with its supporting community.

There was no town on this volcanic plateau until the homesteads, surrounding Forest Service lands, and the Los Alamos Ranch School were acquired by the Army in early 1943 for the top-secret atomic bomb program called Project Y or the Manhattan Project.

**2** The bus travels up Central Avenue past the **Post Office** (built 1948) on the right across from Starbucks.

**3** The park-like area to the left of the Post Office frames **Fuller Lodge**. This large log structure was built in 1928 as the dining hall and guest quarters for the **Los Alamos Ranch School** (1917-1943), an exclusive prep-school for privileged boys, ages 12-18 years. During WW II, Fuller Lodge was a favorite meeting place for the Manhattan Project personnel, and served as a hotel after the war when the Tudor-style accommodation wings were added. No longer a hotel, it serves as a popular venue for community and cultural events. The **Fuller Lodge Art Center** occupies the wing closest to Central Avenue.

Historic **Bathtub Row** extends north (to your right) from Fuller Lodge. Originally, Ranch School faculty and staff cottages, they housed a few leaders of the burgeoning WWII population, including the wartime director, J. Robert Oppenheimer and his family. Along Bathtub Row can be found the **Los Alamos History Museum Campus**. These charming Ranch School buildings are constructed with local logs and stone are private residences. Self-guided Historical Walking Tours include in-town buildings related to the Manhattan Project National Historical Park.

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**4** On your left, note **Ashley Pond**. This natural depression in the mesa top collects rain water and snow-melt. The WWII Tech Area, where the first atomic bombs were developed, surrounded the Pond, but the buildings were sold as surplus as the current Laboratory location replaced it. Photos of the Tech Area are at the History Museum and the Bradbury Science Museum.

**5** **Mesa Public Library** is on your right.

**6** The Master Gardeners' '**Demo**' **Garden** on the left demonstrates water-wise landscaping, growing native plants, and best practices in Los Alamos gardening.

**7** The **Larry R. Walkup Aquatic Center** is a public indoor swimming pool located at the corner of Central Ave and Canyon Road. Trailheads for hiking and bicycling are by the Aquatic Center. The new **Nature Center** is a half block east on Canyon Road. A little further east is a WW II Army Chapel, now The United Church of Los Alamos.

Very little of wartime Los Alamos remains. After the decision was made to keep a permanent nuclear weapons laboratory operating, the government rebuilt the town here and relocated the Lab southward where the bus is now headed. In the 1960's, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) divested itself of non-laboratory real estate. Now, residential and business properties are privately owned, while Fuller Lodge, parks, open spaces, and utilities belong to the Municipality of Los Alamos (established 1949).

An attractive post-WWII community expanded beyond the bounds of the wartime Manhattan Project installation. A fire scar is evident to the west where, in May 2000, the Cerro Grande Fire consumed thickly forested mountainsides and whole neighborhoods on the town perimeter. In June/July 2011, Las Conchas Wildfire consumed over 150,000 acres, but this time the town and the Lab were spared.

Dominating the view to the west of Los Alamos is 11,400 ft. high **Pajarito Mountain**. The **Ski Area** on its north face has over 40 intermediate to advanced runs with 1200 ft. vertical drop, served by 5 chair lifts. Volunteer labor of the Los Alamos Ski Club developed Pajarito Ski Area. Adjacent groomed ski touring trails access the National Forest trails. The public is welcome at the ski area and at Camp May, a county park, located 6 miles above town at the end of Camp May Road, aka Ski Hill Road.

**8 & 9** As the bus turns left on to Diamond Drive, **Los Alamos High School** (grades 9-12, about 1300 students) is on the right, and the **University of New Mexico, Los Alamos Campus (UNM-LA)** is across the street from the High School to the west. The main UNM campus is in Albuquerque.

**10** **Los Alamos Medical Center**, on your left, was built in 1952 to replace the Army hospital that was between Fuller Lodge and Ashley Pond. Privately owned and greatly remodeled since 1962, this full-service medical complex continues to provide for a wide range of health-care needs.

**11** Just beyond the hospital, the trolley enters the 38-square mile campus of Los Alamos National Laboratory. Diamond Drive crosses Los Alamos Canyon on the **Omega Bridge**, built in 1951 as

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construction of today's Lab complex was beginning on South Mesa.

The U. S Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) owns Los Alamos National Laboratory and hires a contractor to operate it. After 63 years of operation by the University of California (1943-2006), a for-profit LLC, was awarded the contract, and In 2018, Triad National Security took over operations. The civilian Atomic Energy Commission was created in 1947 to operate the WWII sites involved in the Manhattan Project, and to advance scientific research and development (R & D). In the 1970's national laboratories and the nuclear weapons program was placed under the US Department of Energy. The National Nuclear Security Agency is a subset of the DOE. There has been no military operation of the Lab since 1947.

**12** The bus now stops at The **Transit Center** where you may transfer to other buses, or you may get off the bus and walk two blocks west into the **Main Tech Area (TA-3)**. There, most buildings are restricted to badge holders, but outdoor interpretive signs are located beneath the flagpoles at the corner of Casa Grande Drive and W. Jemez Rd. Across W. Jemez Rd. is Hot Rocks Java Café (great coffee and food for breakfast and lunch), or you may eat at the Lab's Otowi Cafeteria, upstairs in the **Otowi Building**. In the plaza in front of the 7-story green **NSSB** (administration building) is the **Pentagon 9/11 Memorial**, commemorating victims of the 9/11/01 attack, and across the plaza to the east is the Oppenheimer Study Center, a technical library and conference facility for LANL.

*From The Transit Center the Downtown Circulator heads back into town  
This guide now takes you on the return trip into town.  
When you are back aboard the Atomic City Transit Downtown Circulator . . .*

**13** On the far side of the bridge, the **Health Research Laboratory (HRL)** is on your right, next to the hospital. This office and laboratory building is the hub of the LANL biological sciences research programs.

The bus will now be traveling east on **Trinity Drive**, named after the first atomic test. **Project Trinity** successfully detonated the first atomic bomb on July 16, 1945, in the desert 220 miles south of Los Alamos. At Oppenheimer Drive, you re-enter land once occupied by the Manhattan Project Tech Area. Wartime buildings on both sides of Trinity Drive remained in use for nearly 20 years while the Lab built new buildings across the canyon. By the mid-1960's, most remnants of the hurriedly built WWII town were gone, and the town was transferred from government ownership to municipal, commercial, and private use.

**14** The **Ice House Memorial**, the small pavilion on your left by Ashley Pond, is the memorial to the Manhattan Project. The Ice House, built of native stone, dated to the Ranch School days when ice was cut from the Pond. It became an integral part of the WWII Tech Area because plutonium was stored there, as it became available in significant quantity, and for assembling early weapons cores.

*The bus will loop around to Central Avenue and the Bradbury Science Museum complex.  
For a more extensive narrated tour of Los Alamos and White Rock, The Atomic City Tours, LLC van tour departs from the Bradbury Science Museum. The exceptional guides are Los Alamos residents. The cost is \$25/person and the van tour takes about 1.5 hours. Current Tour Info: (505) 662-2547*