

9/20/2012

Office of the Board Secretary  
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority  
3331 North First Street, Building B-1st Floor  
San Jose, CA 95134-1927

Dear VTA Board of Directors,

As advocates for a vibrant, accessible, and sustainable Silicon Valley, we would like to express our strong support for VTA's efforts to bring Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) to El Camino Real. Improving transit along the 22 and 522 bus routes has been a long time coming; they carry one fifth of VTA's bus riders and transport more people per mile than VTA's light rail system. Unfortunately, the transit infrastructure along the El Camino corridor does not reflect existing demand and it is certainly unfit for the projected tens of thousands of new residents and jobs living on the corridor over the next two decades.

**Over 15 diverse organizations enthusiastically support Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along El Camino Real because it will:**

- **Stimulate the economy and create jobs:** BRT on El Camino Real will attract tens of millions of dollars in federal funding and create hundreds of local jobs. BRT will also provide a foundation for sustainable development, including [supporting local plans for new jobs and homes near transit](#).
- **More efficiently use taxpayer resources:** BRT costs five to ten times less per mile to build than light rail and 40% less to operate and maintain. BRT will also improve VTA's farebox recovery ratio, meaning that a lower percentage of VTA's operating costs will be paid for by taxpayers thanks to increased ridership and faster transit travel times.
- **Provide economic benefits for households:** BRT will provide reliable access to jobs, shops, services, and other needs for all people. In addition, by offering a competitive alternative to private vehicles, [household transportation costs can be reduced drastically](#), thereby freeing up resources for other needs such as housing and healthcare.
- **Improve public safety and create safer streets:** Bike lanes, upgraded crosswalks, and sidewalk extensions can be incorporated in areas with dedicated bus lanes to reduce traffic injuries and fatalities. Increased lighting, fare inspectors, and security cameras at stations will create a greater sense of safety of waiting for the bus, and emergency vehicles can access dedicated bus lanes, resulting in improved response times.
- **Foster healthy and sustainable communities:** High quality public transit and more complete streets encourage walking and biking, thereby reducing diseases stemming from obesity. As more people take advantage of BRT with its state-of-the-art hybrid vehicles, we'll reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, help tackle climate change and improve the air we breathe.

Given the City of Sunnyvale's vote against dedicated lanes, one of the key questions is whether to move forward with BRT on El Camino Real, and if so, how. We hope that the VTA staff recommendation of a mixed flow project outside of the City of Santa Clara will not preclude working towards the best

possible multimodal project on El Camino Real. In particular, we feel that the Sunnyvale City Council vote was not an indictment against BRT with dedicated bus lanes, but rather an indication that several issues remain unresolved, including:

- Opposition from Sunnyvale auto dealerships. More robust outreach and education to them could have resulted in a different outcome.
- A desire for improved north/south transit service within Sunnyvale by some Council members.
- Insufficient information on potential traffic impacts (an Environmental Impact Report has yet to be conducted to determine project impacts and the tradeoffs between dedicated lane and mixed flow alignments).

We feel strongly that these issues can be addressed with additional dialogue and analysis and that staff's recommendation to proceed with a primarily mixed flow design may be premature. Only Santa Clara and Sunnyvale have officially voted, leaving Mountain View, Palo Alto, and Los Altos without the opportunity to weigh in on the record. As such, we urge VTA to:

1. **Continue planning for the best possible project on El Camino Real.** Transformative projects often take many years to plan and to gain consensus, and sometimes political realities and community needs do not lend themselves to artificial timelines. As such, VTA should not close the door for cities to adopt dedicated lanes as more information comes to light over the course of the planning process. In particular, VTA should study both a mixed flow and dedicated lane alternative in the project's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) so that decision makers will have more information to base their opinions on in the future.
2. **Identify a potential solution for better N/S service in Sunnyvale that meets the interests of some City Council members while maintaining VTA's responsibility to the greater transit riding public and taxpayers.** For example, VTA could fund a limited stop pilot project or a shuttle between the Valco Shopping Center at Stevens Creek Blvd and the Moffett Park area to the north along Wolfe Rd and Mathilda Ave. Such a service could be funded through a public/private partnership between businesses in the area, the City of Sunnyvale, and VTA. Performance measures could be adopted that would allow VTA to pull its funding if ridership expectations are not met over a certain time period, thus relieving the agency of an obligation to maintain sub-par transit service.
3. **Reward the City of Santa Clara for their Council's unanimous support of multimodal BRT by ensuring that Santa Clara receives funding for dedicated bus lanes, bike lanes, and pedestrian amenities.** We believe Santa Clara will serve as a model for the region and inspire other cities to support true BRT. While we fully support moving forward with dedicated lanes in Santa Clara, we do not support the option of *ending* the project in Santa Clara. Such a project is unlikely to be competitive for federal funding and could limit the success of the Santa Clara portion of the line compared to BRT along the full corridor.
4. **More effectively engage local elected officials, city staff, residents, and the business community.** VTA staff must work with key stakeholders such as auto dealerships to inform, answer questions, and incorporate concerns and needs into the BRT plans. We are encouraged by VTA's Draft Public Participation Plan and expect staff to utilize this new resource.

Please feel free to contact us for any questions. We are eager to work with you, VTA, and the community in making high quality and cost-effective transit a reality in Silicon Valley in the coming years.

Sincerely,



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