

April 26, 2013

To: VTA Board of Directors

Re: Item 8.3: Consider the Addendum to the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and approve the design changes to the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Bus Rapid Transit Project (“Project”), as discussed in Addendum No.2.

Dear VTA Board members,

SPUR, TransForm, Greenbelt Alliance, Working Partnerships, ATU, SIREN, Eastside Neighborhood Center, and the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter strongly support VTA staff’s recommendation for the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Bus Rapid Transit project.

Great communities and cities serve many modes well and do not prioritize the needs of private auto users over pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders. Bus Rapid Transit, when properly designed, provides the benefits of high frequency, high capacity rail but for a fraction of the cost. The Alum Rock BRT project was designed based on solid research on demand through the BRT Strategic Plan. The 22 corridor already carries more transit riders per mile than light rail and VTA projects major ridership increases as soon as BRT begins service. The beneficiaries of this investment are residents, workers, students across the corridor traveling to destinations such as the Eastridge Transit Center, the Mexican Heritage Plaza, the HP Pavilion, SJSU, and the hundreds of businesses lining the corridor.

83,542 daily riders are expected to use the Alum Rock, El Camino, and Stevens Creek BRT corridors, including 3,976 daily patrons at the transit mall, according to the 2008 project Environmental Impact Report (EIR). These three transit lines, plus an additional line connecting the Berryessa BART station, will converge at the Santa Clara St station between 1st and 2nd St, leading to significantly more foot traffic in the area and greatly overshadowing the minimal loss of parking. Furthermore, BRT will stimulate new compact mixed use development including homes and offices, bringing about larger economic benefits for merchants in downtown San Jose, as has occurred along the Euclid BRT Corridor in Cleveland, Ohio.

When looking at the proposed station design for the downtown BRT station, it’s helpful to look at the recent history of the project, as several changes in the design of the downtown station have taken place over the last year. The previous design for the Santa Clara St station between 1st and 2nd St was identical to the other stations in the rest of the planned BRT system. It functioned well for all users because it prioritized transit operations, maintained auto access (provided protected left turns and safe right turns), eliminated transit vehicle conflicts with autos, improved pedestrian safety, and resulted in no parking removal outside of the planned station area; however, VTA was directed to study a modified station by City of San Jose staff and the San Jose Downtown Association in an Addendum to the EIR to accommodate greater auto-throughput. The new design squeezes in four auto lanes and forces buses to duck out of the curb lane of traffic into a separate dedicated bus loading zone area, thus causing delays for transit vehicles trying to enter and exit the station during congested periods. This new proposal also eliminates the existing protected left turn pockets that allow for safe turning movements onto 1st

and 2nd St and it causes conflicts with pedestrians and buses for cars turning right in front of transit vehicles (if right turns are to be allowed).

In order to avoid buses being backed up in traffic with the altered station design and reduce conflicts between autos and buses merging in and out of the new loading zone area, a coalition of organizations including TransForm, SPUR, SVLG, Greenbelt Alliance, and Working Partnerships, proposed that VTA study the option of transition lanes between Market St and 4th St. The DTEV Policy Advisory Board agreed and directed staff to study the new station design option with and without transition lanes in the Addendum to the EIR. The transition lane proposal has since been shortened to half a block in each direction entering and exiting the station in order to minimize on-street parking and loading zone removal. Traffic analyses show that transition lanes will speed up transit service without impacting Level of Service (LOS). LOS should not be a consideration anyway according to San Jose's existing policies for the downtown area. As part of staff's recommendation, left and right turns for autos will be restricted onto 1st and 2nd St in order to protect pedestrians and avoid conflicts with transit vehicles, a safeguard we fully support.

VTA staff has done an excellent job at coming to a compromise that satisfies multiple concerns, including transit operations, pedestrian safety, and loading zone removal. In regards to loading zone removal, loading zones are preserved by using 10 of the existing 36 on-street parking spaces. Although some merchants have expressed concerns about on-street parking removal, the 10 parking spaces represent only .002% of the available parking spaces in a two block radius.

In summary, we support VTA staff's recommendation, including:

- **Implementation of transition lanes entering and exiting the station:** Transition lanes are necessary *now*, not in some undetermined future. 30% of all bus riders in the County ride along the 22 and 23 corridors which run through this transit station, and even more people will use the system once it is in operation. Queue jumps as advocated by the City's DOT will not function as well as the transition lanes and risk future modifications without VTA's consent. Signal timing modifications negatively affecting VTA operations has occurred in multiple cities including San Jose, Sunnyvale, and Milpitas.
- **Parking management strategies:** Loss of parking in front of businesses, even if for the purpose of increasing mobility, is a concern in many communities. The City and VTA should work together to adapt smart parking strategies used elsewhere to address concerns of lack of on-street parking on Santa Clara St, such as installing "smart" parking meters and allowing for on-street parking at loading zones during peak demand hours.
- **Restriction of right and left turns for autos onto 1st and 2nd St:** Right and left turns must be restricted with the new station design as recommended by VTA staff. Unprotected left turns will not only back up traffic but will also cause conflicts with pedestrians, likely leading to injuries or perhaps even fatalities. Right turns will also interfere with bus operations and cause potential conflicts with pedestrians. Even if right and left turns are restricted, every street and business in downtown will be accessible by auto. For example, as stated in the EIR "motorists originally making right turns at First Street are expected to use the right turns at Market and Third Street while those who used Second Street are expected to use Market and Fourth".

We hope you will consider our recommendations, and we look forward to working with you to ensure BRT is a catalyst for vibrant, healthy, sustainable, and well-connected communities.

Sincerely,

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