

Submitted Electronically

August 25, 2015

Santa Clara Mayor and City Council
City of Santa Clara
1500 Warburton Avenue
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Subject: Agenda Item 11A: Selection of the Long Dedicated Lane (Alt 4C) for the El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project

Dear Mayor Matthews and Santa Clara City Council,

SPUR is a non-profit, member-supported organization that promotes good planning and good government. We recently published *Freedom to Move: How the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority can create better transportation choices in the South Bay*.

We can all see that the growth in auto trips is causing gridlock. A strong all-day local bus network – without buses stuck in traffic – is essential to livable communities and a thriving Silicon Valley. For this reason, SPUR is supportive of a fully-featured Bus Rapid Transit line on El Camino Boulevard, one of the most important transit corridors in the Bay Area. **We may not get this investment opportunity again.**

SPUR encourages the Santa Clara City Council to adopt Locally Preferred Alternative Option 4C because it can cut travel times in half and make riding the bus a more reliable and convenient option for existing transit users and our growing populations. At the same time, Option 4C makes it safer and more comfortable for all people by including buffered bike lanes, landscaping improvements and pedestrian safety measures.

Based on information disclosed in the project Draft Environmental Impact Report, the BRT project will produce much-needed benefits:

1. Noticeably improve the character of streets and neighborhoods.

The proposed project includes street reconstruction, safer crosswalks, cyclist improvements and landscaping in station areas. With the loss of redevelopment funding, these kinds of broad improvements would be difficult to fund without this

project. Cities through this corridor have General Plan and Specific Plan visions for compact, sustainable communities. Rapid bus service provides the transportation backbone to achieve these neighborhood visions.

2. Improve transit dramatically with few impacts to autos.

Traffic conditions along the El Camino Real corridor are projected to worsen in coming years. For the growing part of the population who doesn't drive, transit is an unreliable and slow choice, as buses are stuck in traffic. The DEIR states that dedicated lanes reduce travel time through this corridor from 85 to 48 minutes, and allows VTA to offer 10-minute service. The DIER also shows few impacts to autos, and those few impacts would be spread over a large area. Rapid bus service solves a geometry problem on streets: it can move far more people in a smaller amount of space than private autos can.

3. Use transit funding effectively.

High transit speeds also improve cost-efficiency: the DEIR states that a dedicated lane option costs \$13 million annually to serve over 18,000 daily riders, compared with \$19 million to serve 12,000 daily riders today. These improvements free up transit operating funds for other transit services. A dedicated-lane alternative will be competitive for up to \$75 million in Federal Small Starts funding, while the mixed-flow alternatives will not be. Furthermore, The multi-billion dollar BART extension to Silicon Valley will require quality feeder transit to succeed in achieving its ridership and farebox recovery goals.

4. Grow the South Bay's interconnected high-speed transit network.

Where VTA has increased transit speed and express services, ridership has grown. Rapid bus transit routes are key elements of the regional transit network, needed for quick connections with Caltrain, ACE and Capitol Corridor, the anticipated BART Silicon Valley Extension. BRT on El Camino Real provides a necessary, more affordable transit complement to Caltrain.

Fully featured BRT, with dedicated lanes and frequent service, is the appropriate transit technology to serve this market today and in the future. We applaud the Santa Clara City Council for supporting 13.9 miles of dedicated lanes from Santa Clara to Palo Alto. The El Camino Real BRT corridor was carefully chosen for study by the VTA board in 2009, when the Bus Rapid Transit Strategic Plan showed it has a market for great transit. VTA's 522/22 line is among the highest ridership routes in the region today. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ratna Amin', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ratna Amin
SPUR Transportation Policy Director