

February 26, 2016

Board of Directors  
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority  
3331 N. 1st Street  
San Jose, CA 95134

Re: El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit

Dear VTA Board of Directors,

In 2009, the VTA Board chose the El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor because the Bus Rapid Transit Strategic Plan showed it has a market for great transit. We appreciate that the Board of Directors and the El Camino Real Policy Advisory Board and VTA staff have given careful consideration to each alternative configuration for BRT on El Camino. SPUR has submitted several letters expressing our preference for a fully featured, center running Bus Rapid Transit Line on El Camino Real Boulevard.<sup>12</sup> However, we recognize that it is challenging to integrate a rapid bus service onto El Camino through multiple cities with varying degrees of support for a dedicated lane. As population and jobs continue to grow rapidly in this county, there is a need to provide great transportation choices so that everyone can get around. **We would rather see this project move forward in a right-lane configuration than come to a halt.**

Other cities around the country have successfully implemented a right-lane configuration of rapid bus service. **This letter draws on examples from San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle and offers recommendations on how the right-lane configuration might be piloted and implemented in Santa Clara County.**

- **The pilot should attempt to include all the features of the full project.** A pilot is a trial run that is easily reversible but can tell us more about how a full-scale project will operate. Temporary improvements along the corridor—whether its paint or even traffic cones—balance the need to provide meaningful results with the need to prototype, learn and iterate quickly. If the pilot is only on a very short distance in one city, riders will not experience significant time savings during their journey and cities will not be able to test different enforcement options. Features that reduce the time it takes from when a bus pulls over and rejoins traffic such as off-board payment and all-door boarding make transit more reliable and attractive to users. Real-time transit information can also be accommodated temporarily; while electronic signage is expensive, static signage that directs users to real time transit information on smartphones can be installed and removed easily. These features are critical for increasing the number of people that use transit.

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<sup>1</sup> SPUR, January 2015, <http://www.spur.org/publications/policy-letter/2015-01-22/spur-comments-el-camino-real-brt-draft-eir>

<sup>2</sup> SPUR, April 2015, <http://www.spur.org/publications/policy-letter/2015-04-21/spur-supports-el-camino-real-brt>

- **Intersection improvements should be included in the pilot, even if they are designed to be temporary.** Intersection improvements will make El Camino Real safer and more pleasant for all users—whether they are people riding a bus, driving, bicycling or walking. Intersection improvements can also improve the waiting experience at stations by providing a buffer between a loading area and auto traffic. Importantly, transit agencies in other cities found that intersection improvements generated goodwill towards the full project because it created tangible places and engaging experiences, even for people who do not ride the bus. Figure 1 shows how temporary improvements such as paint and planters can go a long way.



**Figure 1.** Proposed temporary intersection improvements on Connecticut and 25th in San Francisco, which will be served by Bus Rapid Transit. Source: SFCTA

- **The pilot should test which rules and signage work best to manage vehicle access and flow.** This is particularly important if the lane is not restricted to transit only, or if it is only restricted to transit or high occupancy vehicles during certain times of the day. The rules will influence vehicle circulation, such as right and left turns, as shown in Figure 2. Other cities have found it beneficial to have a separate loading zone outside of the bus lane for very high occupancy vehicles, such as employer shuttles, which take a long time to board and can slow transit vehicles down. This is an opportunity to test paint, signs and other ways of communicating who is allowed to use the lane and at what times.



**Figure 2.** This image shows the right-lane bus rapid transit on 3rd Street near Mission in San Francisco. The 1- mile segment of BRT between King Street and Mission intersects with 10 curbcuts, 4 alleys, and 7 major streets. The rules and signage that manage vehicle access and flow are important ways to ensure good circulation.

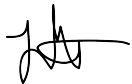
- **The station stops should be located and spaced appropriately to support rapid service and transit oriented development during the pilot and at full buildout.** Several cities found that right-lane bus rapid transit worked best when the stops were located on the far side of traffic lights. They also found that the stop spacing matters, although this is contextual. People will walk farther for high quality, reliable transit service that takes them long distances. But most people will not travel very long distances in El Camino. On the other hand, putting in stations too close together reduces travel speeds. Longer distances between stops means that there can also be fewer stops. This helps concentrate new development around transit stops and supports local plans for more compact and sustainable growth that many cities in the corridor share.
- **Have a clear idea of the goals and how to measure them.** What are the goals of doing a pilot, and what does success look like? The pilot and the actual project should share the same goals and performance indicators. We recommend that a clear set of performance indicators focused on speed (e.g., peak hour average trip times), safety (e.g., number and types of conflicts with other modes), reliability (e.g., adherence to schedule), passenger experience (e.g., buffer between

platform and auto traffic), system performance (e.g., person throughput capacity in peak hours; number of turning restrictions), and operations and management (e.g., costs to operate service be used to evaluate the pilot. These should be communicated to the public and particularly near transit stops.

- **Cities should dedicate appropriate resources to enforcement during the pilot and at full buildout.** The benefit of transit-only lanes is that buses can bypass traffic jams. But when bus lanes are not physically separated, it is easy for unauthorized vehicles to intrude and delay buses. To keep buses out of traffic, VTA could equip buses with cameras and issue citations in order to keep unauthorized vehicles out of bus only lanes. However, visible law enforcement is also necessary. To see real results, all cities will need to dedicate resources to enforcing transit- and HOV-only usage.

We applaud VTA leadership, the El Camino Real Policy Advisory Board and staff for trying to create a workable solution for improving one of the most important transit corridors in the Bay Area. Thank you for your review and consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, please reach out to 408-638-0083.

Sincerely,



Laura Tolkoff  
San Jose Policy Director

cc: Nuria Fernandez, Jim Ortbal, John Ristow, Adam Burger