



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

October 6, 2016

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

Re: Item 6.21 Next Network Light Rail Service Plan Recommendation

Dear VTA Board of Directors,

Thank you for your leadership on redesigning VTA's transit system to be more successful and usable. We appreciate and support staff's direction on the 2017 light rail operating plan.

As we described in our 2014 report *Freedom to Move*,¹ transit in Santa Clara County has not enjoyed consistent success.² The county's current transit system of buses and light rail was overlaid on a car-oriented landscape where transit stops are hard to get to, long distances separate homes and jobs, driving is typically fast and parking is free.

But opportunities for transit to turn a corner are emerging as the county absorbs an estimated 644,000 new people and more than 300,000 jobs within its existing urban growth boundary. As Jarrett Walker's *Next Network* report showed, adjustments to the current system's operations and service can better serve this growing market. We all need transit to succeed if the county wants to grow without gridlock.

SPUR strongly supports proposals that will: 1) increase frequency on lines that serve dense and growing mixed-use places and regional transit hubs; 2) grow the grid network to serve many different destinations so that parallel east-west and north-south routes intersect across the region.

The recommended changes to the 2017 light rail operating plan work towards these goals. Creating all-day frequent service on the Old Ironsides-Winchester line, for instance, creates better access to regional transit at Diridon Station and creates an opportunity for more transit-oriented development near Great America Station, which is quickly becoming a large center of round-the-clock activity.

We also strongly support the proposed wayfinding changes, which will make transit easier to use. As SPUR discussed in our 2015 report, *Seamless Transit*, poor information about how to

¹ <http://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2014-07-17/freedom-move>

² <http://www.spur.org/publications/urbanist-article/2010-08-01/transit-valley>

make a transit trip—especially multi-operator transit trips—deters potential riders and causes stress.

The map and station name changes proposed as part of the 2017 light rail operating plan go a long way towards providing riders with more confidence in the system. We recommend that such maps are developed through a rider-centered design process and coordinated with surrounding and overlapping transit systems/maps.

As a next step, we ask that VTA:

1. Add information about service frequency on the map in a visual format, in addition to what is written in the legend. Additional information about trip duration, particularly for the commuter express service, may also be helpful in attracting new riders.
2. Continue working with cities to create better wayfinding at each station. A starting point could be a program with the City of San Jose, which recently developed a comprehensive wayfinding plan for downtown San Jose.³
3. Quantify what proportion of VTA's budget will be spent on ridership services and coverage services if the proposed rail operating plan is adopted. This should also be evaluated in relation to proposed changes to the bus network.
4. Provide additional information about the commuter express service. Many jobs are located in north San Jose, north of where the proposed express service would terminate.
5. Continue working to improve the speed and reliability of light rail, particularly through downtown San Jose and north San Jose.

We support the direction of the 2017 recommended light rail operating plan and encourage VTA to continue making light rail more frequent, fast, reliable and easy to use. Thank you for your leadership on implementing VTA's Next Network and we look forward to your continued dedication to improving the *entire* transit network to make transit successful in Santa Clara County. Please feel free to contact me at 408-638-0083 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Teresa Alvarado
San Jose Director

cc: Laura Tolkoff, Ratna Amin

³ <http://www.spur.org/news/2015-10-15/how-apps-maps-and-other-tools-can-help-activate-downtown-san-jose>