

February 2, 2023  
*Sent electronically*

Dear Chair Burt and the VTA Board of Directors:

SPUR is a non-profit public policy organization that works to create a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous region. SPUR believes bringing BART to San Jose's downtown and to Diridon is critical for San Jose and the region.

We are deeply invested in this project's success. Over the past decade, we have endorsed funding measures and supported grant applications, hosted study tours for city and transit leaders to learn about great stations, authored numerous reports, held dozens of convenings and public programs, leveraged the expertise of world-renowned designers and transit leaders, and spent many hours participating in community working groups. It is precisely because we care deeply about this project that we raised concerns about its design.

**Our goals** for the design have been to make sure that (1) stations are accessible and safe (2) people can easily and quickly get between the street and the platforms, (3) the stations are connected to the city in purpose and design, and (4) stations are located to maximize the number of people in walking distance to the stations. (See more about our goals and values [here](#)). In the station refinements process, we have advocated for:

- At least two entrances at each station, conveniently and safely sited.
- Entrances on north and south of Santa Clara Street.
- East and west entrances as far away as possible from each other to maximize transit oriented development (TOD) and bring as many people as close as possible to as many origins and destinations as possible.
- Street-to-platform journeys that follow the natural path of travel, with a maximum of one switchback in the vertical circulation.
- Platform access supports efficient boarding and circulation.
- Place all back-of-house facilities underground or inside the station.
- Underground mezzanine enabling people to cross Santa Clara Street to avoid busy at-grade street crossings.
- Make the station head-houses rectangular so that they can fit into an urban context.

**Together, the refinement options and tunneling innovations presented to you today address many of these objectives in a cost-effective way, and will create a much better project for riders and for the city of San Jose.**

**Our outstanding request is to make sure the station head-house at Diridon Station is rectangular, not circular, so that it can fit into an urban context. In a well-integrated place, each element is designed to connect to those around it. The circular shape is an inherently isolated form and should be avoided.** Buildings should provide *edges* to urban open spaces. The goal is to avoid buildings that are

poorly integrated, with each building or project turned inward and buffered from its surrounding. It creates odd remnants of land that are limiting and that can harbor and enable antisocial behavior that makes the space feel untended and unsafe, discouraging women, seniors and people with disabilities from riding. The circular headhouse is isolated from its environment and is not consistent with the city's vision of a larger, more urban transit-supportive district.

Changing the shape of the head house does not mean giving up the plaza. The surrounding plaza can still be incorporated into the design to provide a respite in the urban fabric, even with a rectangular head house.

Finally, the station refinements process led to additional options for additional station entrances. However, it is our understanding that these are not part of the currently-approved project and that the entrances would require additional environmental analysis, land acquisition, and funding to build them. In other words: they are a different, subsequent project. **While we encourage VTA to begin the work of environmentally clearing these sites and putting together a funding plan to incorporate them into the project as soon as possible, we are concerned about whether these additional entrances can be feasibly funded.** It is unlikely that there will be such a generous federal infrastructure package in coming years, the state is projecting a deep deficit and intends to cut capital dollars from the budget, and many transit agencies are anticipating running out of operating funds as one-time federal relief dollars run out. **These dynamics make it even more important to make the primary station entrances as good as possible.**

We thank the VTA Board and staff for hearing our concerns and for initiating a station refinements task force to invite new ideas to improve the project's design. We fully understand that making changes at this stage in a project's life cycle is difficult, and appreciate the BART Silicon Valley team's efforts to consider and evaluate new possibilities.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership on this important project.

Laura Tolkoff  
Transportation Policy Director