

Notice of Preparation

Environmental Impact Report: Santa Clara/Alum Rock Transit Improvement Project, San Jose, CA

Lead Agency: Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority

Project Overview:

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for proposed transit improvements in the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Corridor. The Santa Clara/Alum Rock Corridor is 4.3 miles long, extending along Santa Clara Street and Alum Rock Avenue from the San Jose Diridon Station on the west to the Alum Rock Station on the Capitol Light Rail Transit (LRT) line on the east (see Figure 1). The Corridor lies within a larger study area known as the Downtown East Valley Study Area. The Downtown East Valley Study area is a 30-square-mile area extending from McKee Road/East Julian Street on the north to Capitol Expressway and Yerba Buena Road on the south; and from Market Street/Monterey Highway on the west to the foothills of the Diablo Mountain Range on the east. This area was the subject of a Major Investment Study (MIS) begun in early 1999. The purpose of the MIS was to identify study area transportation needs and develop an investment strategy for those needs. This MIS was completed in August 2000 when the VTA Board of Directors approved a Preferred Investment Strategy for the Downtown East Valley Study Area that included three primary components:

- LRT in the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Corridor;
- LRT along the entire length of the Capitol Expressway; and
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on Monterey Highway.

Following completion of the MIS and the initiation of conceptual engineering, it became evident that further study was necessary to address the unique transportation needs and potential integration of high capacity transit investments into the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Corridor. Six different rail and enhanced bus transit improvement alternatives for the Corridor were evaluated and presented to the public in a series of community participation meetings. Based on this analysis and public input, the Downtown East Valley Policy Advisory Board (PAB) and the VTA Board of Directors made decisions regarding two transit modes and alignments that would be included for further study in the EIR prepared for the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Transit Improvement Project. As further described below, the EIR will evaluate a No-Project alternative, a BRT alternative, and an LRT alternative. Scoping for the EIR will be accomplished through correspondence and discussions with interested persons and organizations; state and local agencies; and through a public meeting. The public meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 14, 2007 in room Wing 120 at the San Jose City Hall from 5:00 p.m. till 9:00 p.m.

Alternatives

The Alternatives for the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Transit Improvement Project to be evaluated in the EIR are:

- No-Project Alternative;
- Bus Rapid Transit Alternative;

- Single-Car Light Rail Transit Alternative.

In accordance with CEQA requirements the **No-Project Alternative** would consist of the existing conditions, as well as what would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved and development continued to occur in accordance with existing plans, consistent with available infrastructure and community services. The No Project Alternative assumes the following LRT Routes would be in operation:

- Guadalupe Corridor;
- Tasman West Corridor;
- Vasona Corridor;
- Tasman East/Capitol Corridor; and
- Capitol Expressway Corridor to Eastridge Transit Center.

The No Project Alternative also includes the current VTA bus network and fleet, and assumes the construction of BART to San Jose.

Under the **Bus Rapid Transit Alternative**, BRT service would be provided in the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Corridor. Buses would operate in the curb lane of Santa Clara Street and Alum Rock Avenue from the San Jose Diridon Station to approximately King Road, where the alignment would become semi-exclusive within the center of Alum Rock Avenue to Capitol Avenue.

The Bus Rapid Transit Alternative would provide limited-stop service between the San Jose Diridon Station on the west to the Alum Rock LRT Station on the east. Near the San Jose Diridon Station along Santa Clara Street, the Bus Rapid Transit Alternative would terminate at bus stops in front of the San Jose Arena, within a short walk for LRT, bus, future BART, or commuter rail transfers. The buses would continue west along The Alameda and El Camino Real to the Palo Alto Transit Center. However, improvements to bus stops and the implementation of BRT amenities would not occur past the Diridon Station.

On the east, the Bus Rapid Transit Alternative would continue south along Capitol Avenue/Expressway, with intermediate stops at Story Road and Ocala Avenue, before terminating at the Eastridge Transit Center.

The Bus Rapid Transit Alternative would utilize articulated VTA buses (approximately 60 feet in length) with unique branding. Buses would run at 12-minute headways during peak periods and would include the following features:

- Bus stations for boarding locations (“bulb-out” design with expanded shelters, lighting, etc.);
- Real-time information at stops; and
- Transit priority measures, such as signal priority, where appropriate.

Under the Bus Rapid Transit Alternative, seven new stations are proposed at the following locations:

- Diridon Transit Center (Cahill Street/Montgomery Street);
- Transit Mall (1st and 2nd Streets);

- Civic Center (6th Street);
- 16th Street;
- 28th Street;
- King Road; and
- Jackson Avenue.

The **Single Car Light Rail Transit Alternative** includes the construction of an LRT route in the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Corridor extending from the Diridon LRT Station on the west to the Alum Rock LRT Station on the east. The proposed alignment is from the Diridon LRT Station along San Fernando Street on trackway used for the Vasona Line, continues with new trackway construction along San Fernando Street from Delmas Avenue to Almaden Boulevard, transitions to Santa Clara Street along Almaden Boulevard, and continues along Santa Clara Street and Alum Rock Avenue to Capitol Avenue where it would connect with the trackway for the Capitol LRT Line.

An optional alignment is under consideration on the western end of the Corridor. Rather than interline with the Vasona LRT Line, the optional alignment would remain on Santa Clara Street toward the San Jose Arena. At Montgomery Street, the alignment would turn into the San Jose Diridon Station parking lot. The terminus station, tail track, and crossover would be located within the parking lot.

The Single Car Light Rail Transit Alternative would utilize current VTA low-floor vehicles operating as a single car running at 15-minute headways through the Corridor during peak periods. Vehicles would operate at-grade in a semi-exclusive (separate from automobile traffic) center right-of-way along San Fernando Street and Almaden Boulevard; in shared operation with automobiles in the outside lanes (curb lanes) of Santa Clara Street and Alum Rock Avenue west of 34th Street; and transition back to a semi-exclusive center right-of-way in the median of Alum Rock Avenue east of 34th Street.

The operation plan for the Single Car LRT alternative includes a one-car operation. It would serve the Diridon Station (either the existing station for the Vasona Line or the optional alignment station in the San Jose Diridon Station parking lot) and the San Fernando Station on the Vasona Line. The Alternative would also serve the Alum Rock Station on the Capital Avenue Line and the Story Road Station, the Ocala Avenue Station, and the Eastridge Transit Center (all included in the proposed Capitol Expressway Corridor Project).

Seven new LRT Stations are proposed in the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Avenue Corridor as part of the Single-Car Light Rail Transit Alternative. Similar to the Enhanced Bus Alternative, new stations are proposed at the following locations:

- Almaden Boulevard (for the first option only);
- Transit Mall (1st and 2nd Streets);
- Civic Center (6th Street);
- 16th Street;
- 28th Street;
- King Road; and

- Jackson Avenue.

Project Purpose

The following objectives have been established to improve public transit service in the Downtown East Valley area of San Jose:

- Improve mobility by providing direct, convenient, time-competitive transit service with connections to existing and programmed elements of VTA's rapid transit network;
- Increase transit ridership serving high-density corridors demonstrating strong transit use;
- Provide improved transit service in high-commute corridors with an emphasis on work and school trips;
- Promote livable neighborhoods, redevelopment objectives, community support, and general transportation needs;
- Meet the needs of transit dependent residents.

The project would provide residents of downtown and east San Jose more efficient access to the existing bus and LRT systems as well as improved connections and greater mobility options throughout the Silicon Valley. The central location of the proposed project would provide additional transit access for Study Area residents to adjacent areas of Santa Clara County with minimal transfer requirements. Connecting the light rail system with an improved east-west transit line in the Corridor would also improve the mobility of residents in the vicinity of Capitol Avenue.

Implementation of either of the build alternatives would provide increased access to VTA's current rail system by connecting to the Capitol LRT Line on the east and with the Guadalupe LRT Line and the Vasona LRT Line on the west. These connections would improve access to the thousands of jobs and other destinations located along these existing LRT corridors as well as improve access to high employment areas. Implementation of the proposed project would also provide improved access to San Jose State University.

Probable Environmental Effects

The purpose of the EIR is to fully disclose the environmental consequences of building and operating the Santa Clara/Alum Rock Transit Improvement Project in advance of any decisions to commit substantial financial or other resources towards its implementation. The EIR will explore the extent to which project alternatives and design options result in environmental impacts and will discuss actions to reduce or eliminate such impacts. Environmental issues to be examined in the EIR include: changes in the physical environment (natural resources, air quality, noise, water quality, geology, visual); changes in the social environment (land use, business and neighborhood disruptions); changes in traffic and pedestrian circulation; changes in transit service and patronage; associated changes in traffic congestion; and impacts on parklands and historic resources. Impacts will be identified both for the construction period and for the long-term operation of the alternatives.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Interested parties are also encouraged to attend the above-described public meeting. Comments

or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIR should be directed to VTA. All questions and comments should be directed to:

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People with special needs should contact _____, Public Communications Specialist, VTA Community Outreach, at _____ or TDD only at _____.