

# Gridlock relief

Fremont, VTA, BART break ground on Warm Springs traffic improvement projects

BY WES BOWERS

Another milestone in making Bay Area Rapid Transit travel to San Jose was reached last month.

BART representatives were joined by Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and California Department of Transportation officials and Fremont City Council members Sept. 28 to break ground on the Mission/Warren Area Improvements Project.

Officials say the latest phase in the BART Silicon Valley Berryessa Extension will feature key safety and mobility enhancements in Fremont, as well as infrastructure upgrades.

The Mission/Warren project will widen Mission Boulevard to six lanes between Interstate 880 and Warm Springs Boulevard and depress Warren Avenue to separate it from BART and Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The project will also include installation of two new railroad tracks and two new BART bridges and a maintenance bridge over both Mission Boulevard and Warren Avenue.

Off ramps and on ramps from Kato Road and Mission Boulevard will also be built.

The project is estimated to cost \$151 million, funded by a combination of federal, state and local sources.

"This is a significant milestone in bringing BART to Silicon Valley," VTA board Chair Ken Yeager said at the groundbreaking. "This will enhance mobility and safety in Fremont, as well as finally connect residents of San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland."

Widening Mission Boulevard will complete phase two of the Mission Boulevard/I-880 interchange project.

Depressing Warren Avenue underneath both railroad and

future BART tracks is required to deliver a fully grade-separated BART extension. When complete, Warren Avenue will have new pedestrian sidewalks — which are not currently present — and striped bike lanes.

Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, said thanks should not only be given to the agencies involved in the project, but the taxpayers for approving Proposition 1B — the half-cent sales tax initiative aimed at funding a variety of transportation projects throughout the state.

"This really should have happened two decades ago, but Santa Clara County and BART both said they had no money to do this," Honda said. "But people started to say their commute was bad, the air was going to get bad, and they needed to get to their jobs."

State Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, agreed, and likened the ground breaking to driving the Golden Spike into the Union



Fremont City Councilmembers Bill Harrison and Sue Chan join Mayor Gus Morrison, Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty, Federal Transportation Authority regional administrator Leslie Rogers, VTA board Chair Ken Yeager, Sen. Ellen Corbett, Caltrans District 4 Chief Deputy District Director Dan McElhinney, Rep. Mike Honda and BART Boardmember Tom Blalock in breaking ground on the Mission/Warren Area Improvements Project Sept. 28.

Photos by James Sakane

Pacific railroad in 1869.

"While the BART extension is an example of the great work that can be accomplished by a number of agencies, we must thank the voters," she said. "Our constituents understood these were important projects and helped get them approved and underway."

Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty said work on Proposition 1B began long before its approval in 2006, and said it has since created 13 freeway interchanges, as well as 27 miles of freeway.

"This is about improving transportation and improving infrastructure to move people to and from work, to good paying jobs," he said. "I'm very proud we started on (Proposition 1B)

long ago."

Fremont Mayor Gus Morrison said the project will also benefit the city's future development in Warm Springs.

The city's plans surrounding the Tesla factory include creating transit-oriented development, and the improvement project's location will help Fremont achieve that convenience for residents.

"We're looking forward to great beginnings," Morrison said. "(Fremont has) great plans. We're looking forward to 600 acres of development surrounding Tesla, and looking forward to plans for people to easily get to and from their homes. This will facilitate that."

Tom Blalock, a BART director, said when he worked for City of Fremont, widening Mission Boulevard was always on his to-do list. However, he said the city never had the money to bring the project to fruition.

"The Warm Springs area will never be choked with stalled traffic on Warren Avenue again, and that's a good thing," he said. "The extension from Warm

Springs to Berryessa is going to be a breath of fresh air to the area."

BART's Silicon Valley Project is a 16-mile extension of its existing system to San Jose, Milpitas and Santa Clara.

The first phase, the Berryessa Extension, is a 10-mile, two-station extension, beginning in Fremont south of the future Warm Springs Station and proceeding through Milpitas, the location of the first station, and then to the Berryessa area of north San Jose, at the second station.

VTA will continue the second 6-mile phase of the project that includes a 5.1 mile-long subway tunnel through downtown San Jose and ends at grade in Santa Clara near the Caltrain station. Construction on the second phase of the project will commence as additional funding is secured.



VTA board Chair Ken Yeager talks about the importance the Mission/Warren Area Improvements Project will carry toward easing congestion and linking Fremont BART to San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco.