

From: VTA Board Secretary
Sent: Tuesday, February 19, 2019 1:53 PM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: February 18-19, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Monday, February 18 and Tuesday, February 19, 2019

1. [VTA asking for public input on proposed changes to bus, light rail services \(ABC 7 News\)](#)
2. [VTA considering cutting bus routes \(Gilroy Dispatch\)](#)
3. [Teacher housing at former VTA lot? \(Morgan Hill Times\)](#)
4. [Op-Ed: Apathy Towards the Unhoused is Dangerous \(San Jose Inside\)](#)
5. [Caltrain projects still a go despite high-speed rail reversal](#)
6. [Not everyone thrilled with 'Complete Streets': Roadshow \(East Bay Times\)](#)
7. [Big changes could be coming to Bascom Avenue: Roadshow \(Mercury News\)](#)
8. [Report: Inequality on the rise in Silicon Valley \(Mountain View Voice\)](#)

[VTA asking for public input on proposed changes to bus, light rail services \(ABC 7 News\)](#)

VTA is asking for the public's input on a proposed transit plan that would cut 4 percent in operation costs.

The Gilroy Dispatch reports the proposal would save VTA \$15 million annually, with 70 changes across bus and light rail services.

VTA says their goal is to increase ridership while minimizing impacts to current riders.

One of the proposals is cutting service on Route 22 from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. Route 22 is the only overnight service in the system.

VTA estimates 40-45 people ride the bus nightly for shelter. VTA estimates stopping operation from 1 a.m. To 4 a.m. would save \$500,000 annually.

VTA has been holding several community meetings to get public input.

The last meeting is Tuesday at 11 a.m. at San Jose State's MLK Library.

The final day to submit public comments is February 28.

[Here's more information](#) on the proposed changes.

[VTA considering cutting bus routes](#) (Gilroy Dispatch)

Valley Transit Authority (VTA) is considering discontinuing some all-day routes, along with some express and school routes, and removing some route deviations, as well as trimming hours and frequency in the early morning and late evening.

However, the authority said some high-demand areas may see an increase in transit frequency. The VTA board proposed the changes at a Jan. 10 meeting.

Commuter routes for South County riders could be affected, according to draft plans posted on the VTA blog. A post by the authority announcing some of the changes said the VTA board is attempting to avoid decreasing transit in the South County because of the high number of commuters riding to and from San Jose.

“Routes 14, 17, and 19 in Gilroy would still be restructured into a bidirectional loop as proposed in the 2017 Next Network Plan, but service levels would not change. Route 16 in Morgan Hill would be renamed to Route 87, but would otherwise remain unchanged,” wrote Holly Perez, public information officer for the authority, in the blog post.

The VTA is proposing to cut two “commute period trips” on Express Route 168, which connects the Gilroy Transit Center with Diridon Station, reducing the number of trips from seven to five “to better match demand without sacrificing rider convenience.”

Perez told this newspaper in an email that additional proposed South County changes include changing the frequency for weekday midday on Route 68 between Santa Teresa Station and Gilroy to every 15 minutes from 30 minutes, eliminating three of nine daily trips in each direction on Express 121, eliminating two of seven daily trips in each direction on Express 168 and discontinuing routes on Express 185.

The VTA said it will continue to consult the public on the 2019 draft transit service plan. The plan will not be adopted until fall of 2019, and public input is being sought as the authority considers cutting routes or changing service schedules.

VTA scheduled a “virtual meeting” Feb. 12 to continue collecting community input on the changes. According to a VTA blog post, the authority is facing a \$26 million deficit in 2019.

The proposed changes are set to save the authority \$15 million annually, with 70 changes across bus and light rail services in the current draft of the plan.

Perez said the VTA is asking for all community input before Feb. 28, so it can be included in the final draft of the plan. Perez wrote in an email, "The community feedback will inform the final draft plan that is scheduled to go before VTA advisory and standing committees in April and to the board for final approval in May 2019."

[Teacher housing at former VTA lot? \(Morgan Hill Times\)](#)

School district undecided on use for Main Ave. property

School district leaders will consider several different options for the recently purchased land at the former Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority bus stop and parking lot on West Main Avenue in Morgan Hill.

"The district had a first option to purchase the VTA lot at market rate and a limited amount of time to consider options for its use," according to Lanae Bays, Morgan Hill Unified School District's communications coordinator. "The connection to our school property is an appealing feature for this property."

Last month, MHUSD bought the nearly one-acre parcel at the intersection of West Main and Hale avenues from the Santa Clara VTA for \$1,147,620, according to staff. The property is adjacent to the athletic fields at Britton Middle School, where most Morgan Hill Pony Baseball League games are played. The board approved the purchase at their Jan. 22 meeting.

"As we restructure our facilities in anticipation of future needs, that property could come into play for building or relocating central district services," Bays said.

District officials also are considering building "some affordable housing (units) for school district employees to rent while they build up income to be able to purchase their own home," according to Bays.

Teacher housing has been a hot-button topic in recent years among many local school districts with the rising cost of living throughout Santa Clara County.

"In consideration of the sports fields, and possible renovation of the Britton fields next to the property, the district may consider additional field facilities for the school or expanded parking for the many sports teams who use the fields after school," Bays continued.

The district funded the purchase of the old VTA lot by using monies from its Capital Facilities and Mello Roos funds.

"Opportunities to acquire additional acreage connected to a school site do not come along often, especially so close to downtown," Bays said. "If we passed it by for any of these valuable potential uses, it wouldn't present itself again in the future."

The topic will be discussed at a future board meeting yet to be determined as school district leaders finalize how they want to use the land.

[Op-Ed: Apathy Towards the Unhoused is Dangerous](#) (San Jose Inside)

Imagine waking up in the middle of the night, your home and all your belongings irretrievably damaged. Imagine that the mayor and other officials went around knocking on doors, alerting folks to potential flooding, but not in your neighborhood. And that the mayor was doing publicity about his great flood “strategery.”

This is what happened to numerous [unhoused](#) people along the creek the night of Feb. 13. They awoke to flooded tents and belongings, salvaging whatever they could, with no help from the city or county. Ironically, the night of the flood was preceded by a “memorial service” for the 157 people that died on the streets last year. The youngest two being one month and five months old and the eldest being 88 and 94.

There were no unhoused people at the memorial. HomeFirst didn’t pass out flyers at their other location, so they didn’t know about the memorial to their brethren. And for those staying at Little Orchard (aka Little Torture), lunch was served when the memorial began. It was obviously not a memorial for unhoused people, it was a PR stunt with elected officials and HomeFirst board members reading the names of the fallen.

One would think, after a memorial, that our most fragile neighbors would be foremost in the minds of officials—particularly on a day with torrential rain and flood warnings.

This clearly wasn’t the case. Nobody came to warn them the night of the flood. Nobody planned ahead and evacuated them during the day. Nobody opened the Overnight Warming Locations (OWLs), one location being right next to the folks who got flooded.

Who is responsible for this failure? Is it Santa Clara County, which issues weather alerts that trigger the opening of the OWLs? Is it the county, which issued a press release declaring the fifth inclement weather episode of the year on Feb. 13 but didn’t trigger the opening of the OWLs until two days later? Was it HomeFirst, which currently run the OWLs? Was it the city of San Jose, which is responsible for warning and evacuating people? I’ve reached out to folks from all these agencies and none have stepped forward to accept the responsibility. Nobody is being held accountable.

Yet many folks lost everything they had—tents, blankets, clothing, you name it, that are now full of river water—or are in the river. They have no way to clean the items they retrieved, so many are huddled under wet blankets in wet tents, wearing wet clothes, sitting through another day of downpours and waiting for the OWL to open for the night. The city is only opening OWLs at three locations, not the four they usually do and one of them, Leininger Community Center, is not being utilized—probably because it’s so hard to find. It should be moved back to Tully Road.

Adding insult to injury, in the press release sent out by the county, the hotline they list for needy families says there is not an inclement weather episode and the OWLs aren’t open. I

wonder how many families have called and ended up in the street or car, not knowing OWLs were indeed open.

Who is going to provide compensation for their loss? Why shouldn't they be compensated like the unhoused victims of the last flood? How can we prevent pneumonia, a leading cause of unhoused deaths last year, if we can't even keep our citizens out of a flood? Who is responsible for this failure? And, more importantly, how do we prevent this from happening ever again?

If the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) has their way, they will cut the 22 line, the only 24-hour line in the city, a vital lifeline for residents of "Hotel 22." This will take away the overnight safe haven for seniors, parents with children, and women who ride the bus all night to stay safe and warm.

Should Route 22 be a rolling overnight shelter in the first place? No, not at all. Because there isn't adequate shelter space for the over 5,000 unhoused people in the county, that's what it's become. The city and county aren't creating any new shelters or navigation centers, regardless of how desperately they're needed, so people are forced to pay nightly for a spot on Hotel 22.

There are very few shelters where people feel safe. There are even less shelters for families to feel safe. There are very few shelters that accommodate a non-9-to-5 work schedule. There is one LGBTQ shelter, but it only sleeps 15 people. Over 50 percent of all unhoused women are raped at least once, so many have dogs to protect them—dogs that aren't allowed at many shelters. In inclement weather, most shelters are over capacity.

If the VTA cuts the 22 from 1 to 4am, there will be more vulnerable people in our creeks. More people will succumb to the wet and cold, adding to an unhoused death rate that rises each year. Route 22 saves lives.

Speaking of saving lives, local law enforcement agencies have taken to doing "warrant checks" in encampments. They say it allows them to get to know folks in the encampments and remove only folks with warrants.

But it doesn't create a sense of goodwill in the camps, it just ratchets up the fear and distrust. It also destabilizes camps and makes them less safe, particularly for women, if the head of the camp, the person who maintains order, or male protector are removed for a warrant. Oftentimes, a warrant that's for being unhoused—trespass, petty theft, unpaid tickets, drug use, etcetera.

Dangerous people should be removed from camps, but with law enforcement continuously criminalizing homelessness by charging folks for unhoused crimes, more and more folks become "criminals" with warrants. Criminalizing homelessness ensures continued homelessness as people with a record have a much harder time finding employment and housing.

It seems to me that the city, county, VTA and others have little regard for human life. If they did, the 22 wouldn't be under attack, unhoused folks wouldn't be subject to random raids by

law enforcement and someone would've figured out that creek dwelling folks needed to be evacuated to an OWL before the flood.

Any of us can become unhoused after a medical issue, job loss, the loss of a relationship, a catastrophic fire or some other unforeseen disaster. We need to show our unhoused neighbors compassion and protect them when the city, county and others fail to do so. We need to demand accountability for these repeated assaults on unhoused people. We need to demand accountability when unhoused people are left to fend for themselves in a flood. We need to demand and show more empathy and less apathy.

Shaunn Cartwright is an activist, housing rights advocate and co-founder of South Bay Tenants Union. Opinions in this article are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of San Jose Inside. Send [op-ed](#) pitches to jenniferw@metronews.com.

[Caltrain projects still a go despite high-speed rail reversal](#)

Local officials say grade separation, electrification will go forward

California hit the brakes on the decadelong effort to build a high-speed rail line between its major population centers. But the turnaround earlier this week in Gov. Gavin Newsom's State of the State address is expected to have minimal impact on a suite of train corridor projects along the Peninsula – at least in the near term.

Caltrain officials [said](#) that funding remains secure for a \$2 billion project to upgrade the rail line to an electrified system. Meanwhile, Mountain View officials say local grade separation projects, to separate the train line from road crossings, should proceed with all financing intact.

In regard to Caltrain electrification, the state's high-speed rail project is obligated to provide \$713 million toward the cost of the upgrades. That funding remains intact, and the state recently awarded an additional \$165 million to the project to purchase electric trains, said Caltrain spokesman Dan Lieberman.

Yet he acknowledged that the shift in high-speed rail could change scenarios for Caltrain in the long-term. Exactly what this means will be investigated by the rail agency in the coming months as it drafts its business plan, he said.

“As far as electrification, I would say there's no major change,” Lieberman said. “As far as the big picture, our business plan looks at a lot of potential outcomes in the future for how California and Caltrain develop. This change will be taken into account.”

Over the years, the California high-speed rail project to connect Los Angeles to San Francisco has faced cost overruns, delays and withering criticism from local municipalities throughout the state, particularly well-heeled cities on the Peninsula, including [Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Atherton](#). In recent years, Mountain View officials have been mostly lukewarm on the project, expressing skepticism as the project languished, but stopping short of outright opposition.

Mountain View Councilman John McAlister, who sits on the VTA board of directors, expressed confidence that the recent setback for high-speed rail would not curtail the city's plan to separate the local train crossings. Those projects include a \$60 million plan to close off Castro Street to road traffic and a \$120 project to tunnel Rengstorff Avenue under the train tracks.

Those expensive infrastructure project already have funding secured, primarily from the 2016 Santa Clara County Measure B sales tax, which allocated \$750 million toward grade-separation efforts, McAlister said.

“The dying of high-speed rail will not affect our projects,” he said. “Right now, as I see it, there's no negative effect.”

Yet the news that California leaders are looking to pull the plug on bullet trains is hardly something to celebrate, McAlister said. The regional housing woes and land costs made it very sensible to pursue some kind of speedy transit line, he said.

“We still need to do something down the road,” he said.

[Not everyone thrilled with ‘Complete Streets’: Roadshow](#) (East Bay Times)

The Complete Streets plan to curtail roadway fatalities raises a question: Why are cities spending millions of taxpayers dollars based on hopes and no realistic basis or expectations?

Fremont is spending millions re-configuring a bunch of streets that is potentially making them unsafe for everyone on the road. For example, reducing the number of car lanes makes them unsafe because it practically eliminates any flexibility to maneuver around an emergency situation without going into the next lane.

In addition, there is very little increase in bicycle traffic. Yet, bicycle lanes have been effectively widened making it unsafe for car drivers.

Kirit Shah, Fremont

A: Complete Streets refers to making local road changes to benefit all users — drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users. It often means losing a lane of traffic, lower speed limits, new bike lanes, shorter pedestrian crossings and more bus-friendly traffic lights.

Bicycling in the Bay Area is slowly on the increase, according to census data. San Jose is on track to have 3-4 percent of trips taken by bicyclists by next year in some areas. That’s short of the 5 percent goal citywide, but it is inching up.

San Jose City has a long-term goal of 15 percent of trips by bike in 2040. John-The-City-Bike-Guy says he is “optimistic San Jose will, in the long-term, see biking rates far above 5 percent.”

The city’s bike plan calls for completing a 500-mile network, consisting of 400 miles of on-street bikeways and 100 miles of off-street trails. To date, San Jose has completed 236 miles of bike lanes.

Q: It seems that Fremont is planning more changes that would add to this list of making “bad” streets and not “complete streets”. Sorry for expressing an opposing viewpoint. Nonetheless, it is based on first-hand experience of driving and observing bicyclists and pedestrians also behaving unsafely in addition to some motorists.

Kirit Shah

A: This is really all about slowing down traffic. In 2015, all fatal traffic crashes in Fremont occurred on major streets with speed limits of 40 miles per hour or greater, and 50 percent of the fatalities occurred on Fremont Boulevard alone. The city has since lowered the speed limit from 45 to 40 mph and from 40 to 35 mph on 11 major streets.

In Oakland, two of three drivers now yield at some crosswalks on Telegraph, compared to just 20 percent a few years ago. Speeding is down 45 percent.

Q: I am not sure about other streets, but Lincoln Avenue has gone from a pedestrian nightmare with two lanes each way, to a very walkable downtown street that slowed cars coming through downtown Willow Glen and turned it back to a wonderful downtown block.

Richard Bernhardt

A: It’s important to remember that these projects are about safety more than anything.

[Big changes could be coming to Bascom Avenue: Roadshow \(Mercury News\)](#)

Q: Some of the worst streets to cross on foot are the eight-10 lane streets (Bascom/Hamilton, try to walk it) where there are way too many lanes coming at pedestrians at once. I am not sure how we can solve the problem easily; people are trying to drive faster and faster and more recklessly, looking at their phones while they are navigating through intersections.

Richard Bernhardt

: Bascom is high on the Complete Streets list, which could mean fewer lanes, buses that have priority at signals, more coordinated signals, shorter crosswalks and easier access to nearby businesses and restaurants over a 5.9-mile stretch from Interstate 880 down to Highway 85.

Community meetings are scheduled next month to get feedback on preferred designs: March 27 at the Bascom Community Center, 1000 South Bascom Avenue, and March 28 at Farnham Elementary School, 15711 Woodard Road. Both begin at 6 p.m.

Q: “Complete Streets” is just another euphemism for “we are going to force you out of your cars whether you like it or not.” Just like “road diet,” “smart growth,” etc.

Creighton Sneetly

A: Now don't be cynical.

Q: Once a week I drive my twin grandchildren to preschool along San Tomas Expressway. To engage them in conversation, I often ask them to look for interesting things since I have to keep my eyes on the road. So one morning, my 5-year-old grandson spied a tiny sign on the side of the road and then we kept seeing more of them.

Of all the traffic issues you cover, I didn't think I'd be asking you this simple question: "What do these small signs (we saw at least 20 of them) mean?" They look like this — FO PB — usually black letters on a yellow background

I told them you could probably solve the mystery, so they made me promise to email you.

Julie Hawkes

A: Grandma and I come through. The narrow orange markers mean Fiber Optic Pull Box and indicate that there's a cable pulling vault within a few inches. Any other kid questions out there?

Q: They shut the Richmond Bridge due to falling concrete. But no one has ever shut down the Caltrain overpass at The Alameda due to numerous pieces of concrete that have fallen off this old bridge. I've seen pieces that weighed several pounds laying under the overpass. Don't we count?

A: You sure do. Caltrain is aware of concerns at the overpass, but say incidents have been rare and do not affect the overall structural integrity of the bridge. They hope to have repairs completed before summer.

[Report: Inequality on the rise in Silicon Valley](#) (Mountain View Voice)

Index of region highlights spiking housing costs, income gap

Despite a sizzling economy and an influx of wealth, Silicon Valley remains a bastion of inequality, with more residents now struggling to afford the growing costs of housing, child care and transportation, according to a newly released snapshot of the regional economy.

The [2019 Silicon Valley Index](#), which was released this week by Joint Venture Silicon Valley, paints a troubling picture of a region where home prices continue to skyrocket, where tech giants are voraciously gobbling up startups and where more people are leaving than coming in.

These trends are casting a shadow over the region's continuous economic expansion, with \$50 billion in venture capital flowing to area companies and average annual earnings reaching \$140,000, more than double the national average.

In his introduction of the annual report, Joint Venture President and CEO Russell Hancock called this year's report a "Rorschach test," with plenty to both cheer and worry about. Hancock noted that some of the challenges, including transportation's woes, sky-high housing costs, and a "yawning income divide," remain troubling but are, in a sense, "old news."

More disquieting, he wrote, are indicators that the region's "fundamentals" — which have driven the area's economic vitality — could be changing.

Among the factors, he wrote, large companies are "acquiring smaller ones at a pace we've never seen, changing the messy way innovation has typically happened here, perhaps even stifling it."

"Fewer startups are getting their seed funding," Hancock wrote. "Our high costs (including salaries) are causing innovative companies to look elsewhere."

For the third year in a row, Silicon Valley has seen more people move out than move in, the report states. Between July 2017 and July 2018, Santa Clara County had a net "out migration" of domestic residents of about 15,000, trailing only Los Angeles and Orange counties. Strikingly, foreign immigrants are also leaving in greater numbers than coming in. Between July 2015 and July 2018, the region gained 61,977 foreign immigrants but lost 64,318 to other parts of California and the United States.

"The influx of foreign immigrants into the region is more than fully offset by the number of Silicon Valley residents moving to other parts of the state and nation; those who choose to stay within California are heading to regions such as the Sacramento and Stockton/Tracy areas where housing costs are significant lower," the report states.

The report also takes note of the region's slowing population growth, which is due primarily to the region's slow and declining birth rate.

At the same time, Silicon Valley remains a diverse region. The report showed that in 2017, Asian residents made up 34 percent of the population, marking the first time that they have represented the largest share of the region's population (in 2007 they accounted for 28 percent of the population). The percentage of white residents has decreased from 40.4 percent in 2007 to 33.5 percent in 2017, the report states.

The report also underscores the region's failures, despite recent statewide and local efforts, to increase residential development and lower housing costs. Median home prices in Silicon Valley skyrocketed in 2018, going up by a whopping 21 percent and reaching \$1.18 million, the report states. And while rental rates in the San Francisco and San Jose metro areas remained steady in 2018, they were significantly higher than in any other metro area in the nation (in these two areas, rental rates are \$3.42 and \$3.20 per square foot, respectively; New York is a distant third at \$2.67 per square foot).

Housing supply has not come anywhere close to keeping up with demand: While the region has produced close to 18,000 new units over the past two years, the new projects have not come close to making up for insufficient building over the prior decade, according to the report. The Index estimates that between 2007 and 2016, Silicon Valley created a housing shortage of about 38,000 units, which would be needed to accommodate the region's growing population.

Furthermore, new buildings are generally priced for the wealthy. Only 8 percent of newly approved residential units in Silicon Valley are affordable to residents who earn less than 80 percent of the area median income. For most potential first-time homebuyers, local prices remain far out of reach. The report shows that only 22 percent of potential-first-time homebuyers in San Mateo County — and 30 percent in Santa Clara County — can afford a median-priced home.

The lack of affordable housing, the report notes, "results in longer commutes, diminished productivity, curtailment of family time, and increased traffic congestion."

"It also restricts the ability of crucial service providers — such as teachers, registered nurses, and police officers — to live near the communities they work," the report states. "Additionally, high housing costs can limit families' ability to pay for basic needs, such as food, health care, transportation, child care and clothing. They can push residents to live with one another for economic reasons and can increase homelessness."

Despite a recent push by traditionally growth-averse cities like Palo Alto to encourage more housing, the pace of construction remains sluggish. The number of residential units that were permitted in Silicon Valley in 2018 — 8,400 — was actually lower than in 2017, when more than 9,000 units received the green light.

The report underscores the region's growing income gap, with the number of high-income households (earning \$150,000 or more) in Silicon Valley and San Francisco rising by 35 percent in the past four years and 2 percent of households claiming 27 percent of the wealth. Furthermore, more than a quarter of Silicon Valley households have household incomes above \$200,000, compared to 11 percent statewide and 7 percent nationally.

But for those at the lower end of the income scale, affording a living has become considerably more difficult. One of the more eye-popping statistics in the new report is the rising cost of child care, which has gone up by 52 percent since 2012 and now stands at about \$20,900 annually for infants. The cost of transportation needs for a family of four has gone up by 18 percent since 2014 and is now about \$6,300.

The report points to income disparities that persist between "residents of various races and ethnicities, and between men and women at the same level of educational attainment." The tech industry continues to be dominated by men. Only 18 percent of highly educated women between the ages of 24 and 44 worked in technical occupations in 2017, compared to 43 percent of their male counterparts.

The report also showed that women made up just 28 percent of the workforce at Silicon Valley's largest tech companies in 2017, and a mere 19 percent of technical roles and leadership positions.

One finding that is unlikely to surprise readers is the growing commute times. Even though the average number of miles driven by Silicon Valley residents has declined for three consecutive years (reaching 22 miles in 2017), solo commuting remains the most popular option — one

chosen by 72 percent of Silicon Valley workers (down from 75 percent a decade ago). The report notes that the average commute time has gone up by 20 percent over the past decade, adding an additional 43 hours of driving time per commuter annually. In 2017, 6.5 percent of employees spent more than three hours on their daily work commutes.

Likely driven by traffic congestion, the share of commuters taking public transportation rose, from 4.9 percent in 2011 to 6.5 percent in 2016. Ridership on Caltrain, a popular commute option on the Peninsula, rose between 2010 and 2018 by 45 percent.

The cost of transportation needs in Silicon Valley went up by 4 percent over the past four years, the report found, even as it decreased statewide by 12 percent over the same period.

"Changing transportation costs affect our residents' ability to get around and still afford their other basic needs," the report states. "And the amount of time wasted due to long commutes and traffic delays affects the everyday lives of our residents — taking time away from work, participating in the community, or being with family and friends."

View multiple charts illustrating the report's findings [here](#).

From: VTA Board Secretary
Sent: Wednesday, February 20, 2019 12:10 PM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: February 20, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Wednesday, February 20, 2019

1. [New Transit Plan Community Meeting \(KTVU Ch. 2\)](#)
2. [Some Bay Area transit agencies scaling back coverage areas: Roadshow \(Mercury News\)](#)
3. [Second Safe Route to School meeting scheduled Monday \(Los Altos Town Crier\)](#)
4. [Ownership, management of planned express lanes decided \(Climate Online Redwood City\)](#)
5. [Silicon Valley Leadership Group CEO Carl Guardino Reappointed to California Transportation Commission \(SVLG.org\)](#)
6. [Why the future of Caltrain is being built in Salt Lake City \(Mass Transit Magazine\)](#)
7. [Former Palo Alto transportation head dies at 71 \(Palo Alto Online\)](#)
8. [Feds want to claw back billions in funding for California high-speed rail \(Business Journal\)](#)
9. [BART responds to riders' questions and complaints \(ABC 7 News\)](#)

[New Transit Plan Community Meeting \(KTVU Ch. 2\)](#)

(Link to video)

[Some Bay Area transit agencies scaling back coverage areas: Roadshow \(Mercury News\)](#)

Q: I read all your Roadshow columns and am prompted to write a response to transit problems in the Bay Area. Public transportation is not practical and impossible during non-commute hours. Like finding a parking space at BART during the day. Impossible! Take public transit to BART: Yes if you have all day and can walk miles.

Transit riders are treated like non-citizens. The silent minority gets the shaft again over and over.

Marty Chew, Danville

Like Mr. Roadshow's [Facebook page](#) for more questions and answers about Bay Area roads, freeways and commuting.

A: The issue was getting more transit from neighborhood to neighborhood after Clay Kallams discovered that a bus ride from his home in Walnut Creek to meet his wife for dinner in San Ramon would stop 29 times and require a long walk.

Q: I understand Mr. Kallam's problem all too well. However, not being able to join his wife for a dinner is far different from having to do things like grocery shopping, haircuts, medical appointments, etc. I am a 72-year-old widow who has never been able to drive. I regularly walk 2-4 miles to do most of these things and more.

Even though I have become a maven of the transportation system in the County Connection district, there are many things I would like to do that I simply have to accept are not in the cards. I certainly don't expect hundreds of billions of dollars to be spent to make my life easier.

Nancy Morris, Walnut Creek

A: And ...

Q: We don't need high-frequency transit service to every Bay Area neighborhood. We just need effective transit. I don't need a bus down the street from me every 15 minutes. But the last time I tried to plan a route from home to work, an 11-mile commute, I was looking at three transfers and a 2½ hour ride in each direction.

S.S.

A: Ouch. This is an issue facing many transit agencies. Do they try and provide decent coverage for all or cut expenses and rerouting lines to areas where most riders live? The Valley Transportation Authority will likely scale back service from 30 percent to 10 percent of Santa Clara County and re-route bus lines through downtown San Jose, so stay tuned.

Q: Concentrate service in the highest demand locations? There lies the problem. Is there transit service to the San Jose airport? No. Is there legitimate grade-separated transit service to Santana Row//Valley Fair, Oakridge mall, Westgate mall, Eastridge mall, the Great Mall, Raging Waters, Stanford, Apple, Levi's Stadium/Great America, Google, Facebook, etc?

No there isn't. No wonder transit in the Bay Area is broken.

M.B.

A: Whoa. There is light rail to Levi's Stadium, the Great Mall and Eastridge and grade separated crossings are coming to Caltrain.

[Back to Top](#)

[Second Safe Route to School meeting scheduled Monday \(Los Altos Town Crier\)](#)

The second community engagement meeting of the Homestead Corridor Safe Route to School Study is scheduled 6-8 p.m. Monday in the auditorium at Homestead High School, 21370 Homestead Road, Cupertino.

The meeting will feature a discussion of the bicycle and pedestrian improvements proposed by the Homestead Corridor project team, provide an update on the study and solicit community feedback. According to the meeting agenda, the proposed changes will include suggestions made by residents at the first community meeting in November. The improvements aim to increase traffic safety for students traveling to West Valley Elementary School, Cupertino Middle School and Homestead High via Homestead Road, and will span the area from Grant Road to North Stelling Road and Hollenbeck Avenue.

The project team, led by the consulting firm Kimley-Horn, includes representatives from the Cupertino Union School District and the Fremont Union High School District; Homestead High, Cupertino Middle and West Valley Elementary; the cities of Los Altos, Sunnyvale and Cupertino; Caltrans; California Water Service Co.; the Valley Transportation Authority; the Santa Clara County Road and Airports Department; and Santa Clara County's District 5 office.

Since the project's kick-off meeting in September, the team has been identifying safety concerns and developing a plan for the improvements. According to the posted study schedule, the team hopes to finish the final report and submit a joint grant application by March. The final community engagement meeting will be an opportunity for the community to provide input.

To review slides from the first community engagement meeting and read through the issues identified by local residents, visit sccgov.org/sites/rda/PnS/CP/Pages/Homestead-Rd.aspx. Email questions to the Homestead Corridor project team at RDA-HomesteadRoad.Study@rda.sccgov.org.

[Back to Top](#)

[Ownership, management of planned express lanes decided \(Climate Online Redwood City\)](#)

joint powers authority consisting of the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (TA) and the City and County of Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG), will own and set policy for the roughly 22 miles of express lanes planned for U.S. Highway 101 in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Expected to be completed in 2022, the San Mateo US 101 Express Lanes Project would build an express lane in each direction on highway 101 from the San Mateo/Santa Clara county line to Interstate 380. Carpools with three or more people will be allowed to travel for free, while others can travel in the lane for a toll while maintaining targeted 45 mph traffic flow.

On Thursday, the TA Board of Directors, along with the C/CAG, voted to form a joint powers authority in order to retain ownership of the San Mateo U.S. 101 Express Lanes facility.

As owner, the joint powers authority will set tolling policy, issue violations, adopt incentive programs, budget and pay of operation and maintenance, assume liabilities, adopt an expenditure plan and provide and operating and capital reserves to ensure state of good repair of tolling equipment, according to TA.

Also Thursday, the governing bodies voted to have the Bay Area Infrastructure Financing Authority (BAIFA) operate the San Mateo US 101 Express Lanes facility, managing its day-to-day operation.

Thursday's decisions were necessary in advance of the final design phase for the project that will determine its technical requirements.

"As C/CAG chair, I was both relieved and inspired by (Thursday) night's board action approving the direction to approve the San Mateo County/BAIFA owner/operator model and form a JPA with equal representation from both boards," C/CAG Chair Maryann Moise Derwin said in a statement. "After much difficult discussion, the joint ad hoc committee and staff worked collaboratively to come to a consensus recommendation that everyone felt comfortable with. My board takes it on good faith that the ad hoc committee will work out such JPA details as staffing in a way that represents a true equitable partnership between C/CAG and the TA, as has been demonstrated thus far."

[Back to Top](#)

[Silicon Valley Leadership Group CEO Carl Guardino Reappointed to California Transportation Commission \(SVLG.org\)](#)

Governor Gavin Newsom announced today that he has reappointed Carl Guardino to his fourth consecutive four-year term on the California Transportation Commission.

Carl Guardino, 57, of Monte Sereno, has served on the Commission since 2007. He has been president and chief executive officer of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group since 1997. Guardino was director of government affairs at Hewlett-Packard Company from 1995 to 1997, vice president of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group from 1991 to 1995, and district director of the Office of California State Assemblymember Rusty Areias from 1984 to 1990. This position requires Senate confirmation and the compensation is \$100 per diem. Guardino is a Democrat.

About the Silicon Valley Leadership Group

The Leadership Group, founded in 1978 by David Packard of Hewlett-Packard, represents more than 350 of Silicon Valley's most respected employers on issues, programs and campaigns that affect the economic health and quality of life in Silicon Valley, including education, energy, environment, health, housing, tax policies, tech and innovation and transportation. Leadership

Group members collectively provide nearly one of every three private sector jobs in Silicon Valley and contribute more than \$3 trillion to the worldwide economy.

[Back to Top](#)

[Why the future of Caltrain is being built in Salt Lake City \(Mass Transit Magazine\)](#)

The future of Caltrain is taking shape in a gusty sagebrush plain formerly owned by the Mormon Church with a dramatic view of the snow-covered Oquirrh Mountains.

The future of Caltrain is taking shape in a gusty sagebrush plain formerly owned by the Mormon Church with a dramatic view of the snow-covered Oquirrh Mountains.

A massive new production facility designed to rebuild Caltrain's fleet has sprouted up here over the last few months, the backbone of one of the biggest upgrades in the commuter railway's 155-year-history.

The \$2 billion electrification project is replacing most of Caltrain's trains and putting up electric wires along the 51-mile track from San Francisco to San Jose's Tamien station. Once it's complete, proponents say, the difference between the new electric trains and the current diesel ones will be like Teslas versus gas guzzlers: nimbler, smoother and far more energy efficient.

"We want to convince people to leave their cars at home," said Martin Ritter, the U.S. chief executive of Stadler, the Swiss company that's building the trains.

The future of rail in California got a jolt last week when newly elected Gov. Gavin Newsom said he was scaling down ambitions for the state's San Francisco-to-Los Angeles bullet train, focusing on a Merced-to-Bakersfield section for the near future. The Caltrain electrification project would allow the rapid trains to share its tracks up the Peninsula, and the state's high-speed rail agency committed \$741 million to the project, with the rest coming from local and federal funds.

But even now that bullet trains may not reach the Bay Area anytime soon, Caltrain's electrification funding is unaffected -- and the project is currently on budget and on schedule, with service planned to start in 2022.

Caltrain is the largest U.S. contract yet for Stadler, which has built trains for railways around the world, including the new biodiesel trains on BART's extension to Antioch (which were made in Switzerland). The company's leaders call their Salt Lake City plant an investment in the prediction that increasingly congested American cities will need to build more of the public transit that's common in European capitals.

The Bay Area is a perfect example. The region's most important highways are sluggish every rush hour, and the traffic is getting worse -- by 2040, an additional 1.2 million people will be living within two miles of Caltrain stations along the San Francisco Peninsula. At the same time, more than half of Caltrain's passenger cars, as well as two-thirds of its locomotives, are already past their retirement age, requiring costly extra maintenance.

The electrification project is aimed at getting more people to ride the rail. The new trains will still run at 79 mph, the same as the current maximum speed, but they'll be much faster at stopping and starting. That means they can fit in more stops in less time.

The upgraded trains also will feature free WiFi, an electric outlet at almost every seat, more luggage space and improved digital signage. Each train still will have multiple bike cars, although only one bathroom.

Another plus: The ride will be a lot smoother than today's sometimes bone-shaking experience, thanks to the electric acceleration and special air cushioning around the wheels.

Signs of progress were clear on a recent afternoon at Stadler's Salt Lake City facility. Six bright and shiny red-and-white train cars stood out on the assembly floor, skeletons waiting to be filled with the guts of the train's interior. Workers in bright orange vests aimed laser trackers to mark locations for bolts and screws and started to install stairs and other components.

Even as the work progressed, construction continued on the facility itself, which includes a massive warehouse for hundreds of train parts and special rooms to work on different pieces of the new trains. Big Swiss and U.S. flags hung from the walls.

"In March last year, we literally had cows grazing out here," said Jacob Splan, the energetic construction manager, as he gave a whirlwind tour of the sprawling plant. "It's a mad dash right now to finish it."

The car shells make an impressive journey from Stadler's factory in Altenrhein, Switzerland: They're trucked to Basel, boated down the Rhine River to Antwerp, shipped across the Atlantic to Houston and then delivered via rail to Salt Lake City.

When the trains are done here, they'll weigh about 45 tons. Massive yellow cranes built into the facility's 64.5-foot-tall roof will lift them onto built-in rail tracks, and they'll start their trip on a train bed to the Bay Area.

Closer to home, crews already are installing 3,000 new electric poles along the tracks to power the trains. There will be some service changes on weekends and evenings across the route through next year.

Once the project is done, Caltrain will be an exception -- electrified trains account for less than 1 percent of railroad tracks in the U.S., compared to roughly a third around the world, according to researchers.

The Utah plant represents a big reason that Caltrain's electrification project is actually going forward. Soon after President Trump took office in 2017, his administration delayed the final sign-off on \$647 million in federal funds for the effort, even though it had passed almost the entire approval process under President Obama's Department of Transportation.

Democratic leaders protested the holdup, accusing the president of trying to get back at a state that voted heavily against him. California Republicans argued that the project was a wasteful way of boosting the high-speed rail project.

But some of Caltrain's biggest champions were Utah's GOP officials, including then-Senate President Pro Tem Orrin Hatch, who supported the project for its economic impact here. Caltrain is expected to create more than 500 jobs in Utah and more in a dozen other states. The federal Department of Transportation approved the grant in May 2017.

"It wasn't just blue California but really suppliers across the country" that benefit from the project, said Casey Fromson, Caltrain's government affairs director. "That was a pretty powerful argument."

Why Salt Lake City? Utah has a big logistics and transportation industry, and Stadler also is receiving generous tax incentives from the city and the state. Thanks to the Mormon Church's wide-ranging missionary program, the region also has a lot of bilingual people -- German and English can both be heard on the factory floor.

And the folks from Switzerland feel at home among the mountain peaks and snow of the Salt Lake Valley region. "It looks almost the same to me," said Christoph Brocker, the project manager, who had worked on similar train projects in Austria and Switzerland before coming to the U.S. to build Caltrains.

One difference between working in Switzerland and Utah: "Don't ask your people to come to work on a Sunday here -- they won't show up," Brocker said. "But they'll work twice as hard on a Saturday."

[Back to Top](#)

[Former Palo Alto transportation head dies at 71 \(Palo Alto Online\)](#)

Joseph Kott aimed to make city a national 'traffic-calming' model

No matter how daunting a task, Joseph Kott believed that Palo Alto and the greater Silicon Valley region could become a national model for how to cope with a deluge of motor vehicles.

The Palo Alto chief transportation official from 1998 to 2005 dedicated most of his life to pursuing ways to get drivers out of their cars, becoming a prominent thought-leader in the push to create a regional transportation system aimed at reducing traffic congestion.

He co-founded Transportation Choices for Sustainable Communities to advance alternative transportation systems in cities nationwide; served as a private consultant at local, regional and state levels; taught sustainable urban and regional transportation planning at various universities, including Stanford and San Jose State; and mentored emerging planners for more than three decades.

On Feb. 14, Kott died of heart failure while at his Oakland home with his wife, Katherine. He was 71.

"Joe was a true pleasure to work with. He always had a smile on his face and was ready to talk to any resident who wanted to talk, ask questions or give opinions," former Palo Alto Mayor Yoriko Kishimoto said Tuesday. "He was passionate about transportation."

Kishimoto said Kott represented a "changing of the guard" of transportation professionals who had been trained to get cars through town as fast as possible.

He understood that "streets are for people in all modes of transportation and there has to be a balance to allow people to get places by walking, biking, transit, as well as ... vehicles," she said.

Kott worked as Palo Alto's chief transportation official during a time when the city was coping with an overflow of traffic caused by hordes of commuters coming into the city every day.

While not all of his forward-thinking ideas earned him praise in Palo Alto, colleagues considered him a hands-on visionary who didn't shy away from new and sometimes controversial traffic-calming proposals, such as roundabouts.

Kishimoto told the Weekly his resignation in 2005 was "a real blow" to the city.

"We're all devastated by his leaving," she said, calling the sometimes-embattled Kott an "out-of-the-box" thinker. "He was willing to stick his neck out."

While in Palo Alto, Kott worked to bring regional solutions to city streets. He pushed to improve Caltrain service with more express trains between Palo Alto, San Francisco and San Jose; bring better bus connections to get people from Caltrain to work; improve biking facilities in Palo Alto; and add more physical traffic-slowing devices on Palo Alto's streets, such as speed humps.

He described his role as a delicate balancing act to keep overburdened city streets calm and safe.

"The key is not to keep people out but to reduce the number of cars on the road by encouraging people to use carpool or public transportation," he told the Weekly in 2000. "We'd like more people but fewer cars. It's an important strategic issue for the city."

Kott also pushed to bring plans for the city's state-of-the-art Intermodal Transit Center downtown closer to reality, which the City Council gave the green light to while Kott was chief transportation official. The new transit hub was designed to attract between 1,500 and 3,000 drivers to mass transit and improve access from between Palo Alto and Stanford Mall.

Kott also supported a \$50-million proposal for personal rapid transit (PRT), a futuristic monorail-like system that would connect Palo Alto to Stanford Research Park.

"There are so many opportunities to innovate in Palo Alto," Kott told the Weekly.

After drawing fire for a number of the transportation projects he managed, including the Downtown North traffic-calming trial and the Homer Tunnel, Kott left his position in 2005 to work for the transportation firm of Nelson/Nygaard, which helped Palo Alto develop its transportation master plan in 2000.

"Some of the controversies have been very worthwhile experiences in terms of personal growth," Kott told the Weekly at the time. "I learned how good people can disagree."

Former Weekly Editor Jay Thorwaldson called Kott's position "one of those lightning-rod posts in which the person can do virtually nothing right -- in the eyes of *someone* in town."

Kott continued an active career in city and regional planning for the remainder of his life. He earned a doctorate from Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia in 2012; held a master's degree in transportation and traffic engineering from Monash University in Melbourne, Victoria Australia; a master's of regional planning from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill; and a bachelor's in political science from Wayne State University.

He was a charter member of the American Planning Association and maintained certification with the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Colleagues from Transportation Choices said Kott was the organization's "most ardent supporter and its most important leader. He was the glue that bound us."

Born in Detroit, Michigan, on July 15, 1947, to Joseph Frank Kott Jr. and Catherine V. Szydlodski, Kott is survived by his wife of 45 years, Katherine (Kitto) Kott; son Paul Thomas Kott; daughter, Amy Elizabeth Rands; brother-in-law William Dean Brown; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins. He was preceded in death by his parents, son Andrew Joseph Kott and siblings Shirley Brown and Raymond John Kott.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m., on Saturday, March 9, at Corpus Christi Church in Piedmont. A reception will follow.

[Back to Top](#)

[**Feds want to claw back billions in funding for California high-speed rail \(Business Journal\)**](#)

The U.S. government said Tuesday that it plans to cancel or claw back billions of dollars in federal funding slated for California's high-speed rail project.

The move comes after Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) last week [drastically scaled back](#) the vision for the state's multibillion-dollar bullet train. Rather than work to connect the Bay Area and Sacramento with Southern California, the state will focus, for now at least, on only the under-construction Central Valley portion of the project, Newsom said.

The Federal Railroad Administration, which is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, intends to cancel \$929 million in federal grant funds that were slated for the bullet train, FRA Administrator [Ronald Batory](#) wrote in [a Feb. 19 letter](#) to California High-Speed Rail Authority Chair Brian Kelly.

The Department of Transportation is also "actively exploring every legal option to seek the return from California of \$2.5 billion in federal funds FRA previously granted for this now-defunct project," according to a statement from the agency.

The federal rail authority has determined that the state high-speed rail project will not be completed by the 2022 deadline agreed upon for the federal funds, Batory wrote. "When compared against the amount of funds expended, the pending contractual completion dates show CHSRA is failing to make the type of sustained progress necessary to meet the 2022 deadline," he wrote.

Newsom, a frequent antagonist of President Trump, has faced calls from some quarters to scrap the project entirely, but last week [tweeted](#) that he's "not interested in sending \$3.5B in federal funding — exclusively allocated for HSR — back to the White House."

We're going to make high-speed rail a reality for CA. We have the capacity to complete the rail between Merced and Bakersfield. We will continue our regional projects north and south. Finish Phase 1 enviro work. Connect the Central Valley to other parts of the state.

For those who want to walk away: Abandoning high speed rail means we will have wasted billions of dollars with nothing but broken promises and lawsuits to show for it. I'm not interested in sending \$3.5B in federal funding--exclusively allocated for HSR--back to the White House.

Last year, [California's state auditor blasted the California High-Speed Rail Authority](#) for "ongoing poor contract management" leading to "billions of dollars in cost overruns." The latest estimates to complete a state-wide high-speed rail project were at least \$77 billion in total costs, with a completion date of 2033.

"There's been too little oversight and not enough transparency," Newsom said last week in his first State of the State address to California lawmakers. Instead, the state will focus on the Bakersfield to Merced "Phase 1" segment, Newsom said.

He added: "Right now, there simply isn't a path to get from Sacramento to San Diego, let alone from San Francisco to (Los Angeles). I wish there were."

He [later alluded](#) to "regional projects" that would continue, but didn't provide specifics.

Some Bay Area leaders [have said they intend to work to raise private funds](#) to revive the idea of a "Valley to Valley" segment that would connect Silicon Valley at San Jose's Diridon Station with the Central Valley.

The line was originally intended to connect into Diridon Station and then travel north along the Caltrain route to San Francisco, terminating at the city's new Transbay Transit Center.

"It makes sense for high-speed rail to extend from the agricultural capitol of the Central Valley to the innovation capitol of Silicon Valley," Carl Guardino, CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, a regional business advocacy group, said in a statement last week. "During his speech, Governor [Gavin Newsom](#) exhibited his commitment to doing the hard work to get the Valley to Valley connection done. He spoke to the hard work of prioritizing while also balancing 'dollars and cents' so I appreciate his approach in starting with the Bakersfield to Merced connection."

The original vision for California high-speed rail

Here's a closer look at what California's bullet train was supposed to look like, before Gov. Newsom's focus on the Central Valley.

Guardino said Newsom was "also clear that California remains committed to investments in Caltrain and completing the environmental work for the Valley to Valley project."

He added: "Of course, this will be a collaborative process and we will have to work together to raise private and federal infrastructure funds. It will be much easier to do our work if we get the first phase of high-speed rail completed."

[Back to Top](#)

[BART responds to riders' questions and complaints \(ABC 7 News\)](#)

BART spokesperson Alicia Trost sat down Tuesday with ABC7 news reporter Leslie Brinkley to respond to questions from riders. There were hundreds to filter through following last weeks [Building a Better Bay Area series](#) examining complaints from passengers.

Jon A. wrote about his commute on the Fremont Richmond line saying, "It's so hard even standing around as people get on and off board because there is literally no room."

Trost responded, "As we get more new trains into service it's basically letting us make other trains longer so if it wasn't 10 cars before it soon will be."

Another rider complained, "I don't like that they took out the extra seat. No one wants to stand for 45 minutes to get to work."

Trost said, "For every person who hates we took out the extra seats there are people

demanding we take out even more seats. A lot of our riders are getting on and getting off and they just want to be able to fit on the train."

Harvey F. from San Bruno wrote, "I worry about walking in the garage because I notice a lot of the overhead lights are burned out. Also, no one is cleaning the human feces. "

Trost responded, "That's definitely unacceptable, that's a safety hazard."

That kind of complaint BART says can be addressed in real time. Report things like burned out lights or waste or needles to the station agent or on the BART app. That will ping BART maintenance, they say they'll even board a train to take care of it. So by the end of the day, San Bruno should be resolved.

Dawna T. said, "Please tell us about the new BART stations that they're going to have the appropriate gates that don't allow people to just jump over them."

BART said they are currently testing out retrofit ideas at several stations for the gates and are looking at other agencies as well. What will they look like? Recommendations on modifying gates or installing new ones will be unveiled on March 28 at the BART board meeting.

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Sent: Thursday, February 21, 2019 12:15 PM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: February 21, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Thursday, February 21, 2019

1. [Op-Ed: Solving Homelessness Requires Empathy, Collaboration \(San Jose Inside\)](#)
2. [Sistema de Transporte VTA realizará cambios en sus rutas \(Univisión Ch. 14\) \(VTA Transportation System will make changes in its routes\)](#)

Op-Ed: Solving Homelessness Requires Empathy, Collaboration (San Jose Inside)

Every opportunity to shine the spotlight on the plight of homelessness—no matter the season, no matter the weather—is not only welcome, it’s necessary. It is far too easy to make assumptions about the people who are living unhoused and about those who have chosen to work on solutions. It is counterproductive to trivialize the work we do with barbs such as “Little Torture” and “PR stunt.” It is impossible to *demand empathy*.

[The original op-ed began](#) asking the reader to image the conditions on the streets right now. We don’t have to *imagine what it is like*, because it a reality we face every day in our work. HomeFirst outreach teams were out every day, all day last week to warn anyone living along a potential flood zone of the impending danger of the forecast storms. The ideal outcome is to bring the individual or group (with beloved pets) back to the shelter—to a safe, warm space to sleep along with meals and access to supportive services.

While those defined as “chronically homeless” are but a small percentage of the total number of unhoused, the reasons for chronic homelessness are highly individual, sometimes, but not always a result of mental illness or substance use, sometimes a result of abuse, sometimes a fear of living in close contact with strangers. This is the stereotype.

We, along with the city of San Jose, Santa Clara County and a long list of service providers, choose to offer services and shelter in the hope that consistent contact may build trust. We make wellness checks, offer water, snacks, hygiene kits, dry clothes, blankets and more.

That is why HomeFirst has hosted a memorial service every year since 1999, the heart of which is the reading of the names of everyone who died unhoused the previous year. On February 13, we read 158 names and birthdates. Each name represents a whole person, no matter how long or short their life. For each there is a life story and where possible we included an anecdote to focus on that life, that story.

Petre Strezoski was remembered by a coworker as “truly a joy to work with. He was always happy and positive. He was quick to smile and offer a joke or a snack if you were tired. He was even patient enough to put up with me trying to learn Macedonian.”

Max Zizumbo was born in San Jose, graduated from Yerba Buena High School and joined the US Army in 1989. He served in the Gulf War. He was a fan of the SF Giants and the Dallas Cowboys.

Jake Maldonado (b. June 29, 2018) and **Bernadette Pereira** (b. April 24, 2018) died as infants, infants without a place to call home. This is not acceptable in our community.

It is, frankly, obscene that 94-year old **Florence Leung** and 88-year old **Gunter Barth**, died homeless at such an advanced and vulnerable age. We can do better.

All 158 were remembered, because all 158 mattered.

We are proud that six of our board members volunteered to be readers this year—proud of their passion for the mission and for any opportunity to be of service. This is a moving and meaningful experience for each of them. Because we work hand-in-hand with local elected officials on solutions such as the Bridge Housing Project, the elected officials who enact policy are always an integral part of our public events.

The day of the service was cold and rainy so overnight guests of the Boccardo Reception Center on Little Orchard where the service was held, were invited to stay indoors all day. (Typically, shelter guests vacate the Boccardo Reception Center (BRC) in the morning and return in the late afternoon, enabling staff to complete the vital daily deep cleaning and disinfecting that keeps the facility safe for our vulnerable population. Only those using the veterans center or too sick to be up and about are inside for lunch which is served at noon to preserve the routine.)

Every guest of every shelter HomeFirst operates is welcome to attend the memorial service, as are volunteers, community leaders, fellow service providers and anyone who is homeless. Save-the-date postcards and numerous on-line reminders were sent to more than 1,000 individuals. Numerous announcements were made throughout the day at the BRC. There were, in fact, homeless guests in attendance, but we gave everyone the choice of whether to participate or not.

As one guests said, *“Honey, I face death every day. There’s no way I want to sit here and have it in my face.”*

Among the suggestions we’ve already received are to distribute flyers and posters at all shelter facilities, to offer transportation to and from the BRC, and to begin the service at 2pm rather than noon.

San Jose’s Overnight Warming Locations (OWL) are managed by HomeFirst on a day-by-day basis but activated by the city. Originally there were four sites with one just for families. As of Jan. 13, no one had visited the Alum Rock family site so we focused on the remaining three locations: Leninger, Bascom and Roosevelt. Since Dec, 24, the OWLs have been activated for 30 nights with a total of 1,699 overnight stays. The maximum capacity of 30 beds per site has been reached seven times at the Bascom site and 18 nights at the Roosevelt site.

Last year, a guest at one of the OWLs told me, *“This place saved my life. It was so cold last night I thought I’d freeze to death. Thank you for making this a warm, safe space.”*

With more than 7,300 homeless people in our county, we need people and organizations to work together to drastically reduce this number. We need creativity and cooperation.

The way the Valley Transportation Authority’s Route 22 (aka Hotel 22) has been used by many unhoused people seeking overnight respite is truly creative, and for that we are grateful. HomeFirst has aligned with others to lobby for the continuation of this service, yet ultimately it is the VTA’s decision.

The number one reason for homelessness is job loss and the longer the episode of homelessness the longer it takes to get back on one’s feet. Among the recurrent reasons that unhoused people eschew shelters is past experience with domestic violence, PTSD, traumatic brain injury and other conditions that makes a large, loud facility with strangers especially threatening.

For those who believe homelessness is solely the result of laziness, a desire to work the system, or such, we are unlikely to dispel those notions. Yet, we are grateful for the many who are solution-focused and will continue to work with them until our resources meet the need—the need to find affordable housing for those who are literally priced out of Silicon Valley and the need for shelter designed to meet the various levels of care needed by our most fragile and vulnerable neighbors.

Every day I see the enormous empathy that drives so many to work tirelessly on this issue. There are stereotypes to dispel, misinformation to address and personal agendas to consider; but if we are generous enough to acknowledge one another for efforts—large and small, the odds of making a lasting difference will be greatly increased.

To anyone who wishes to be part of the solution, please feel free to contact me.

Stephanie Demos is the chief development office of HomeFirst. Opinions in this article are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect those of San Jose Inside. Send [op-ed](#) pitches to jenniferw@metronews.com.

[Back to Top](#)

[Sistema de Transporte VTA realizará cambios en sus rutas \(Univisión Ch. 14\)](#)

(VTA Transportation System will make changes in its routes)

([Link to video](#))

Algunas rutas serán reubicadas e incluso eliminadas debido a problemas financieros. Sin embargo, estos cambios buscan incrementar el servicio en donde más se necesita.

(Translation:

Some routes will be relocated and even eliminated due to financial problems. However, these changes seek to increase the service where it is most needed.)

