

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Sent: Monday, November 18, 2019 1:44 PM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: November 18, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Monday, November 18, 2019

1. [Santa Clara VTA, BART agree to pause pre-revenue service operations \(Mass Transit\)](#)
2. [BART service to Santa Clara County isn't going to happen this year \(Business Journal\)](#)
3. [New express lanes open on Route 237 \(Milpitas Beat\)](#)
4. [New Express Toll Lanes Open on Highway 237 \(KPIX Ch. 5\)](#)
5. [Vision unveiled for new San Jose Diridon Station "world class transit hub" \(Mercury News\)](#)
6. [Around Town: Capital plans; the power of literacy \(Palo Alto Online\)](#)

[Santa Clara VTA, BART agree to pause pre-revenue service operations \(Mass Transit\)](#)

The first phase of the Silicon Valley extension will not open until 2020 following a revision of the project's work plan.

Phase 1 of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) built extension of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) service to Silicon Valley will not open until 2020. The two agencies have deferred most pre-revenue operations on the BART Silicon Valley Berryessa Extension pending a revision of "a more practical work plan."

The extension was to open for revenue service before the end of the year. The agencies called the decision to defer pre-revenue operations difficult but said they arrived at the conclusion "in the interest of achieving a safe and reliable start of revenue service."

Phase 1 of the 16-mile BART Silicon Valley Berryessa Extension [broke ground in 2012](#) and control of the infrastructure changed hands from [Santa Clara VTA to BART](#) in June 2019 with [pre-revenue operations commencing on the extension in late October](#).

The agencies were involved in simultaneous efforts to complete final systems modifications and related testing, including BART's system acceptance testing and readiness activities such as training and simulated service. Before these readiness tests and activities can continue, Santa Clara VTA will complete remaining testing which resulted from required modifications to train control and rail intrusion systems. Santa Clara VTA explains that resequencing these activities removes conflicts associated with track access and other facilities.

"All infrastructure projects include a period of acceptance from builder to operator. For transit projects, this responsibility usually resides within the single agency as owner. For the Berryessa Extension Project, this responsibility is being fulfilled by two separate agencies," Santa Clara VTA posted on its website.

"This means the period of acceptance involves personnel from two different agencies and is significantly more complicated. BART began this acceptance phase earlier this summer where it took control of the extension and began to perform a wide range of testing activities. During this 'stress testing,' items are identified for clarification, preference or correction."

Santa Clara VTA also noted that properly addressing items identified during "stress testing" is an iterative process requiring significant coordination between itself and BART. It became impractical to simultaneously test, identify and implement resolutions and retest.

The agencies said they are developing a revised testing and training plan that includes completing all testing and resolving all items identified during “stress testing” before resuming full pre-revenue operations.

[Back to Top](#)

[BART service to Santa Clara County isn't going to happen this year](#) (Business Journal)

The [Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority](#) has confirmed that BART service into Santa Clara County won't happen this year.

VTA made the announcement in [a blog post on Friday](#).

VTA, which built the BART extension from the Alameda County line to new stations at Milpitas and Berryessa, and BART were doing simultaneous testing of the line, said blog author [Bernice Alaniz](#), a VTA spokeswoman.

But she said VTA concluded that the two transit agencies' work conflicted with each other because each needed access to certain areas of the project simultaneously. BART will hold off on its “pre-revenue operations,” and that “will necessarily result in the start of passenger service after December 31, 2019.” VTA and BART have long offered different versions for starting service to the county, and VTA's version was always the more optimistic one. Its posting does not mention a new target date for service.

[Back to Top](#)

[New express lanes open on Route 237](#) (Milpitas Beat)

In an effort to ease Silicon Valley's notoriously congested traffic, new express lanes have been added to State Route 237. The new lanes total 7 miles and took 20 months to build.

As of today, November 15, commuters will find the new express lanes extending in a westward direction to Sunnyvale's Mathilda Avenue. Back in March, 2012, the initial phase of express lane additions, complete with the 880/237 connector, commenced by Milpitas' Dixon Landing Road. It's estimated that those lanes have shaved between 7 and 20 minutes off people's commutes.

Consistent with prevailing Bay Area express lane rules, the new 237 express lanes will open at 5AM and remain so 'til 8PM. Within that time frame, only drivers with FasTrak transponders will be able to travel in the fast lanes (a practice already established in Contra Costa County). Carpoolers, motorcyclists, and clean air cars are not exempt from the transponder requirement. Those who violate the penalty will be billed for the regular toll cost plus a penalty by mail.

After 8PM and before 5AM, regular drivers can make use of the express lanes.

Regarding clean air vehicle (CAV) drivers: They will be subject to an express lane payment requirement, and get 50% off the regular toll cost. Qualifying for the discount will call for registering their cars on Fastrak's site (<https://www.bayareafastrak.org/>) and then verifying their CAV usage, after which they will receive a special transponder.

[Back to Top](#)

[New Express Toll Lanes Open on Highway 237](#) (KPIX Ch. 5)

The Valley Transportation Authority opened a seven-mile stretch of new toll lanes on Highway 237, one of the most congested traffic corridors in the South Bay.

The new express toll lanes give drivers a way to steer clear of the nightmarish traffic on their day commutes — for a price.

Time is money, right?” said commuter Deepak Somaya who says he will likely use the new lanes sparingly but appreciates having the option.

“If I’m in a rush, if I know I have to pick up my kid by 6 p.m., I value the flexibility. I’ll pay the six dollars. That’s fine. But I won’t have the stress,” Somaya said.

VTA says the new toll lanes will operate between 5 a.m. and 8 p.m. Car-poolers will still be able to use the toll lanes for free but will be required to sign up for a Fastrak Flex transponder.

“It’s definitely an option for people. You can opt to pay the toll if you decide your time is worth the money,” said Brandi Childress, a spokesperson for VTA.

Childress says drivers of clean air vehicles like electric cars can use the lanes for a 50 percent discount. There is also a system of cameras and sensors which will be used to police drivers who might try to cheat the system.

VTA estimates the express toll lanes could shave anywhere from seven to 20 minutes off an average commute.

Still, not everyone is convinced.

“I’m already putting so much money into the tax for my vehicle, for the gas tax and, now, they’re getting us for this driving lane too,” said commuter Martha Lamdin.

[Back to Top](#)

[Vision unveiled for new San Jose Diridon Station “world class transit hub”](#) (Mercury News)

The plan includes elevated tracks above downtown San Jose streets

In one of the first steps of an ambitious effort to transform San Jose’s Diridon Station into a “world-class transit hub”, officials have released [an initial blueprint](#) for what the station’s overhaul might look like.

The plan merely serves as a rough draft for what is to come — elevated tracks above downtown roadways, a station with two separate concourses near West Santa Clara and West San Fernando streets, shops and services in the station’s ground level and public squares for cyclists and pedestrians to easily move in between modes of transit.

The station’s redevelopment, which will take about a decade to bring to fruition, will [serve as a key focal point in the robust revitalization](#) of downtown San Jose’s western edges, which will include [Google’s transit village](#).

“The ambition is to create a lively and active neighborhood that best services bikes and pedestrians in a safe and pleasant manner,” said Daniel Jongtjen of Benthem Crouwel Architects.

The concept layout was the product of more than a year of planning between the impacted agencies and the community. In July 2018, the City of San Jose, Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and California High-Speed Rail Authority formed a public agency partnership to begin reinventing the station.

The group then [hired Benthem Crouwel](#), an architect that re-designed Western Europe transit hubs in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague; and Arcadis, a design and engineering consultant. Over the past year, they’ve gathered public input through an online survey and dozens of community meetings, pop-up events and conversations with stakeholders and neighborhood groups.

A layout of what the new San Jose Diridon Station shows where the various features might be located. San Jose Diridon Station Joint Policy Advisory Board

The plan, which outlines the functionality of the station rather than its architectural design, envisions station entrances on both the east and west sides of the two concourses on Santa Clara and San Fernando streets. It also includes elevated tracks from Julian to Virginia streets, which will allow for safer and more efficient travel from the east and west sides of the city.

To accommodate the future expansion of service at the station, an additional track and platform have been proposed — widening the station’s footprint to the east. In order to accommodate that extension,

the section of Cahill Street between Santa Clara and San Fernando streets would be restricted to cyclists and pedestrians.

Diridon Station currently serves as a transportation hub for approximately 17,000 daily passengers via light rail, Caltrain, Amtrak, the Capitol Corridor, ACE Train and bus lines. Within the next decade, BART is scheduled to expand through San Jose to Diridon Station. And eventually, the station could serve as a vital point for high-speed rail to connect Silicon Valley to the Central Valley.

Nearby, Google anticipates that its transit-oriented community featuring office buildings, stores, restaurants and open spaces on an approximately mile-long strip in downtown San Jose west of Highway 87 will serve 15,000 to 20,000 of its employees.

Between additional traffic driven by Google's new campus and BART's planned expansion, the Valley Transit Authority projects that the Diridon Station will serve more than 100,000 passengers by 2040, according to its 2019 Travel Demand Model.

At a Diridon Station Joint Policy Advisory Board meeting Friday afternoon, city and transit officials, as well as residents, voiced overwhelming support for the initial station layout and the elevated tracks that will improve travel for anyone traveling from one side of the tracks to the other throughout much of downtown San Jose.

But backlash brewed when they discussed the southern approach of the tracks toward the downtown station.

Early in the concept planning phase, officials and their team of consultants studied the viability of building a bridge-like structure — also known as a viaduct — to carry either some or all of the trains over the Interstate 280 and Highway 87 interchange. But the group decided against the idea after realizing that the substantial infrastructure would adversely impact currently unaffected neighborhoods, including Washington Guadalupe, Tamien and Alma-Almaden, citing visual, environmental and noise concerns.

"We find, unfortunately, that there's more trade-off with the 280 viaduct than there were benefits," Liz Scanlon, a consultant with the planning and design engineering firm Kimley-Horn, said during a presentation at Friday's meeting.

Instead, the team decided that the safety, noise and visual issues would be better addressed by maintaining the existing track paths and making improvements such as building vegetation-covered walls and adding rubber bearings on the tracks.

A rendering shows what a viaduct for high-speed rail and Caltrain could look like over West Virginia Street. San Jose Diridon Station Joint Policy Advisory Board

Despite the assessment by the consultants, some of the advisory board members and most of the residents in the audience urged the consultants to continue studying the opportunity for a viaduct to absorb some of the impacts on nearby residents.

Roo Diridon — the namesake of San Jose's train station — said he saw the viaduct as a way for the city to create an "iconic structure" that could help the city create an identity for itself.

"With the cooperation of the light rail authority, you very well could create something there that could be quite startling and remarkable that could help identify the city a little bit more dramatically than our airport flattened skyline," Diridon said.

Bill Rankin, a member of the North Willow Glen Neighborhood Association, pointed out that the necessary track expansion without utilizing a viaduct would nearly cut Fuller Park in half.

"The impacts of a third or fourth rail line coming through the neighborhood to the south of Diridon are just too impactful for it (the viaduct) not to be studied further," Rankin said. "These neighborhoods have been dissected, bisected and affected by transportation changes over the years. The environmental injustice that has been directed on these neighborhoods in the past cannot be ignored — nor should it be ignored in the future."

The consultants hope to get approval to move forward with more detailed engineering and environmental design plans after receiving approval from the San Jose City Council at its meeting on Dec. 3 and the Caltrain, VTA and California High-Speed Rail Authority board of directors at their meetings in early December.

[Back to Top](#)

[Around Town: Capital plans; the power of literacy \(Palo Alto Online\)](#)

Tidbits on people, events and other happenings in Palo Alto

CAPITAL PLANS ... Palo Alto's elected leaders have plenty of gripes when it comes to Sacramento, from desires to see more state funding for railroad improvements to concerns about housing bills that may diminish local control over land-use decisions. The job of communicating these concerns to state legislators falls to Niccolo De Luca, a legislative advocate with the lobbying firm Townsend Public Affairs. On Nov. 18, the City Council is scheduled to add two years and \$204,000 to the city's agreement with Townsend, bringing the contract total to \$799,000. Last Tuesday, De Luca came to Palo Alto to provide an update to the council's Policy and Services Committee and hear from local lawmakers about their Sacramento priorities. For Councilman Greg Tanaka, the overarching priority remains securing funding for grade separation, the redesign of railroad crossings so that rail tracks don't intersect with local roads. Last year, De Luca worked with Assemblyman Marc Berman on including some funding for design work in the state budget. The proposal didn't advance, though De Luca assured the committee that they made some headway on securing funding for grade separation. "Obviously we didn't get to the finish line," De Luca said. "If this was marathon, it would be mile 24." Tanaka suggested that by keeping the list of legislative demands small, the city may have better luck in getting the grade-separation funding. Tanaka noted that the downtown Palo Alto Caltrain station is the second busiest in the entire system. Councilwoman Lydia Kou lobbied for a more ambitious list of demands, including supporting legislation to audit major transportation agencies such as the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, Caltrain and BART. The city has been working with Townsend since 2014. City Manager Ed Shikada made a case in a new report for retaining the relationship. While recognizing the "significant expenditures," Shikada argued that the discontinuation of the firm's services would make it "significantly more difficult to establish effective relationships when needed to respond to concerns with pending legislation, and similarly more difficult to advance the City's funding and policy initiatives."

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 19, 2019 10:38 AM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: November 19, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Tuesday, November 19, 2019

- 1. [City council preview: Will Santa Clara Create an Innovation Zone with San Jose on Stevens Creek?](#)**
- 2. [BART Delay \(Multiple outlets\)](#)**
- 3. [Delays on Delays: Milpitas and Berryessa BART stations definitely will not open in 2019 \(Mercury News\) Officials won't say when they expect the stations to open in 2020](#)**
- 4. [In latest BART delay, Bay Area showcases its poor decision-making to the world \(Business Journal\)](#)**

[City council preview: Will Santa Clara Create an Innovation Zone with San Jose on Stevens Creek?](#)

Here's some of the highlights of tomorrow's Council meeting:

- Authorize the City Manager to approve the sale of approximately 1,744 square feet of land at the San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility Site from the City of San José to the Valley Transportation Authority
- Public Hearing: Adoption of Phase II of the Fiscal Year 2019/20 Municipal Fee Schedule. We wrote about this [in July](#).
- Consideration of Councilmember **Teresa O'Neill's** request to Participate in an "Innovation Zone" with the City of San José for the Stevens Creek Corridor. This sounds good but there's not a lot of info on this or how it will impact neighborhoods. It should be interesting.
- **Consideration to work collaboratively with the VTA, County of Santa Clara and the Cities of Cupertino and San Jose Regarding a Stevens Creek Boulevard Corridor Study. Maybe this should be combined with the Innovation Zone.**
- [Back to top](#)
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BART Delay (Multiple outlets)

[KTVU](#) (link to video)

[KCBS Radio](#) (Link to audio)

[NBC Bay Area](#) (link to video)

[Back to top](#)

Delays on Delays: Milpitas and Berryessa BART stations definitely will not open in 2019 (Mercury News)

Officials won't say when they expect the stations to open in 2020

When the clock strikes midnight on the last day of December, it will not only mark the beginning of a new decade but another delay piled on top of years of unfulfilled promises for the [new Milpitas and Berryessa BART stations](#).

After months of [insisting upon a late December opening date](#), the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority has finally announced that the two new stations will not open in 2019 after all. In fact, officials won't even say when in 2020 they expect the stations to open.

"I don't have a new date," VTA Spokesperson Bernice Alaniz said in an interview Monday. "We are just now laying out all of the activities that need to be done in this new sequence, so I do not want to speculate on what a date would be right now."

Up until Friday, VTA and BART engineers were conducting testing on the tracks simultaneously as BART also began "pre-revenue testing" — exercises with first responders and scenarios meant to stress-test the new systems by simulating day-to-day problems. It was part of a plan announced by BART last month to [shorten the typically three-month testing process](#) to just over two months.

But the plan, which required VTA and BART engineers and employees to access the tracks and operating systems concurrently, "was getting increasingly complicated," according to Alaniz.

Instead, VTA — which built the extension and turned it over to BART this summer to manage — will solely work to finish its testing and needed repairs identified by BART. Once completed, BART will conduct its final round of testing to ensure the tracks, services and employees are ready to serve commuters.

"There's an added sort of layer of having an owner that is different from the operator, and when you're signing off on accepting the project, there are two different entities that need to do that," Alaniz said.

"You can take your best guess on how it's going to be accepted, but it's when you get out there and put it in real life that you see there might be slight modifications needed."

San Jose Councilmember Lan Diep, whose district includes the Berryessa neighborhood, said he was disappointed with the delay but agreed that public safety was most important.

"What we don't want to do is to open on some artificial, expected date and then have service not be what riders expect," Diep said.

The Milpitas and Berryessa stops are the first phase of a decade-in-the-making extension of BART that will eventually bring trains from Fremont's Warm Springs stop south through downtown San Jose. VTA is also funding and building [a \\$5.6 billion BART extension](#) with four new stops from the Berryessa Station to Santa Clara, including [San Jose's Diridon Station](#). The agency, however, acknowledged last month that it also pushed back the estimated opening of those stations from 2026 to sometime in 2029 or 2030.

Elizabeth Alexis, a co-founder of Californian Advocating Responsible Rail Design, said the years of delays have "real consequences on commuters" and offers dim hopes for the larger expansion plans.

"It's concerning given that the next project is a \$6 billion, much more complicated project," Alexis said.

"What does this say about the relationship between BART and VTA? If they can't work together on this, how are they going to get that project done?"

VTA and BART are currently working on an updated work plan. In the meantime, VTA still plans to launch its new transit service plan for buses and light rail — which will modify some existing bus routes and add some new routes to accommodate commuters from the new Berryessa and Milpitas transit centers — on Dec. 28.

Bus lines 180 and 181, which provides service to commuters from San Jose to the closest BART station in Fremont, will continue to operate until the new BART stations open.

“VTA and BART are working as safe and expedient as possible to bring this to Santa Clara County as soon as possible,” Alaniz said. “We’re very appreciative of the public’s patience as we take this next step to ensure that.”

[Back to top](#)

In latest BART delay, Bay Area showcases its poor decision-making to the world (Business Journal)

The [Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority](#) has no target date yet for when it will finish its testing on the BART extension into Santa Clara County beyond a statement today that “we still see that on the near horizon” although it won't happen this year.

[But the reason for the delay](#) — both VTA and BART can’t properly test their own work on one line at the same time — is the result of the highly unusual situation of one transit agency building a railroad that the other will operate. BART sometimes needs to run test trains 20 hours a day, leaving VTA with only a four-hour window for its work, according to spokeswoman [Bernice Alaniz](#).

In addition, the two agencies haven't always seen eye-to-eye even though they've tried to work closely together. [Disagreement over the design of the subway](#) planned beneath San Jose is just the biggest example. But the separation between builder and operator is a time- and money-consuming workaround to a decision more than half a century ago that “is a case of the Bay Area showcasing to the world a monumental example of poor planning and decision-making,” said [Russell Hancock](#), president and CEO of Joint Venture Silicon Valley.

His 26-year-old organization, based in *nouveau riche, nouveau urbain* San Jose, was formed three decades after leaders of a more rural, poorer Santa Clara County opted not to join a BART system then in its planning stages.

Rod Diridon Sr., for whom San Jose’s main rail passenger station is named, said that at the time, the fear was that Santa Clara County would become “a subordinate community. They said we're just going to have own headquarters and our own economy rather than just be a bedroom community to San Francisco.”

The 2001 agreement between VTA and BART to extend BART into Santa Clara County keeps the county off the hook for the billions in property taxes that it would have paid into the BART system over the years if it joined now. It was cheaper for VTA to build the railroad on its property and then turn it over to BART.

Both Diridon, who campaigned for a half-cent county sales tax in 1976 that created VTA’s predecessor rapid transit district, and Hancock said BART’s absence from the local transportation mix and the complicated efforts now required to rectify that mistake are arguments for not allowing intercity travel to be controlled by local governments.

“The solution to this is one that many communities around the world have taken on nationally,” Diridon said. “Europe is a good example. The rail systems are run at the national level. In our case, it probably would be a statewide organization.”

The argument is a variation of the case being made by housing advocates that local land use decisions cause problems beyond the towns where housing is located and thus require a higher level government authority to regulate it.

“This is what you get when you don't have any overarching structure for regional planning and decision-making,” Hancock said. “When we don't have it, we have everybody doing their own thing. So the BART system did its thing and Caltrain is doing its thing up the Peninsula and VTA decided to do its thing down in the south part of the Bay.”

[Back to top](#)

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Sent: Wednesday, November 20, 2019 1:46 PM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: November 20, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Wednesday, November 20, 2019

1. [Racist graffiti found in VTA's field operations office \(KTVU Ch. 2\)](#)
2. [Santa Clara VTA pauses pre-revenue service on Berryessa extension \(Progressive Railroading\)](#)
3. [Bart Delay \(KRON Ch. 4\)](#)
4. [Quest to Make San Jose Streets Safer Crashes into Worsening Pedestrian, Cyclist Injury Stats \(San Jose Inside\)](#)
5. [Electric bus workers in L.A. unionize — with the support of their Silicon Valley CEO \(Los Angeles Times\)](#)

Racist graffiti found in VTA's field operations office (KTVU Ch. 2)

Amateur drawings of swastikas, KKK and other racially offensive images have been found in Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority's (VTA) field operations office in San Jose. VTA said it reached out to the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office, which has opened a criminal investigation.

In October and June, multiple people who have access to the "employee only" areas in the VTA building sent KTVU pictures of the racist images. The individuals asked to remain anonymous because they fear retaliation. They said they complained to VTA management but felt the company did not take the issue seriously.

"[VTA] is actually wiping it away. I believe there's something more happening - an underground group," said one of the complainants.

Sheriff's investigators said they have conducted several interviews but have not identified any suspects. The case is currently an open investigation.

The pictures captured the images on a small refrigerator in an employee lounge area and in the men's bathroom. While most of drawings depict swastikas and "KKK," several of them showed words and images that are specifically derogatory towards people of Asian decent.

VTA's spokesperson Brandi Childress said the offensive drawings have been removed. Steps the transportation agency has taken so far include:

- A security incident report taken
- Clean up of the graffiti and removal of offensive items
- Installation of a camera outside the location where the graffiti was found.

VTA's Office of Civil Rights has also been notified and has documented the incident. VTA has posted the below poster at every operating and administrative division.

The Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office is asking with additional information to call them at 408-808-4500.

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Sent: Friday, November 22, 2019 5:32 PM
To: VTA Board of Directors <VTABoardofDirectors@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: November 21-22, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Thursday, November 21 and Friday, November 22, 2019

1. [BART Delay KQED radio](#)
2. [Rico: A vision for the Diridon Station Area \(San Jose Spotlight\)](#)
3. [Council Review: Council Okays Stevens Creek Corridor Study and Approves Ballot Language for New Districts Amidst Charges of Racism \(Santa Clara News\)](#)
4. [In The Valley This Week: November 21 – 27 \(Silicon Valley Voice\)](#)
5. [Opinion: BART trying to dupe riders into thinking system is safe \(Mercury News\) Transit agency Director Debora Allen blames crime on porous gates, board's reluctance to hire enough cops](#)

[BART Delay KQED radio](#)

[San Jose's Bad-Ass Bike Network \(StreetsBlog\)](#)

Pay heed, Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco--when it comes to quick-build protected bike lanes and intersections, San Jose eats your lunch

protected bike lanes, protected intersections, contraflow bike lanes--think of some top-notch, quick-build bicycle infrastructure, and San Jose's got it.

In the past year, the city has laid down ten miles of quick-build protected bike lanes. Some are parking protected. Some are protected by rows of robust-looking K71 plastic bollards. San Jose's quick-build scheme costs the city only \$1.5 million for an impressive transformation of the downtown core. Vignesh Swaminathan, a consultant who helped design the city's quick-build network, explained that they saved money by making the installations a part of planned repaving.

[Unlike in San Francisco and other Bay Area cities](#), the new protected bike lanes are nearly all joined by protected intersections. San Jose's new protected bike lane network continues the protection well into the intersection

"Motorists and cyclists still get startled by them," explained Peter Bennett, who is in charge of the Bike and Pedestrian Program for San Jose. But he said they're learning how to navigate the new set-up--and it's working to reduce collisions. "Some people perceive it as inviting a right hook, but it's about a negotiation."

The idea is to force cars to slow down and make a tight turn--and to shift the relative angles of motorists and cyclists so they can make eye contact. "The treatment tries to induce a yield--and fifty percent of the time it's the cyclist that needs to slow," explained Bennett. Because of the treatments, both the motorists and cyclists have ample time to react to potential conflicts. In addition, the stop line for bikes is always placed far in front of the stop line for automobiles, to make cyclists more visible to drivers and to give them a head start across intersections.

Streetsblog recently [covered the protected intersection pilot treatments in Berkeley, San Francisco, and Oakland](#). The San Jose design has the most in common with Oakland, since both use K71 plastic bollards and paint as an inexpensive, interim treatment. But San Jose has an added feature: Bennett and Swaminathan stressed that it's essential to have two marked radii, or guidelines, for drivers making the turn.

Some of [San Francisco's treatments have an outer radius on turns](#), but they're only marked by paint. Oakland's [protected intersections at Lake Merritt have only one radius](#). In San Jose, the outer radius includes the equivalent of Botts' dots—raised pavement markings that make noise if a car or truck tire drives over them. This warns the motorist that they're taking the turn too tightly and/or need to slow down. "If a truck is turning too tight, the driver feels the bumps," explained Bennett. In addition, the geometries are set up so the apron of the truck or bus can pass over the bumps without the vehicle taking out the plastic vertical bollards that mark the inner radius (see diagrams above). Protected intersections have two radii, which warns drivers that they're taking the turn too close *before* they hit the bollards.

And those bollards are set back far enough to keep cyclist or pedestrians from ending up in the truck's blind spot. They've also measured to make turns "as uncomfortable for truck drivers as possible." Bennett and Swaminathan explained that they did this by emulating minimum clearances at construction sites. "Truck drivers are trained to navigate them," said Swaminathan (who also gave Streetsblog a full tour of the infrastructure).

All of this may explain why [Oakland's protected intersections](#), which lack that additional, dotted radius, had squashed bollards shortly after it opened, while San Jose's seem to be holding up better.

San Jose also made sure that bus stops were built with raised bike lane cut-throughs, as seen below: These quick-build bus-boarding islands are the same kind as those used on Telegraph in Oakland, but with some additional features

The city used the same kind of [quick-build bus stop islands that Oakland used on Telegraph](#). But Swaminathan said they [upped the game](#) by adding bollards to make sure cyclists didn't ride into the drainage channel against the curb. They also added safety railings and leveled the island with two-by-fours and some asphalt underneath, to greatly reduce the risk of someone in a wheel chair rolling off the platform and into the bike lane—or of a blind person mistakenly navigating into the path of a bike. San Jose added bollards, wood and asphalt to improve these quick-build bus boarding islands, including leveling the surface

The city seems to have thought of everything, including providing new loading zones and even adding these armadillos to keep garbage dumpsters out of the bike lanes:

These armadillos keep garbage dumpsters out of the bike lane

The plan is to slowly replace all of these plastic treatments with concrete.

[While these installations went in amazingly fast](#), this didn't all [happen overnight](#) and there were some compromises. Swaminathan said [he anticipated issues with the fire department](#), so he approached them before anything was built and assured them that building sufficient clearances for their trucks was "the single biggest priority." The result: the fire department was on board. The other result: San Jose ended up with more traditional bike boxes and faster turns than they would have liked in a few places, because the fire department insisted everything be built to accommodate their oldest fire truck (despite the fact that it will soon be scrapped). The city also had to compromise with the local transit agency, VTA, which was concerned about clearances for buses (note the slightly less-than-ideal turning radius in the intersection six images up). San Jose had to use some sub-optimal designs in a few places as a concession to the fire department. But at least it's safe for dinosaurs, as seen in the above stencil

San Jose has moved forward with an impressively integrated, protected system that should work for all users. Most importantly, they have focused on keeping intersections safe. The Dutch, Danish, and others have long been moving away from so-called "mixing zones," which San Francisco, Oakland, and other

Bay Area cities continue to install (that's a standard installation where bicycles going straight are somehow supposed to zipper in with right-turning cars and trucks). Mixing zones are the best way to maximize vehicular throughput, but San Jose has decided that safety for people on foot, bike, and scooter is more important.

The good news is that what San Jose has accomplished didn't cost much money. It was all about political will—it helps to have the backing of a [“bicycle mayor” such as Sam Liccardo](#)—and a few important details that other cities can emulate.

Rico: A vision for the Diridon Station Area (San Jose Spotlight)

South Bay YIMBY's vision for the development of the Diridon Station Area is of a vibrant, diverse, affordable and sustainable new neighborhood in the heart of San Jose. Making the most of this opportunity will require bold and proactive leadership from the city of San Jose to address key challenges with the current land use in the Diridon area.

Growth of the Diridon area should benefit all San Joseans, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status. It should be a place where everyone feels welcome and at home. This is an opportunity to establish an iconic place representative of the larger San Jose community, reflecting the cultural history and rich diversity of the city's population.

We believe that a bold, inclusive and equitable neighborhood plan can meet the needs of San Jose and Santa Clara County, address the extreme housing crisis and need for an integrated transit plan to connect the city to the rest of the Bay Area.

The city must double-down on its efforts to address the housing crisis in its Diridon Station Area Plan. Housing insecurity is already high and will continue to rise if job creation grows without housing growth to match. Currently, the 2014 Diridon Station Area Plan only contains 2,588 new homes – nowhere near enough to meet current needs, let alone the greater demand for housing in the area that Google's arrival will bring. A plan for so many new jobs without new homes is a plan for displacement.

There must be enough housing to meet San Jose's needs. We recommend a minimum of 20,000 homes between Diridon and surrounding connected transit corridors, with at least 10,000 in the station area itself and at least 5,000 at below market rents, to meet the demand for housing in the area. The city must work to ensure that housing built in the Diridon Station area accommodates a range of needs, including accessible homes for disabled residents as well as supportive housing and extremely low-income affordable housing to help end homelessness. Simultaneously, the city should act to protect people already living in the station area (and elsewhere in San Jose) from displacement due to rising costs.

The station area needs to be a vibrant community and an active neighborhood. Housing built in the station area should be integrated throughout and should be mixed-use, to include not only housing but services oriented toward residents, transit users and visitors to the area. People should feel comfortable moving through the area to access downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, Guadalupe River Park and the SAP Center. We urge Google to build a permeable, fully integrated campus, and recommend maintained public restrooms for use by the general public, including our homeless neighbors.

We strongly urge Google and others to maintain a transparent and responsive dialogue with community members and develop an engagement process that considers the needs of the community.

Development of the Diridon Station Area presents San Jose with the opportunity to create a world-class transit hub. With Caltrain electrification scheduled to come online in 2022 and the eventual arrival of BART and California High Speed Rail, studies indicate there will be more transfers in 2040 than there is transit ridership today. It's critical to the success of Diridon Station that transfers between modes are as seamless as possible.

We want to see a station design allowing fast and easy transfers, with safe and convenient access to the station by walking, biking and other active modes. We support the development of integrated fares across agencies and encourage the city to work with MTC and Clipper to support regional fare integration. We encourage Caltrain, VTA and BART to coordinate scheduling for easy transfers. Integrating the station area into the rest of San Jose should also mean integrated planning. As jobs are added around the transit hub, the city should plan for increased housing capacity in surrounding transit-linked neighborhoods. Proactively planning for how the Diridon area connects to, affects, and is affected by the rest of San Jose will help the city meet its housing needs and ensure the transformation of the Diridon area brings shared prosperity rather than rising housing costs and displacement. Given the rich infrastructure for transit, active transportation and a mix of uses, we support a mode share goal that reduces dependency on private automobiles and encourages biking, walking and use of public transit connections. We recommend that vehicle parking policies further this goal and do not encourage more driving than is needed. We support shared parking between uses that attract drivers at different times of the day and week.

We support unbundled parking for both residential and commercial development, allowing residents without cars to save on rent and commercial tenants to provide incentives to employees who choose not to drive. We oppose fully subsidized parking and support parking fees to encourage non-driving transportation modes.

We strongly encourage local entertainment businesses to borrow lessons from San Francisco's urban sports/entertainment venues and take advantage of the improving transit and active transportation options. Encouraging fans to use transit can help local businesses like bars and restaurants.

If you want to help make this vision come true, [join us in the fight](#).

Proactive planning from the city focused on housing for all, seamless integration of the Diridon area into the city and creating a people-centered place, can allow San Jose to make the most of the opportunities presented by the transformations underway in the Diridon Station Area. South Bay YIMBY is committed to supporting the city in achieving these goals – and pushing back when we see them straying from these priorities.

[Council Review: Council Okays Stevens Creek Corridor Study and Approves Ballot Language for New Districts Amidst Charges of Racism \(Santa Clara News\)](#)

Last night, the Council approved working with San Jose, Cupertino and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) on a Stevens Creek Corridor Study. The goal is to figure out new and better transit options for the busy corridor.

But the cities and the VTA don't have the staff and resources for this. So they'll need grants for a study. After that, they'll need a plan to fund something. Maybe **Elon Musk** and the **Boring Company** want to help Silicon Valley commuters. (Hint, hint).

Councilwoman **Teresa O'Neill** promoted the move. She's also the Chair of the VTA.

But O'Neill could not convince her colleagues to work with San Jose on an "Innovation Zone" near our border. This idea was promoted by San Jose Vice Mayor **Chappie Jones**. But Jones and his staff couldn't say what would be tested in the zone or what ideas companies had proposed. It sounded like they were hiding something or they were a little clueless. So the Council punted the decision to January when they look at Council priorities. But they didn't sound too interested in the idea. And they'll want a lot more info from Jones and San Jose.

Charter Amendment

The Council approved the ballot language [that was recommended by the Charter Review Committee](#) to create 3 council districts with 2 councilmembers each. The vote was 4-2, with Vice Mayor **Patty Mahan** and Councilwoman **Karen Hardy** opposed. Councilman **Raj Chahal** was on vacation.

Some members of the public who opposed the Charter Review Committee's recommendation suggested the Council and City staff were biased and racist. (We saw those charges, too, during the 2018 advisory vote campaign. Some racist comments were sent to this site).

But there were strong rebuttals from the Council majority. Councilwomen **Kathy Watanabe** and **Debi Davis** made excellent personal statements about the biracial families. So did City Attorney **Brian Doyle** who also talked about his biracial family.

City Clerk **Hosam Haggag** was criticized, too, by Santa Clara **Wesley Mukoyama**. Mukoyama is one of the plaintiffs who sued the City using the California Voting Rights Act.

But Haggag delivered a strong statement about the integrity of the charter review process. And he reminded everyone that he ran successfully city-wide as a member of a non-white "protected class." It's a shame that some people, including elected officials, have made this an issue about racism. I've lived in Santa Clara for 35 years. The Mission City is diverse and welcomes everyone. In fact, it's racially and economically integrated, not segregated. That's why Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge **Thomas Kuhnle** had to play [with the numbers and the district lines](#) so much to come up with his ruling. That's why some political experts think Santa Clara will win a court appeal.

I'm glad the Council decided to appeal Kuhnle's ruling. To accept it would be to accept the argument that we're racist in our voting. We're not. But that doesn't mean the opponents won't argue we are again during this coming election.

The good thing is that this ballot language is much simpler. 2018 was confusing. And the City's communication effort was weak. Let's hope it'll be better this year. Then, we can create new districts that work well for Santa Clara.

Editor's Note: At the end of the meeting, Doyle announced that the **49ers** have sued the City again. This is their seventh lawsuit. They believe the City can't take away their purchasing authority after they got caught for wage theft. We'll write more about this issue soon.

[In The Valley This Week: November 21 – 27 \(Silicon Valley Voice\)](#)

Thursday, November 21

- VTA Wants Your Input: Virtual Town-Hall Webinar. 1 p.m. Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is seeking public input on ways to improve its governance structure and practices to help better serve the community. [Register to receive YouTube Live link access](#). Complete an [online survey](#) by Dec. 6.

[Back To top](#)

[Opinion: BART trying to dupe riders into thinking system is safe \(Mercury News\)](#)

Transit agency Director Debora Allen blames crime on porous gates, board's reluctance to hire enough cops

Is BART safe? As a BART director, I am asked this question frequently — and after this week's fatal stabbing of an innocent rider the inquiries will keep coming. The answer depends on one's expectations. Safe compared to city streets? BART is a closed, pay-as-you-go system. It should be more secure than the streets it travels through. But BART, in fact, often answers the safety question by comparing its crime rate to that of the cities it serves, because crime on BART tends to mirror trends on the streets. It shouldn't be that way. BART has an obligation to protect the safety of riders inside its fare gates and is legally allowed to take protective measures, based on court rulings. But BART's fare gates are

notoriously porous and offer no real barrier to protect paying commuters. With fare evasion rampant, it's no wonder there is little difference between safety on BART and safety on the streets. BART actually has many rules already in place to protect riders. What's lacking is the will — and staffing — to enforce them. Simply put, BART's police department growth has not kept up with the expansion of the transit system because the agency directors, past and present, have not made police protection a priority.

In 2018, a transit police and safety expert reported to the BART Board of Directors that 94 more sworn police officers should be added to address public safety concerns. That would represent a 50 percent increase in the size of the force. In response, the board increased this year's police budget by just 19 officers, none of whom are on patrol yet. Riders rightfully expect far more police presence at BART stations and on trains than they are getting.

Not helping matters is the fact that the political will of most of the directors is against enforcing low-level infractions and rule violations because of social equity concerns. This was demonstrated yet again by the board majority's recent refusal to even consider preventing panhandlers from intruding on riders on station platforms and trains.

For over a year, several directors have pushed for hiring civilian "ambassadors" to keep the peace on trains while balking at hiring more police officers or cracking down on fare evasion. The former agency general manager opposed the ambassador program as inadequate because ambassadors would have no formal training, be given no drug or criminal background checks and would likely be hired from local social service agencies.

Nonetheless, urban directors continue the push to allocate \$1.5 million for a pilot ambassador program and the new general manager is considering it.

If approved, the ambassadors would provide a "presence" on the train to make riders feel safer. Yet, they would have no enforcement authority and would serve no real public safety purpose. Armed only with a cell phone, they would be taught to call in if they see something that isn't right on the train. Of course, BART's 415,000 daily passengers can theoretically do the same thing and be just as effective. Such toothless programs are a waste of management resources at a time when the agency's focus should be on expanding more proven enforcement programs.

Until the majority of directors make public safety a more urgent priority by giving the general manager proper direction and financial resources, riders are going to continue to feel unsafe using the system and will look for alternative ways to travel.

It's time to get serious about law enforcement on BART, at all levels. We don't need alternative social justice programs to dupe riders into believing BART is providing for their safety.

Debra Allen is a BART director representing District 1, which stretches through central Contra Costa County from Martinez to San Ramon.

[Santa Clara VTA pauses pre-revenue service on Berryessa extension](#) (Progressive Railroading)

The [Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority](#) (VTA) last week announced it has suspended most of [Bay Area Rapid Transit's](#) (BART) pre-revenue operations on the 10-mile BART Silicon Valley Berryessa extension in California to create a “more practical” work plan.

Since June, VTA and BART have been working on starting passenger service on the extension before year's end. The work has involved efforts by both agencies to complete final systems modification testing, BART's system acceptance testing and BART's pre-revenue operations.

However, the complexity of the project, which requires simultaneous testing and acceptance from both agencies, has required VTA to pause pre-revenue operation activities while it completes its remaining testing, VTA officials said in a press release. Following VTA's testing, BART will then complete its remaining Phase 3 acceptance testing and restart full pre-revenue operations activities.

Resequencing these activities eliminates the conflicting needs for access to the track and other facilities, but will delay the overall project beyond 2019, VTA officials said.

VTA and BART are developing a revised testing and training plan before resuming full pre-revenue operations.

The decision came after “extensive review and coordination” with BART management, VTA officials said.

[Bart Delay](#) (KRON Ch. 4) (link to video)

[Back to Top](#)

[Quest to Make San Jose Streets Safer Crashes into Worsening Pedestrian, Cyclist Injury Stats](#) (San Jose Inside)

Not a day goes by when Brandon Alvarado doesn't encounter something or someone blocking [downtown](#) San Jose's new protected bike lanes. Trash bins. Idling Uber and Lyft drivers. Package courier vehicles. Moving [vans](#). Linen and beverage delivery trucks. Bird, Lime and Jump [scooters](#). VTA buses. Even [police cruisers](#).

Just weeks ago, a motorist almost started a fight after the bicycle mechanic snapped photos of a car impeding a bikeway by the Adobe tower off of San Fernando Street. All too often, Alvarado says, drivers get verbally or physically threatening when he politely informs them of his right to a clear bike route. For Kelly Snider, a land use consultant and lecturer at San Jose State University, the barriers installed along 20 miles in and around the city's central district have brought some relief. But she, too, has seen more than her fair share of tense exchanges with scofflaw motorists. “I will go up to the driver's side if there's someone in the car and I'll knock on their window and say, ‘You can't be here, you're illegally stopped here,’” she says. “I get yelled at all the time for being perfectly legal in the bike lane.”

That's *after* San Jose painted its bikeways bright green and buffered them with matching plastic posts, new lane striping and signage and parking moved from curb to mid-street to clear the path for cyclists. While only 1 percent of trips in San Jose are made by bike, the city aims to boost that rate 15-fold by 2040 as part of an ambitious effort to reduce its carbon footprint.

Yet a vocal coalition of bike advocates say that will never happen until the city figures out a better way to protect cyclists than flimsy plastic bollards, which—combined with orange plastic barricades, detours

and blocked lanes from a crop of new construction—have forced people behind the wheel to navigate a baffling new landscape.

“One of the biggest reasons people don’t ride their bikes is because they’re fearful of the road,” says Alvarado, who chairs San Jose’s Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee. “If we don’t do something to make them feel safer, then how are we going to meet our ridership goals?”

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) ranks San Jose as the third [most perilous city](#) to bike in America in terms of [cycling fatalities](#) and injuries. And while the Capital of Silicon Valley bills itself as one of the nation’s safest big cities, it’s growing more treacherous for people walking, biking and scooting along its sprawling tessellation of roads.

San Jose’s pedestrian and cyclist fatality rate hovers at around triple the national average and remains on an upward trajectory that saw car-related deaths overall rise by 37 percent in the past decade though the population grew less than 10 percent. Statistics for critical traffic injuries are equally jarring. In 2018, the number of people severely hurt by cars reached 195—the highest number in the past five years. The city’s death toll of pedestrians and motorists peaked at 60 fatalities in 2015—the same year San Jose joined the global Vision Zero campaign, vowing to eliminate traffic deaths through cyclist-and-pedestrian-friendly street design, public education and stronger enforcement.

San Jose took the Vision Zero pledge with all the pomp of a coronation, boasting about becoming the nation’s [fourth municipality](#) to formally sign on to the international safety campaign. The unanimous 2015 City Council vote came 18 years after Sweden’s parliament endorsed the principle that “it can never be ethically acceptable that people are killed or seriously injured when moving within the road transport system” and resolved to end traffic fatalities by 2020. The initiative promoted the notion of shared responsibility between road designers and motorists to improve safety with slower car speeds and by physically dividing vehicle traffic from pedestrian zones and bicycle lanes.

Sweden’s traffic fatalities fell from 471 in 2007 to 253 in 2017 and Europe generally saw a 40 percent drop, along with a more than 20 percent decline in deadly bicycle crashes during the same period. The local trend has been less encouraging.

San Jose’s vehicle deaths now outpace homicides most years, an unusual lethality evidenced in white cross shrines surrounded by prayer candles and flowers along busy thoroughfares and crowdfunding campaigns to bury loved ones or foot medical bills for survivors. A murder rate as sharply ascendant might prompt widespread outcry. Other than occasional warnings from law enforcement for drivers to pay attention and pedestrians to look both ways before crossing, however, the city’s roadway deaths are met largely with inaction.

Five years have passed, and despite the new lanes and grand plans, San Jose has made little progress toward its Vision Zero goal. Clearly, it will take more than green paint, plastic cylinders and positive affirmations to protect lives from fast-moving metal.

“Protected bikeways are a start,” Alvarado says. “But they’re not enough.”

Zero Sum

When Jesse Mintz-Roth left New York City to head San Jose’s Department of Transportation’s Vision Zero efforts, the initiative was running up against decades of ingrained practice. After generations of optimizing San Jose’s 180 square miles for cars, reimagining the cityscape for walkers and cyclists proved daunting and costly.

In an effort to at least pick up the pace a bit, the city’s elected leaders asked the transportation agency earlier this year to estimate how much money it would need to make meaningful progress on Vision Zero. The numbers that came back were staggering.

According to San Jose Transportation Director John Ristow, completely overhauling 56 miles of the city’s most dangerous streets could cost \$560 million. If San Jose took things a step further and re-engineered an additional 330 miles of major roadways, it would draw \$3 billion from the city’s already strained capital budget.

Better Bikeways SJ—one of several San Jose-specific plans by which the city aims to achieve its Vision Zero goals—brought buffered bike lanes downtown and offered a workaround to the fiscal constraints. Instead of using more permanent materials like concrete for protected bike paths, the city opted for cheaper posts and paint as part of what it calls a “quick-build” strategy, which it wants to expand throughout the city.

Mintz-Roth says he worked on similar projects at his last job as a transportation planner in the Big Apple, where he also fielded misgivings from the public at the initial rollout. “Some people feel like it might be more dangerous,” he says, “but in practice I think that sort of double-take where you have to think to yourself, ‘How do I use this street?’ ... slows people down.”

But Alvarado says the city needs to bolster public outreach to drivers before bringing its quick-build bike lanes to the rest of the city. “They say people have to learn to use it,” he says, “but my fear is that they build it so fast that they build more conflicts between cyclists and cars. I don’t know. I’m just not convinced yet.”

Rocky Road

What’s fueling the rise in traffic fatalities is up for some debate. After four decades as a personal injury lawyer, Michael Kelly says he’s fairly certain distracted driving is pushing up the death toll to record heights. It’s not just talking on the phone, he clarifies—simply having a handset in the car dangerously divides the driver’s attention.

“I actually think somebody ought to think about a complete bar on being on your phone while driving,” says Kelly, of Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Shoenberger. “There is a belief that if you’re not holding your phone, you’re not being distracted. But then why are these deaths so high? We’ve electrified intersections, we’ve painted bright stripes on the roads, we’ve built these barriers, we’ve put in lights—so what the eff is happening? I don’t think it’s about visibility. I think it’s about inattention.”

Public safety officials put some of the blame on an uptick in SUVs, whose size makes them safer for the people inside but deadlier to pedestrians. The San Jose Police Department says it’s a dearth of enforcement. During the Great Recession and ensuing battles over unfunded pension liabilities, the number of traffic cops in San Jose dwindled from a couple dozen to barely a handful, a staffing level that held steady until this fall when Chief Eddie Garcia finally brought the Traffic Enforcement Unit up to 12. California Walks—a non-profit that advocates for pedestrian-safe cityscapes—and its local chapter contend that the problem lies with poorly designed streets. “We need to invest in infrastructure,” says Nikita Sinha, manager of the Walk San Jose program. “Ultimately, if you want to see people driving slower ... you need the infrastructure to support that behavior. It’s going to come down to how our city physically looks.”

Of the 17 major streets deemed deadliest by San Jose’s DOT, most comprise multi-lane corridors with long distances between traffic signals that allow drivers to pick up velocity and posted speed limits of more than 40mph. Other risk factors, according to San Jose Walks: a lack of sidewalks, signage, bike lanes and crosswalks. Forty-three percent of San Jose’s traffic deaths and nearly a third of serious injuries happen in those 17 roadways, dubbed by DOT as “priority safety corridors,” which span a combined 70 miles.

Law enforcement data show that, by far, the most destructive prevailing factor behind the collisions is speed. The victims are disproportionately Latino and Vietnamese and skew middle-aged to elderly. The deaths of 56-year-old William Povio and 91-year-old Gerald Williams each offer a case in point. On Oct. 23, a silver Lexus plowed into Povio as he walked near First and Virginia streets in broad daylight. Just days later, a Toyota RAV4 struck Williams as he rode his bicycle left toward Capewood Drive. [Both died in hospitals](#) earlier this month, bringing the year-to-date tally of San Jose traffic deaths to 43.

The deadliest intersections tend to lie in San Jose’s downtown and East Side, where they’re concentrated in some of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. Between 2014 and 2018, Councilwoman Maya Esparza’s District 7, which encompasses Tully-Santee and Seven Trees, saw 52 traffic fatalities—

the highest rate in the city. During the same timeframe, Councilman Raul Peralez's District 3, which spans downtown, counted the second highest number of deaths at 34 and the most crashes at 5,544. Despite demographic and geographic disparities in traffic fatalities, however, the city allocates \$200,000 in traffic calming funds to each council district. Peralez says the city should use an evidence-based approach to budgeting for pedestrian safety by giving more money to the highest-need areas. "The way that we currently do things is not equitable," he tells San Jose Inside, "and I don't think that's fair for the communities out there potentially suffering more than others."

The costs to realize Vision Zero may seem insurmountable, but the price of inaction is greater. According to the NHTSA, car crashes in the US cost [more than \\$870 billion](#) a year in lost productivity, medical and legal bills and related societal and economic impacts. While driver deaths have declined as vehicles become safer for the people inside them, they've become more lethal for anyone in their path, turning 2018 into the deadliest year for cyclists and pedestrians [since 1990](#).

Dark Moment

Kyle LaBlanc had no desire to ever get behind the wheel of a car. A stickler for the rules of the road and every other sphere of life, it annoyed him to no end to see so many reckless drivers. The honking, the speeding, the unpredictability of the roadways felt like chaos to his extraordinarily perceptive mind. Public transit, on the other hand, with its schedules and fixed routes, appealed to his sense of order. Throughout high school, the San Jose teen confidently navigated the South Bay's plexus of trains, light rail and bus lines.

He appreciated the interconnections that brought him from one point to another as he appreciated the reticulations of computer networks and electrical circuits, which he learned to build at the age of 5 with the same grandfather who taught him how to ride a bus.

For as long as anyone in his family remembered, the boy loved using technology to devise new inventions. At 17, he created his own software cloud with a dozen computers he built from scratch. His parents and little brother could tell when he powered them all up at once because the lights would dim in the LaBlanc home. "He would have been an excellent IT person," says his mother, Gina LaBlanc. "He was *my* IT person. He really loved helping everybody fix their computers. He could bring a dead iPhone to life."

Just three weeks after Kyle's 18th birthday and about eight months before he planned to start computer networking classes at Monterey Peninsula College, a mass of steel and glass came hurtling toward him and cut that future short.

It took multiple months and lawsuits for Kyle's parents, Gina and Steve, to piece together the events preceding the crash that killed their son on Jan. 25, 2016. They learned that Kyle walked westbound on a dirt path beneath the Highway 87 overpass by the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority station at Curtner Avenue, which has confusing crosswalks and no signs to steer pedestrians to a safer route.

Recent rain muddied the path and Kyle—in brand-new basketball shoes—stepped off the curb and into the bike lane. With the lights out under the freeway, a waning moon offered the only illumination. Shortly past midnight, a Tri-City Recovery Dodge Ram tow truck drove under the same overpass, where he merged slightly into the bike lane and struck Kyle at about 45 mph.

Paramedics rushed the boy to Valley Medical Center's intensive care unit, where trauma surgeons undertook what Gina calls "a valiant effort" to mend his mangled body. Kyle's parents showed up in time to take one last look into his eyes.

"I felt like he was waiting for me to get there," Gina says. "Then his eyelids started to fall." He died minutes later at 3am.

A day later, the city dispatched a public works crew to install new lights below the freeway. Other than that, nothing's changed. At least two other pedestrians lost their lives in the same way in the same spot just months before and after the trucker killed Kyle.

"It's a pedestrian trap," Gina says, "and nothing's been done to fix it."

Change Makers

There are plenty of ways to curb vehicle deaths. But overhauling streets to slow traffic and get people out of their cars doesn't exactly score a lot of political points. Just look at the backlash against the "[road diet](#)" on San Jose's Lincoln Avenue a few years back, or more recent efforts in Los Gatos, where the southbound lane of North Santa Cruz Avenue was turned into a one-way street. Budgets restrict safety efforts at the local and state level, where highway widening and major public transit projects eat up most of the funding. Police departments say they're stretched thin, and privacy concerns prevent many locales from installing cameras to enforce speed limits.

Diane Solomon, a local author and activist who bikes along many of those problem corridors, agrees with Walk San Jose's stance that the city needs to reconfigure the streets and invest in more traffic signals, brighter paint, bigger signs, new lighting and traffic-slowing measures like speed bumps. "This will be expensive and unpopular," she says, "but it will save lives."

After years of complacency, at least the city is finally ramping up those kinds of projects. On Nov. 4, Mintz-Roth went before the city's Transportation and Environment Committee to present the latest sobering statistics on "KSI collisions"—bureaucratic shorthand for crashes in which a vehicle "killed or seriously injured" someone. He called for more funding for data analytics and road redesigns and asked the city to form a multi-agency task force to double down on the Vision Zero pledge.

Kirsten Smith, whose dad died by a hit-and-run earlier this year, applauds the proposals but also asks what took the city so long. "Hearing that for six years you've seen a trend in KSIs go up ... how did we let that go?" she asked at a recent public meeting. "How did no one see that for six years?"

Losing her father, Bob Lavin, robbed her of the safety she felt all her life in San Jose, she said. Multiple traffic deaths have occurred around the same Curtner Avenue corridor where police say 35-year-old Anthony Trusso, on June 28, [rammed his car into Lavin](#) during one of his daily bike rides. But a continued lack of enforcement and a dearth of cameras render it just as unsafe as the day he died, she added. "With all due respect, my dad is not a KSI," Smith said, addressing city staff. "His name is Bob Lavin. ... So, I know you need your lingo, but he's a person."

Minutes later, Gina LaBlanc—who wore a pin on her sweater with a picture of her smiling son in a Captain America T-shirt—stepped up to echo Smith's condemnation.

"I am shocked that a dangerous situation is allowed to continue and *no* changes have been made, as though my son's death and life didn't matter," she said, holding up a blown-up version of the same photo. "This is my son, not just a data point." A self-described "cycling geek," Mayor Sam Liccardo has long backed policies to make San Jose more bike-friendly. As downtown councilman a decade ago, he helped create the city's Bike Plan 2020, which envisioned a 500-mile bikeway network and called for halving the number of car-bike collisions by 2020. This year, he became a data point.

When Liccardo barreled into an SUV crossing a northeast San Jose intersection on New Year's Day, the cycling community nationwide took note. Public safety in poor, underserved areas with large immigrant populations have been historically ignored, but suburban streets that aren't even safe for a cycling-enthusiast mayor made national headlines.

Liccardo fractured his sternum and two vertebrae in the collision, which left him wearing a brace for months. Shiloh Ballard, head of the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, rode to the scene of the crash—at Salt Lake Drive and Mabury Road—[to assess](#) whether improved visibility might have prevented the accident.

Alvarado also seized on the moment as a chance to raise awareness about the dangerous state of the city's roads. "I wrote him a card that had a bunch of bikes on it and hand-delivered it to his office," he recalls. "It said, basically, that I hope you recover, I'm sorry to hear what happened and that I want to meet you to talk about what I could do individually to make things better."

Liccardo took him up on the offer, granting a face-to-face klatch where Alvarado shared his idea of bringing a Ride of Silence—a nationwide ride to commemorate victims of traffic collisions—to San Jose.

Alvarado's first Ride of Silence took place on a rainy mid-May evening in downtown and drew a few dozen participants. But what he initially planned as an annual event took on a life of its own. In the weeks after Bobby Lavin's death, the man's family asked Alvarado for help putting together a celebration-of-life ride.

"I jumped on it," Alvarado says. "I'd already made a personal commitment that when somebody does have a fatality, we can have this format for a ride ready to go."

Lavin's surviving relatives picked a date in early August, a day before the funeral. Councilman Sergio Jimenez sponsored the Hawaiian-themed event, while Liccardo and council members Dev Davis and Pam Foley spoke and Johnny Khamis came to watch. The perambulatory tribute ended at the Lavin home, where about 50 of the remaining attendees formed a circle, held hands and joined in a traditional Hawaiian prayer.

Lavin's widow said the gathering made her feel at peace about going to her husband's funeral the next day.

"We can't bring back their loved ones," Alvarado says. "But we do want to bring these families into the conversation and let them know that we're here for them."

On Sunday, Alvarado will join Walk San Jose and SF Bay Area Families for Safe Streets in a [World Day of Remembrance](#) march for people killed and injured by cars. The solemn procession will start at 1:30pm at St. James Park and wend its way to City Hall, where friends and relatives of victims will have a chance to share stories of a kind of loss that's widely accepted as an inevitability of modern life.

[Back to Top](#)

Electric bus workers in L.A. unionize — with the support of their Silicon Valley CEO (Los Angeles Times)

Blanchard Pinto, a supervisor on Proterra's electric bus assembly line in City of Industry, had never considered joining a union in his nine years with the company.

That changed on the day before Halloween, when his bosses invited him and his co-workers to a meeting with the United Steelworkers Local 675.

Pinto was wary at first. In his experience working for other companies, management usually tried to avert unionization at all costs. On top of that, the majority of Local 675's existing members work at oil refineries across L.A. — not exactly natural allies for Proterra, whose business model requires public transit agencies across the country to ditch fossil fuels for greener battery-powered vehicles.

But Steelworkers reps convinced him they understood the need to move to a carbon-neutral economy and were serious about helping their oil industry members survive the transition. And Proterra's leadership seemed surprisingly amenable to the union drive.

Two weeks later, on Nov. 12, Pinto and his co-workers at the L.A. plant voted overwhelmingly to join the Steelworkers. "This is my first time being in a union, and I'm actually excited about it," Pinto says. "It was a no-brainer for me that it was something we could use for the job stability."

That same day, Silicon Valley-based, venture capital-backed Proterra voluntarily recognized the union and pledged to sign a "community benefits agreement," which would commit the company to working with local nonprofits to hire and train workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The City of Industry plant, with 61 workers, represents just a fraction of Proterra's overall workforce: Including nonunion office workers, the company has 126 employees in L.A. County, plus a larger plant in Greenville, S.C., and a head office in Burlingame. But with California's ambitious goals for reaching carbon neutrality and L.A. Department of Transportation's plan to have a fully electric fleet by 2030, it's poised to grow.

An organized labor force is new territory for Proterra Chief Executive Ryan Popple, too.

Popple joined the company in 2014 after working as an early executive in the finance department at Tesla — whose head, Elon Musk, has taken an [antiunion stance](#) — and as a partner at the blue-chip venture capital fund Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers. Proterra has raised \$525 million since being founded in 2004, with Kleiner Perkins and other venture capital funds investing along the way.

“Because of my background, we had some hilarious conversations at first,” says Popple of meetings with labor reps. “It seemed like their assumption going in was because of Silicon Valley and VC [venture capital] and companies I’d worked for, I was a hardcore tech libertarian who believed that ultimately there will be no government and everything should work like Burning Man.”

But the looming threat of climate change, Popple says, helped focus the conversation: “If you end up with realists in labor talking to realists in tech, and our primary concern is that we have about 10 years to get something done, that creates a sense of urgency.”

Plus, Popple sees upside in having a union workforce. “Because of the position that a lot of the labor unions have taken from an environmental perspective, I found that we were more aligned than opposed,” Popple says. “If you can have environmental advocacy groups and labor advocacy groups aligned, I think you end up getting more done from a policy perspective.”

And being known as a union-friendly shop could be an edge when it comes to competing for public transit agency contracts. Those clients, which include the L.A. Transportation Department and Foothills Transit, have bought a total of 700 buses from the company, and make up almost all of Proterra’s business (though the company also sells its battery and drivetrain technology to manufacturers looking to build other types of electric vehicles).

“There’s nothing formal in procurement guidelines that allows a city to pick one manufacturer or another based on where you’re located or whether you’re unionized,” Popple says. “But there are qualitative aspects to procurement.”

In recent years, nonprofit groups in Los Angeles have pushed for community benefits agreements, like the one that Proterra agreed to sign, to be linked to government contracts.

BYD, another battery-powered bus manufacturer with a large factory in Lancaster, signed a similar agreement in 2017 when its workforce unionized under SMART, a union mostly representing sheet metal and transportation workers.

Jobs to Move America, an L.A.-based nonprofit that advocates for policies like community benefits agreements, brokered the deal with Proterra. Hector Huezo, a senior staffer at the organization, says that Proterra’s deal will look something like BYD’s, which created an apprenticeship system targeted at recruiting and training women, African Americans, formerly incarcerated people and military veterans. “Our coalition coalesces around this idea that a company that relies on public contracts to build up their business should be accountable for creating community benefits in that process,” Huezo says.

His group and the Steelworkers approached Proterra in 2016, when it first announced plans to open its City of Industry factory, to open the relationship that ended with last week’s unionization vote.

For leaders at Local 675, who have been discussing how to advocate for their members who work at oil refineries while also working toward a future free of fossil fuels, Proterra’s entrance into the union represents a potential proof of concept for the idea that switching to a green economy doesn’t have to mean abandoning the security of carbon-based jobs in energy and transportation.

“We here at the local have been talking about a just transition for over 20 years,” says staff organizer Moises Hernandez.

“Oil’s gonna fight tooth and nail till the end — they don’t believe that they’re gonna end anytime soon — but we are looking at the future for our membership so that they have something to transition into, and organizing Proterra might be the first step.”

[Back to Top](#)