

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Sent: Monday, December 23, 2019 11:38 AM
To: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
Subject: From VTA: Dec 23, 2019 Media Clips

VTA Daily News Coverage for Monday, December 23, 2019

1. [**UPCOMING PROJECTS: December 2019**](#)
2. [**VTA report recommended no changes to board member appointments \(San Jose Spotlight\)**](#)
3. [**A toll lane future is inevitable in California as traffic congestion worsens \(LA Times\)**](#)

[**UPCOMING PROJECTS: December 2019**](#)

San Jose

BART Silicon Valley Extension

The \$5.5 billion, 6-mile BART Silicon Valley Phase II Extension includes 5 miles of tunnel constructed by a single, large-bore TBM on the order of 45-ft in diameter. The extension includes four stations (three underground). The overall project is a 16-mile extension of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system in the San Francisco Bay area. Construction is planned to start by 2021 with passenger service by 2026. A joint venture of HNTB and WSP agreed to a four-year, \$88.3 million program management contract with the owner, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA). Mott MacDonald/PGH Wong was awarded a general engineering consultant contract in January 2019. Plans are for construction to occur from 2022-2028.

Web: <http://www.vta.org/projects/bart-sv/>

[**VTA report recommended no changes to board member appointments \(San Jose Spotlight\)**](#)

The public on Friday got its first look at a long-awaited report from a consultant detailing how to improve the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, but there were no suggestions to elect VTA board members — who are currently appointed by their cities — as some Silicon Valley transit activists had hoped.

A Board of Directors elected specifically to be transit officials is the “most important change” the VTA can make to improve its governance, said transit activist Andrew Boone.

And although there wasn’t any discussion on direct elections at a Friday VTA committee meeting, director Teresa O’Neill — who is also a Santa Clara councilmember — indicated a willingness to open up board seats to members of the public.

"I would lean more towards and really go for a change of having some kind of committee that selects nominees," O'Neill said. "Whether they're elected officials or members of the public who apply to be on the board."

[The concern](#), as highlighted in a recent grand jury report, is a "lack of experience" among VTA board members who are elected officials in their cities and towns, but not transit experts. Some members are active and engaged, while others are not. Currently, the 18 board members are elected officials appointed by their jurisdictions, with fifteen city councilmembers and three members of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

Mass transit activist Monica Mallon said she "wholeheartedly" supports the direct election of board members. Still, she said she would prefer a board with a full-time focus on transit, even if they are appointed.

"A full-time board of directors that is more responsive to public concerns about transit would be excellent even if it is a smaller board and not elected directly," Mallon said. "They are spread so thin, I get frustrated with them, but I realize they are running the cities and they are running the county. They have a lot on their plate."

Instead of a discussion on electing board members, Boone said he and other activists were stunned when consultant RSM made several recommendations that would limit public input at the VTA's Board of Directors meetings. The suggestions come as Silicon Valley's mass transit system sees rapidly declining ridership and embarks on [new service changes in 2020](#) following another delay in opening two local BART stations.

One of the recommendations presented at VTA's Ad Hoc Board Enhancement Committee on Friday is to restrict public comment at board meetings if an agenda item has already been discussed at a committee meeting — which are typically held during weekdays.

RSM also suggested the board move public comment on items not on the agenda to the end of its regular meetings. The San Jose City Council also withholds general public comment until the end of meetings, [a source of concern for residents](#).

"This attempt to kill off public comment at the VTA board meetings is shocking," Boone told the committee Friday. "To move the non-agenda public comment period from the beginning to the end of meetings is unbelievable. Meetings typically end at 11 p.m. or midnight so this would effectively make it impossible for members of the public to comment at all."

He noted recent organized attempts to influence the Board of Directors' decision-making during public comment had been successful, including a push for a [climate change emergency](#) declaration. Boone says the only way for most people to reach directors on transit issues is at the board meetings, since they are all elected officials in various cities and towns.

Board director and Mountain View City Councilman John McAlister agreed.

“To move public comment to the end would be disrespectful,” McAlister said. “We have to make sure we respect the public and make sure they have an opportunity to comment.”

Meanwhile, VTA spokeswoman Brandi Childress told San José Spotlight that the full board of directors will consider RSM’s recommendations in 2020 and “they may reject, approve or revise,” any of them.

“These are well thought out recommendations by an independent consultant based on their professional opinion which was informed by significant research, dialogue, analysis and extensive community input over the last five months,” Childress said.

Among RSM’s other controversial recommendations is to eliminate the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and the Committee for Transportation Mobility and Accessibility.

Director O’Neill expressed reservations about that because “those communities are under served and we need to make sure that we are hearing their voices.”

[A toll lane future is inevitable in California as traffic congestion worsens \(LA Times\)](#)

When California began building its freeway network after World War II to connect its booming suburbs, the expectation was that drivers would be able to use them to speedily bypass traffic lights, pedestrians and increasingly congested city streets.

And while not expressly stated, the flowing concrete ribbons would be unlike the toll roads in the East: That is, these roadways would be free.

But that was long before those freeways became congested with bumper-to-bumper traffic, making for miserable commutes and perpetually smoggy skies.

Now, California is expanding toll lanes on freeways like never before, not just to raise revenue for transportation projects but to change behavior as well.

Toll lanes are in the works along the 405 Freeway in Orange County, the 15 Freeway in Riverside County and Interstate 880 in Alameda County.

Orange County is considering a huge expansion of toll lanes, [eyeing the 55, 57 and 91 freeways as possibilities](#). Darrell E. Johnson, head of the Orange County Transportation Authority, said the plan is part of a decades-long, \$43-billion investment in the county’s transportation network.

[L.A. County officials are even considering adding toll lanes to the 405 in the congested Sepulveda Pass](#), and later, on the 105 and 605 freeways. Another proposal would add toll lanes to the 5 Freeway between Red Hill Avenue and the L.A. County line, costing \$223 million to \$779 million, according to Caltrans.

The moves have sparked opposition, with some saying drivers should not have to pay tolls in the lanes after already paying for the construction of the freeways themselves through taxes.

The humanitarian organization is helping kids around the world, around the clock.

But there is increasing consensus that high-occupancy toll lanes -- which reserve certain parts of freeways to carpools and solo drivers paying tolls -- are a key solution. They bring needed revenue for new transportation projects while also putting a higher price tag on driving solo.

Michael Manville, an associate professor of urban planning at UCLA, said those who can afford to pay the fees are able to avoid congestion for a reliable daily commute, while presumably lessening traffic for those who don't pay and use the general lanes, he said.

"What happens on the 405 every day is what happens at Best Buy and Target on Black Friday," he said. "People who study congestion have known for a long time that the only thing [that will relieve congestion] is dynamic pricing."

According to a recent study by the Southern California Assn. of Governments, [a \\$4 fee to drive into a 4.3-square-mile area of West Los Angeles](#) during weekday rush hour could almost immediately reduce traffic delays and miles driven there by more than 20%.

The decrease in traffic would correspond with a 9% increase in transit ridership, a 7% increase in biking and a 7% increase in walking inside the zone, according to the study.

State and federal goals to reduce the effects of climate change have contributed to the explosion of toll lane projects across California.

[Gov. Gavin Newsom recently issued an executive order](#) to spend money on projects that reverse the effects of greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation. Since then, it has become more difficult to get approval on projects that don't reduce greenhouse gases, said John Standiford of the Riverside County Transportation Commission.

About a decade ago, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, or Metro, received a \$210-million congestion-reduction demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, which was used to convert 11 miles of carpool lanes on the 110 Freeway and 14 miles on the 10 Freeway into price-managed express lanes, Metro spokesman Rick Jager said.

According to the OCTA, 75% of carpool lanes in Orange County are congested during rush hour and the lanes fail to meet federal standards mandating that vehicles move at a minimum of 45 mph 90% of the time in peak hours. The rule was made about a decade ago after California legislators wanted to allow solo drivers of electric vehicles to use the carpool lanes.

As electric vehicles have grown in popularity, carpool lanes across the state have become more clogged, said Joe Rouse, chief of Caltrans' Office of System Operations.

Traffic has been exacerbated by the imbalance of jobs and housing in some areas, said John Goodwin, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in San Francisco. The Bay Area, for instance, lacks adequate housing in its two major job hubs — Silicon Valley and San Francisco — making for longer commutes from the suburbs.

Highways in the Bay Area — known as the electric vehicle capital of California -- have a less-extensive carpool lane network than other parts of the state. That means electric vehicle drivers are flooding carpool lanes for free.

Add to that congested mix other solo drivers who cheat the system and the express lanes can become one big bottleneck. More than 25% of carpool lane users in the San Francisco transportation agency's jurisdiction are solo drivers illegally using the lanes, Goodwin said.

Officials are now cracking down on cheaters to make the system more effective. In Los Angeles County, Metro is installing cameras that can detect vehicle occupancy and bill drivers delinquency fees if they violate toll road rules, Jager said. The camera system will be in operation in January. Other agencies are doing the same.

"We've been giving away precious space on the freeways for too long," Goodwin said.

Experts agree the move toward more toll lanes is long overdue. While Orange County is in the early stages of planning, other parts of the state are less than a decade away from new toll lanes.

In San Mateo County, an extension for [toll lanes on Highway 101](#) is under construction and is expected to be complete in 2022.

[The Highway 237 corridor in Sunnyvale](#) has just undergone 20 months of construction for an added seven miles of express toll lanes.

Caltrans also is exploring the possibility of building [toll lanes on Interstate 80 in Sacramento](#), which could be under construction as early as 2023, according to reporting by the Sacramento Bee.

CALIFORNIA

[Pay \\$4 to drive to the Westside? Congestion pricing could cut traffic gridlock, report says](#)

March 28, 2019

In Orange County, toll lanes on the 91 Freeway save commuters using those lanes up to 30 minutes of travel time per day, according to the OCTA.

Though transportation officials say drivers in the general lanes are also saving time, it's unclear how much.

Despite the seeming benefits, officials know earning the public's support for express lane projects is an uphill battle.

Orange County residents say the toll lanes are economic discrimination and would unfairly charge drivers for highways they already paid for with taxes. Denise Colber of San Clemente is part of an online group of residents who consistently write letters to local officials opposing the toll lanes. She was outraged to learn that Orange County was adding even more lanes.

Like some critics, Colber calls them "the Lexus lanes."

"It's sad to say, but it's becoming that," she said. "A lot of my friends have moved to Texas, Arizona, Florida. Not everyone can afford it. That's not fair."

But transportation experts dispute the notion that toll lanes are unfair to low-income earners.

"No one who was driving for free is now not driving for free. It is just an extra option rather than a new burden on motorists," Manville said.

Construction is underway on a \$1.9-billion widening of the 405 Freeway that will result in two toll lanes in each direction from the Los Angeles County line to the 73 Freeway. This is a view of the 405 Freeway looking north from the Fairview Road overpass.

(Marc Martin/Los Angeles Times)

Manville noted that because toll lanes generate more revenue than other transportation projects, they could theoretically allow for subsidies for low-income drivers.

The poorest communities are also the most affected by pollution caused by stop-and-go traffic and idling on cramped freeways, he said.

Although high-income earners use the toll lanes more regularly, middle- to low-income drivers benefit more from using toll lanes from time to time, according to a study by the University of Washington.

Wealthy people who use the toll lanes often make up 10% of all users, while 90% are middle-income earners who use the lanes only when it is most beneficial, "such as when a \$10 peak toll is worth paying to avoid a \$20 day-care late fee," according to the study.

"Assuming that these findings are representative of priced express lanes in general, this study should serve to put to rest the 'Lexus lanes' canard once and for all," researchers said.

Colber, who regularly carools to work, said she fears that if the carpool lanes on the 5 Freeway are converted to toll lanes, she no longer would be able to use the portion of freeway she paid to build with taxes from Measure M.

Now known as the [OC Go program](#), the measure allocated \$13 billion to improve transportation in the county over 30 years. That included adding the carpool lanes on the 5.

Asked about this possibility, Caltrans spokesman David Matza said: "We see this project as a complement to what OCTA is doing. We don't see it as

breaking the promise. We're not going to do anything without consulting not just OCTA but all our local partners."

James Moore, director of USC's transportation engineering program, said drivers have resisted toll roads since their inception and the thoroughfares have been a subject of "political terror."

"People tend to view prices as the enemy of wealth," he said. But that's not the case. In reality, Moore said, toll roads are a no-brainer that will simply take time to get used to.

"It may never feel good to people emotionally to have to pay for something twice," Moore said. "But I think they will get used to the benefits."

From: VTA Board Secretary <Board.Secretary@vta.org>
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VTA Daily News Coverage for Thursday, December 26, 2019

1. [New Service plan \(NBC Bay Area\)](#)
2. [In a push to boost low ridership, VTA's new service plan to debut with free rides \(San Jose Spotlight\)](#)
3. [Vehicle dwellers leery of Mountain View's safe parking program \(Mountain View Voice\) City sees few sign-ups; homeless advocates cite limited hours, onerous rules](#)

New Service plan (NBC Bay Area) **(link to video)**

In a push to boost low ridership, VTA's new service plan to debut with free rides (San Jose Spotlight)

The Valley Transportation Authority's service changes, which include greater frequency on its most popular routes and a new light rail line, debut Saturday. And, for the first four days, riders can try the new service for free. The new service plan was geared partly toward boosting ridership, which has decreased in recent years. From 2015 to 2019, bus ridership dropped by 17 percent and light rail use declined 26 percent, VTA spokeswoman Brandi Childress said.

Some of that drop mirrors a nationwide decrease in ridership as the economy ticked up and steered people toward car ownership and as ride-share companies such as Uber and Lyft grew in popularity.

Also, recent rail line rehabilitation has led to slowdowns, which likely contributed to lower ridership, Childress said.

Work on the VTA's new service plan began in 2016, when the agency hired a consultant to study ridership data.

"That assessment identified options for VTA's strategy for increasing ridership, improving the farebox recovery rate, making our service more useful to riders and lowering barriers to transit," Childress told San José Spotlight.

The authority devoted roughly a year and a half to community outreach, with traditional meetings, virtual meetings online, information booths and social media posts. Childress said the public seemed most interested in boosting VTA's speed and efficiency.

"The overwhelming feedback was, 'It's too slow, it's not often enough,'" Childress said.

This public sentiment prompted the VTA to focus 90 percent of service on locations with the most ridership. Twenty all-day routes are expected to have increased frequency and include the Rapid 522, which runs along El Camino Real from the Palo Alto Transit Center to the Eastridge Transit Center and the Rapid 500, which runs from Diridon Station to the soon-to-be-opened Berryessa BART station.

However, because the authority is still working with the same funding, boosting frequency of popular lines meant reducing service elsewhere. Transit activist Monica Mallon, who commutes by bus from Cambrian Park to San Jose State University, isn't pleased.

"I'm going to be losing the route I take every single day to San Jose State," Mallon said. "It's going to be a lot harder for me to get around as someone who doesn't own a car."

Mallon added that although she can walk farther to make connections, she worries about seniors and people with limited mobility.

Through her own research, Mallon has determined that ridership increases with better coverage and says she thinks VTA is headed in the wrong direction with its new plan.

Childress said she understands Mallon's frustrations but believes the VTA's resources are where they need to be.

This is the most significant transit service change that VTA has implemented since 2008, officials said. The change shifts resources from low ridership routes, she said, so that 90 percent of VTA's service is now focused on high ridership areas where it can serve more people.

Transit leaders say the changes will result in shorter wait times with 20 all-day frequent routes operating every 15 minutes or less.

"We're not in the business to not have service on our street," Childress said. "It's a balancing act. We're looking forward to this being a big improvement for the majority of riders."

Childress said she hopes increased ridership from the most popular lines will boost revenue, allowing the authority to build back some of the other routes. Concerned riders are encouraged to call the VTA customer service line at 408-321-2300 or visit <https://newservice.vta.org/> for help with trip planning. Riders can also download the Transit app for additional support, and VTA's Street Team Ambassadors are planted at major transit centers to answer questions.

The four days of free rides, beginning this Saturday, is for all VTA service including bus and light rail.

[Vehicle dwellers leery of Mountain View's safe parking program \(Mountain View Voice\)](#)

City sees few sign-ups; homeless advocates cite limited hours, onerous rules
Safe parking lots? Check. Entitlements? Check. People who will sign up?
That's a no.

After crossing off everything on the list, Mountain View is ready to dramatically expand its safe parking program as an alternative for those camping out on public streets. But they're missing one important thing people who actually want to use the lots.

As the city prepares to launch space to take in up to 70 vehicles, it is having trouble finding participants willing to resettle there. After weeks of outreach, only 13 people have agreed to sign up for overnight parking, according to officials from the Community Services Agency (CSA).

That number pales in comparison to the hundreds of inhabited vehicles parked along streets across the city. The safe parking expansion comes as city officials are preparing to roll out new parking restrictions that would heavily restrict where large lived-in vehicles like RVs and trailers can park. As part of that plan, these inhabited vehicles are expected to relocate over to the safe parking lots.

One primary reason why there are so few sign-ups is the city's requirements, according to case workers and people living out of their vehicles. In particular, many sources highlighted the city's overnight-only rule that restricts safe parking sites to operate only from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. During the day, safe parking residents are required to move their vehicles to somewhere off-site.

For anyone living out of their car, this requirement is a non-starter, said Janet Stevens, an RV resident and member of the Vehicle Residents advocacy group. This would mean each RV resident has to relocate their vehicle twice each day and find street parking during the daytime hours. It's a rule that is counter-productive and burdensome, she said, estimating that it takes at least an hour just to find parking under normal circumstances, not counting the time needed to pack up and get ready.

"For RV people, this is just not a well-crafted plan, and it's just not feasible for many reasons," Stevens said. "It's not as easy as it sounds to move your car twice a day in a moment's notice. For me, it would be impossible."

As Mountain View officials were reviewing rules for safe parking lots, homeless advocates repeatedly warned that the overnight-only restrictions would turn away many people. But city officials say they have little choice in the matter.

City attorneys claim Mountain View could be legally liable for operating the equivalent of a mobile home or RV park if it didn't enforce temporary hours of operation. If city leaders wanted to change this rule, attorneys suggested that Mountain View should seek state legislation that would grant an

exemption. Similar daytime restrictions are enforced by most other cities that operate safe parking lots, including East Palo Alto and San Jose.

There are other reasons why safe parking sites are seeing low sign-ups.

Under city rules, anyone residing in a safe parking lot must have a working vehicle that doesn't leak oil, sewage or other hazardous materials. Vehicles must also have current registration and insurance. In many cases, lived-in vehicles fall short of one of these stipulations, CSA officials say.

CSA does provide financial help to people living in vehicles who need repairs or DMV registration. As of this year, the organization reports more than 16 vehicles have been repaired with its aid.

Another problem is, in many cases, the people who reside in vehicles don't actually own them. City officials say many residents are renting their vehicles, which means they often lack information on insurance and registration.

In any case, CSA officials say the safe parking sign-ups should be expected to come in gradually. More should come as the program ramps up, said Nicole Fargo Nosich, CSA associate director.

"It does take some time to get people prepared to get on the lots," she said. "Like most new initiatives, it can take some time for the word to get out, and others may need to hear feedback from other participants before they decide to enroll."

City officials say they are just about ready to open three new safe parking sites that will dramatically expand their capacity to take in vehicles. These locations include a city-owned parking lot near Shoreline Amphitheatre at the corner of Crittenden Lane. Under city guidelines, the lot is expected to hold up to 30 RVs or trailers, significantly more than city officials originally expected.

As many as 30 more vehicles could soon be parked at a former VTA parking lot at the now-closed Evelyn light rail station.

It remains unclear exactly when the new safe parking lots will open.

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VTA Daily News Coverage for Friday, December 27, 2019

1. [New Transit Service Plan \(multiple outlets\)](#)
2. [VTA Overhaul Includes Improved Routes, Shorter Wait Times \(NBC Bay Area\)](#)
3. [Big changes coming to Valley Transportation Authority bus routes in South Bay \(ABC 7 News\)](#)
4. [Free rides on VTA buses and light rail for final days of 2019 \(Mercury News\) Free service marks start of new bus routes](#)
5. [Where did the money for the Rengstorff Ave. rail bridge go? \(Palo Alto Daily Post\)](#)
6. [SCVTA's JWI Apprenticeship Graduates Receive First-Time College Certificate of Achievement \(Mass Transit\)](#)

New Transit Service Plan (multiple outlets)

[ABC 7 News](#) (6 pm Thursday)

[ABC 7 News](#) (6 am Friday)

[NBC Bay Area](#) (6:30 am Friday)

[KPIX Ch. 5](#)

[KTVU Ch. 2](#)

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[VTA Overhaul Includes Improved Routes, Shorter Wait Times](#) (NBC Bay Area)

The Valley Transportation Authority in the South Bay is getting a makeover. VTA workers were busy preparing for a new service rollout, starting Saturday across Santa Clara County.

The overhaul includes 3,300 new bus stop signs, a new light rail line, a more frequent bus network and improved routes.

VTA officials say riders can expect shorter wait times. Though the agency said some routes will be discontinued, it is working to create new ones to make up for the cuts.

Also for the holiday season, all VTA bus and light rail rides will be free from Saturday through the end of the year.

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[Big changes coming to Valley Transportation Authority bus routes in South Bay](#) (ABC 7 News)

The Valley Transportation Authority will usher in a new era of bus and light rail service, beginning Saturday, with its biggest service changes in more than a decade.

Riders can expect greater frequency on 20 of the agency's most popular bus routes, as well as the debut of a new light rail line.

In preparation, dozens of VTA employees are in the process of swapping out old bus signs at nearly 3,300 stops across Santa Clara County over the next two days.

"We've been working on this since 2016," said VTA spokesperson Brandi Childress. "We were getting ready for the new BART service to come into Milpitas and North San Jose area and we knew that was a great opportunity to really look at the service and see where we might make our biggest gains in ridership."

VTA officials say local ridership has been declining over the past four years. Despite that, urban planning experts say there's still demand for high quality and reliable service.

"If you have to take two or three different kinds of buses and trains, that's where you really start to lose the big percentages of riders," said SJSU urban planning instructor Kelly Snider. "You want to be where people are starting their journey, and get them to where they're ending it."

The new service plan incorporates community feedback that was gathered over the past year and a half.

However, some routes are being eliminated, such as the one used by transit activist Monica Mallon, who travels from Cambrian Park to San Jose State University on a daily basis.

"I'm hopeful that we can stop this from happening in the future and actually bring these routes back and do other things that will really make transit a better option for a lot of people," said Mallon.

As part of the switch, the VTA is offering free rides to the public Saturday through Tuesday.

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[Free rides on VTA buses and light rail for final days of 2019](#)

(Mercury News)

Free service marks start of new bus routes

People get ready, there's a new plan for bus and light rail service in the South Bay a-coming.

And for the last four days of 2019 you don't need a ticket, you just thank the Valley Transportation Authority.

VTA is offering free rides aboard all of its buses and light rail from Saturday through New Year's morning, no Clipper cards or tickets required.

The deal will continue into the wee hours of Jan. 1, when VTA's service for the holiday wraps up around 2 a.m. Line 22, which runs overnight, will have free rides until 5 a.m. on New Year's Day.

It's part of the roll-out for [VTA's new service plan](#) that includes reworked maps and schedules, which goes into effect Saturday.

The plan will provide more frequent service along 19 of the system's more popular routes, which VTA hopes will help attract new riders.

But it will come at the expense of other lines — VTA is eliminating 17 less popular routes, including three express bus lines and the Almaden light rail spur, which includes two stations. VTA officials stress the system's total service hours will stay the same as a result of the changes.

VTA is also [ending free rides](#) on the popular DASH shuttle downtown.

The shuttle will be replaced by another line, called the Rapid 500, which for now will run between Diridon Station and the intersection of Santa Clara Street and North 6th Street. Once the new Berryessa BART station opens — VTA and BART officials have not said when that will happen, but the latest estimates indicate [service could start in late April](#) — the route will extend there. The Rapid 500 bus will cost the standard VTA fare of \$2.50.

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[Where did the money for the Rengstorff Ave. rail bridge go?](#) (Palo Alto Daily Post)

The city of Mountain View is ready to build a train bridge, or grade separation, above Rengstorff Avenue and Central Expressway. But the city is waiting on funds from VTA, which were approved by voters three years ago. "There is funding to get this done, but the question is when we can get the funding," said Dawn Cameron, the city of Mountain View's public works director.

The city plans to lower the Rengstorff Avenue and Central Expressway intersection so that Rengstorff Avenue runs beneath the Caltrain tracks. The city estimates that the Rengstorff Avenue grade separation project will cost about \$120 million, and some of the funding would come from VTA, which will use proceeds from the 2016 Measure B half-cent sales tax.

VTA spokeswoman Brandi Childress said the agency is working with the city and Caltrain on a “cooperative agreement” to fund the project. “The amount of 2016 Measure B funding is under discussion,” Childress said. “We hope to execute the agreement in early 2020. In 2016, voters approved the \$6.3 billion sales tax measure by 71%. Of the \$6.3 billion, \$700 million is set aside for grade separations.

Long process

It’s been 15 years since the city first looked at separating Rengstorff Avenue from the train tracks. Last year, the city council decided to move forward with the initial design and environmental review phase of the project, which will cost about \$3.5 million.

At the time, VTA had just untangled itself from a lawsuit that had prevented the agency from tapping the money from Measure B. On Jan. 30, 11 months ago, the legality of Measure B was upheld and the money was freed up. Cameron said funds from Measure B will be used to fund eight grade separations: Two in Mountain View, at Castro Street and Rengstorff Avenue; four in Palo Alto, and two in Sunnyvale.

The city of Palo Alto is evaluating grade separation options at Charleston Road, Meadow Drive and Churchill Avenue. The city plans to make a decision for the crossings by April. A decision on the crossing at Palo Alto Avenue by the creek has been put off until a study is done of downtown traffic.

Cameron said VTA is still working out on which projects get funding and when.

“That’s why we’ve been using city funds to take both projects through preliminary engineering and environmental clearance,” Cameron said.

‘Shovel ready’

The transit agency has previously said that it would deliver funding based on how “shovel ready” a project is. Mountain View and Sunnyvale are the closest to having projects ready to be built.

The public works director said that if VTA delivers the funds for the projects on time, construction on Rengstorff Avenue could begin in 2024.

Construction on Castro Street could begin in 2021. The Castro Street grade separation will be a pedestrian and bicycle tunnel under Central Expressway. The city is looking into closing the 100 block of Castro Street to vehicle traffic to create a pedestrian mall.

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[SCVTA's JWI Apprenticeship Graduates Receive First-Time College Certificate of Achievement](#) (Mass Transit)

SCVTA’s program was the first in the country to offer a bus operator apprenticeship, officially sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Labor, and it is the first in the country to offer such college credit, in its partnership with Mission College and ATU.

SCVTA's JWI Apprenticeship Graduates Receive First-Time College Certificate of Achievement

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Another "first" for the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority's Joint Workforce Investment (JWI) apprenticeship program with the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). Two hundred seventy graduates of the program received Certificates of Achievement in Transportation from Mission College in Santa Clara. The participants who completed the 18-month JWI apprenticeship program at VTA received 18 college credits. VTA's program was the first in the country to offer a bus operator apprenticeship, officially sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Labor, and it is the first in the country to offer such college credit, in its partnership with Mission College and ATU. General Manager and CEO Nuria Fernandez addressed graduates at a November ceremony.

"We know we face many challenges in this industry," Fernandez told the graduates, "And one of them is attracting and retaining highly skilled, dedicated workers to carry mobility service into the next several decades. We are bringing labor and management together to identify and implement solutions that upskill, reskill and build the knowledge and capabilities of our operators and maintenance workers," she said.

Since the inception of this initiative in 2015, Mission College has supported the education and training leading to Transit Career certifications in the fields of Coach Operator, Overhead Line Worker, Track Worker and Service Mechanic, which mirror the apprenticeships. Providing college credit in the program facilitates and encourages employees to advance in their careers. Each participant is assigned a more experienced mentor, which has allowed this program to become a national model for improving working conditions for transit workers, cutting down on absenteeism and reducing stress.

Earlier this year, [ATU International President John Costa](#) visited San Jose to get a closer look at the workings of the joint management-labor initiative. Subsequently, his International Union passed a resolution to support the creation and development of similar programs at transit agencies across the country. VTA's JWI program serves as a national model and works with the Transportation Learning Center to help other agencies develop like initiatives.