

## VTA Bus Pass Ad Hoc Committee Final Report

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Los Gatos Complete Streets and Transportation Commission

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# Glossary

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Terms and concepts used throughout this report can be found in the table below. Note some of these terms that are particular to this report.

Term	Definition
Per-Ride Model	A category of programs where the Town of Los Gatos pays the VTA for each individual bus ride for a selected population. Every month, the Town of Los Gatos will be billed for every ride covered by the program.
Subscription Model	A category of programs where the Town of Los Gatos pays the VTA on a Per-Rider basis. Every month, the Town of Los Gatos will be billed for every ride.
Clipper	Clipper is an all-in-one touchless payment service for public transit services throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.
Pilot Program	A small-scale implementation to prove the viability of a longer term project.
Ride & Taste LG	An existing program to introduce Los Gatos' bus system to seniors in Los Gatos through complimentary bus rides and lunches.
MTA	Shorthand for "Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority," a special district that provides public transportation services throughout Santa Clara County.
Measure B	<p>2016 Measure B, a 30-year, half-cent countywide sales tax to enhance transit, highways, expressways and active transportation (bicycles, pedestrians and complete streets). Measure B is a countywide sales tax that provides a local revenue source that can be leveraged to help obtain additional funds through regional, state and federal fund sources. It has been previously used to fund the 2019 School Bus Pilot Program.</p> <p>This is a potential source of funding for a bus pilot program in Los Gatos.</p>
Ridership	The number of distinct riders using a particular form of public transportation over a defined period of time.
Fare	The cost of accessing a transportation service. Single ride fares are

	the price for one ride for a single passenger. Some fares operate on a periodic basis. For example, VTA has a monthly fare, where riders can pay a fixed cost to access unlimited transit services for a given month.
SmartPass	SmartPass is an annual subscription model where all of the members of an institution are provided access to VTA's transportation network. In this case, such a subscription model is cheaper than if each individual was charged for each pass.
Paper/Flash Pass	<p>The Paper/Flash Pass is a monthly subscription model where a chosen institution is charged with distributing passes to a defined population.</p> <p>At the start of a given period, VTA would provide a set number of Paper/Flash passes to an organization. Then, the organization would distribute these passes to its target population. The Town would be charged every month for each pass that was distributed. At the end of the month, any pass not distributed or used could be returned and, therefore, not be billed to the Town of Los Gatos.</p>
S/D/M	A category of riders who receive discounted fares from VTA. Stands for "Senior/Disabled/Medicare."
Los Gatos-Saratoga Union School District	A school district responsible for operating two schools: Los Gatos High School and Saratoga High School.
LGHS	An acronym for "Los Gatos High School"

# Overview

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In 2024, the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission (CSTC) established the VTA Bus Pass Ad Hoc Committee (VBPAC). The purpose of the VBPAC is to investigate and evaluate potential ways for the town to launch a bus pass pilot program for residents of Los Gatos. Such a program would enable Los Gatos residents (specifically students, school staff, and/or seniors) to ride the bus free of charge at the point of service. The VBPAC focused primarily on discerning the logistical requirements of launching and administering such a program. There are three such potential programs included in this report, one for Los Gatos High School and two for Los Gatos senior residents.

The viability of these policy initiatives has been reviewed by various members of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) leadership, including a board member, a coordinator, a manager, a director, and an executive. Since the inception of the VBPAC, its members have had five separate conversations with VTA's leadership to discuss viable policies. Ultimately, these conversations with VTA were informative in nature and contained no formal commitments from either the Town of Los Gatos or the VTA.

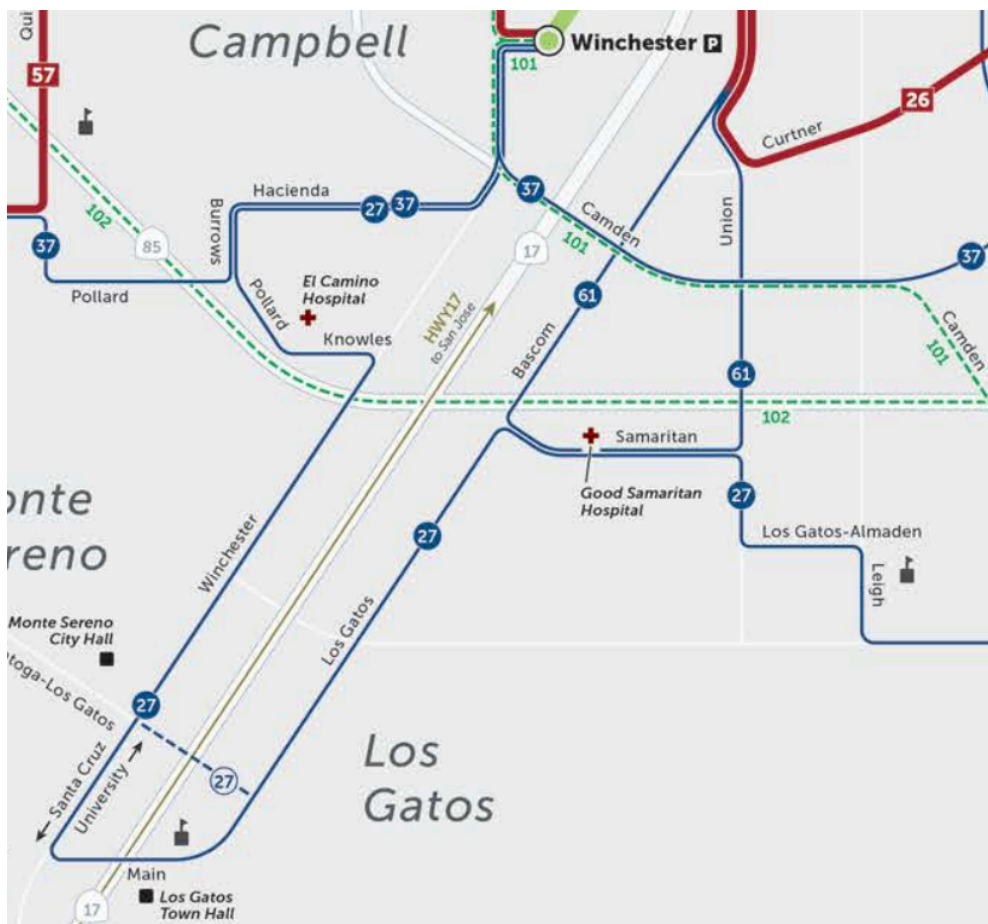
While this report primarily focuses on bus travel, the policies presented largely include access to bus and light rail services across all of Santa Clara County. VBPAC dedicated several months to find a viable way to subsidize and promote only bus travel within the Town limits through a centralized payment mechanism. Such a payment mechanism would entail distributing cards where expenses would be charged directly to the Town. However, in its conversations with VTA, VBPAC discovered that such a centralized payment system only exists in variations of VTA's existing programs, specifically its SmartPass and Paper/Flash Passes. These existing programs cannot be restricted to specific bus stops or specific modes of transportation. Therefore, to launch any of the pilots in this report, the Town would need to cover other forms of transportation as well.

# Section 1: The Case for a VTA Bus Pass

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## Section 1.1: Current Conditions of Bus Ridership in Los Gatos

- Los Gatos residents use a variety of transportation methods to commute to, from, and around Los Gatos. These methods frequently include walking and biking for shorter distances. For longer distances, residents overwhelmingly drive in automobiles. Public transportation services are limited in Los Gatos. The Town's singular form of public transportation is its bus system. The primary lines that operate in Los Gatos are the 27 and 37 Bus Lines, the latter running along the Los Gatos-Campbell border.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> The 61 Line runs primarily and most frequently through San Jose. Since this report largely concerns travel within Los Gatos, discussion of the 61 is limited in this report.

- 2024 Bus ridership and fare revenues are shown in the table below. Revenue is from cash and cash-equivalent fares only; ridership based on farebox and clipper data, not taken from on-board automated passenger count data.<sup>2</sup>

Los Gatos Bus Routes								
CY2024 Clipper & Farebox - Ridership & Revenue								
CLIPPER								
Route	Youth Ridership	Adult Ridership	S/D/M Ridership	Ridership Total	Youth Revenue	Adult Revenue	S/D/M Revenue	Revenue Total
27 Total	3,503	35,100	5,520	44,123	\$ 4,378.75	\$ 87,104.25	\$ 5,520.00	\$ 97,003.00
37 Total	342	5,775	1,020	7,137	\$ 427.50	\$ 14,374.25	\$ 1,020.00	\$ 15,821.75
Total	3,845	40,875	6,540	51,260	\$ 4,806.25	\$ 101,478.50	\$ 6,540.00	\$ 112,824.75
FAREBOX								
Route	Youth Ridership	Adult Ridership	S/D/M Ridership	Ridership Total	Youth Revenue	Adult Revenue	S/D/M Revenue	Revenue Total
27 Total	21,777	60,405	65,330	147,512	\$ 14,977.13	\$ 41,317.33	\$ 44,708.06	\$ 101,002.52
37 Total	6,057	14,141	13,864	21,770	\$ 1,786.19	\$ 3,910.46	\$ 3,575.36	\$ 9,272.01
Total	27,834	74,546	79,194	169,282	\$ 16,763.33	\$ 45,227.79	\$ 48,283.42	\$ 110,274.53
TOTAL								
Route	Youth Ridership	Adult Ridership	S/D/M Ridership	Ridership Total	Youth Revenue	Adult Revenue	S/D/M Revenue	Revenue Total
27 Total	25,280	95,505	70,850	191,635	\$ 19,355.88	\$ 128,421.58	\$ 50,228.06	\$ 198,005.52
37 Total	6,691	22,841	15,344	28,907	\$ 2,213.69	\$ 18,284.71	\$ 4,595.36	\$ 25,093.76
Grand Total	31,971	118,346	86,194	220,542	\$ 21,569.58	\$ 146,706.29	\$ 54,823.42	\$ 223,099.28

- Cumulatively, the 27 and 37 lines facilitated approximately 220,000 total rides in 2024,<sup>3</sup> or an average of 602 rides daily.<sup>4</sup> Precise figures of other forms of transportation are unknown, as exhaustive data for volumes of bicycle, pedestrian, and car traffic for the entire town does not exist. However, in comparison to Los Gatos' population of 32,216, these 602 rides represent low ridership. Assuming that all daily rides originate from residents of Los Gatos and a single round trip per day, approximately 1% of residents use the bus daily, or 1 in 100 residents.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This table was provided during correspondence with VTA. These dollar amounts do not include revenue from VTA Monthly Passes or Smart Passes.

<sup>3</sup> The calculation of total rides is derived from dividing the total revenue generated for each age group divided by their respective price per single ride. The fare for adults is \$2.50, for youth \$1.25, and for S/D/M (Senior/Disabled/Medicare) \$1.00. This figure includes both residents and non-residents of Los Gatos.

<sup>4</sup> The calculation of daily rides is the calculated number of annual rides divided by 365. This calculation notably does not include days when bus service has been reduced in Los Gatos. For example, on beach traffic weekends, service on the 27 Line is typically reduced and re-directed away from the Downtown.

<sup>5</sup> This is the average daily number of rides divided by 2. Note that this is, at best, an approximation. VTA does not have existing data on the number of distinct bus riders that use its services. Additionally, this estimate is likely an overestimation, since it includes non-Los Gatos residents.

- In the table above, there are also notable differences in bus utilization between different age cohorts. By far the largest demographic of bus fares are generated from adults, aged 18-64. Adults generate over 53% of all bus rides in Los Gatos. S/D/M (Seniors/Disabled/Medicare) generate approximately 39% of bus fares.<sup>6</sup> By far the lowest revenue is generated from Youth riders, comprising the remaining 8% of all bus fares. In comparison, 23.6% of Los Gatos' population are youth. While a portion in the youth demographic may be too young to independently ride the bus, there does seem to exist an underrepresentation of bus utilization among the youth. For example, a recent survey conducted at Los Gatos High School shows that only 8 out of 449 surveyed students took the bus to school as their primary mode of transportation, or less than 2% of LGHS students.<sup>7</sup>

## Section 1.2: The Benefits of Increasing Bus Ridership

- The primary purpose of distributing a publicly funded VTA Bus Pass is to bolster bus ridership in Los Gatos. There are a number of benefits associated with increasing bus ridership, listed below.
- **Benefit 1: Increasing bus utilization reduces traffic congestion.** Cars require far more space per passenger than other forms of transportation, including buses. The road space requirements for cars, bicycles, and buses are visualized in the graphic below.<sup>8</sup> As Los Gatos' population grows due to recent and future expected development to meet its housing needs under state law, it will be increasingly necessary to accommodate its growing population. Additionally, the general population of neighboring municipalities is also expected to increase. A growing population necessitates a corresponding increase in services, which requires the transportation of more goods, services, and labor. To ensure that traffic conditions do not worsen in Los Gatos over time, the Town of Los Gatos will

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<sup>6</sup> We did not receive a dataset that distinguished between seniors, riders with disabilities, and riders with Medicare.

<sup>7</sup> During a Complete Streets and Transportation Commission meeting on May 9th, 2025, Youth Commissioner Elijah Ashegian presented the results of a survey of students from Los Gatos High School, conducted by the LGHS Green Team. The school allocated 10 minutes for students to fill out a survey during one sixth period. After the Commission meeting, Complete Streets and Transportation Commissioner Jeff Suzuki reviewed the survey results to derive this figure.

<sup>8</sup> Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative. *Road Space Requirements*. Infographic. September 2021. <https://transformative-mobility.org/multimedia/road-space-requirements/>.

need to increase its overall capacity to move *people*, not only cars. Finally, traffic congestion brings forth concerns of community safety, particularly from wildfires and health emergencies. There is the persistent challenge of ensuring that there are efficient and effective routes of evacuation. Finally, reducing traffic congestion reduces air and noise pollution, which would improve the quality of life for people in Downtown.

## Road Space Requirements

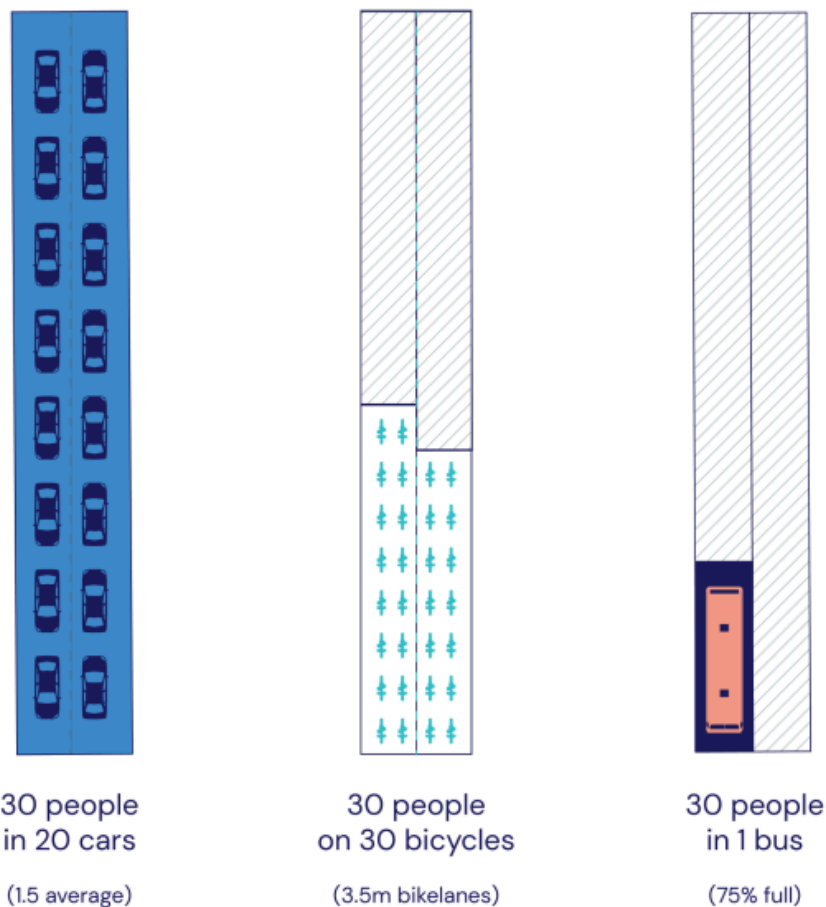


Illustration based on: Petersen (2004, p.8). Sustainable Transport: A Sourcebook for Policy-makers in Developing Cities, Module 2a, Land Use Planning and Urban Transport, GIZ. [https://vtp.org/files/content/documents/resources/A\\_Sourcebook/SB2\\_Land-Use-Planning-and-Demand-Management/GIZ\\_SUTP\\_SB2a-Land-use-Planning-and-Urban-Transport\\_EN.pdf](https://vtp.org/files/content/documents/resources/A_Sourcebook/SB2_Land-Use-Planning-and-Demand-Management/GIZ_SUTP_SB2a-Land-use-Planning-and-Urban-Transport_EN.pdf) (accessed: 2009/2018)

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transformative-mobility.org

- **Benefit 2: For the parents/guardians of students, buses can save time and effort in driving their children to school.** Additionally, for families that do not live near a bus

stop, the reduced congestion from increased bus utilization would reduce congestion, saving them time as well. In fact, some parents and students have publicly expressed their support for bus services in Los Gatos. Examples include:

- In January 2019, Los Gatos launched an 18-month School Bus Pilot Program. Before its discontinuation due to prohibitive costs for relatively low ridership, the Town Council received multiple comments voicing their support for preserving the program. One such written comment said, “[f]or those of us who live in the mountains, have households with either two working parents with no flexibility in our schedules, or a single parent who may work in Santa Cruz Co., having bus service has been a godsend. It has alleviated stress, saved jobs, allowed us to have consistency and stability in our schedules without having to scramble to find rides for our children, worry about sick days and the other children we’re leaving stranded when we have to stay home, or imposing on friends whose homes at which we can drop our kids off, often an hour+ early so we can get to work on time. [...] The bus service has also allowed us to earn more so we can afford to pay for this vital service. For those of us that do not have the wherewithal to hire nannies or au pairs or chauffeurs, or hire Uber-type drivers on a daily basis[,] having a community bus is affordable, vital and necessary.”<sup>9</sup>
- Another public comment for the 2019 School Bus Pilot Program provided the following perspective: “This service has extremely helped our quality of life. While I understand parents are responsible for transporting their child to school, I find that the traffic in Los Gatos causes extreme duress as it can take between 40 minutes to an hour to drive one way. And with fulltime work, it was nice to have our children go home after school via the bus. I worry about what my daughter will do after school, as there are no activities that she can participate in- and the after school club house doesn't exist anymore. My husband and I know at 12 she can hang out at the public library until we get off of work, or she can take three buses to get to my work. There is no doubt that her quality of life will change. She has special needs (has an IEP), and I'm concerned about her ability to be

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<sup>9</sup> Town of Los Gatos, Submitted Written Comments, March 2, 2020, <https://mccmeetingspublic.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/losgatos-meet-21e67aee9f1b472a8c5b47e7a3077393/ITEM-Attachment-009-6aae0450042c4ce9bf8fbb89496337db.pdf>.

responsible enough to be on her own for four hours in town or to ride three buses to get to San Jose where I work. I understand that this is not the town's issue, but I wanted to let you know the real-life ramifications that result in this change.”

- <sup>10</sup>In an editorial from El Gato News, the student newspaper for Los Gatos High School, students who rode the VTA bus to school cited benefits. One senior noted that “taking public transit to and from school beginning freshman year enabled greater independence and helped lighten her parents’ load.” A junior cited buses as his “main form of transportation from school, to work, and to weekend guard rehearsals” and argued that if more people took the bus, it would help alleviate traffic and parking issues.<sup>11</sup>

- **Benefit 3: A Bus Pilot Program can help meet the transportation needs of low-income residents.** Transportation costs are a major expense, especially for low-income households. Ensuring accessible transportation services for everyone in Los Gatos provides a layer of financial security that allows them to continue to live and work in Los Gatos. The costs of owning and using a personal car should not be understated. According to a paper published by the American Public Transportation Association in 2023, the costs associated with car ownership have increased substantially in recent years. Since 2020, the cost of purchasing a new car has increased by 30%, an old car by 40%, and gasoline by 25%.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the costs associated with the use of public transit have not increased, which is of particular relevance to the Town of Los Gatos as the entity billed for this program.
- **Benefit 4: Increasing ridership in Los Gatos would increase the knowledge of transportation systems locally and regionally.** Los Gatos is known as a high-income neighborhood. For many families with students, when a minor comes of legal age to operate a car, it is common for parents to provide a car for them, often by purchasing an

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<sup>10</sup> Town of Los Gatos, Submitted Written Comments, March 2, 2020, <https://mccmeetingspublic.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/losgatos-meet-21e67aee9f1b472a8c5b47e7a3077393/ITEM-Attachment-009-6aae0450042c4ce9bf8fbb89496337db.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Complete Streets and Transportation Commission, Meeting Audio Recording, May 9, 2024, audio, Town of Los Gatos, <https://losgatos-ca.municodemeetings.com/bc-cstc/page/complete-streets-and-transportation-commission-2>.

<sup>12</sup> American Public Transportation Association, *Transit Savings Grow as Auto Costs and Gas Prices Increase*, policy brief, September 2023, <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-POLICY-BRIEF-Transit-Savings-09.27.2023.pdf>.

additional car. As recent survey results from Los Gatos High School students show, many high school students transition to driving during the latter two years of high school, which has a direct effect on the commuting behavior to and from school. Comparing students from 9th/10th with 11th/12th grade, rates of car ridership without carpooling increase from 56% to 64%, while other modes of transportation decrease from, seen in the table below:<sup>13</sup>

	9th-10th	9th-10th (%)	11th-12th	11th-12th (%)
Non-Family Car	115	44%	69	37%
Family Car	149	56%	116	63%
Total Students in Cohort	264	100%	185	100%

Many residents in Los Gatos possess little to no knowledge of the locations of bus stops and routes—such knowledge is not strictly necessary for many households. However, the general distribution of free bus passes would incentivize many households to research the bus system and see how it could benefit them. Considering that people often both “learn by doing” and “do by learning,” a pilot program would help “prime the pump” as new riders are issued a free bus pass with minimal effort in registration. In other words, people who would otherwise never attempt to spend the time to learn would be incentivized to try public transportation for the first time. Naturally, those who use the bus system often find that it connects to other transportation services that exist outside of town, including bus services and light rail in other municipalities, enabling households to commute regionally without cars. For the youth, learning how to navigate public transit systems is a valuable skill that they retain as adults, especially if traveling by car is unavailable. Finally, a more informed, aware, and invested population would be more effectively able to advocate for improvements to its public transit system.

- **Benefit 5: Facilitates the Expansion of Public Transportation Services in Los Gatos.**

A VTA Bus Pass Pilot Program would be a quick and relatively inexpensive way to

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<sup>13</sup> During the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission meeting on May 9th, 2025, Youth Commissioner Elijah Ashegian presented the results of a survey of students from Los Gatos High School. After the meeting, Complete Streets and Transportation Commissioner Jeff Suzuki reviewed the survey results to derive these numbers from the survey results. “Non-Family Car” transportation includes students who primarily walk, bike, scoot, skate, or bus to school. Family car transportation includes the student driving to school or the parent of a student driving to school.

incorporate hundreds, if not thousands, of Los Gatos individuals and families into the public transit system, many for the first time. If one or both of the Pilot Programs in this report prove to be successful, it would build a strong base of public transit users in Los Gatos, which would help to encourage the expansion of public transit services from VTA that Los Gatos needs to reduce traffic and meet the transportation demands of our growing population. Increasing bus ridership could also warrant improvements in our bus system, as increased ridership would warrant increasing bus frequency and installing bus-specific infrastructure, making existing lines faster and more convenient. Additionally, higher ridership could also warrant an expansion in the geographic range of bus services to other parts of Los Gatos, for example by bringing the buses back to the Town's mountain communities. Cultivating bus ridership would make larger and more ambitious projects feasible—for example, the Bus-Bike Boulevard proposal detailed in the Beach Traffic Ad-Hoc Committee's report published on June 6th, 2025 (included in the same agenda packet as this report), or the proposed Vasona Light Rail extension. Rather than entering a public transit "death spiral," as it has been referred to in one Town Council meeting,<sup>14</sup> the Town can take proactive steps to spur demand to foster necessary and more attractive improvements to its public transit system.

- **Benefit 6: A Bus Pilot Program can help meet the transportation needs of Los Gatos' senior population.** Los Gatos seniors make up approximately 20.1% of the Town's population, many of whom would benefit greatly from the mobility that increased public transit access provides. As driving becomes more difficult as seniors age, public transit access may become an essential service for them, allowing many to maintain their independence for a longer period of time. According to the VTA Senior Mobility Guide, "[A]ll VTA buses are equipped with lifts or ramps to assist those who use mobility devices or have difficulty with steps. Full-size buses are equipped with a kneeling feature which lowers the front of the bus easing the first step when boarding. Light rail platforms are level to the train, allowing riders to easily board the light rail train. All buses and light rail trains automatically announce major transfer points, intersections and destinations;

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<sup>14</sup> Penner, Drew , "VTA Moves Weekend Bus Route Further Away from Downtown," Los Gatan, February 23, 2023, <https://losgatan.com/vta-moves-weekend-bus-route-further-away-from-downtown/>.

information is also displayed on electronic message boards inside the vehicle.”<sup>15</sup> These measures make public transportation more accessible for many seniors. Finally, many lower-income seniors, many of whom are likely to be on fixed incomes, would benefit from the savings that come from utilizing public transit, forgoing the costs associated with car ownership.

### **Section 1.3: Historical and Ongoing Initiatives to Increase Bus Utilization**

In the last 10 years, there have been two major initiatives to increase bus utilization in Los Gatos:

- School Bus Pilot Program (2019 - 2020)
- Ride and Taste LG Program (2023 - Present)

#### **School Bus Pilot Program (January 2019 - February 2020):**

- The Los Gatos School Bus Pilot Program was originally introduced to the Town Council as an 18-month pilot program in September 2018. The program was proposed in order to help address school-related traffic congestion on several corridors near Los Gatos schools, including Los Gatos Boulevard, East Main Street, South Santa Cruz Avenue, Blossom Hill Road, Shannon Road, Highway 9, and Highway 17.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the Pilot Program served the Mountain community. Ultimately, the School Bus Pilot Program was implemented in January 2019, utilizing a private contracted company called “Student Transportation of America” (STA). The School Bus Pilot Program implemented two to three custom routes over the course of its existence, each of which had one designated pick-up and drop-off time for each location on the route, before and after school.
- Funding was proposed to have come from three sources:<sup>17</sup>
  1. Firstly, from fares paid by parents of the children using the bus service. Each family could enroll their children in the program for \$350 per year.

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<sup>15</sup> Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, *Senior Mobility Guide*, July 2023, p. 4, [https://www.vta.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Senior\\_ENG\\_Final\\_2022\\_0.pdf](https://www.vta.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Senior_ENG_Final_2022_0.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Town of Los Gatos, Town Council Agenda Packet, September 18, 2018, p. 214, <https://d3n9y02raazwpg.cloudfront.net/losgatos/39976437-36cd-4870-aa5d-dbb8136d8ac9-f104c635-5485-42d8-b79c-acfdde6444e2-1537222956.pdf>. “School Bus Pilot Initial Agenda Packet” in subsequent footnotes.

<sup>17</sup> School Bus Pilot Initial Agenda Packet, p. 229.

2. Secondly, from competitive funding sources such as from the Santa Clara County 2016 Measure B and from other grants the School Bus Pilot Program could qualify for.
  3. Thirdly, from additional Town subsidies coming directly from the Town's budget.
- In actuality, besides subscription funding from the parents (which was only ever expected to pay for ~14% of the total cost of the Pilot Program over two years<sup>18</sup>), the town was only able to secure external funding through a Transportation Fund for Clean Air grant. Measure B funding had not materialized despite the Town Staff's hopes, leaving the Town responsible for \$375,000 in ongoing costs (\$90,000 of which were staff costs and \$285,000 of which were service contract costs).<sup>19</sup>
  - In February 2020, the Town Staff recommended that the City Council let the School Bus Pilot Program expire at the end of the fiscal year 2019/20. Shortly afterwards, in March 2020, Los Gatos school districts closed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively ending the School Bus Pilot Program.
  - According to the Town Staff, the program was very well-received by the families who used the service, and many residents requested that the Town reconsider its decision to shut down the School Bus Pilot Program. However, bus ridership as a percentage of subscriptions remained low throughout the duration of the program (~50%, compared to the Year 2 target of 65%).<sup>20</sup> A survey conducted in the Spring of 2019 asked program participants to describe the primary reason why their child did not ride on the bus on a particular day—the top reason provided was that their child had before or after school activities, or other schedule conflicts such as doctor's appointments, that prevented them from taking the bus. Another major reason for low ridership described by the Staff was the longer travel time taken by the bus compared to driving; parents often drove their children to school in order to allow them to get more sleep in the morning. Anecdotal evidence noted by the Town Staff also suggested that many parents used the bus as a “back-up option” for transportation, leading to naturally lower actual ridership compared

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<sup>18</sup> School Bus Pilot Initial Agenda Packet, p. 228.

<sup>19</sup> Town of Los Gatos, *COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT*, February 26, 2020, pp. 4-5, <https://mccmeetingspublic.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/losgatos-meet-21e67aee9f1b472a8c5b47e7a3077393/ITEM-Attachment-009-6aae0450042c4ce9bf8fbb89496337db.pdf>. “School Bus Pilot Termination” in subsequent footnotes.

<sup>20</sup> “School Bus Pilot Termination”, p. 2.

to the number of active subscriptions.<sup>21</sup> Ridership was considered one of the most important measures of the program's success, as the original goal of the program was to reduce school traffic congestion on road corridors near the schools. Ultimately, the Town Staff judged the program to be cost-ineffective for the Town as a way to reduce school traffic.

- In other words, the major reasons for the School Bus Pilot Program's ultimate failure were in its inconvenience for a majority of the ridership compared to driving and in its cost-inefficiency, which put a significant strain on the Town's budget. VBPAC's proposed VTA Bus Pass Pilot Programs, to be discussed in Section 2 of this report, address both of these problems directly, by providing a more versatile and geographically broader service for a lower cost to the Town of Los Gatos.

#### **Ride and Taste LG Program (2023):**

- The Town of Los Gatos facilitated the creation of the "Ride and Taste LG" program, which remains in operation. In response to the 2023 Senior Road Map, a community task force formed from a segment of the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission. The task force has continued to focus on orienting seniors toward VTA transportation options in and around town.
- The task force is currently in its second year of offering bimonthly "Ride & Taste LG" events involving Los Gatos' highest ridership bus line: the 27. VTA provides an orientation with Outreach Coordinator Menominee Boyd, who in turn provides each participant with a free bus token and bus schedule. Specified by VTA, the maximum allowable number of participants for each event is 10, translating to 60 people annually. The Los Gatos Recreation Department provides a venue and publicizes the event within its 55+ program. Before each orientation, volunteers assist seniors in completing a senior Clipper Card application.
- Next, the Community Coordinator provides a 20-minute orientation at the Senior Center, followed by further orientation at the bus stop. Then, participants ride together to a local restaurant, socialize, and enjoy a meal sponsored by the Los Gatos Thrives Foundation. The sponsored meals cost up to \$30 each. After the meal, any participant who's applied

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<sup>21</sup> "School Bus Pilot Termination", pp. 3-4.

for, or already has their own senior Clipper card is eligible to win a \$25 Clipper Card in a raffle, paid for by the Los Gatos Thrives Foundation. After the raffle, participants complete an evaluation form and are presented with the option to visit nearby stores before riding back to the Senior Center on the 27 bus line. The program is designed to be beneficial for all involved, as Los Gatos seniors learn how to navigate Los Gatos' local bus system, patronize local businesses, and meet others in the community.

## Section 2: Potential Pilot Programs for Los Gatos

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Contained in this report are potential pilot programs targeting two high-priority populations in Los Gatos: students and seniors.<sup>22</sup>

For students, this report presents an **LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program**. All students and staff are issued a card that enables them to utilize VTA's transportation network for free at the point of service. Students may use this pass as long as they are enrolled in the school.

For seniors, this report presents a **Senior VTA Pass Pilot Program**. The target population is residents 65 years or older. Seniors in Los Gatos would be able to enroll for a Flash/Paper Pass that would enable them to travel on buses for free. Unlike the student program, all eligible users are not concentrated in a single location at specific and predictable times. Therefore, the public promotion of this program will be necessary by the Town of Los Gatos and VTA.

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<sup>22</sup> There is an additional opportunity to expand this latter group to include those with disabilities and/or medicare in accordance with VTA's own categorization.

## Section 2.1: LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program

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### **Executive Summary:**

The LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program involves enrolling the entirety of LGHS' students and staff for VTA's SmartPass. SmartPass is an annual subscription model where all of the members of an institution are provided access to VTA's transportation network.<sup>23</sup> In this case, such a subscription model is cheaper than if each individual was charged with each pass. In other words, the Town would purchase VTA passes in bulk for students and staff of Los Gatos High School. The SmartPass would guarantee access to VTA buses and light rail, including routes and stops from outside of town.

Under its existing fare policy, the SmartPass program has historically served collegiate, corporate, and not-for-profit institutions. This does not include high schools. However, in VBPAC's conversations with VTA, the latter expressed a willingness to expand this program under a 6-month pilot to LGHS at the California Community College rate of \$20 per member annually. For comparison, the cost of a monthly pass for a single youth rider is \$35 per month, or \$385 annually.<sup>24</sup> The cost of a monthly pass for a single adult is \$90 per month (excluding Express Buses), or \$990 annually. This 6 month period, as defined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), is the time limit for this initial period. If the VTA Pass Pilot Program began on August 13th, 2026, this pilot would end on February 13, 2027. Afterwards, continuation of this VTA Pass Program would necessitate a fare policy change and Title VI Fare Equity Analysis within VTA.

From the most recent estimates, the current student population at LGHS is 1,907 students.<sup>25</sup> According to LGHS' staff directory page, there are currently 148 staff members employed at

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<sup>23</sup> Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. *SmartPass*. Accessed June 4, 2025.  
<https://www.vta.org/go/fares/smartpass>.

<sup>24</sup> The cost of 12 months at the monthly rate and the annual rate are different.

<sup>25</sup> Los Gatos High School. *School Profile 2024–2025*. Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District. Accessed June 4, 2025.  
[https://lgsuhsdorg.finaisite.com/uploaded/Los\\_Gatos\\_HS/LGHS\\_School\\_Profile\\_2024-2025.pdf](https://lgsuhsdorg.finaisite.com/uploaded/Los_Gatos_HS/LGHS_School_Profile_2024-2025.pdf).

LGHS.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the target population would include 2,054 students and staff. Assuming the California Community College rate of \$20.00 per member, the estimated cost of acquiring a VTA SmartPass for LGHS would equate to \$41,080 per year. Due to the 6-month limit under VTA's existing fare policy, the initial cost would be \$20,540 for 6 months. The ability to extend the duration of this program would be dependent on decisions from VTA.

### **Potential Advantages:**

- **Little to No Staff Costs:** There would be no effective need for the Town to directly administrate elements of the program aside from providing funds for the program. For reference, Los Gatos' 2019 School Bus Pilot Program had a projected annual cost of \$375,000 at its termination, approximately \$90,000 of those costs associated with staff.<sup>27</sup>
- **Ease of Implementation:** The target population of this program can be expected to appear at predictable times, facilitating the distribution of cards from a centralized location. For students, cards can be distributed during class (e.g. student registration or 1st period).
- **Cost Efficiency:** A VTA SmartPass program for LGHS is projected to cost \$41,080 per year. If every student were enrolled in VTA's monthly pass program instead, the collective annualized cost would be \$800,940, or \$133,490 over 6 months. If every staff member were enrolled, the annualized collective cost for staff would be \$159,840, or \$79,920 over 6 months. In other words, the Town of Los Gatos would pay \$41,080 annualized for over a million dollars' worth of coverage. This is a bargain.
- **Broad Services:** A VTA SmartPass guarantees access to VTA buses and light rail, including routes and stops from outside of town. This access to the broader transportation network would particularly benefit staff and students who live outside of the borders of Los Gatos. This would also benefit staff and students who have travel needs outside of Los Gatos, as their cards would be active outside of operational hours and the school year.

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<sup>26</sup> Los Gatos High School. *Staff Directory*. Accessed June 4, 2025.  
<https://www.lghs.net/about-us/staff-directory>.

<sup>27</sup> Town of Los Gatos, *COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT*, February 26, 2020, p. 5,  
<https://mccmeetingspublic.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/losgatos-meet-21e67aee9f1b472a8c5b47e7a3077393/ITEM-Attachment-009-6aae0450042c4ce9bf8fbb89496337db.pdf>.

- **Achieves the Aforementioned Benefits stated in Section 1.2**, including reduced congestion, removed/reduced commute times for parent-student drop offs, satisfaction of transportation needs of low-income residents and staff, and incentives for program participants to learn the Town and region’s transportation network. Lastly, this pilot program can help cultivate a base of public transit users in Los Gatos, which could warrant the expansion and improvement of the Town’s public transit services in the future.

### **Potential Risk:**

- **Low Utilization.** If utilization of public transportation services does not increase substantially at LGHS, the benefits of a SmartPass program may not justify its costs after the initial 6-month period. During its meetings with VTA, VBPAC expressed concerns of a potential risk: that the Town of Los Gatos may pay more for this subscription than for a Per-Ride Model, where the Town pays for single ride fares through this card. For example, if only 38 students (2% of the student population) rode VTA buses to and from school during this pilot program duration, the cost of their single ride bus fares would be \$10,118.64.<sup>28</sup> This Per-Ride Model would have a substantially lower cost than the \$20,540 SmartPass cost estimate. In other words, if use of public transportation does not increase sufficiently, Los Gatos may “overpay” for its rides if transit utilization is low during the pilot program duration.
  - **Alternative Potential Policy Option to Address this Potential Risk:**
    - While VTA does not have an existing product with a centralized payment mechanism that has the form of a Per-Ride Model instead of a SmartPass Model, VTA may be able to launch a fare pilot program that lasts a maximum of 6 months, as defined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Any post-pilot efforts by VTA would require a VTA fare policy change and Title VI Fare Equity Analysis. At the end of this 6-month period, VTA would bill the Town for any rides taken during the period. If

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<sup>28</sup> Hypothetical Cost = (1,902 students \* 0.02) \* (2 rides/day) \* (185 - 52 days). There are 185 total days between August 13th, 2026 and February 13th, 2027. 52 weekend days and 14 days when school is not in session during this period. As mentioned before, 2% is the approximate bus ridership rate among Los Gatos students.

the cost of this ridership is higher than the cost of the SmartPass program for 6 months (\$20,540), then Los Gatos would instead pay the cost of the SmartPass program.

- VTA advised VBPAC that the administrative efforts to review monthly ridership, cost-benefit analysis, card administration, and flexible billing/invoice during this 6-month pilot may be too cumbersome. This would require substantial staff time and resources from both the Town and VTA to review and transition between two pilot programs. As a result, VBPAC advises against the implementation of this alternative policy.

#### **Overall Evaluation:**

- VBPAC considers this one of the most economical and potentially impactful funding opportunities possible. Its potential benefits justify its costs. It is possible that Measure B could be a funding source.
- Originally, VBPAC desired for such a pilot to be sustained for at least 3 years to ensure there is sufficient time to evaluate the program's effects. However, the aforementioned requirements for a fare policy change and Title VI Fare Equity Analysis within VTA limits this initial pilot to a duration of 6 months. VBPAC believes that VTA is willing to meet these requirements before or during the pilot duration. Multiple VTA members have dedicated a substantial amount of time to meet and communicate with VBPAC, reviewing and providing feedback to its proposals. If the Town decides to pursue this pilot program, it should actively pursue and advocate that these requirements are met.
- Therefore, VBPAC requests that the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission recommend that the Town Council pursue the LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program from August 13, 2026 to February 13, 2027. Before and during this period, the Town should communicate with VTA to seek a change in the latter's fare policy and conduct a Title VI Fare Equity Analysis to extend this pilot program.

## Section 2.2.1: Senior VTA Pass Pilot Program - Paper/Flash Passes

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### **Executive Summary:**

To address the transportation needs of the Town's senior population, the Senior VTA Pass Pilot Program entails two alternative policy options.

The first policy would be to distribute Paper/Flash Passes to seniors in Los Gatos. The Paper/Flash Pass is a type of pass that is shown directly to the bus operator, who checks the pass visually before allowing the passenger to ride the bus. The Paper/Flash Pass is a monthly subscription model. At the start of a given period, VTA would provide a set number of Paper/Flash passes to the Town of Los Gatos. The Town would then distribute these passes to seniors in Los Gatos. The Town would be charged every month for each pass that was distributed. At the end of the month, any pass not distributed or used could be returned and, therefore, not be billed to the Town of Los Gatos.

Preliminary roles in the implementation and administration of this program would include:

- An organization, agency, or department in the Town of Los Gatos that would coordinate the distribution of VTA passes. This role would also include vetting applicants to ensure that they meet age qualifications. Potential candidate organizations for promotion and distribution include, but are not limited to, the Los Gatos Library, Los Gatos Thrives Foundation, and LGS Recreation.
- VTA: provides the cards to the above distributor(s) for distribution, bills for services rendered, and provides monthly metrics on the use of the pass to the Town of Los Gatos, including ridership and ride frequency.
- The Town of Los Gatos: covers ride or subscription costs.

Unlike the LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program, such Paper/Flash Passes are currently included under VTA's existing fare policy. In other words, from the perspective of VTA, the Senior VTA Pass Pilot Program would not be considered a pilot program. Therefore, there would *not* be a 6-month

limit that would necessitate a fare policy change and Title VI Fare Equity Analysis to maintain this pilot program longer than 6 months.

Another difference with LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program is that SmartPass cannot be utilized, since SmartPass can only cover all of the members of an organization—Los Gatos seniors are not collectively members of a single organization. In VBPAC’s conversations with VTA, the latter stated that these paper passes would cost \$30 per pass every month. This is the same as the price of a monthly pass for an individual senior.

Therefore, the cost estimate is reliant on the number of paper passes distributed. Of the 32,952 residents in Los Gatos, approximately 20.1% of them are seniors. Therefore, there are approximately 6,623 senior residents in town. Below is a table projected cost based on the number of Paper/Flash Passes distributed (e.g. the number of seniors with free access to VTA transit systems) and the potential annual cost.<sup>29</sup>

<b>Number of Paper/Flash Passes Distributed</b>	<b>Annual Cost</b>
100	\$36,000
120	\$43,200
200	\$72,000
300	\$108,000
400	\$144,000
500	\$180,000
1,000	\$360,000
6,623	\$2,384,280

As shown in the table above, the costs of covering the entire senior population would cost millions of dollars. This cost is almost certainly unmanageable for the Town unless funded through a grant.

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<sup>29</sup> The calculation of the annual cost = (Number of Paper/Flash Passes Distributed) \* (\$30 per pass per month) \* (12 months)

**Policy Selection:**

The Town could consider distributing the Paper/Flash passes more selectively. In fact, a selective distribution of passes is likely a logistical necessity—unlike the student program, the eligible users are not all concentrated in a single location at specific and predictable times, rendering the distribution of such passes more difficult.

A selective program may include the following elements:

1. A substantial proportion, if not a majority, of the recipients of the Paper/Flash Pass would ideally *not* be current users of public transportation. This would help ensure that this program increases ridership, instead of paying for individuals who already ride transit.
2. Since program recipients would not be current users of public transportation, they should receive some level of background information prior to receiving the pass to maximize the chance that they use it.

There is one program that meets these two elements: the Ride & Taste LG program, described in Section 1.3. This program currently raffles off a single \$25 Clipper Card to one of the ten of its participants once every two months. In practice, this bus education and promotion program relies on the other nine participants to obtain their own Clipper Cards on their own initiative after the event. The existing program pays for approximately \$300 of meals in the hopes that all 10 participants in each event would become bus riders. It is unclear whether seniors actually do acquire a Clipper Card after the event.

To improve the Ride & Taste LG program, VBPAC proposes two policy options for improving the Ride & Taste LG Program with the following changes:

- Instead of raffling off a single VTA card with \$25 on it, the Town would provide 10 Flash/Paper passes at the end of each event for 12 months.
- Rather than hosting this program on a bimonthly basis, Ride & Taste LG should be hosted monthly. VBPAC expects that this program would be more attractive if participants of Ride & Taste LG could expect a guarantee to access the entire public transit network for free after the event ends.

Assuming that 10 Flash/Paper Passes are provided each month via the Ride & Taste LG Program, the estimated cost for the first year of this pilot program would be a maximum of \$23,400.<sup>30</sup> Subsequent years of this pilot would cost \$43,200 annually, assuming the town stops adding new seniors in subsequent years.

### **Potential Advantages:**

- **Ease of Implementation:** Distribution of these Paper/Flash Passes would utilize an existing program in Los Gatos, Ride & Taste LG, where program recipients can be expected to appear at predictable times, facilitating the distribution of cards from a pre-planned location.
- **Broad Services:** Paper/Flash Passes guarantee access to VTA buses and light rail, including routes and stops from outside of town. This would benefit seniors who have travel needs in and outside of Los Gatos.
- **Pilot Program Duration at Town's Discretion:** Unlike the LGHS VTA Pass Pilot Program, the Town of Los Gatos may choose a duration for this pilot program for as long as it wishes.
- **Achieves the Aforementioned Benefits stated in Section 1.2,** including reduced congestion, satisfaction of transportation needs of low-income residents, and meeting the transportation needs of Los Gatos' senior population. Lastly, this pilot program can help cultivate a base of public transit users in Los Gatos, which could warrant the expansion and improvement of the Town's public transit services in the future.

### **Potential Risks:**

- **Difficulty in Quantifying Program Impact:** Flash/Paper passes are not tagged like a Clipper Card, since they are manually reviewed by the operator. As a result, quantifying the exact effect of this pilot program would be difficult. Surveying recipients of these cards or calculating estimates of impact on ride frequency through statistical/econometric analyses might be feasible. But impacts of this program can only be approximated.

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<sup>30</sup> If 10 Flash/Paper Passes were distributed each month for 12 months, each 10 pass "batch" would cost a different amount in the first year of the program. For example, the first 10 passes would be billed for 12 months, while the last 10 passes distributed would be billed for 1 month.

- **Scale of Effect.** The scale of this program is relatively small, impacting less than 2% of Los Gatos' senior population. Even if this program is successful at increasing utilization of public transportation services, its effects may not appear immediately obvious.
- **Low Utilization.** Each Paper/Flash Pass would cost \$30/month, or \$360 per year per pass. For this program to be cost-effective relative to existing single ride fares, pass recipients would need to consume, on average, at least \$360 of VTA services per year. For reference, the fare for a single bus ride for seniors is \$1 and the fare for light rail passes for 8 hours is \$2. Therefore, program recipients would need to take 360 bus rides (or 1 roundtrip every 2 days), ride light rail on approximately 180 days (assuming one light rail pass per day), or some combination of bus and light rail rides whose collective worth is \$360. If program recipients do not use these Paper/Flash Passes, the Town risks overpaying for this service.

**Overall Evaluation:**

VBPAAC's evaluation of the program is provided at the end of the next section.

## Section 2.2.2: Senior VTA Pass Pilot Program - Pre-Paid Clipper Cards

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### **Executive Summary:**

To address the potential risk of overpayment for the Paper/Flash Pass service described in Section 2.2.1, a second policy option for the Town could be instead to provide pre-paid Senior Clipper Cards to all Ride & Taste LG program attendees who either have a senior clipper card or have filled out an application for one. VBPAC imagines that \$100 for each prepaid Senior Clipper Card would be an appropriate amount for the Town to fund over time.

This policy alternative would effectively cost \$1,200 per month for the Town of Los Gatos if Ride & Taste LG is hosted monthly, instead of its currently bi-monthly schedule. Each year, 120 seniors would be able to receive these cards.

VBPAC considered \$100 as potentially excessive. However, in comparison to the Paper/Flash Pass model noted in the previous section, this is a substantially cheaper program. Additionally, \$100 Clipper Cards would be more marketable and attractive to recipients.

If other distribution methods through other organizations and programs are available, this number can be scaled up accordingly.

### **Potential Advantages:**

- **Almost No Way to Overpay:** The primary advantage of this policy option, especially as compared to the Paper/Flash Pass option detailed in Section 2.2.1, is that the funds in these cards would never expire. This option may prove to be even more cost-effective than the paper passes if the Town expects utilization of Paper/Flash Passes to be low. The risk of overpaying lies in the Clipper Card remaining unused.
- **Achieves the Aforementioned Benefits and Advantages stated in Sections 1.2 and 2.2.1, without as many risks as Section 2.2.1.** Additionally, this incentive may be sufficient to spur bus ridership on its own for the seniors involved, as \$100 of transportation services is substantial for individuals.

- **Financial Flexibility:** It should be noted that \$100 in funds for each clipper card is used only as an example—this amount is subject to discussion based on the Town’s budget, and may change from year to year with minimal disruption to those who already possess their prepaid passes.

**Potential Risks:**

- **Scale of Effect.** As in the first policy option detailed in Section 2.2.1, the scale of this program is relatively small, impacting less than 2% of Los Gatos’ senior population per year. Even if this program is successful at increasing utilization of public transportation services, its effects may not appear immediately obvious.

**Overall Evaluation:**

VBPAC requests that the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission recommend that the Town Council formally consider funding one of two programs. The first program entails distributing 120 Paper/Flash passes over the course of a year. The second policy option would provide all future Ride & Taste LG participants with a prepaid Senior Clipper Card, which would have an account value higher than the current \$25. VBPAC considers increasing the balance and the number of Senior Clipper Cards distributed to be the more practical of the two options presented.