



**MAYOR STEVEN SCHARF**  
sscharf@cupertino.org

CITY HALL  
10300 TORRE AVENUE • CUPERTINO, CA 95014-3255  
TELEPHONE: (408) 777-3191 • FAX: (408) 777-3366  
CUPERTINO.ORG



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To the members of the VTA Board of Directors and the VTA SR 85 Policy Advisory Board,

This letter is regarding the work of the State Route 85 Policy Advisory Board (“SR 85 PAB”) on behalf of the City Council of the City of Cupertino (“Council”) to support the Board’s progress while making recommendations on a preferred alternative.

The Council recently discussed the status of the SR 85 PAB and discussed the various alternatives presented by the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) staff at the April 2019 workshop held at Community Hall in Cupertino.

While the Council supports a high-capacity, high-speed transit project along this corridor, it is concerned with the direction of the initial proposed alternatives, including the assumption from the Travel Market Analysis suggesting a low projected ridership due to demographics and land use patterns of the west valley.

This corridor is congested mostly due to the lack of affordable housing near job centers, with growing employee commute times while employees continue to move further from job centers in search of adequate housing. Proposed State Laws such as SB-50 and SB330, if enacted, will exacerbate displacement of low-income workers further from Silicon Valley job centers to communities with lower housing costs. Demographics of the neighborhoods immediately surrounding SR 85 are less relevant, as a high-speed and frequent transit service will attract riders from a greater catchment area if it is time competitive with driving.

It is worth noting that two Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Communities of Concern are located in close proximity to this corridor, both near SR 85 and US 101 at its southern junction. Also worth considering is that Morgan Hill and Gilroy are the fastest growing cities in Santa Clara County with the most building permits issued according to MTC data.

Light rail already exists in the CA 85 median from CA 87 to Santa Teresa. When CA 85 was extended from Stevens Creek Boulevard to US101, space was reserved in the

median for light rail. While light rail may not be the most cost-effective solution for the remainder of this corridor, three of the proposed alternatives presented by VTA staff are for High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) toll lanes or carpool lanes and are not transit project alternatives. Converting the median of CA 85 into more vehicle lanes does not serve the long-term transit interests of Santa Clara County.

Specifically, the Council supports the following:

1. A physically separated transit guideway for high-capacity transit vehicles, with travel speeds comparable to rail, not for use by public vehicles, with the exception of corporate shuttles, which would pay a fee to use the guideway to subsidize a public transit service in the corridor. We would also like VTA to explore bringing corporations into the process early to provide partial funding for such a guideway in exchange for future fee offsets.
2. Sufficient bicycle capacity to address “the last mile.” Caltrain is a good example of the need to accommodate large numbers of bicycles because there is often no public transit alternative for commuters to travel from their home to the transit station or from the transit station to their destination. This is even more critical given continued cuts to VTA’s bus service coverage.
3. Fewer stations (3-5) to allow transit service time to be competitive with car travel during peak commutes, with minimal dwell time at stations. These stations will allow transfers to/from local ride share and other shuttle services, as well as to existing and planned bicycle infrastructure such as protected bicycle lanes and multi-use paths.

The Council opposes the following:

1. Freeway widening for Diamond or Express lanes: adding capacity for low-occupancy vehicles will not provide adequate capacity to address our traffic challenges and may lead to increased congestion in neighboring communities, particularly, for example, if the freeway is widened south of Cupertino but not to the north; and
2. No stations in the corridor, or too many stations (>5), for the reasons cited above.

Caltrain serves as a good local example of how a relatively fast, high-capacity transit service, with peak hour travel patterns can generate a high ridership and high farebox recovery despite passing through lower density communities, and despite constrained parking facilities.

A transit guideway service with complimentary scheduling to the Mountain View Caltrain station would make the system convenient for transit riders. A physically separated guideway could also serve as a testing ground for autonomous transit vehicles, which may be of interest to private entities in the region interested in testing this technology in a controlled environment. Autonomous vehicles could reduce operating costs of a public transit service significantly.

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We look forward to continuing to collaborate with VTA and the SR 85 PAB to help address congestion on this critical corridor that supports region's vibrant and growing economy, with an eye towards planning for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steven M. Scharf". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Steven Scharf  
Mayor

cc: John McAlister, City of Mountain View  
Susan Landry, City of Campbell  
Howard Miller, City of Saratoga  
Johnny Khamis, City of San Jose