SPUR
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San Jose City Council
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113

Submitted Electronically
September 19, 2017

Re: Item 6.1 BART Phase II Priorities and Preferred Alternatives (Sept. 19, 2017)

Dear Hon. Mayor Liccardo, Vice Mayor Carrasco and Councilmembers:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the BART preferred alternatives. Bringing BART to downtown San Jose has been decades in the making, and SPUR is thrilled to be engaged in the discussion about how to bring the transit promises into realty. The three decisions San Jose is considering will shape San Jose and the future of transit in the south bay for decades to come.

1. **West or East: SPUR supports the west option for the downtown station location.** The decision about where to locate BART will shape San Jose for the better part of a century. We believe that the west location will:

    - *Maximize the number of potential riders.* There are more potential riders within walking distance of the west option today, and there will continue to be more in the future with 58,000 new jobs and 14,000 housing units planned nearby.

    - *Support economic development.* The west option offers more support for job growth, as areas that are transit rich are more attractive to employers.

    - *Promote quick, direct and intuitive connections between modes.* The west option offers closer and more direct connections to buses and light rail than the east option.

For SPUR's detailed analysis of the downtown station location options, please see:

http://www.spur.org/publications/policy-letter/2017-03-09/spur-comments-bart-silicon-valley-phase-ii-eireis

http://www.spur.org/news/2017-01-26/where-put-downtown-san-jose-bart-station-go-west

In addition, we recommend that the City and VTA work together to select portal locations that are most consistent with San Jose's goals for accessibility and placemaking. We support Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers' Khamis, Davis, Diep and Peralez's recommendation to put a portal on W. Santa Clara Street at Third Street. Portals should be highly visible from main streets and directed to help orient people to nodes of activity.

- For the downtown west option with single bore construction:
    - Make the portal on Santa Clara near Lightston Alley/ in the VTA Block be west-facing, rather than north-facing.
    - We suggest removing the south-facing portal on the VTA Block.
    - We suggest working closely with a developer to integrate the VTA Block portals into a new development project.
- For the downtown west option with twin bore construction:
    - Relocate the Fountain Alley Portal to the corner of Santa Clara Street and 2nd Street.

2. **North or South:** SPUR recognizes that there are benefits and costs of both the north and south alignments for BART at Diridon station. We encourage the City and VTA to take into account the following best practices in station design and station area development.

    - *The station location should promote quick, direct and intuitive connections between modes.* The placement and physical design of high-speed rail, light rail, bus and bicycle facilities aren't set in stone. Therefore we don't know which will offer the best connections between modes.

    - *The station should contribute to an integrated, walkable public realm.* If BART is to shift to the north, it is critical to rethink W. Santa Clara Street's current configuration as an auto-oriented arterial. It must become a safe place to walk and bike at all times of day and night.

Therefore, we encourage the City and its partners to create an integrated vision for the overall spatial configuration and accessibility of Diridon Station and the broader station area (about 1 mile). The process should engage key existing stakeholders in evaluating the ease of connections between modes as well as a circulation plan that considers multiple approaches to the station. This is a process that should not be constrained by current conditions. Instead, the best location should maximize transit functionality and facilitate accessibility for pedestrians, bicycles, buses, shuttles and transportation network companies to and through the station.

3. **Single or Double:** SPUR recognizes that there are benefits and costs to each of the tunneling methods, but the best long-term benefits to transit operations and transit riders must be made.

    - *What are the financial risks?* All large tunnel boring carries some risk, leading to unanticipated delays and cost overruns. A particular risk with double-bore tunnel projects is that they can run into unforeseen utilities and ground conditions, driving up capital costs. A single-bore option allows the tunnel to bypass most of the utility infrastructure, potentially saving money and time. VTA estimates that a double-bore tunnel could cost $70 million more in capital costs than a single-bore tunnel.

    On the other hand, operating costs shouldn't be overlooked. VTA estimates that a single-bore tunnel could cost 2.8 percent more over 30 years compared to the double-bore tunnel. Although the single-bore costs less in capital costs, that money most likely can't be repurposed for operating costs due to restrictions on uses of funds. VTA is responsible for all of the costs of operating BART in Santa Clara County, and VTA's budget is already very strained. The additional money will need to come from somewhere.

    - *Which option will create a safe and comfortable experience for riders?* The single-bore station doesn't perform quite as well as the double-bore in terms of promoting intermodal connections and passenger experience. A single-bore tunnel requires a narrower platform that can only be used by people traveling in one direction, like this one in Barcelona. The single-bore's narrow platforms could feel crowded if there are a lot of riders (which we hope will be the case) or if there is a delay.

    - *Which option will promote quick, direct and intuitive connections between different modes of transportation?* The single-bore tunnel is deeper than the traditional double-bore tunnel, meaning that platforms are farther below the surface. This can be a disadvantage when it comes to station design and passenger experience. Therefore, greater care in designing the station (i.e., lighting, signage) and connections will be required.

    - *What are the local impacts?* One of the main reasons why VTA is considering a single-bore method is because it could have fewer surface disruptions. Many people in favor of the single-bore method remember the painful construction of light rail in downtown, as well as more recent disruptions caused by bus rapid transit construction, and are understandably eager to avoid negative impacts to local businesses once again.

However, BART is not the only project that will be under construction in downtown. Along with BART, Caltrain electrification, high-speed rail and potentially even a new Google campus at Diridon Station may be under construction. With so many projects going on at once, the single-bore tunnel's smaller surface impacts may not make a noticeable difference on a day-to-day basis to downtown business owners, workers and residents. Cars will be re-routed, trucks will be carrying debris off-site, and it will be noisy—regardless of which tunneling method is chosen.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important decision. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns at 408-638-0091.

Teresa Alvarado
San Jose Director

cc: Nuria Fernandez, Mayor Jeannie Bruins