



Memorandum

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Mayor Sam Liccardo

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: February 4, 2019

Approved

Date

02/04/2019

SUBJECT: BUILDING A SAN JOSÉ CENTRAL STATION FOR THE FUTURE

RECOMMENDATION

As part of a future study session on rail planning in San José, or a separate update to Council:

1. Present for discussion various technology and alignment options for connecting the San José International Airport to Diridon Station. The same discussion may or may not include other potential corridors to Diridon Station, depending on staff's readiness;
2. Assess the extent to which VTA can use 2000 Measure A funds, or other fund sources, to fund study, conceptual design, or preliminary design of transit connectors to the Airport, along San Carlos-Stevens Creek, or Monterey Road.

BACKGROUND

The integration of multiple transit lines in our central station presents us with a complex and critically important set of tasks. Nobody wants to make this more complex or difficult, but if we're planning the region's Grand Central Station for the next century, we shouldn't do so wearing blinders to the future.

Several other transit connections are worth exploration, and we need to build a station with "room" to grow for additional portals to our region. As Bay Area regional leaders contemplate a regional transportation measure in the next four to six years, it would serve us well to get far along in a study and conceptual design, to ensure we'll be ready for a larger funding push in the near future. I do not desire to distract us from the very important work we have before us, but I want to ensure that we're not ignoring the importance of continuing to think big.

A. The Long-Sought Airport Connector

For two consecutive years, the Mineta San José International Airport has been the fastest growing airport in the United States. City and regional leaders have long sought a means of connecting the Airport to the rest of our emerging transit system, and such a proposal comprised a key part of the 2000 Measure A, a countywide sales tax approved by more than 70 percent of the voters. In 2000, I left my job as an attorney to work on the measure as a communications coordinator on Measure A, and I recall polling showing that its "people mover rail line

connecting the airport passenger terminals directly with BART, Caltrain, and the VTA Light Rail line” rose near the top of voter surveys about the various Measure A component projects. An Airport connector to Diridon could serve another important priority as well: identifying opportunities for parking to serve the Arena and the rest of the emerging “Grand Central Station.” Parking has become a bone of contention with our longstanding Arena partners, the San José Sharks, and we need to find long-term solutions that do not require tens of millions of wasteful expenditures on parking infrastructure that will likely become obsolete within a decade. The Airport has a large supply of parking, the demand for which will decline with the continued emergence of ride sharing and autonomy. Over time, the Airport could become a “car port” for those needing to hop on a High-Speed Rail train or attend a concert, with a rapid, futuristic ride to the Arena’s front door.

Since the passage of Measure A in 2000, the City, VTA, and various partners have analyzed multiple options for a transit connection to the airport, ranging from standard rail to futuristic personal rapid transit (PRT) concepts. Although plans from the ballot measure generally contemplated connections to the Santa Clara BART or to North First Street Light Rail stations, the cost for standard rail seemed excessive—some \$800 million, according to an estimate a half-decade ago—and PRT appeared ill-suited to a corridor with relatively light projected ridership.

In the last eighteen months, I began—and DOT has continued—communications with senior officials at the Boring Company, Elon Musk’s tunnel-construction firm, about the possibility of boring a 2-mile tunnel between the Airport and the Diridon Station area. From those conversations, the possibility of a private-public partnership has emerged that could dramatically reduce the cost of tunnel construction, with some modification of transitional transit models. The Boring Company, as many know, is currently testing the use of individual automotive vehicles (modified Teslas, of course) along a flat surface in a tunnel in Southern California.

We could explore, through a public Request for Information (RFI), the viability of a public-private partnership with Boring or other private competitors for such a connection, by tunnel or viaduct. Such an RFI should explicitly mention the need to abide by longstanding City policies, such as prevailing wage. Because non-rail transit allows for greater flexibility of design and construction, we might explore options that would not penetrate the already-complex maze of transit alignments through Diridon, such as a portal at Arena Green, with a subsequent connection into the core of the central station.

As part of a future study session on the Diridon Integrated Station Concept Plan, or through a separate update to Council, City and VTA staff should return with potential options for connecting the Airport to Diridon Station. We should also flesh out the extent to which such a connection to Diridon would be eligible for 2000 Measure A funding (with a legal analysis of whether the ballot measure is restricted to as to the precise location of the line), and the extent to which Airport user fees might fund some portion of the extension.

B. The West San Carlos-Stevens Creek Corridor

An even more complex—but equally vital—undertaking would connect Cupertino, Santa Clara, and San José along the San Carlos-Stevens Creek corridor. This corridor could link major health,

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education, employment, retail, and housing destinations in our region, including De Anza College, Main Street Cupertino, Vallco, Valley Fair and Santana Row, the Apple headquarters, and three San José Urban Villages, and with a short detour, Valley Medical Center.

Measure A in 2000 also committed funding to the study, design, and construction of light rail options throughout the region, including corridors along Capitol Expressway, El Camino Real, Vasona, and Stevens Creek. Again, it would be helpful to know whether there is any flexibility in the programmatic allocation of that funding to study and perform preliminary design of different transit modes along the same corridor.

C. Future Portals: to Monterey Road and Beyond

While there is no regional plan or funding source for a transit line along our Monterey Road corridor, a very preliminary conceptual study of a bus-rapid-transit line has been contemplated. A committee headed by Councilmembers Jimenez and Esparza will be exploring some conceptual options as part of a series of other critical issues facing residents and businesses along that corridor. VTA has also begun a countywide High-Capacity Transit Study to identify the places where demand for this service exists and what kinds of transit technologies would be most appropriate to serve them. DOT and VTA staff may identify other critical corridors for study or preliminary analysis, particularly as we contemplate a potential regional funding source for new transit development.

Recognizing that funding and planning is many years off, we should acknowledge, through explicit Station design, the desire for scalability to enable new portals to the transit center as concepts evolve and funding emerges. I particularly appreciate VTA's role in setting a comprehensive vision and action plan for our region and ask that VTA leadership and staff continue to work with the City to rapidly advance work on regional transit, particularly these critical connections. I thank the City, VTA, and other partner agency staff for their willingness to consider these options amid all that they're juggling today, and I look forward to undertaking this exciting exploration with our Council and our community.