

Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund

P.O. Box 151439 San Rafael, CA 94915 415-460-5260

October 28, 2007
By E-Mail and U.S. Mail

Tom Fitzwater, Environmental Resources Planning Manager
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
Environmental Programs and Resources Management
3331 North First Street, Building B-2
San Jose, CA 95134-1927

Re: Silicon Valley Rapid Transit Project REIS

Dear Mr. Fitzwater:

The Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund (TRANSDEF) is an advocate for comprehensive regional transportation, air quality and land use planning to preserve the environmental amenities and quality of life for the Bay Area. As such, we take special interest in the proposed Silicon Valley Rapid Transit Corridor, due to the extraordinary levels of financial support the region is being asked to provide. We are concerned that VTA's current plans will devastate the region's ability to fund the extensive regional transit network that will be needed to meet the challenge of global climate change while preserving mobility. In that light, we offer the following comments on scoping the Revised EIS (REIS):

Environmental Justice

As such, we first take note of FHWA's NEPA procedures, which require full project funding before an FEIS can be approved and a Record of Decision be issued. Your agency has implemented fare increases and service cuts on its bus system at the same time that massive amounts of funding are being spent on preliminary engineering for this rail project. We remind you of the Title VI implications of this course of action, given the significant disparities in the ethnic and income composition of current bus ridership as compared to the future beneficiaries of a Rapid Transit project.

We further remind you that the agreement between VTA and BART for a \$48 million annual payment is predicated on a lien on TDA funds, which are essential to providing service to the same communities that are being hurt by fare increases. In short, the financing plan for this project depends on violating the civil rights of current and future bus passengers. The EIS/R should thus fully discuss the funding plan for this project, and evaluate the socio-economic impacts of the service cuts that would result from the seizure of the funds pledged by the TDA lien. Document the benefits as compared to the burdens imposed by the proposed project on communities of color and low-income communities.

Alternatives

The MTC 2001 RTP FEIR data indicated that a BART extension to San Jose, *et al* would produce little in the way of benefits to the region. "All differences in vehicle trips at the corridor level comparing Project B [i.e., no BART-SJ] to Project alternative [i.e., includes BART-SJ] are negligible (<0.3% in all corridors)." (Table 2.1-9, p. 2-12) No differences were found in regional travel times between an RTP with the BART-SJ project and one without it. (Table 2.1-7, p. 2-10).

Given the dismal results when the project is modelled by agencies that are not its direct sponsors, the REIS must inquire as to whether alternative projects exist that would better serve the Project's Purpose and Need, especially if that can be accomplished at a substantially lower cost. Our organization created a Regional Transportation Plan Alternative for MTC's 2005 RTP called the TRANSDEF Smart Growth Alternative. Instead of connecting San Jose to Fremont with a BART extension, the Alternative proposed a High Speed Rail (HSR) link, entering the Bay Area over the Altamont Pass. Its salient features:

- It would use the same EMU conventional rail technology as Caltrain is planning.
- It would offer express service as well as local service.
- Trains would be faster than BART but lower in purchase price.
- It would provide a cross-platform transfer to BART at Fremont.
- Regional service from the Tri-Valley and the Central Valley would connect directly to Silicon Valley without transfers.
- The project would be exceptionally cost-effective, because the same infrastructure would provide a BART-like frequency of service to Fremont while accommodating ACE service and eventual HSR service to Sacramento and Southern California.
- Its route would provide a station at Mineta International Airport and in North San Jose, the San Jose neighborhood with the highest concentration of jobs as well as much planned high job growth.
- It could receive substantial funding as part of a State HSR project, in the same way that Caltrain is expecting a major future upgrade by the HSR project. This would enable the project to be constructed in phases, with a lower-cost initial operation making the project more fiscally feasible (consider using at-grade crossings, clean-diesel locomotives and bi-level cars for start-up), followed by a major infrastructure upgrade when the State HSR project is funded.
- Evaluate the cumulative impacts of investing the capital and operating funds that are freed up when an alternative with a lower-cost initial operation is selected. Assume the funds are spent on implementing the full list of VTA capital projects. If additional funds are left over, implement Santa Clara County projects from the TRANSDEF Smart Growth Alternative from MTC's 2005 RTP.
- Evaluate how well each alternative serves the comprehensive transit needs of Santa Clara County, as defined by the Purpose and Need Statement.

We suggest using the rail alignments recommended by Architecture 21, on its website <http://www.arch21.org/BARegRail.dir/BayRailDetailMaps.dir/mapindex.html>. For modelling convenience, MTC should be able to provide network coding files for the TRANSDEF Smart Growth Alternative.

Demographic Assumptions

Previous BART extension ridership projections have been tainted by unsupported growth assumptions. Thoroughly document the assumptions to be used in modelling the ridership by:

- Identify the *Projections* series serving as the basis for the assumptions.
- Provide a detailed description of the methodology used to convert *Projections* census tract information into TAZ assumptions.
- Provide the Santa Clara County population and job numbers from *Projections*, along with the resulting TAZ numbers.
- Provide a certification that the population and jobs assumptions by TAZ are consistent with MTC practice.
- Provide a table of population and job assumptions by TAZ, containing the base year and the horizon year. Provide a column in which is calculated the percentage growth between the base year and the horizon year for that TAZ.
- Calculate the density of population and jobs for each TAZ for the base year and the horizon year.
- For comparison purposes, provide the density of population and jobs for each TAZ within a half mile of the San Francisco BART stations, for the same years.
- Provide the assumption for how much parking is available in each TAZ in the base year and horizon year.
- For accountability purposes, provide the name of the supervisor responsible for approving the assumptions used in the modelling.

Ridership modelling

- Identify the travel markets this project potentially could serve, along with their relative sizes. Prioritize them by size. Examine the modelling results developed by the High Speed Rail DPEIR/S and Regional Rail Plan.
- Evaluate how well the alternatives fit those travel markets.
- Demonstrate that the projected station boardings are quantitatively reasonable by comparing them to current levels of San Francisco BART boardings.
- Document that the frequency of service that is modelled is consistent with operating cost projections.
- Document that the frequency of service that is modelled is consistent with existing BART service planning.

- Model each alternatives at an equivalent frequency of service.
- Provide the stations boardings at SJC and North San Jose on the Architecture 21 route. Compare the densities of population and jobs for those stations with the TAZs within 1/2 mile of the stations on the Proposed Project route.

Without an analysis of land use alternatives, there can be no adequate justification of the proposed project. The environmental document must determine the environmentally superior transit project in conjunction with its associated station area land use sub-alternative. If the project is approved with a set of specific land use assumptions, the project may not go forward until the zoning of station areas is consistent with those assumptions. A Bait and Switch strategy of projecting high ridership on the assumption of dense station areas, without a followup of requisite General Plan and zoning amendments, will not be tolerated. The environmental clearance for the project must include the associated land use assumptions.

Please be aware that, despite our concerns about current VTA plans, we strongly support a rail connection from BART to the South Bay. The distinction is that we recognize that the BART technology and its 'park and ride' planning paradigm are obsolete and unacceptably expensive. TRANSDEF firmly believes that if the Bay Area had had a regional transportation planning agency worthy of the name, a commuter rail extension from would have been built early in the previous decade, in operation in time for the great boom of the 90's, to the great benefit of thousands of commuters. Unfortunately, unwise investment allocation decisions were made by elected officials. TRANSDEF seeks to not repeat that dismal episode. We appreciate the opportunity to be involved in such a vitally important review process.

Sincerely,

/s/ DAVID SCHONBRUNN

David Schonbrunn,
President