

Comments on draft Plan Bay Area 2050

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External Email

Hello and thank you for putting together this draft plan. I did read the entire thing. Here are my comments, with apologies for the length and for any repetition or other lack of organization.

EC1.

Regarding the Universal Basic Income, I am fortunate to be among the high-income households for whom this added amount would make not a bit of difference. To those struggling, it would make a world of difference. Could it instead be focused on those individuals or households making under a certain amount, with a phase-out so there would be no disincentive to exceed whatever income threshold? The benefit itself could potentially be larger, and it could make a bigger impact to those who need it most. Failing that, could high-income individuals or households opt out, with the funds directed back into the program or to other good causes?

I see upon reading the corresponding chapter in the larger document that the plan calls for taxing affluent households to cancel out the benefit. At least that sort of approach will mean that the UBI is immediately available to people who might lose their employment. Still, if resources are limited at first, it would seem to make sense to favor low-income households.

Please take care when implementing a UBI that it would not invalidate or reduce other benefits or assistance to those who rely on them. Many programs are conditional on being below some specified income and/or assets to qualify.

EC3. The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that the digital divide is alive and well. Well-off neighborhoods may have better options than underserved ones, but coverage is still inconsistent, choices are limited, and plans may be expensive. I'm all in favor of focusing on the greatest needs. I hope we can address region- and state-wide internet access across the board, in the process.

There is one long-standing project to bring high-speed fiber internet to California's libraries:
<https://library.ca.gov/services/to-libraries/broadband>

One option that I hope will be considered is more widespread free public wi-fi, including at transit stations. Whether people use it to find buses and trains or simply to pass the time while waiting for the next train to arrive, I think it would serve the public well. Not everyone has ample data on their phones.

EC5-EC6.

If we succeed in creating more jobs in the East Bay and elsewhere, we may have more people traveling in what has been the counter-commute direction. If so, transit will need to adapt. My husband lives with me in Santa Clara and cannot currently take Caltrain to work near the Blossom Hill Caltrain

station, because it does not run in that direction at that hour. Similarly, ACE only runs west in the morning and east in the afternoon, and would not serve us if one of us were working in Livermore. Our residence is determined by a range of factors, chiefly that we already live here and own the house here, but also that we both work in different locations, which move from time to time as job opportunities are available. My husband and I have commuted to Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz, respectively, for previous jobs.

I'm glad the plan identifies Priority Production Areas. Given that jobs may be concentrated in such areas, I hope the transportation element of the plan will be coordinated to include good transportation options to get to these areas, and to areas in general where jobs are concentrated. My engineer colleagues and I sometimes make midday trips to visit contract manufacturers and suppliers, and currently these trips are not well-served by transit, largely due to the time and distance that would be involved. (North Santa Clara to either South San Jose or Fremont, and back, in my case.)

T1, T10. I recognize that transit and especially farebox revenue has been hard-hit in the past year, and that this is a baseline. However, 2019 levels in the South Bay represented decades of reductions and a system that was already struggling and lacking for coverage, with minimum or nonexistent night and weekend service on many routes. Transit routinely takes me up to twice as long as bicycling somewhere, even for trips that are 10 miles, usually due to low frequency, and lack of coordination at connections. The long range goal must be to improve upon 2019 levels. While I recognize the value of focusing on popular routes and commute hours first, a healthy, equitable, and usable system must include off-peak hours and "coverage" service, as well. When transit is this slow, people only ride if they're exceptionally determined or have no other choice.

T3-T4. I am so glad to see this. Currently, to get from my home to SFO involves VTA-->Caltrain-->BART. Even though the transfers occur at hubs, schedules are unrelated. Even with Clipper, there are three different processes to pay three separate fares. Now, imagine trying to do any such trip if you just got off the plane from Japan and have limited English. Local and regional transit interoperate well everywhere else I have been. I hope you have seen and been inspired by the Seamless Bay Area work to date; if not, please do review it. (On the same subject, can a visitor buy a Clipper Card in the airport or at the airport transit station? For all major regional airports? Is this process user-friendly enough that someone with limited English can easily tell what they need to do?)

One thing that really should be integrated with transit fares and the Clipper card or the app that takes its place, is access to the electronic bike lockers already being installed in many public facilities. It's important that electronic lockers interoperate with one another, too. (I see that this is already the case with the lockers at Santa Clara Caltrain. Please make this the rule, not the exception.) Good bike parking also needs to be available at destinations (offices, apartments, schools, libraries, shopping) to make bicycling an effective last-mile option for many people, and interoperability will help to make it that way.

T7. Traffic signal upgrades could do much more for pedestrians and bicycles. Detection of bicycles, plus adaptive signal timing and (provided early trials prove successful) touchless pedestrian activation. Santa Clara County Roads is propagating adaptive pedestrian and bicycle signal timing, and is piloting touchless pedestrian sensors. (Bicycle-adaptive signal timing adds a few extra seconds to the current or upcoming green light upon detection of a bicycle. It makes crossing wider roads much more comfortable.)

Just as agencies are encouraged to incorporate complete streets elements in conjunction with pavement maintenance, please encourage agencies to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle signal improvements in conjunction with traffic signal upgrades and timing projects, including, as appropriate, adding an evaluation criterion for funding and prioritization.

T6., T8. Freeway, expressway, and major arterial interchanges are often extremely hostile to those not in a car. Please prioritize bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements when upgrading interchanges.

T8. Please help multi-use trails be built with best practices. Separate pedestrians from faster moving uses wherever possible. San Jose Trails include a 2-foot gravel shoulder on either side where the width is available. It gives joggers a soft surface, helps keep the paved trail edges from decaying, and provides additional separation between bikes and pedestrians.

Other important points about trails: provide high quality way-finding. Keep them maintained. Have frequent access points. Provide lighting at nighttime and consider personal safety. Think through connections to on-street facilities. For creek trails and the like, consider what alternatives will be used when facilities are closed for darkness, maintenance, flooding, or events.

Caltrans has a standard for bollards and chicanes on multi-use trails. Done wrong, they end up creating a bottleneck, blocking access to cargo bikes and wheelchairs, and even creating a hazard.

T9. I'm in favor of lower speed limits, but signage and enforcement alone will not slow drivers down on a straight, wide, four- or six-lane road. Road design, including traffic calming and diversion where appropriate, must be consistent if it is to result in the intended speeds.

Vision Zero should also focus on high-incident regions, and should include an effort not only to reduce incidents but also to make those mistakes that do occur, less damaging. Street designs should anticipate user error in ways that lessen the harm.

That said, I look forward to unifying the patchwork that is city-level Vision Zero policies and safety planning currently.

T11. I hope we will reconsider or at least defer BART from San Jose to Santa Clara. It will be an enormous expense for a redundant segment, and the money could be better spent on T1 and T10.

T12. Could "express lanes" include dedicated bus lanes on high-frequency routes? Will we start to phase out the HOV stickers for electric cars?

(I am less familiar with good housing policies, but I suggest that the small business assistance should include measures to reduce displacement when shopping centers are renovated or redeveloped. Also that affordable housing and new housing in general, especially multi-family, should be built with diverse family units in mind, and with an eye toward maximizing disability access. A single portal for affordable housing would be a good step, too. Currently, public assistance of all kinds suffer from a disjointed and inefficient, under-resourced process.)

EN2-3. What is standing between me and an environmental home upgrade is not money. Rather, it is making informed choices and prioritizing and coordinating the work around personal activities and other planned maintenance and renovation. Eventually, I would like solar, but I hope to add it in

conjunction with removing a disused wood fireplace and replacing a 30-year-old roof. To electrify my gas appliances will require upgrading the electrical circuits that power them.

Many people still equate "electric stove" with the old, slow type they've experienced. The organization Acterra has an initiative to lend portable induction burners to those who would like to try them out. Perhaps extend such a program to libraries throughout the region.

Adding home solar in California costs three to five times what it costs in Australia. Given that the reasons appear to be largely regulatory, might it make sense to review the regulations?

<https://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2018/01/home-solar-energy-cost-much-united-states.html>

Adding residential solar and other local generation and network capacity could reduce reliance on grid power that gets shut off during public safety power shutdowns. If reliable power could be part of the program's motivation, it might be much more attractive to local voters and officials.

In conjunction with EC2, one way to further these objectives would be to train more qualified contractors to be able to assess, design, and install such upgrades, and to create a directory of qualified installers. Programs such as the existing utility rebates for things like upgrading to an energy-efficient appliance could likewise provide incentive and impetus to get going on efficiency improvements and electrification. Similarly, access to power during outages and reduced insurance premiums might motivate more people to upgrade and improve.

EN7. Current status: my employer offers pre-tax transit fares, through a third party administrator called WageWorks, which has one of the least user-friendly websites I have encountered. I wonder how many colleagues know it exists. (It's not on our main portal, and I've spoken to longtime colleagues who hadn't heard about it.) Benefits must be ordered by the tenth of the previous month to be effective a month later. An order submitted on February 11 would not result in fare being available until sometime after April 20, even though it's delivered purely electronically after the card is issued. The benefits may offset the cost of paid parking (really?) but do not include any sort of bicycle stipend. Might more people bike if they could be earning their next bike (or light/lock/helmet/gloves/tires/raincoat) in the process? The right voucher or reimbursement program would also serve to support local bike shops.

Because commute benefits go through employers and only larger employers are required to provide them, I suspect they may never reach some of the workers who could most benefit from defraying the costs of a transit or bicycle commute. Many franchise restaurants, for example, count as small employers because they stay below a certain number of employees for that location, even if the parent corporation is enormous. Similarly, are contract food service and janitorial staff eligible? While I applaud the effort to support small business, some employees of small businesses may be among those who most need programs to make transit more attractive and affordable.

EN8. Please include electric bicycles in "electric vehicles," as a matter of course, whether talking about purchase incentives, test and demonstration events, or charging stations. They are a game-changer. Electric cars do not fix congestion or sprawl effects and they are no more safe for people outside of cars. E-bikes move people far and fast, carry cargo and passengers, and cover greater distances. They can take the place of cars in many more cases.

EN9. It's not enough to hand out transit passes. Please follow up and make sure TDM efforts are being implemented and that they are working as intended. If transit passes are intended for residents in new housing or employees of businesses, there needs to be a process in place to see that they are, in fact, issued in a timely manner, including to new residents/employees down the road. I don't know if there also need to be provisions for following up with subsequent landlords or tenants. Besides ensuring that they are implemented, is there any way to assess later on what has and has not proven effective?

Map 1.1 Is there a version where the reader could zoom in, or a place to see detailed maps of local areas, and could you provide a link to it?

Chapter 2: The advantage of defining income ranges as a percentage of AMI is that it varies by region and with inflation, as it should. The downside is that most people reading this will not recognize that a single person earning \$82,000 in Santa Clara County right now is low income. That, in turn, means that some people oppose housing because they suppose that "low income" always means "lazy, unsuccessful, they deserve it." The job examples help. A link to an outside resource with numbers might help even more. You can't change everybody's mind, but you can state things clearly.

I don't see anything in this section about mobile home parks, one previously affordable option for some. While residents own their dwellings, they must rent the lot, and some owners raise prices or seek to redevelop or sell the land out from under tenants. That leaves residents uniquely vulnerable to owner/investor whims, as they may have both physical and financial difficulty moving. This, in turn, leads to relatively low resale values and low or inconsistent equity. Whether or not there is any intention to set policy about it here, a mention like the one about razing and replacing older apartments might be in order.

Chapter 3

Another way to put jobs, homes, and transit near one another is to bring homes and transit closer to jobs.

Remember that jobs and homes are not the only destinations. People need to visit doctors, schools, parks, libraries, day care, shopping, and leisure, among other things.

Manufacturing, tech, and tech-adjacent jobs are not the only good jobs we need to train. It's likely we'll need more people skilled in taking care of children and seniors. VTA is in the process of training another 100 bus operators and our local school district was urgently recruiting bus drivers a couple years ago.

Santa Clara, even pre-pandemic, has seen storefronts sit empty because no prospective small-business owner thought they could consistently find enough workers to staff another shop or restaurant.

Workers, customers, and cities need a full range of jobs and a full range of workers to thrive.

Chapter 4

p. 56, item 2. I am in favor of slower, safer streets. Please encourage local agencies to accomplish this goal through traffic calming features (circular intersections, chicanes, narrower lanes, etc.) rather than only through signage and enforcement. The latter approach is ineffective.

Autonomous vehicles need to consider the safety of people outside of cars. It still takes time for an autonomous car to stop, even without the delay of human inattention, and the faster it's going, the

longer it takes. Autonomous vehicles have also proven less than capable of successfully recognizing unusual things (a person on a recumbent bicycle, a person in a power wheelchair, a little kid moving unpredictably) and responding to them in a way that's both safe for everyone and in a way that is expected and able to be interpreted by human drivers on the road.

With respect to autonomous vehicles, will they create additional car-miles and even traffic congestion by circling the block rather than seeking parking, or by encouraging more people to take on longer car commutes when they don't have to attend to driving?

For freeway capacity improvements, including interchange improvements, I recognize that some older facilities may require improvements for safety. I strongly encourage reviewing them through the lens of climate and induced demand. If we increase freeway capacity, that will simply encourage that many more people to drive. Toll lanes and the like could help to tip the economics back in favor of transit, but only if the transit can be made reliable and time-efficient enough that it is competitive with driving with respect to more than just cost. Congestion relief must include priority for transit, so that buses don't simply sit in the same congestion.

p. 58 The Transit app is already almost the app you describe, but it has its shortcomings. It seems to assume users have gotten on the bus and uses that to decide where buses are, and it's not always the first thing to know about service or schedule changes. If the transit vehicle itself could be equipped with GPS, so a rider could tell whether the bus were minutes away or had already left, that would be an improvement. If the app could send anonymous or aggregate data about what transfers people were trying to make, and that could inform scheduling or tell drivers to hold connecting buses until trains arrived, that would be a huge improvement. GPS in transit vehicles could also be used to coordinate transit signal priority.

p. 61. I'm in favor of per-mile tolling and congestion taxes. Electric cars are still cars, as far as congestion, pedestrian safety, and microplastic pollution from tire dust are concerned. While HOV stickers have helped in speeding the adoption of electric and hybrid cars, I hope there will be some plan to phase them out.

p. 62. I love the participatory budgeting exercise, and I'm glad you're inviting low-income groups. I hope you'll also do outreach specifically to people who are disabled, and I encourage you whenever possible to talk directly to the disabled community rather than their caretakers. Whether it's a budgeting exercise like this, a facilitated brainstorming session, partnerships with organizations active in the region, or an ongoing committee, it's very important to get input directly from the people who depend on accommodations, to ensure that the accommodations are well thought out. I also see relatively little attention to people with disabilities in the plan. Given that lack of access to transportation shuts people out of earning money and living independently, and that many people with disabilities rely on public transportation, I would say this is a major oversight. Making transportation and other facilities so that it serves disabled people also serves the growing population of seniors, parents of young children, and others.

p. 63-66 As a frequent bicyclist, I'm delighted to see this part of the plan. It will require funding and other incentives. City governments including mine are reluctant to invest in bicycle infrastructure, especially when it comes to redirecting money or street space from cars. In conjunction with the active transportation plan, I hope there will be both language and funding requirements that prioritize bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements and discourage reluctance and delays.

Simply having more people bicycling and walking can make bicycling and walking safer, because it's not such an unexpected event to encounter somebody outside a car. Bicycle facilities can go hand-in-hand with traffic calming facilities and green streets features such as trees and rainwater collection, which also help with reducing the heat island effect in cities.

Protected and separated bike lanes need to come with plans for sweeping them and clearing weeds and debris.

Facilities such as creek trails are delightful and bring park-like benefits. They are also often isolated with limited access points and closed after dark. Some of them are hard to spot if you don't know they're there. Please design with CPTED standards in mind wherever possible and consider high-quality on-street options for when darkness, ,, maintenance, or events close the trails.

State and regional design standards for protected bike lanes, protected intersections, and trails need to catch up to what cities and agencies are already doing. Mixed-use trails work best when they separate fast-moving uses (bikes, micromobility) from slow-moving ones (walking, jogging), or at least allow ample space for people going different speeds to pass safely.

p. 68 In my experience, the biggest disadvantage to transit is its speed. Five miles to work takes me 20 minutes in rush hour traffic, 30 minutes by bike, and over an hour by bus. Ten miles seems to take two hours by transit in many directions. Better connections between services would help, as would more evening and weekend service to some routes that lack it.

Light Rail through San Jose is excruciatingly slow not because of congestion, but because the trackway is essentially sharing a wide sidewalk with people wandering on and off the tracks on foot, skateboards, and bicycles. Recent efforts to separate these uses have helped somewhat. There are other delays, such as the lack of priority at the very long light at Montague Expressway and North 1st Street. I can bike from Levi's Stadium to the San Jose Convention Center nearly as fast as I can ride light rail.

p. 73 Is the express bus shown between San Francisco and Santa Clara/San Jose somehow not redundant to Caltrain?

Services I don't think I see much in the transportation chapter include ACE and Amtrak Capitol Corridor.

Chapter 5

p. 80. I'm glad to see access to parks and open space as a priority. A few years back, Santa Clara County Parks ran ads on VTA buses, and I checked to see how many of the county parks I could reach on a Saturday morning by riding the buses that carried their ads. I started at transit-rich San Jose City Hall. Over half (17/28) were not accessible by transit, and another two had no Saturday option.

Urban greening makes a tremendous difference in temperatures and rainwater retention versus runoff. Well-placed parks, in addition to serving nearby residents for recreation, can serve as gathering places in the event of a natural disaster. Parks in the right places can also serve as a buffer between waterways and buildings in case of a flood. It's much less of a disaster if a park floods.

A frequent objection I have heard from residents opposing infill development is, "Where will we get the water?" The City of Santa Clara recently released its updated Urban Water Management Plan, showing that the increased population is using less water total—not just per capita—than it was during the 1990 drought. New buildings can start with drought-tolerant landscaping and water efficient fixtures. For single-family homes, lawn buy-back programs are very effective for promoting water conservation. Water conservation is energy conservation, too. It takes a great deal of energy to treat and deliver water and to collect and clean wastewater.

p. 84-85 The expansive parking lots around the office building where I work make the facility significantly less walkable and bikeable. Meanwhile, parking underground or in parking structures adds around \$50,000 per car stall to the price of the new building it serves, a cost that is presumably passed along to tenants and thence customers. I'm very glad to see the consideration of parking minimums and costs in this plan.

The City of Santa Clara currently has a moratorium on bike share and scooter share services. The intention was to revisit it, but that effort has been delayed due to COVID. If you intend for bike and scooter share to be a last-mile transportation option, it must be available. It's been a while since I looked into car share options near me, but I think they are not really available.

p. 87-89. Diesel exhaust has particles an order of magnitude smaller than PM 2.5, and thus it is especially deleterious to lung health. Is there any effort to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads that emit this exhaust? Oversized pickup trucks, especially, are very popular, even though they have no real function on suburban streets.

Do the mandates for TNCs include any effort to reduce miles traveled with just the driver? Will there be any sort of assistance to drivers to upgrade their vehicles to cleaner ones?

Chapter 6

Thank you for considering clean air, access to parks, and traffic safety as public health issues.

Chapter 7

I'm glad to see that implementation is part of the plan.

p. 123 On the transportation goals, is the congestion charge really the only high-impact climate action here? If the improvements to transit make it time- and cost-efficient enough to get a large number of people out of single-occupancy vehicles, wouldn't that have a major contribution? If the transit objectives don't have that effect, perhaps they're the wrong objective or they're not ambitious enough.

p. 124 I'm not sure what "partner" means in this context. At the very least, I would hope MTC would craft a baseline Vision Zero policy that cities and local agencies would be encouraged to use and to build on, and to evaluate funding requests and give design direction based on how well a given project furthers Vision Zero objectives.

p.126 Again, I wonder why only one of these housing strategies is considered to have high GHG impacts when land use choices in the aggregate drive commuting patterns and building to energy- and water-efficient new standards will also have so much impact.

p. 135 Just in case you need a catchy acronym when it's time to secure funding, **R**estore, **O**perate (or optimize), **A**nd **M**aintain would work well for a transit program.

p.144 I am glad to see a regional energy network in the plan. Ideally, we could start to electrify what is still powered by petroleum products, while being more locally self-sufficient in ways that tend to reduce widespread power interruptions.

General:

I have seen my own city council and plenty of others reject or defer many of the sorts of projects described in this plan, including housing density, parking reduction, and bus lanes. For this plan to be implemented in the long term, laws and funding eligibility will need to align with it.

I find the word "disability" only once in the entire draft plan. Ideally, building to newer standards and implementing an affordable, efficient public transportation network would automatically make our area more accessible to people with disabilities and by extension to people who are old and young, or caring for someone who is. However, it's a common error on the part of people who don't have disabilities, to suppose that it's obvious what people need who do have disabilities. In reality, there can be a very big difference between what the standards dictate and what would make things truly accessible, safe, and equitable. Whether it's in the plan or not, I would strongly encourage communicating with organizations and people already working in this space, to improve the plan and the supporting funding and standards for people with disabilities, including our growing senior population.

Thank you for recognizing that affordable housing and land use is a transportation issue and a climate issue.

Kudos to all those who worked on this plan and who incorporated public feedback such as mine, and thank you to anyone who managed to read this far.

Many thanks,

Betsy Megas (she/her)

Resident, City of Santa Clara

Member, VTA and City of Santa Clara Bicycle and Pedestrian Committees, speaking for myself