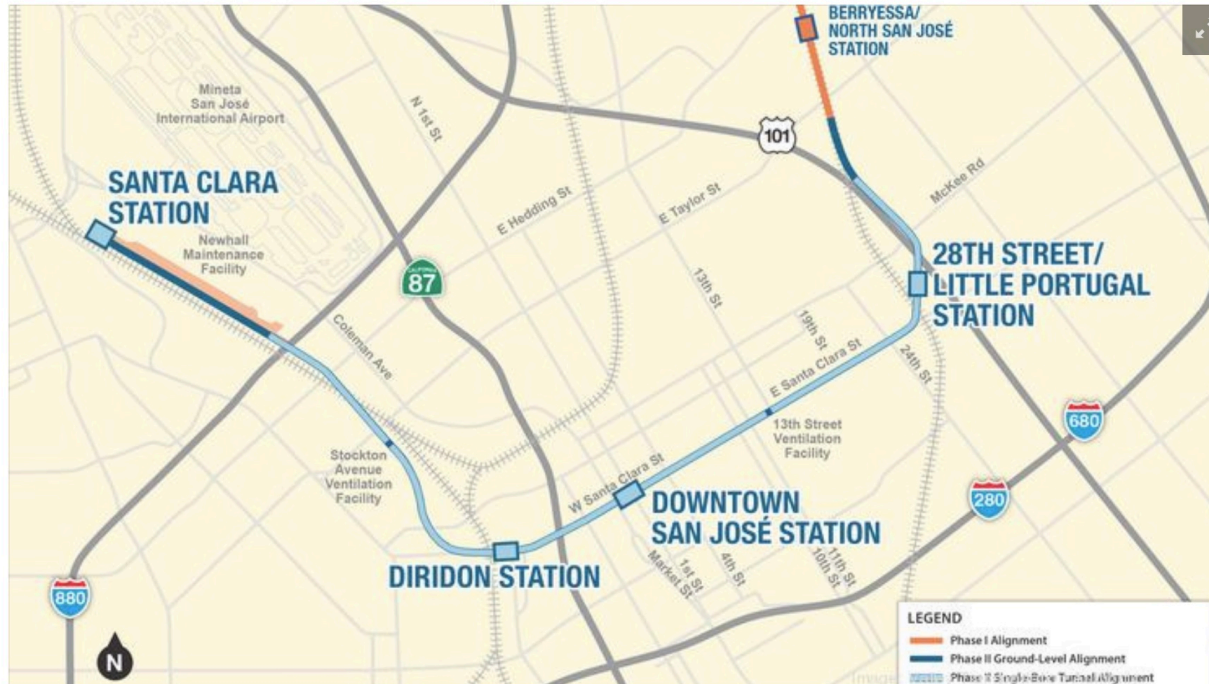


San Jose's BART tunnel has a problem. How can riders cross the street? 🔑

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Phase II of BART's Silicon Valley extension will extend the commuter rail service six-miles from the Berryessa Transit Center into downtown San Jose and terminating in Santa Clara. Phase II is estimated to carry 52,000 passengers to destinations throughout the Bay Area... [more](#)

SANTA CLARA VALLEY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY



By [Jody Meacham](#) – Reporter, Silicon Valley Business Journal
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The Valley Transportation Authority worked for years to figure out a way to build the BART subway beneath downtown San Jose that wouldn't repeat the horrendous construction destruction that building the light rail system through the city's core caused in the 1980s.

Having done so, the VTA may have created a bigger problem when people are supposed to start riding the trains in 10 years – one they'll discover when they cross the street to get to the station entrances. The first formal discussion about how to solve this problem comes to VTA's capital projects committee at noon Thursday.

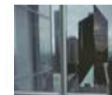
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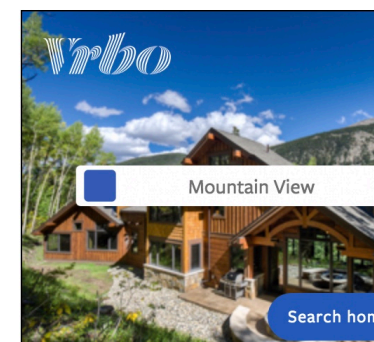
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VTA's construction solution was a single large-diameter tunnel big enough to fit two tracks and stations inside it, and that could be bored with a machine that wouldn't require tearing up all of Santa Clara Street, downtown's main drag. Downtown business folks and local elected officials were on board with that from the get-go. After a few years of arm-twisting, which included a visit to the only other such subway in the world that uses this approach – in Barcelona, Spain – the single-bore concept was even acceptable to BART.

VTA's tunnel options for BART beneath downtown San Jose

VTA is beginning a series of public outreach events to inform the public and gather input on its BART tunnel plans for San Jose.



The federal government, led by a Trump administration generally hostile to mass transit, liked the novel concept so much that it awarded a \$125 million grant last year to get the project underway quickly in one of the bluest counties of an anti-Trump state. And it promised expedited consideration of the \$1.7 billion grant that it knew would be forthcoming this summer.

In the grant submission, all the entrances to both the downtown and Diridon Station stops are on the north side of the street, while most of the subway riders are expected to approach the stations from the southern side. What happens to traffic on downtown's major east-west thoroughfare when hundreds of pedestrians need to cross the street to catch a train in two minutes? And that happens every 10 or 15 minutes?

“We have to be mindful that we don't want to be victims of our success,” said VTA board chair Cindy Chavez.

The entrances were placed on one side of the street because of the single-bore design, Nuria Fernandez, VTA's general manager, told the board earlier this month in response to questions.

The platforms are to be stacked atop each other so they will be wide enough to accommodate passengers boarding and alighting within the 48-foot diameter tunnel. The current design calls for passengers to descend to a level below ground where they would purchase tickets and pass through turnstiles, then enter the station tunnel from the side on one of two platform levels depending on their direction of travel.

“We will take a look” at other ways for passengers on the south side to reach the platforms without crossing the street at-grade, Fernandez said then. “We'll come back and we'll share with you what the pros and cons are and challenges and the costs so that you can have a conversation about it.”

Among those concerns is whether there is sufficient clearance between the top of the subway tunnel and the street to build subterranean passageways for passengers to cross without digging up the street - the problem that a single-bore was intended to avoid.

The project has only been environmentally cleared for north side entrances, VTA spokeswoman Bernice Alaniz said, although other entrances were studied during earlier design phases.

But Mayor Sam Liccardo, who also sits on VTA's board, said, “I haven't conceded that it's a necessary conclusion that a single bore requires entrance only on the north side of the street. The mass of downtown is to the south of Santa Clara and not to the north. And that's also where we expect the most development in the years ahead.”

And both Chavez and Liccardo said they're not convinced either cost or federal deadlines should be a hindrance to design changes.

“Why not do it right and well the first time?” Chavez said, noting that would be cheaper in the long run.

“The world may change in the first week in November,” said Liccardo. “I think we need to be nimble and opportunistic, OK? And if we need to go find another source of funding, then that's something we can figure out, perhaps with a property-based revenue source.”

The officially named Downtown San Jose station, which is planned to stretch three blocks beneath Santa Clara from Market Street on the west end to Third Street on the east, was anticipated to be used by 24,500 passengers a day by 2030 when it was originally planned.

But that was years before anyone anticipated Google's announcement in 2017 that it planned to build up to eight million square feet of office space and 5,000 units around Diridon.

Google's plan inspired four million more square feet from Jay Paul at what is now City View Plaza, more than 600,000 square feet at Market Street Towers from Sobrato at Market and San Carlos, plus whatever materializes from Sobrato on the one-acre Block 2 on East San Fernando and 1.3-acre Block 3 across Second Street. All that is within three blocks of the station.

“There's going to be a lot of infill and a lot of future BART customers created south of Santa Clara Street, not to mention the existing generators such as the convention center and the biggest one of all, San Jose State University,” said Scott Knies, CEO of the Downtown Association.