

El Camino Real Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



1. **What is Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)?** BRT is essentially light rail without the tracks. BRT emulates the best features of rail through its use of dedicated bus lanes, traffic signal priority, state-of-the-art vehicles, and rail-like stations.
2. **How much will the El Camino BRT project cost, and where will the money come from?** The project will cost about \$240 million, and it will be financed by the Santa Clara County Measure A half cent sales tax and federal funds¹.
3. **Why not invest in light rail instead of BRT?** It will cost \$8-13 million a mile to build BRT, compared to \$100 million a mile for light rail. BRT is also expected to cost 40% less to operate².
4. **Have other cities had success with BRT?** BRT has been highly successful across the globe.

- Los Angeles Orange Line was expected to reach 22,000 average weekday boardings by 2020 but after only 6 years since it began service, the line already has about 28,000 boardings³.
- Eugene's BRT ridership is almost double what it was when BRT service started in 2007, and ridership on Cleveland's BRT line is 60% higher than when it opened a few years ago⁴.

5. **What are the environmental benefits of BRT?** If dedicated bus lanes are incorporated on El Camino Real, BRT could remove 4,555 metric tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions annually while lessening our dependence on foreign oil and cleaning up our air⁵. 40% of our region's GHG emissions come from transportation, so encouraging more public transportation use will help address global warming and meet the requirements of California's climate change laws (AB 32 and SB375)⁶.

6. **How will BRT affect the economy?** For every \$1 invested in public transportation, \$4 in economic returns is generated⁷. For example, by 2025, Cleveland's HealthLine is expected to spur 13,000 new jobs, over 5,400 new or renovated residential units, and 7.9 million square feet in commercial development⁸. If exclusive bus lanes and bike lanes are adopted on El Camino Real, VTA anticipates a tripling in transit ridership and 4-5 times as much bicycling, thus attracting more people to the corridor. VTA has said that the El Camino BRT project could help generate 4,780 jobs as a result of both direct and indirect economic benefits⁹.



The Metropolitan Express BRT in Las Vegas has seen a 25% increase in ridership over the previous route since its completion in 2004. Credit: Erik Weber. Image source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/herrvebah/4574805831>.



BRT vehicles will provide wireless internet access and a more comfortable ride. Image source: www.valleyrapid.org

¹ Gary Richards, "Major Changes May be Coming to El Camino Real", *San Jose Mercury News*, October 23, 2011.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ VTA staff

⁶ <http://www.onebayarea.org/glossary.htm>

⁷ <http://www.apta.com/mediacenter/ptbenefits/Pages/default.aspx>

⁸ Shenshen Cao and Others, "Recommendations for Implementing Bus Rapid Transit in Pittsburgh's Oakland-Uptown-Downtown Transit Corridor", *Carnegie Mellon, Heinz College Center for Economic Development*, May 6, 2011.

⁹ VTA staff

7. **What kind of bicycle and pedestrian improvements can be funded with BRT?** If cities choose to adopt bus-only lanes, VTA can also install bike lanes and pedestrian improvements, including landscaping, street trees, and enhanced crosswalks.

8. **Bus rapid transit? On El Camino Real? Give me Wi-Fi, convenience, and on-board lattes and we'll talk.** BRT vehicles will have wireless internet access and many conveniences such as real-time bus arrival information. Plus, with exclusive bus lanes, you'll never need to worry about traffic again! No plan for latté services yet.

9. **Replace a car lane with a bus lane in each direction? How will that help my commute?**

- The population of Santa Clara County is projected to increase by 28% by 2035, or by roughly 7 times the current population of the City of Mountain View¹⁰. With our growing population, everyone's commute will be impacted unless we invest in high-quality public transportation options today and focus on moving people more efficiently, not just cars.
- Replacing auto lanes with bus-only lanes, bike lanes, and pedestrian improvements is not expected to create noticeably more traffic congestion on El Camino Real because more people will walk, bike, and take public transportation, and because longer-distance drivers will take alternative routes, such as Central and Foothill Expressways¹¹.
- Transit use is expected to triple on El Camino Real by 2035 in part because exclusive bus lanes will cut transit travel times by half between downtown San Jose and Palo Alto, making BRT competitive with car travel¹². Similarly, installing bike lanes will quadruple bike use¹³.

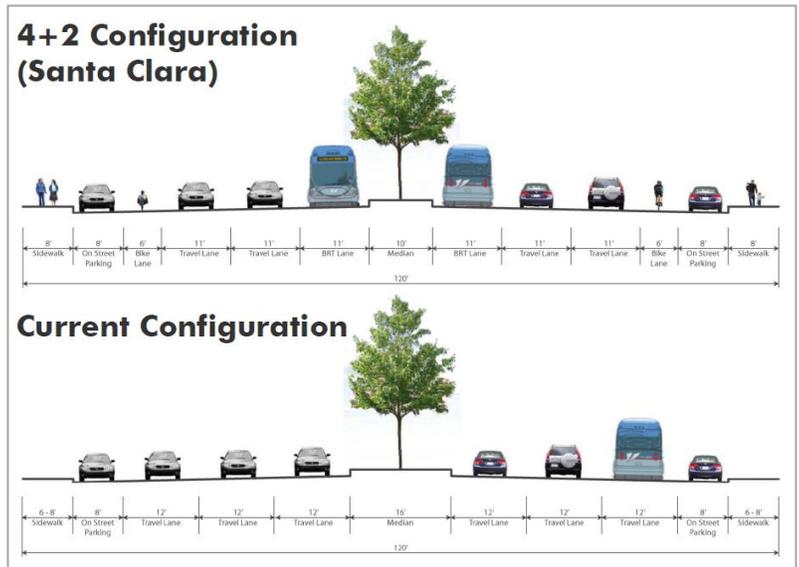
10. **Will medians be removed?** Medians will not be removed. The question is how wide they should be. A 10 foot wide median will allow for two BRT lanes and bike lanes, four auto lanes, and on-street parking. A 16 foot wide median will not provide enough space for both bike lanes and on-street parking.



Bike lanes and pedestrian improvements can be incorporated along with BRT lanes on El Camino Real. Image source: <http://www.copenhagenize.com/2011/06/barcelona-and-bicycle-culture.html>



Signalized left turn lanes can be preserved: An illustration of a northbound BRT station with exclusive bus-lanes and left turn lanes. Image source: www.valleyrapid.org



A more balanced corridor: 4 auto lanes, two BRT lanes, two bike lanes, on-street parking, and a median can be accommodated on El Camino Real. Image source: www.valleyrapid.org

¹⁰ Gary Richards, "Major Changes May be Coming to El Camino Real", *San Jose Mercury News*, October 23, 2011, http://www.mercurynews.com/traffic/ci_19175306.

¹¹ <http://www.valleyrapid.org/2011/10/what-happens-to-cars-in-the-northern-cities/#more-252>

¹² http://www.valleyrapid.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Transform_Presentation_Aug_11_2011.pdf

¹³ Ibid.

11. If auto lanes are reduced, will traffic spill over to smaller side-streets?

Neighborhood streets are typically slower for autos than El Camino Real; however, cut-through traffic on local side streets might be an issue as traffic increases over time (with or without BRT). Traffic calming improvements on smaller side streets may be funded by the BRT project if studies show that the conversion of auto lanes to BRT lanes will cause more traffic on side streets.

12. Will BRT lanes eliminate left turn lanes?

All signalized single left turn lanes can be preserved, and VTA is willing to incorporate additional signalized left-turns where desired. Non-signalized left turns will need to be converted to signalized left turns or eliminated.¹⁴ Double left turn lanes will need to be reduced to single left turns.

13. Will parking be removed?

Some on-street parking might be removed, but that depends on what street design is chosen for median widths, auto lanes, etc.

14. Will emergency vehicles be able to access the bus-only lanes?

Yes, a 3-inch curb will separate the bus lanes from cars, but the curbs will be low enough to allow emergency vehicles access.

15. Will BRT compete with Caltrain?

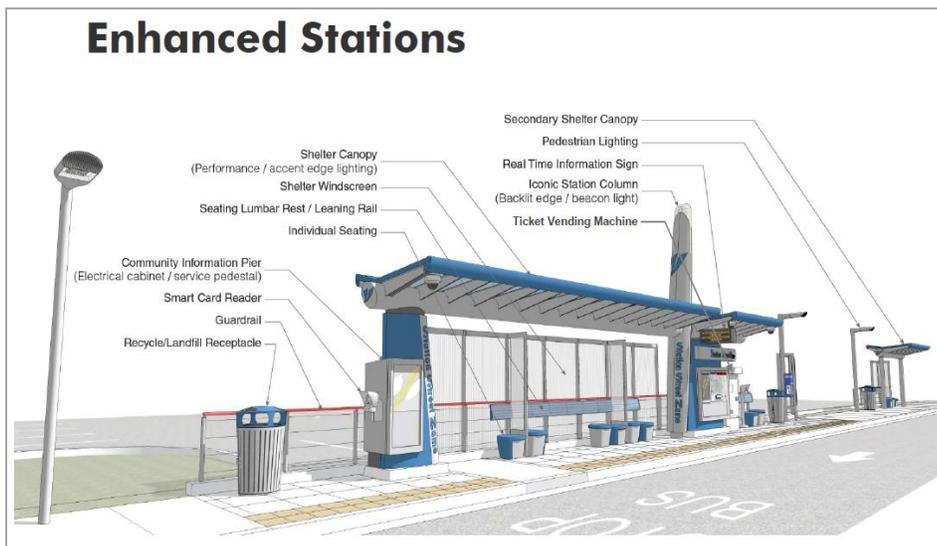
BRT is more likely to complement, rather than compete with, Caltrain. Among the differences: Caltrain only makes three stops on the El Camino corridor (Palo Alto, Santa Clara, and Diridon transit centers). On the other hand, BRT will make 15 stops on El Camino Real and the Alameda, providing access to more destinations. Caltrain is faster and serves longer-distance commuters, but BRT is more frequent and more affordable at \$2 for a one-way trip. The average trip length on Caltrain is 20+ miles, compared to 7 miles with BRT¹⁵. BRT will run every 5-10 minutes throughout the day.

16. Where can I find more information?

- Visit www.valleyrapid.org to find out more about VTA's plans and upcoming public meetings.
- Visit www.transformca.org/bay-area-transportation/brt to join other residents, business owners, and students in advocating for rapid transit that is convenient, reliable, and meets community needs.
- Contact Chris Lepe, Transform's Community Planner, at clepe@transformca.org or (408) 406-8074.

17. What is TransForm?

TransForm is a non-profit organization that works to create world-class public transportation and walkable communities in the Bay Area and beyond.



Upgraded stations: BRT stations will include amenities such as real-time bus arrival information and ample shelter. Image source: www.valleyrapid.org



BRT will better-connect the downtowns of Palo Alto, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, and San Jose, as well as Stanford and Santa Clara Universities. The area highlighted in blue is proposed for exclusive bus lanes. Image source: www.valleyrapid.org

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.