

MAKE BIG MOVES FOR PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE





CHAPTER FOUR.

To address some of the larger needs and desires of the community, we will need to do more than make changes to streets and sidewalks. That is why the DTP also proposes longer-term projects that will need extensive planning, big budgets, and widespread community support to accomplish. These larger-scale improvements are called “Big Moves.”

There are already several Big Moves happening in Downtown in various stages of development. These include:

The Big Moves put forward in the DTP complement and build on the momentum of the projects below, responding directly to community needs and desires expressed in outreach activities for this plan.

FIGURE: DOWNTOWN BIG MOVES

BART SILICON VALLEY PHASE II EXTENSION



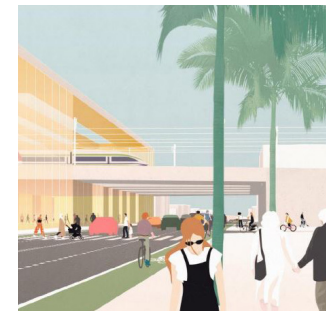
CENTRAL BIKEWAY



DIRIDON TO AIRPORT CONNECTOR



DIRIDON INTEGRATED STATION CONCEPT PLAN



GOOGLE'S DOWNTOWN WEST DEVELOPMENT



ST. JAMES PARK REVITALIZATION



THE GUADALUPE RIVER PARK RE-ENVISIONING



PARK PASEO





DTP BIG MOVES

A Big Move is a large, transformative physical improvement that addresses important community needs. Each Big Move will require its own dedicated project development process, including ongoing community engagement and support from Downtown residents. Each Big Move will require significant work and take many years to carry out.

The DTP begins to explore these Big Moves and gauge community support for pursuing them. For the ideas with the most community support and potential benefit, this plan suggests how each could be pursued.

Proposing a large construction project is not something the City takes lightly. The DTP recommends four Big Moves, listed below and further described later in this chapter.

- » **Enhancing Santa Clara Street:** During community engagement, the DTP team heard broad dissatisfaction with the current look, feel, and function of Santa Clara Street. The DTP envisions Santa Clara Street as San José’s premier “Grand Boulevard,” a street that must prioritize high-quality transit. In addition, Downtown residents and workers would like it to be an attractive street with vibrant commercial and pedestrian activity, a place where they like to spend time. This Big Move explores this possibility.

- » **Fixing Gaps in the Downtown Trail Network:** While San José has one of the best trail networks in the Bay Area, trails are interrupted by busy Downtown streets as they go through the city core, which can be dangerous, unpleasant, and confusing for trail users.
- » **Speeding Up Downtown Light Rail:** While the VTA light rail system offers fast and convenient transportation in much of San José, trains slow to a crawl as they navigate through the Downtown core. Making light rail faster and more reliable would make the service more appealing. This Big Move looks at how this might be achieved.
- » **Breaking Barriers – Fixing the Freeway Problem:** Residents often share concerns about the damaging effects of the two downtown freeways (SR-87 and I-280) on quality of life. This Big Move explores ways to break the freeway barriers and create slow, low-traffic streets to connect Downtown neighborhoods.

ELEMENTS OF BIG MOVES

.....
Transformative for Downtown San José

.....
Great potential to meet Downtown transportation vision and goals

.....
Advances equity goals and is consistent with community values

.....
Addresses critical transportation challenges

.....
Would require extensive implementation effort in terms of cost and time



Each Big Move described below is divided into sections outlining the need that the Big Move would address, the purpose of the Big Move and recommended next steps.



ENHANCING SANTA CLARA STREET

Santa Clara Street is generally considered to be San José's "main drag." It is vital to civic life, hosting parades and other large public celebrations. Beyond its social and economic importance, Santa Clara Street is also one of the city's most important transportation corridors, connecting City Hall, Diridon Station, and places beyond. The future BART alignment will run underneath it, which will further reinforce the street's prominence.

But except for a few specific times during the day or special events, the street lacks the vibrant street life that one would expect on a city's main drag. Its sidewalks are not pleasant places to walk, shop, or hang out, and businesses struggle to attract customers. Transit buses get stuck at red lights and in traffic, preventing them from providing fast, frequent service.

In community engagement for this plan, Santa Clara Street emerged as Downtown's least-liked street. Comments on Santa Clara Street were as numerous as they were varied. While this may seem perplexing, it is also normal for a city's primary corridor. In a large and diverse city like San José, Downtown residents and workers are a varied group of people who engage in a wide range of different activities and who have many different preferences. A city's main drag should – to the greatest degree possible – satisfy people's varied and often competing desires. Currently, the street does not do a very good job of this. It is for these reasons that the notion of reshaping the street garnered the most community support compared to other Big Move ideas.

Hearing these concerns, the DTP considered how Santa Clara Street could be more memorable: an iconic street for the Capital



STRATEGY 7

Enhance Santa Clara Street to be Downtown's most prominent street for transit and commercial activities

Strategy Implementation

Primary Benefits	Climate, Economy, Place
Magnitude of Benefits	High
Cost	\$\$\$
Phasing	Mid-term (before BART opening)

of Silicon Valley and the Bay Area's biggest city. To pursue a better and brighter future for the street, the DTP recommends a comprehensive and holistic study to show how the street could be livelier and more enjoyable while also better serving its transportation purpose.

The proposed Downtown Street Network includes Santa Clara Street as San José's premier "Grand Boulevard." As such, it would prioritize high-quality transit over other types of travel. Fast and frequent bus service is envisioned at street level, and BART will provide high-capacity transit underneath the street in a decade or so.

But as Downtown San José's main thoroughfare, Santa Clara Street can be more than simply a street for transit. It is also Downtown's best opportunity for commercial revitalization. With significant updates to the function and feel of the street, it can be a signature place that welcomes people who are shopping, going to work, eating at restaurants, or simply enjoying the city on foot.

The DTP recommends initiating a future comprehensive study of the corridor. Potential opportunities to remake Santa Clara Street may include:

- » Creating dedicated lanes for transit and other public service vehicles
- » Significantly widening sidewalks
- » Expanding outdoor space

Santa Clara Street could be remade in a variety of ways. Several potential street design options include (shown on the next page):

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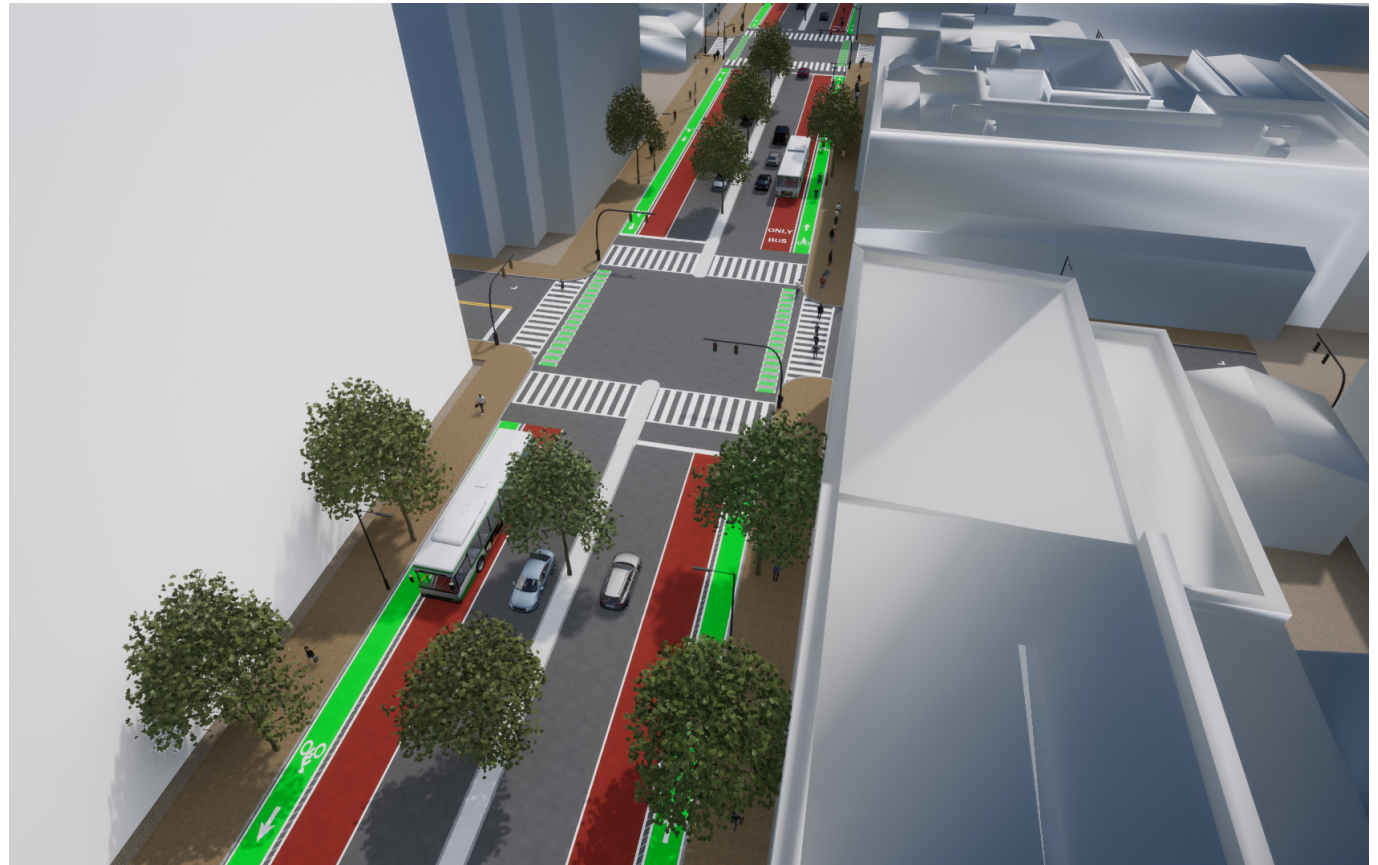
Santa Clara Street is my least favorite street because of the many accidents there that have injured or killed pedestrians. Also, the homeless situation can be scary at times in circumstances where mental health or dependency concerns are not met. The street often smells like urine, which is both an aesthetic and health hazard. All these things make it hard for the many great dining and coffee businesses on the street to survive. I've seen so many new businesses come and go over the years.”

– DOWNTOWN WORKER

OPTION A: DEDICATED LANES FOR BIKES AND TRANSIT

Option A would include dedicated lanes for both transit vehicles and bikes. Transit lanes would function as public service lanes and be open to other public service uses, such as emergency vehicle travel, deemed appropriate by the City. Bike lanes would be adjacent to the transit lane and be fully or partially raised above street level to provide a buffer between bikes and buses. Sidewalks would be widened slightly over their current configuration. Finally, a narrow median with landscaping or small street trees would provide space for pedestrian refuge islands to be installed at intersections. Vehicle left turn movements would be restricted at some locations. For most blocks, no vehicle parking would be available on the street.

RENDERING: DEDICATED LANES FOR BIKES AND TRANSIT



OPTION B: DEDICATED LANES FOR TRANSIT WITH PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND COMFORT AMENITIES

Option B would include dedicated lanes for transit vehicles. Like Option A, transit lanes would function as public service lanes and be open to emergency and other public service uses. Sidewalks would have the same width as their current configuration, though pedestrian curb extensions would be installed at intersections to improve pedestrian safety and reduce crossing distances. A median with landscaping and/or street trees would improve the overall design of the corridor. On-street vehicle parking would generally be maintained or converted to other curbside uses based on demand, such as loading/unloading zones or parklets. This option would be substantially lower in cost than other options. As a result, some or all elements could

RENDERING: DEDICATED LANES FOR TRANSIT WITH PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND COMFORT AMENITIES



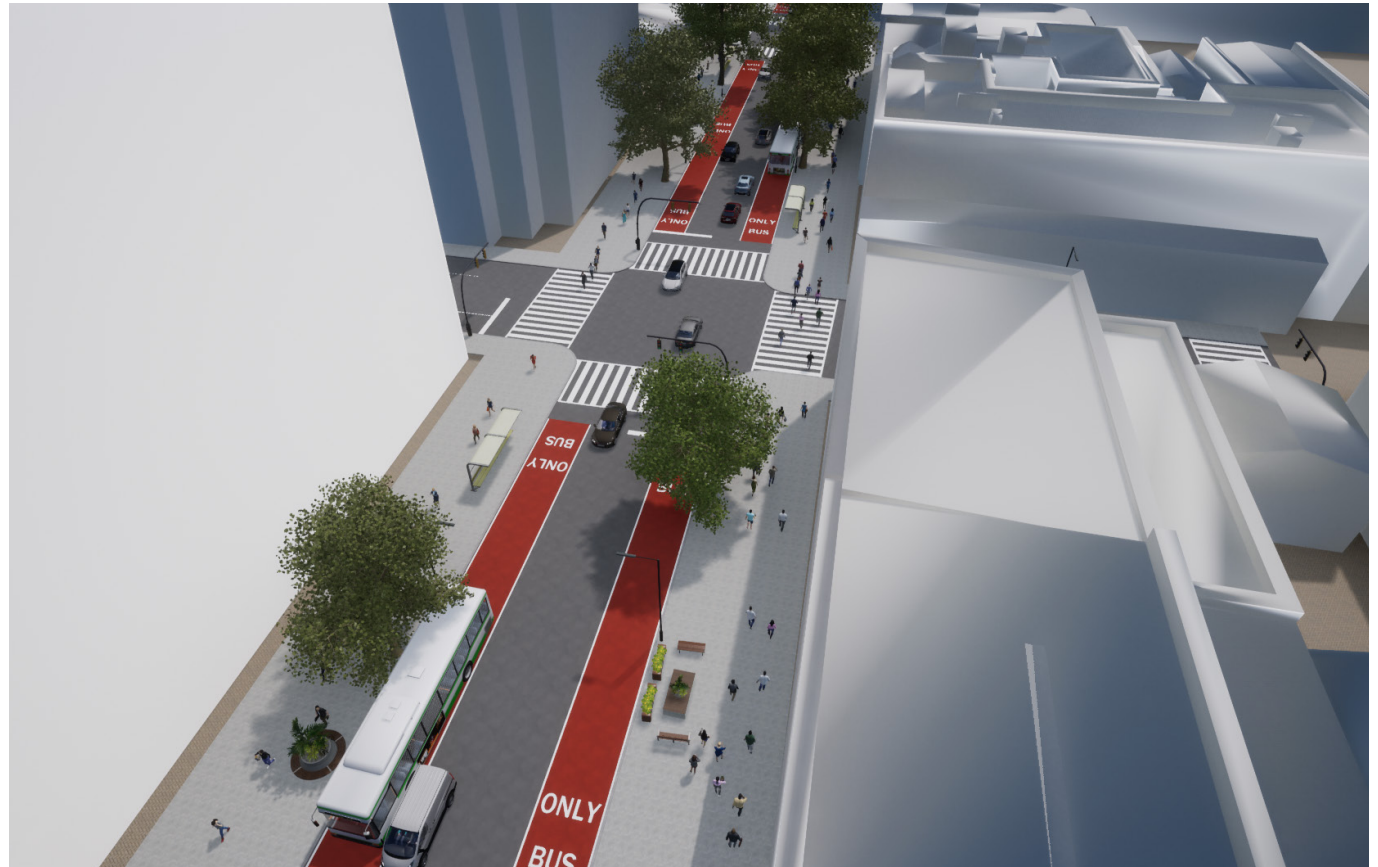
be implemented more rapidly as a “quick-build” design. Bicyclists would share vehicle lanes with drivers or use the parallel St. John or San Fernando primary bikeways.

OPTION C: PEDESTRIAN- FOCUSED MAIN DRAG

Option C would include dedicated public service lanes for transit vehicles. Option C would also have much wider sidewalks – roughly double their current width. Wider sidewalks would support the goal of a pedestrian-focused main street with a variety of public life opportunities. These could include outdoor dining, public plazas, expanded parklets, and other uses. Vehicle left turn movements would be restricted at most locations in order to maintain a wide pedestrian thoroughfare. Vehicle parking would generally be prohibited, though some blocks could have small loading/unloading or delivery zones.

A preliminary comparison of these options is included in Appendix E. Each of these options would require further study to better understand community needs and benefits, feasibility, and tradeoffs with overall cost. As a next step to advance

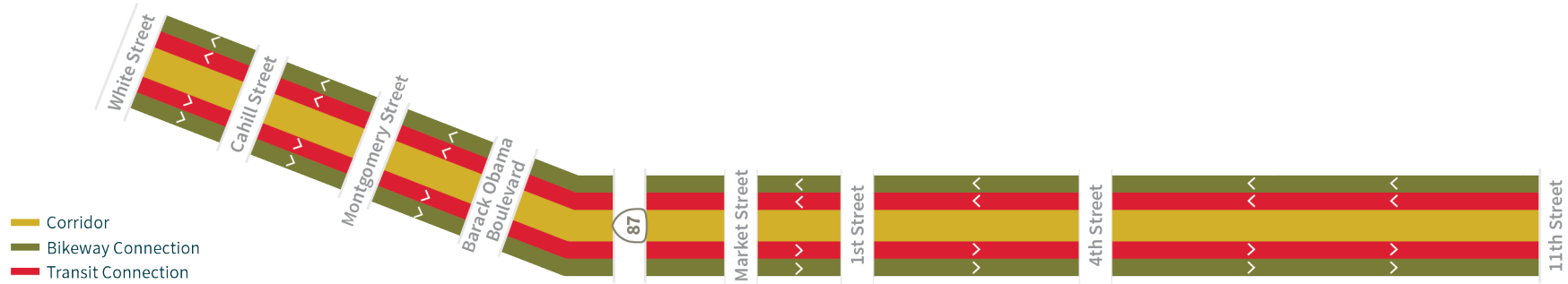
RENDERING: PEDESTRIAN-FOCUSED MAIN DRAG



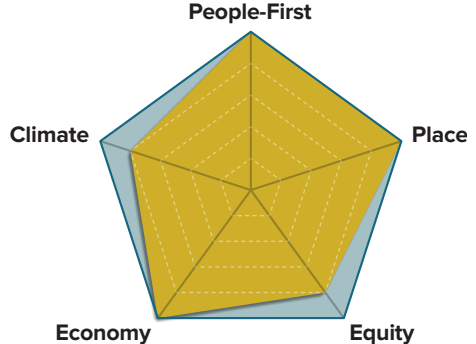
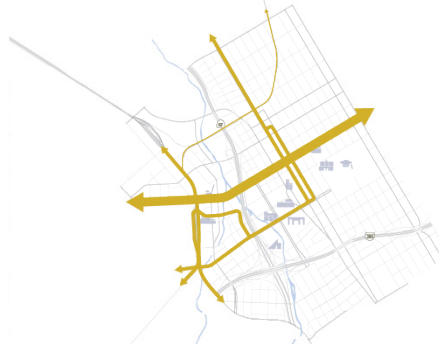
this Big Move, a dedicated study of Santa Clara Street would further refine and develop concept designs for the above three options and include extensive opportunities for

further community involvement. Additional design options may also be developed and considered as part of this follow-up study.

SANTA CLARA STREET BIG MOVE OPTIONS



Santa Clara Street is one of the city’s most important transportation corridors. There are three options that could be considered for how the street is designed in the future. This will be a focus of future study for Santa Clara Street.



EXAMPLES



16TH STREET CORRIDOR IN DENVER, COLORADO



16TH STREET CORRIDOR IN DENVER, COLORADO

NEXT STEPS

- » Develop Santa Clara Street Grand Boulevard Plan (2023-24)
- » Pursue funding for streetscape design and construction (2024+)



FIXING GAPS IN THE DOWNTOWN TRAIL NETWORK

San José has one of the best trail networks in the Bay Area. However, a frequent complaint is that many trails, as they cross through the downtown core, split into multiple paths or direct bicyclists onto on-street bikeways with little warning. Rather than crossing streets directly, users often must follow a confusing cloverleaf route to alternate creek banks that accommodate underpasses. This can make them both challenging to follow and difficult to use for those who are new to San José or new to bicycling.

As Downtown grows and densifies, there will be many more people on the streets. This growth may cause more conflicts between people using different methods to get around. If the City is to reach its ambitious goals of getting more people to get around by foot, bike, and other sustainable modes, we need well-designed, continuous, and comfortable trails through the Downtown core for users of all ages and abilities. The DTP describes several possible approaches to achieving this below.

The City has previously investigated opportunities for improving these trail connections, including in the following document:
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/20573/636687633033230000>



STRATEGY 8

Invest in bike superhighways or car-free connections across Downtown

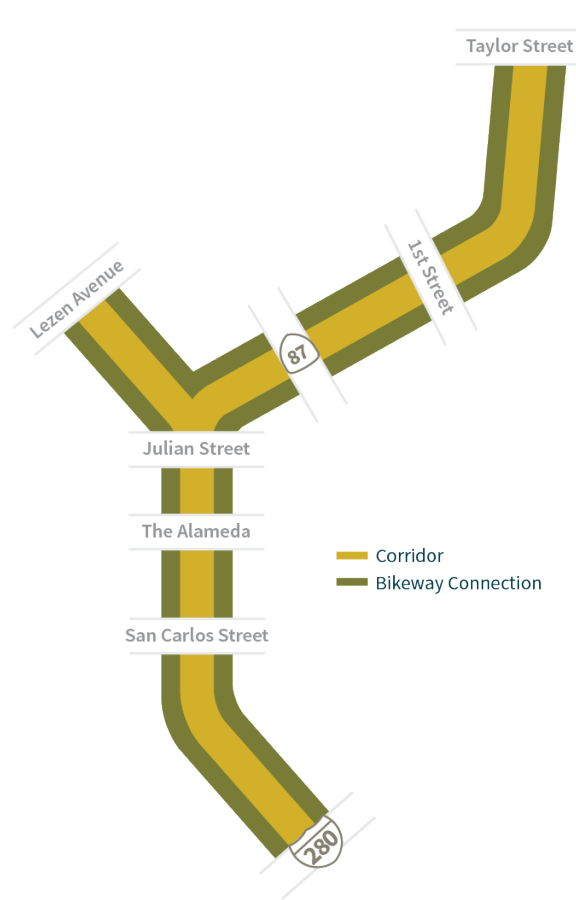
One idea to improve north/south connectivity along the Guadalupe River Trail through Downtown – originally introduced in the 2021 Diridon Station Area Plan Amendment – is to create an elevated trail connection from Julian Street southward through the Diridon Station Area through to I-280. A popular example of a similar high-quality piece of infrastructure of this nature is the “Bike Snake” in Copenhagen. Another example is a proposed bike corridor and paseo along the Caltrain tracks from around Lenzen Avenue to the Gardner Neighborhood and Willow Glen when rail lines are elevated with the reconstructed Diridon Station. Routes like these would provide quicker and safer access for people biking or scooting, regardless of age or ability.

Strategy Implementation

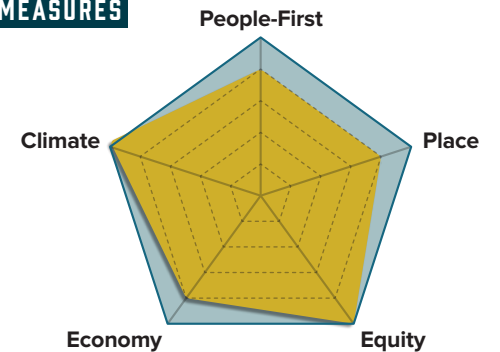
Primary Benefits	Climate, People-First
Magnitude of Benefits	High
Cost	\$\$\$
Phasing	Long-term (after BART opening)

DOWNTOWN TRAILS BIG MOVE OPTIONS

Though San José has one of the best trail networks in the Bay Area, the trails are often challenging to follow and dangerous to use. There are several options to provide quicker and safer access for people biking and scooting, regardless of age or ability.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES



NEXT STEPS

- DEVELOP CONCEPTS AND PRIORITIES FOR DOWNTOWN TRAIL CONNECTIONS [2023]
- PURSUE FUNDING FOR DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF TOP PRIORITY PROJECTS [2024-25]
- ADVANCE DESIGN EFFORTS FOR REMAINING TRAIL PROJECTS [2025+]



"CYCLE SNAKE" IN COPENHAGEN, DENMARK. JAKOB MUNK, CC BY-SA 4.0



NELSON STREET CYCLEWAY IN AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND.





SPEEDING UP DOWNTOWN LIGHT RAIL

The VTA Light Rail system offers fast and convenient transportation in some parts of San José. But trains slow down significantly as they travel through the Downtown core. This is because trains follow a winding and circuitous path through Downtown with several places where the light rail system crosses paths with cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists. In community outreach for the DTP, respondents cited slow light rail travel speeds as one of their primary concerns about the Downtown transportation network.

That said, getting people to and from Downtown via light rail is critical to the system's success, as Downtown has the greatest density — especially with the new people joining in recent years and moving forward.



STRATEGY 9

Realign the Light Rail system in Downtown for faster service

In response to the community’s concerns with travel speeds in Downtown, the VTA Board of Directors directed VTA staff to study potential options for accelerating service there. The study, which began in July 2022, is considering a range of different options for the direction and position of the routes as well as the potential to elevate or underground light rail tracks in areas. The study will ultimately bring forward one or more alternatives into conceptual engineering and high-level cost estimates. This process, in conjunction with additional outreach, will help the VTA Board of Directors determine whether to move forward with a project.

Underground, aerial, and at-grade options are being considered. Additionally, some re-routing options are being considered to reduce the curviness of the alignment. As an example of the options being considered, the following two could offer travel time and service benefits:

GRADE-SEPARATED LIGHT RAIL

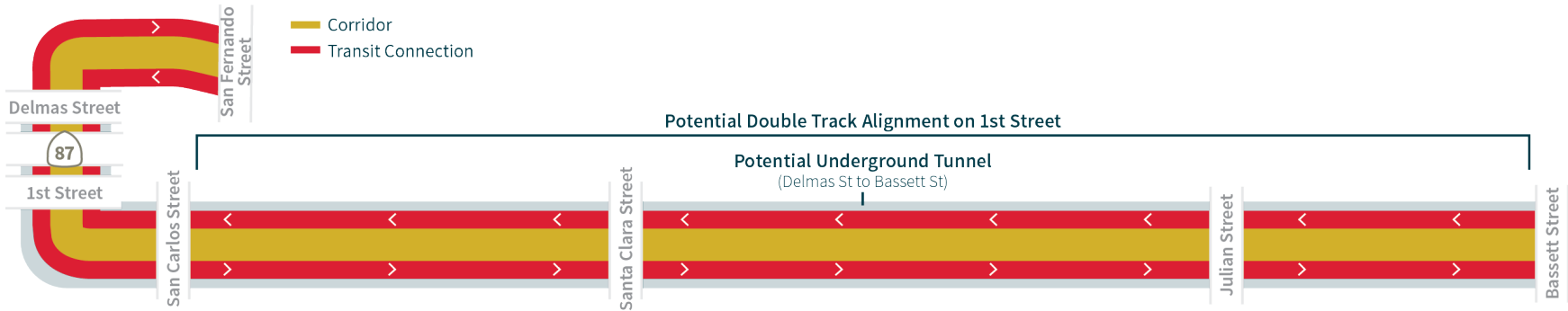
Relocating the light rail from street level, where it interacts with vehicles and pedestrians, to a tunnel or aerial guideway would result in faster travel speeds. However, this would come with tradeoffs like high costs and disruption from construction.

AT-GRADE REALIGNMENT

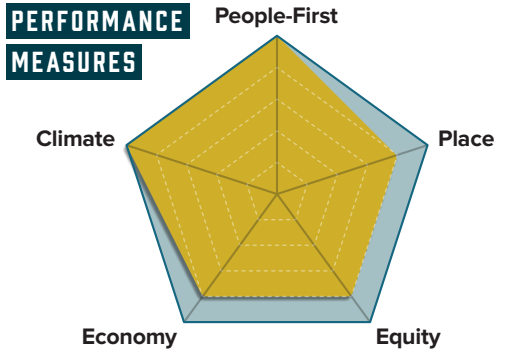
Consolidating northbound and southbound light rail service onto one corridor would remove the confusing First/Second Street split and make train travel more direct through Downtown. Additionally, consolidating light rail tracks would allow for a new track configuration that would permit higher maximum operating speeds. If consolidated onto First Street, the at-grade realignment would also complement the City’s St. James Park Revitalization project, allowing for more complete unification of the park across Second Street.

Strategy Implementation	
Primary Benefits	Climate, Economy, Place
Magnitude of Benefits	High
Cost	\$\$\$
Phasing	Long-term (after BART opening)

DOWNTOWN LIGHTRAIL BIG MOVE OPTIONS



The San José community has expressed slow light rail travel speeds as one of their primary concerns about the Downtown transportation network. Here are the two options that could reduce travel time and offer better service benefits.



DOWNTOWN LIGHT RAIL IN ST PAUL, MINNESOTA



DOWNTOWN LIGHT RAIL IN ST PAUL, MINNESOTA



DOWNTOWN LIGHT RAIL IN ST PAUL, MINNESOTA

NEXT STEPS

WORK WITH VTA TO DEVELOP
DOWNTOWN LIGHT RAIL STRATEGY
[2023-25]

PURSUE FUNDING FOR DESIGN
AND CONSTRUCTION



LOVE

SAN JOSE

DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION PLAN

BREAKING BARRIERS: FIXING THE FREEWAY PROBLEM

The community outreach generated much interest in reducing the extent to which the two downtown freeways, SR-87 and I-280, impact the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods. SR-87 runs north-south above street level, bisecting areas on the western side of Downtown. I-280 runs east-west along the southern edge of Downtown, acting as a barrier to neighborhoods to the south.

Both freeways are major barriers to anyone trying to travel without a car, particularly pedestrians, wheelchair users, and bicyclists. San José is not alone in facing these issues. In recent years, cities across the country have expressed concerns that past investments in automobility have had significant negative impacts to the health and quality of life of central city communities that urban highways bisect. Hearing these concerns, both the federal and state governments have recently established new grant programs to repair the past harms of transportation infrastructure projects. Among the most high-profile of these is the USDOT's Reconnecting Communities program.

San José's downtown will continue to grow and intensify over the coming decades. This means that the number of people who experience the negative impacts of these freeway barriers will also increase. This is especially true for SR-87 since it divides the downtown core from the emerging and rapidly growing Diridon Station Area.



STRATEGY 10

Reconnect Downtown communities by transforming freeway access to Downtown

Many members of the public have recommended the City conduct a study or plan to help overcome freeway barriers. Such a plan, in order to be implemented, would likely require significant financial assistance from one of the federal or state funding programs mentioned above. Long-term approaches could include the following options:

Strategy	
Primary Benefits	Equity, Place
Magnitude of Benefits	High
Cost	\$\$\$
Phasing	Long-term (after BART opening)

CONSOLIDATING I-280 RAMPS

This could include reducing the total number of on- and off-ramps on I-280 within Downtown. Removing the ramps at First, Fourth, Sixth, and Seven Streets would allow these streets to connect key destinations with high-quality pedestrian and bicycle undercrossings.

DECKING OVER THE BIRD AVENUE/ I-280 INTERCHANGE

This could include building a structure or “deck” over the portion of I-280 that is depressed at Bird Avenue to create a public plaza and better connect neighborhoods on either side. An example of the concept is the Freeway Park in Seattle, WA.

TRANSFORMING SR-87 INTO AN URBAN BOULEVARD

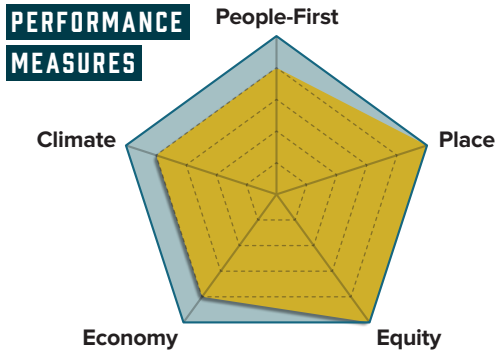
This could include changing the existing elevated structure to a street-level thoroughfare with high quality landscaping and open space, like the Embarcadero in San Francisco.



DOWNTOWN FREEWAY BIG MOVE OPTIONS



The San José community has expressed interest in reducing the extent to which the two downtown freeways impact the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods. Here are many options to be considered for how the area could be redesigned for the future.



LOCATION OF FORMER CHEONGGYEcheon EXPRESSWAY IN SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA



LOCATION OF FORMER WEST SIDE HIGHWAY IN NEW YORK CITY

- NEXT STEPS**
- PURSUE FUNDING FOR FREEWAY BARRIER REMOVAL STUDY (2023)
 - INITIATE PLANNING PROCESS TO STUDY FREEWAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR SR-87 AND I-280 (2024+)