

17. VTA

What will be your strategy in dealing with the VTA to stop their proposed severe reduction of VTA bus service within Palo Alto, and to persuade them instead to improve their service in Palo Alto so more commuters working in Palo Alto will take VTA buses to their jobs in Palo Alto?

Stewart Carl:

It has been very difficult to increase bus ridership. Many residents complain that the bus does not go where they want to go, or it takes too long. Buses will come under increasing competitive pressure from networked ride-sharing services, and eventually self-driving cars and taxis which will be able to serve populations traditionally not well served by Automobiles (too young, too old, and the disabled). Smaller, networked self-driving buses may offer opportunities to improve bus service. Palo Alto must begin planning to integrate these new technologies into our transportation network.

Leonard Ely III:

Unfortunately, as far as I know you can't force people to take a bus. I live right off of Middlefield and watch the buses go by empty or with 1 or 2 riders. What might be possible is to persuade VTA to use smaller buses at the north end of the county. I think this strictly an economic issue and legislating the solution will just make the rest of the county subsidize our buses. Also, the environmental impact of underutilized buses is enormous.

Adrian Fine:

I support working with VTA to explore options for maintaining service. But I would also like to see Palo Alto be active in exploring other options such as shuttles/Marguerite that serve corridors where service may be reduced and how ride sharing services could fill the gap.

We must also be clear with VTA that Palo Alto pays them on annual basis, and we deserve commensurate consideration and investment. This will require coordination with the County Board of Supervisors, the congestion management agency, and nearby north-County cities.

Finally, if we can implement successful TDM measures for new and existing developments, that will drive demand for VTA, which gives Palo Alto a stronger bargaining position.

John Fredrich:

I'm against HSR and any new revenues for VTA until this is sorted out.

Arthur Keller:

I led the successful fight against the VTA the last time they tried to cut the 88 bus. Instead of cutting the 88 bus, they connected it to go from Midtown to the Veterans Administration Hospital and added service for Gunn High School through special runs for the 88 bus and the 88L and 88M bus routes. The service to Gunn High School carries over 100 students to and from Gunn High School each day, even more on rainy days. This critical reduction of cars on Arastradero Road during school commute hours that is important for a congested residential arterial route

servicing multiple schools and the Stanford Research Park. Even though my twin daughters graduated from Gunn High School several days ago, I continue to serve the Gunn PTSA as Transit Coordinator. I ensure that the timing for bus service for Gunn High School adjusts when the Gunn High School schedule changes, such as for state exams and early dismissals. I have a good working relationship with the VTA staff and Gunn staff to make and announce these schedule adjustments in a timely manner.

VTA 35 bus is an important transportation backbone for Palo Alto residents. It provides access to several community centers, libraries and schools and provides access to both Palo Alto and Mountain View downtowns.

Cuts to VTA 35 and 88 buses can also result in cuts in Outreach paratransit service because, by Federal law, rides must be provided within ¾ mile of a VTA transit route.

Penny Ellson and I have been making presentations to Gunn High School students, the Gunn High School PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association), the PAUSD Council of PTAs, and senior communities, including Stevenson House and Avenidas about the risks of cuts from the VTA Next Network project to VTA 88, 35, and Outreach paratransit services. We have started an online petition at <http://tinyurl.com/Save-35-88-Outreach>

Liz Kniss:

I am the only candidate that serves in leadership roles on regional boards, one of which is the VTA Policy Committee and I staunchly argue for and support service to the north county, specifically, Palo Alto.

Lydia Kou:

The political reality is that San Jose controls VTA – it has a majority on the Board through a combination of the proportional representation of the cities and representatives from the County Board of Supervisors. San Jose's priorities for VTA have been and will likely continue to be:

- BART-to-San Jose
- Bus service for those who have no alternative (for example, can't afford a car), with special emphasis on San Jose.

At a public meeting in December 2015, Cory Wolbach - the Council's alternative representative to VTA – stated that the VTA Board majority regarded Palo Alto as having "streets paved with gold" and that they tended to be unresponsive to the needs of Palo Alto. Of course, they may talk differently in the period before an election to raise taxes for VTA, such as now

Our long-term history with VTA has been one of decreasing services, with some fleeting "victories" in restoring service. While we can't give up entirely on VTA, I believe that Palo Alto's policies should be based on an expectation of very low service levels from VTA (the definition of insanity is doing something over and over again and expecting a different result). Our focus for bus service should instead be on a combination the City's shuttle bus and integration with Stanford Marguerite Shuttle.

Danielle Martell:

DID NOT RESPOND

Don McDougall:

I support discussions with VTA about maintaining Palo Alto service. In addition I support exploring options that the City can control such as designing shuttle routes to replace lost service if that occurs and negotiation with providers like Lyft and Uber perhaps with cost sharing by the City.

Greer Stone:

Cutting bus services to Palo Alto hurts the most vulnerable in our community. Typically, it is not the wealthiest that rely on bus services; it is the workers in our restaurants, our dishwashers, bus boys, janitors who are harmed by this. It is our most needy who need affordable bus tickets to reach critical services in San Jose. It is our seniors and high students who need to get to the grocery store or to school. These are the people who are most impacted by VTA's cuts. Palo Alto's jobs/housing imbalance proves there is a need for public transportation into and out of this city. If the VTA bus routes are expanded, more workers will take the bus. Our Downtown businesses should form together under the TMA in order to receive a group rate from the VTA. The VTA has already expressed an interest in this, and the city should help facilitate this partnership in any way possible.

Greg Tanaka:

I want to see VTA merge service with SamTrans along the El Camino Real routes so that service to, and through Palo Alto will be smart and vital for commuters. Currently they have to change bus lines at Palo Alto station if they want to reach San Mateo County stops—this subjects commuters to inconveniences and hardens their consideration of using a bus over driving a car.