

The Future of Downtown San Jose

How the South Bay's urban center can
achieve its potential

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The Future of Downtown San Jose

How the South Bay's urban center can achieve its potential

The SPUR San Jose Advisory Board reviewed, debated and adopted this report as official policy on November 21, 2013.

Executive Summary

After decades of investment, downtown San Jose is poised to benefit from the growing trend toward working and living in urban centers.

But downtown needs more people. It is neither small enough to navigate easily nor large enough to draw significant crowds on a regular basis. As a result, it's not attracting the level of activity necessary to succeed.

We don't believe there's one silver-bullet solution. Instead, we recommend pursuing a number of different approaches. We identify six big ideas for achieving a more successful and active downtown:

- #1 Welcome all kinds of uses into downtown — but hold out for jobs near regional transit.
- #2 Make sure that what gets built adheres to key urban design principles.
- #3 Promote a larger area of “Central San Jose” with downtown as its core.
- #4 Make it easier to get to and through downtown without a car.
- #5 Retrofit downtown to be more pedestrian-oriented.
- #6 Build on downtown's strengths as the cultural and creative center of the South Bay.

See pages 60–61 for a complete list of our recommendations and the parties responsible for implementing them.

We offer 25 recommendations for how to realize these ideas. They include:

- Expand the existing network of paseos, or pedestrian walkways, throughout downtown. In particular, extend the Paseo de San Antonio to Diridon Station.
- Use downtown as a demonstration zone for achieving the city's goal to reduce driving alone to just 40 percent of all travel by 2040.
- Reserve major unbuilt sites around Diridon Station and near Market and Santa Clara streets for jobs.
- Eliminate minimum parking requirements in new development.
- Require new development to have tall ceiling heights and active uses on the ground floor.
- Make downtown a “park once” environment where people prefer to park their cars and then get from place to place on foot.
- As a precursor to high-speed rail, create a faster Caltrain bullet service that connects San Jose and San Francisco in less than 60 minutes.
- Make light rail faster by speeding up the trains, studying double tracking and reducing the number of stations.
- Make it easier to hold concerts, festivals and other events by reducing barriers such as permit costs.
- Use lighting, signage and interactive displays to better connect existing centers of activity and make downtown easier to navigate.
- Further integrate downtown and San Jose State University, in part through establishing a student district just outside campus.

Downtown is already developing its own sense of spirit and place, and that should be enhanced and encouraged. Any group that wants to make downtown its home should be welcome. This is a time to embrace those with energy and ideas — and reduce the barriers that currently prevent more from taking place. 🌀

Introduction

A great city begins in its downtown. Usually the place of greatest density, a downtown sets the tone for a city and is the primary public expression of its identity. Downtown San Jose's evolution over the past several decades — and its more rapid transformation in the past few years — has laid the foundation for the rest of the city to become more urban. Downtown San Jose is the densest, most walkable, most transit-oriented and most dynamic place in the South Bay. It's now poised to benefit from the growing trend toward working and living in urban centers.

But downtown San Jose needs more people. After decades of investment in buildings and public spaces, it has the room and the amenities to welcome many more workers, residents and visitors. As the number of those enjoying downtown city life begins to grow, the vitality and dynamism of the place will, too.

Today, downtown San Jose fills up with people during major events. But we want to see this level of activity become part of daily life.

Across the country, many downtowns are experiencing a revival, with new residents, jobs, investment and overall attention. Demographic trends — such as an increasing percentage of single households and the millennial generation's tendency to delay car purchases — are favorable for cities and urban centers. But this renewed interest in urban environments means that many cities are working to capture the wave of growth. Downtowns in Denver, Portland and San Diego have reshaped themselves in the past two decades and now exert a strong pull on talent and

investment. The City of San Jose recognizes this competition, as well as the value of having a strong center, and is ready to turn its downtown into a dynamic place that befits an increasingly urban city.

This report lays out the steps San Jose needs to take to make the most of its downtown.



Sergio Ruiz

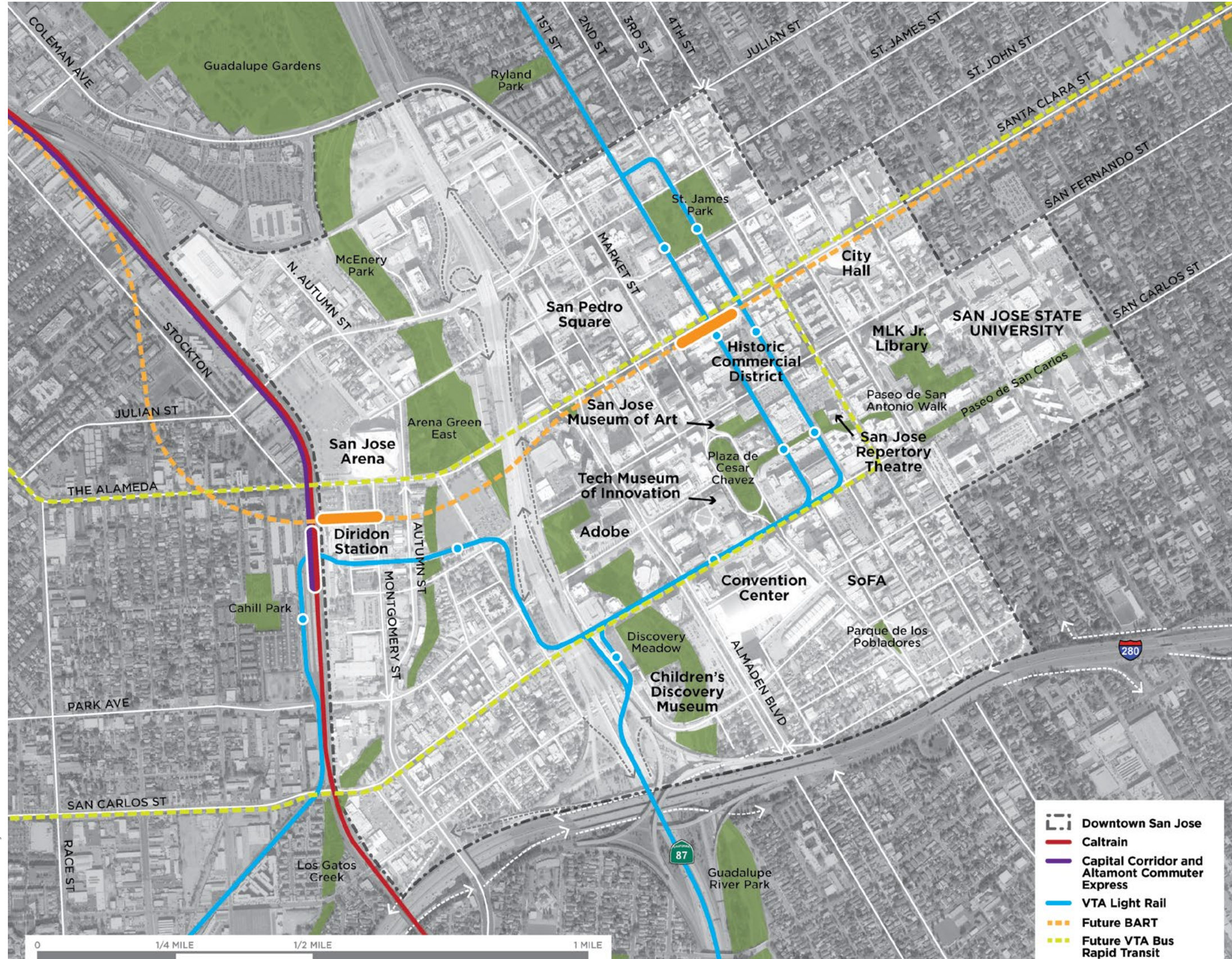


FIGURE 1

The Geography of Downtown San Jose

SPUR defines downtown San Jose as the 800-plus-acre area that stretches east from Diridon Station to City Hall and San Jose State University, and south from Coleman Avenue to Highway 280. It is larger than downtown Oakland's 750 acres and larger than San Francisco's 620-acre downtown commercial district.

The Regional Importance of Downtown San Jose

The Bay Area has many hubs of concentrated activity, and San Jose is never going to be the single traditional downtown business district for the South Bay, as no such place exists. Instead, there are a string of urban centers and downtowns stretching north along the peninsula to San Francisco: downtown San Jose, Sunnyvale, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Redwood City and San Mateo. Each city has its own walkable downtown, and Caltrain links them all. With the upcoming extension of BART to San Jose, this connection will extend up the East Bay to Milpitas, Fremont, Union City and beyond. This is the new geography of Silicon Valley: an axis of innovation stretching from Market Street in San Jose to Market Street in San Francisco.

Within this constellation of places, downtown San Jose could become the largest and most significant hub of the South Bay. It has the greatest concentration of public transit, bringing together Caltrain, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) light rail and buses, the Altamont Commuter Express from Stockton, and the Capital Corridor Amtrak service from the East Bay and Sacramento. Soon downtown will have two BART stations, and someday high-speed rail will stop at Diridon Station. There is no other spot on the South Bay map that comes close to offering this web of connections.

Downtown also features Silicon Valley's greatest concentration of anchor institutions: San Jose State University (SJSU), the San Jose Arena,¹ the Tech Museum of Innovation, the Civic Auditorium, the Montgomery Theater, the California Theatre, the San Jose Repertory Theatre, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Convention Center, San Jose City Hall, Martin Luther King Jr. Library and more.

It holds more multi-tenant office space than any location south of San Francisco. It is home to the world headquarters of Adobe, the regional headquarters of numerous professional services firms and more than 80 technology startups.

¹ Formerly the HP Pavilion, its official name is now the SAP Center.

It has more residential high-rises than any other place in the South Bay, with many more units in the works.

It includes hundreds of bars, restaurants and nightclubs, far more than any other center in the South Bay.


It is also the only downtown in the South Bay that is willing to grow in a serious way. A sad irony of Silicon Valley is that the future growth of this center of innovation is constrained by a widespread conservatism when it comes to changing physical places. But San Jose, almost uniquely, welcomes growth in an urban form — and due to its density and transit infrastructure, downtown remains one of the best places for growth of all kinds. This is an economic development asset that will only become more important over time. As the talented people who drive Silicon Valley increasingly embrace walkable urban places, downtown San Jose will become a vital part of the success of Silicon Valley.

This report identifies strategies for achieving a more successful and active downtown. Today, too many people simply do not find enough cause to go downtown — or they think that the barriers to getting there are too high. We need to overcome these concerns, but we don't believe there's one silver-bullet solution. Instead, we recommend pursuing a number of different approaches simultaneously. Downtown is already developing its own sense of spirit and place, which we'd like to enhance and encourage. Any group that wants to make downtown its home should be welcome. This is a time to embrace those with energy and ideas — and reduce the barriers that currently prevent more activity from taking place.

Six Big Ideas

This report is the culmination of dozens of meetings and interviews with the people who are most active in shaping downtown San Jose.² It contains SPUR's recommendations across a range of city policy areas, organized into six major themes:

1. Welcome all kinds of uses into downtown — but hold out for jobs near regional transit.
2. Make sure that what gets built adheres to key urban design principles.
3. Promote a larger area of Central San Jose, with downtown as its core.
4. Make it easier to get to and through downtown without a car.
5. Retrofit downtown to be more pedestrian-oriented.
6. Build on downtown's strengths as the cultural, entertainment and creative urban center of the South Bay.

Within each of these major themes, we offer a set of recommendations and key actors who have the power to implement them. **See pages 60-61 for a complete list of recommendations.** Then, beginning on page 49, we provide detailed suggestions for implementing the recommendations on key streets and districts within downtown. 

² The San Jose Downtown Association, which represents business and property owners downtown, is one of those most active in shaping downtown. The group has outlined its thoughts on the revitalization opportunity in a white paper titled "Downtown San Jose: In Search of a Strategy," released April 2013, and in the Downtown Strategic Action Plan, released September 2013. Available at: <http://sjdowntown.com/wpsite/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Downtown-Strategy-Needed.pdf> and <http://sjdowntown.com/wpsite/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Strategic-Action-Plan-2013-Final.pdf>

Big Challenges, Big Opportunities

Downtown San Jose is the largest single urban center in the South Bay — a dense, walkable core surrounded by historic neighborhoods and anchored by SJSU. It is the location of some of the Bay Area's most significant future regional transportation infrastructure investments, including bus rapid transit, BART, Caltrain and high-speed rail.

Yet today, downtown San Jose is just one node of activity within the competitive landscape of the South Bay. Downtown faces two major challenges and has three significant opportunities it can maximize:

Challenge 1: Downtown is a small job center within a decentralized sub-region where there is significant competition for jobs and investment.

By national standards, downtown San Jose has a small job base of about 36,000 jobs. Neither does it fare well when measured against other western U.S. cities of a similar age and with comparable transit systems. For example, downtown Salt Lake City has nearly 64,000 jobs, downtown San Diego has about 88,000 jobs, downtown Portland has 112,000 jobs, and downtown Denver and downtown Dallas have more than 140,000 jobs each. In regional comparisons, downtown Oakland has more than 80,000 jobs and downtown San Francisco has more than 300,000 jobs.³

Downtown San Jose holds more than seven and a half million square feet of office space. This is just over three and a half percent of the total 210 million square feet of combined office and research and development (R&D) workspace in the South Bay (where many office buildings are classified as R&D). It is the 11th-largest job center by space in the South Bay and has less workspace than North San Jose and South San Jose. (See Figure 2 on page 10.)

Downtown San Jose is also at the southern end of much of the economic dynamism of Silicon Valley. South Bay commercial rents are typically highest in downtown Palo Alto and decline both north and south from there. Downtown San

Jose is 18 miles south of Palo Alto. Its office vacancy rates are higher and commercial rents are significantly lower than other office centers in the South Bay.



³ These comparisons were conducted with the U.S. Census tool On The Map (<http://onthemap.ces.census.gov>). We compared a 4-square-mile area centered in the downtown of each city.

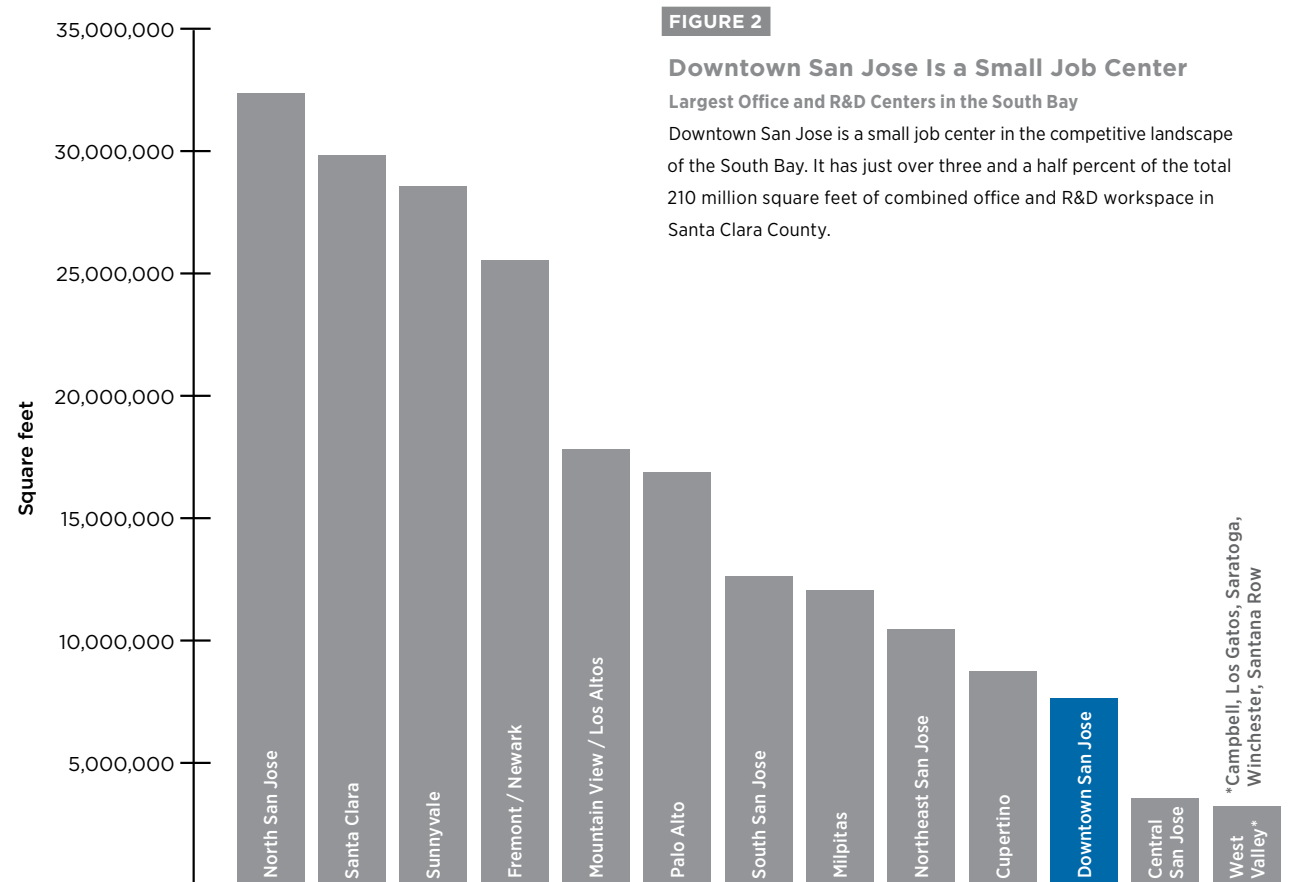


FIGURE 2
Downtown San Jose Is a Small Job Center
 Largest Office and R&D Centers in the South Bay
 Downtown San Jose is a small job center in the competitive landscape of the South Bay. It has just over three and a half percent of the total 210 million square feet of combined office and R&D workspace in Santa Clara County.

Source: CBRE, Silicon Valley Office Market View, Q2 2013. Available at www.cbre.us/research/Pages/LocalReports.aspx

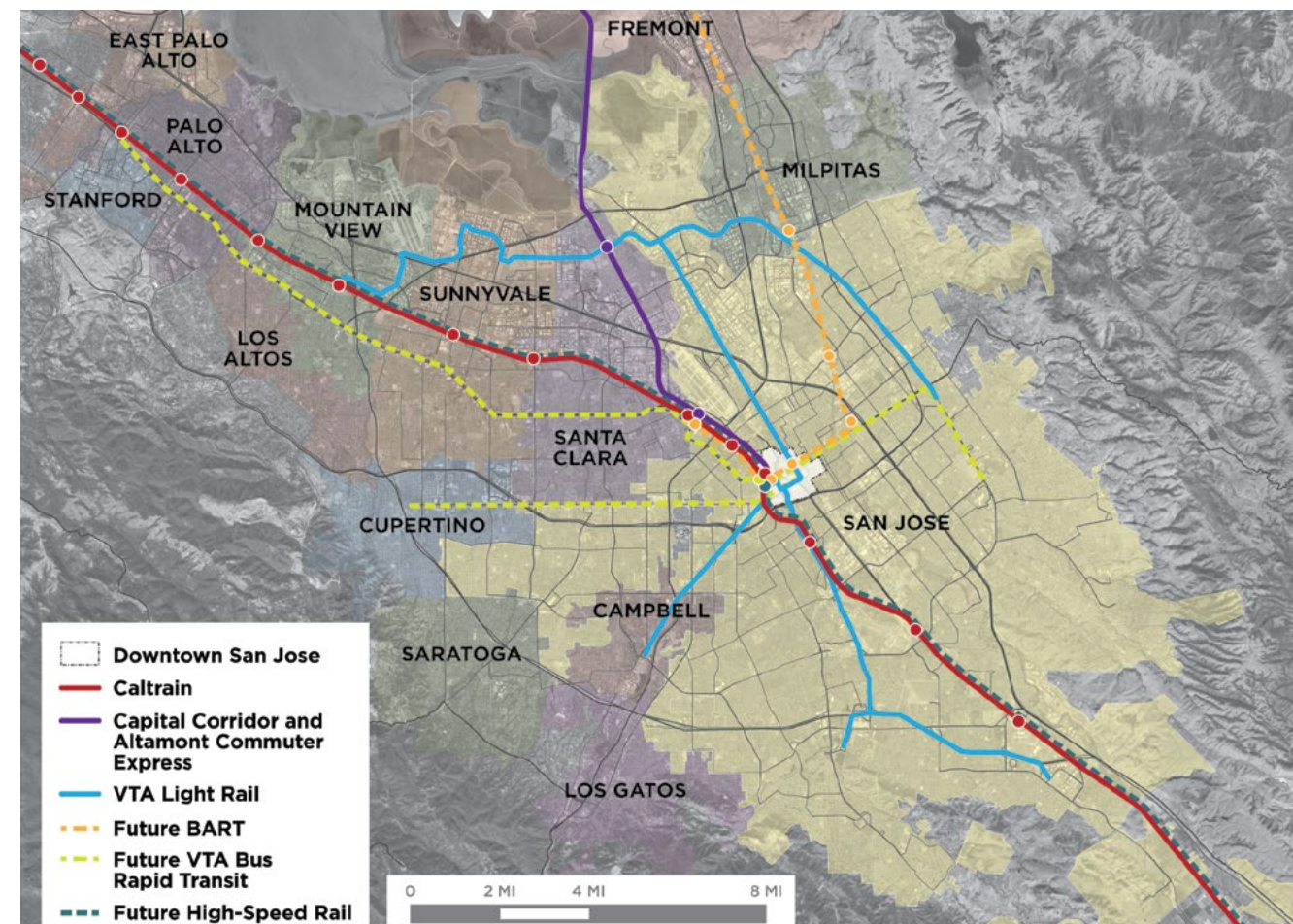
Challenge 2: Although downtown is at the center of the South Bay’s transit network, getting to and through downtown on transit is slow, and transit is not competitive with driving.

Travel to or from downtown on transit is sometimes twice as slow as driving. This is due to a combination of factors: decades of highway investments that promoted auto travel in Santa Clara County; the slow speed of light rail; and the decentralized land use pattern in the South Bay, where jobs and housing are often far from transit. Potential commuters to downtown may find transit hard to access from their homes. Downtown residents commuting out have an easier time getting to transit, but their commutes are much slower than driving. For example, a direct trip from downtown to Cisco’s offices, located at a light rail station in North San Jose, would take 15 to 22 minutes by car (depending on traffic) and more than 40 minutes by light rail. (It should be noted that certain trips are getting more competitive now that VTA is running select express service from the south.)

Opportunity 1: The fabric of downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods make it the most urban place in the South Bay.

Downtown features more blocks of walkable urbanism and high-rise development than any other place in the South Bay. Several thousand units of high-rise residential development have been recently built there or are permitted or under construction. It has over 300 restaurants, bars and other entertainment venues — more than any other center in the South Bay. Between 2000 and 2010, downtown added 8,000 new residents. It is a place where you can always find something happening. But visitors and nearby residents don’t always recognize its strengths. Some perceive downtown San Jose as more difficult to navigate than other, much smaller centers nearby — yet not as large and consistently full of life as a place like downtown San Francisco.

Our goal is to improve the consistency and quality of downtown’s activities and experiences while overcoming the perception that it’s a hassle to park there. The city’s climate



Source: SPUR and SOM analysis

FIGURE 3
Future Transit Investments Will Benefit Downtown San Jose

Downtown San Jose is already the center of the transit network in the South Bay. Investments over the next few decades will bring bus rapid transit, improvements to light rail speed, the electrification of Caltrain, the extension of BART and eventually the arrival of high-speed rail.

and topography make cycling an ideal way to get around, so building on San Jose’s reputation as a bicycle mecca presents a great opportunity. Another strategy is to leverage the coming transit investments to bring more people downtown. The growing preference for urban experiences will benefit these assets of downtown San Jose.

Opportunity 2: With new investments, downtown will become one of the most transit-connected locations in the entire state.

An unprecedented number of transit projects are coming to the South Bay, with key stops in downtown. (See Figure 3.) Planned bus rapid transit projects will connect to downtown along the Alameda and El Camino Real, Santa Clara Street and Alum Rock Avenue, and San Carlos and Stevens Creek boulevards. Light rail efficiency plans will result in faster speeds and hopefully increase ridership. The extension of BART from Fremont to San Jose’s Berryessa neighborhood, currently under construction, will eventually reach Diridon Station, making the East Bay’s employment opportunities

much more accessible and providing significant numbers of new riders for local transit. Caltrain’s plan to switch from diesel to electric engines and add faster bullet service could further shrink the travel time between San Jose and San Francisco. Altamont Commuter Express and Amtrak’s Capitol Corridor line already link the South Bay with the East Bay and Central Valley. And the California High-Speed Rail Authority has selected Diridon Station as the primary South Bay stop on its statewide network. Collectively, these transit investments will make downtown one of the most transit-connected places in the state.



Jerome Brunet, Courtesy San Jose Jazz Summer Fest

Opportunity 3: Downtown has numerous core anchor institutions and hundreds of successful events that increasingly fill its streets with life.

Downtown San Jose's streets fill with life during major events. Some of the key anchors for this activity are:

- SJSU, one of the largest urban universities in California with 30,000 students and 4,000 employees. The university is in a new athletic conference, which will increase attention, visitor numbers and the public's awareness of the school and downtown San Jose overall.
- The growing Convention Center, which draws more than a million visitors a year and has 1,000 employees. Thanks to conventions, downtown's 2,200 hotel rooms see 250,000 nights of booking per year. The Convention Center completed a 125,000-square-foot expansion in 2013 and now includes 550,000 total square feet.
- The four theaters operated by Team San Jose: the City National Civic, the Center for the Performing Arts, the California Theatre and the Montgomery Theater. In 2013, these four venues hosted theater performances on 375 days.

- The San Jose Arena, home of the Sharks hockey team, which hosts 150 events per year and is the major regional center for many concerts and other popular performances.
- 38 nearby cultural and civic institutions.
- Major downtown festivals and events, such as San Jose Jazz Summer Fest, Christmas in the Park, the Cinequest Film Festival and the ZERO1 Biennial.

It is these opportunities that shape what is possible in downtown San Jose. ○

Big Idea #1

Welcome all kinds of uses into downtown — but hold out for jobs near regional transit.

For many years, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency, the largest in the State of California, carefully managed uses, designs and other aspects of development throughout downtown. The redevelopment agency could decide to make a site an office building, for example, and then recruit a developer and provide subsidies to get it built. Each site was constructed according to a redevelopment plan for both institutional uses (like museums) and private uses (like hotels, offices and residential buildings). Sometimes the projects failed to find tenants or were oversized for the level of activity downtown. But over several decades, the city put in place the infrastructure for a much larger downtown. Recent increases in activity in the area are now making clear the valuable legacy of these investments.

Today, the redevelopment agency is gone. Its role as a funder and decision-maker for everything from demolition to urban design to tenant selection is no more. Now no entity has the same sweeping authority, and the question remains: Should the City of San Jose try to manage development, the way the redevelopment agency once did, toward a specific set of land uses? For example, should the city prioritize office, residential or retail? Or should it allow market forces to determine which uses come to downtown?

Downtown has a small job base compared with other downtowns regionally and nationally. Adding employment opportunities would not only fill downtown's streets with more people but also reaffirm it as a central business district (CBD) — the quintessential downtown of high-rise office buildings, lunchtime eateries, business-oriented hotels, and hustle and bustle. CBDs have proven effective at getting commuters onto transit because they provide large numbers of jobs in a concentrated location. In fact, commuting to work accounts for nearly 60 percent of all transit use in the United States, with many of these riders going to and from a CBD.⁴ CBDs often provide a measure of status to

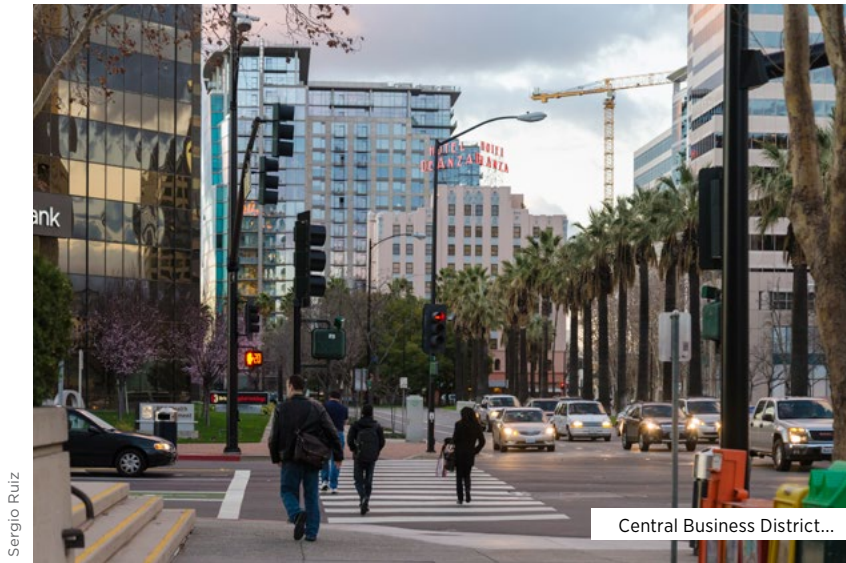
businesses based on their proximity to related companies (think advertising on Madison Avenue or finance around Wall Street). And CBDs can have more people per square mile than a residential-focused downtown because workers occupy less space per capita than residents. For example, a 300,000-square-foot building might hold 1,500 or more workers but only house 600 or fewer residents.⁵

Some have argued for an alternative model for successful downtowns as central social districts (CSDs).⁶ In this model, which San Diego embodies, downtowns are principally places for socializing, living, shopping, tourism and entertainment. Like CBDs, CSDs see lots of activity, but the activities are defined by consumption, not working. CSDs do offer job opportunities, but many of these fall within the service sector, which often pays lower wages than knowledge firms and other office-based occupations do. Investment and growth in social and entertainment-related uses (such as housing and hotels) take precedence.

⁴ See www.apta.com/resources/statistics/Documents/transit_passenger_characteristics_text_5_29_2007.pdf

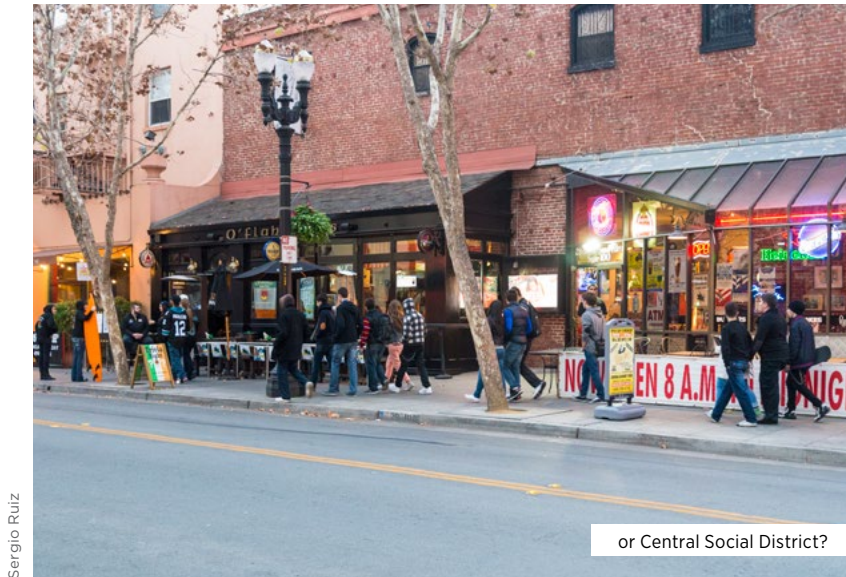
⁵ Note: This is based on an assumption that an average resident will occupy 500 square feet of living space while an average worker will only need 200 square feet of workspace. But averages vary depending on the unit mix or type of business. Many workers occupy 150 square feet or less, and studio apartments for singles are often larger than 500 square feet. As a result, an office building can sometimes be three times as dense as a residential building of the same size.

⁶ The idea of the central social district was described most prominently by former Indianapolis mayor William Hudnut. See www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/liveonline/00/levey/bob0606.htm. SPUR wrote about the tension between central social districts and CBDs in an article on San Francisco. See www.spur.org/publications/library/article/framingthefutureofdowntownsf03012007



Sergio Ruiz

Central Business District...



Sergio Ruiz

or Central Social District?

Urban planners debate whether downtowns are best suited to be places of work or places for socializing and entertainment. San Jose's downtown has, and should retain, elements of both.

addition, San Jose as a city is extremely focused on becoming a job center rather than a bedroom community for other Silicon Valley cities to the north. Downtown is a key part of the city's strategy to capture more jobs overall. Further, the point of extending BART to San Jose and into downtown is to reduce congestion and give commuters an alternative way to get to jobs. For that investment to be successful, downtown must be a major job center.

However, there has not been huge demand for office space in downtown San Jose in many decades. The Silicon Valley firms have been more drawn to North San Jose and other locations that allow for campus-style workplaces. It is simply not clear if San Jose will ever get large numbers of jobs downtown. As market demand for an urban living experience grows, the city faces a choice between holding out for jobs that might or might not come and gradually ceding more land downtown to residential uses.

While we would like downtown San Jose to capture more jobs, we balance this against the reality of decades of weak job growth downtown and continued employment growth in scattered office parks and campuses throughout the South Bay. Despite this generally decentralized job pattern, many employers recognize that proximity to regional transit like Caltrain and BART is an increasingly important factor in selecting a business location. This puts two areas in a unique position: the neighborhood around Diridon Station (downtown San Jose's current Caltrain stop and a future stop for BART) and the area around the future BART station near Market and Santa Clara streets.

SPUR's conclusion, after talking with hundreds of people from all parts of the real estate world, is that San Jose needs to allow the market to guide land use while having very firm requirements about density and urban design. But we make one key exception to this market orientation: We believe it is critical to make maximum use of the development opportunities within a half mile of regional transit (BART and Caltrain) stations and to preserve key parcels for jobs in the immediate vicinity of those stations (i.e., a quarter mile).

Downtown San Jose has a lot of strengths to build on as a CSD, including about 200 restaurants and more bars and nightclubs than any other place in the South Bay. The San Jose Arena hosts close to 150 events per year, including more than 40 home games of the National Hockey League team, the Sharks. SJSU also hosts more than a hundred events per year.

Many in San Jose would *like* downtown San Jose to be a major job center. All major downtowns in the United States are job centers in part, and the best-performing downtowns capture some of the benefits of downtown employment, such as tax revenues, higher transit ridership and a daytime population base that supports retail and street life. In

FIGURE 4

Central Business District vs. Central Social District

What is the function and role of a downtown? Some argue for promoting downtowns as a place of work, while others say downtowns should focus on socializing, residential living and entertainment-focused activity.⁷ While all great downtowns have some of both, the mix can create tension over the function and identity of downtown, as well as the impact of various types of users.

Key pros and cons of each approach:

- Pros of a CBD**
- Creates greater density of people during the day.
 - Makes best use of transit investment in a downtown, since most transit ridership is to/from work.
 - Provides an economic advantage in the knowledge economy by facilitating greater face-to-face interaction, which helps reinforce innovation and competitiveness.
 - Provides a range of quality jobs in close proximity.
 - Can result in the greatest diversity of people and activity.

- Cons of a CBD**
- May require holding land vacant until the market is ready for job-related development.
 - Can have less evening and night-time activity. This deadens the pedestrian experience after hours and makes it particularly difficult for small-scale retailers who must generate most of their business during the narrow lunchtime window.
 - Requires investment in rush hour transportation capacity, which can lead to oversized and underused infrastructure (parking lots, highways, major streets, transit) at other times.

- Pros of a CSD**
- Can allow for downtown to grow and fill in more quickly, particularly in a strong residential market.
 - Reflects a growing trend toward cities as places for consumption.
 - Can have more evening and weekend activity.
 - Helps support future job growth by testing the market and bringing more people. Residential projects provide the pedestrian activity and the customer base for retail that eventually makes a downtown like San Jose's more attractive to employers.

- Cons of a CSD**
- Increases out-commuting, often via car, as residents of downtown work elsewhere.
 - Reduces potential density, since many more people occupy an office building than a residential building of the same size.
 - Risks opposition from new downtown residents who may not want the features that make the CSD model successful (live music, new residential buildings, evening events and activities, development with limited parking).⁸
 - Produces lower-quality employment options. Retail and other service jobs pay less than the office-related occupations found in a traditional downtown. This means that many of the workers in a CSD may not be able to afford to live in the new housing being built there.

Source: SPUR analysis

⁷ See www.spur.org/publications/library/article/framingthefutureofdowntownsf03012007

⁸ There are examples in San Jose and other Bay Area cities of residents of new development opposing additional nearby residential and commercial development (due to perceived impact of traffic or loss of views) as well as entertainment venues (due to noise concerns).

Goals for Growth — and Barriers to Getting There

Downtown could accommodate new development of all kinds. Envision San Jose 2040 — the current General Plan, completed in 2011 — analyzed capacity for growth in downtown San Jose and assumed that downtown could add nearly 50,000 jobs and more than 10,000 housing units between 2010 and 2040.

This amounts to 10 percent of citywide jobs and 8 percent of citywide housing, based on a total of 470,000 additional jobs and 120,000 housing units. The plan also assumes that the city’s 70 urban villages will capture nearly three times as many jobs as downtown.

FIGURE 5

San Jose’s Plan for Growth by 2040

	Jobs	Housing Units
Downtown San Jose (including Diridon)	48,500	10,360
Specific Plan Areas	28,920	8,480
Employment Lands (e.g., North San Jose, Edenvale)	257,090	32,640
Urban Villages	135,490	68,520
Total	470,000	120,000

Source: Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan. Available at: <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/474>

Unfortunately, downtown will only add this many jobs and residences under certain limited conditions. New development will have to meet minimum density levels and include far less parking than what is currently dictated by both city requirements and market conditions. Quite simply, adding close to 50,000 jobs plus 10,000 housing units will require more than 16 million square feet of space (over 9 million for work and 7 million for living). Achieving this amount of development requires every developable site downtown to maximize its height and floor-area ratio (explained in Recommendation 2 on page 18), with 75 percent of total square footage going toward living or working — not so-called unproductive uses like parking, common areas or HVAC and other building systems.

Two significant restrictions on growth make this level of new development extremely difficult downtown. The first is building height limits. Downtown’s proximity to Mineta



flickr user anthony_goto

Downtown’s proximity to the airport is an advantage for travelers, but it’s a limiting factor in downtown’s overall development. The tallest buildings are restricted to around 22 stories.

San Jose International Airport provides great accessibility for those who need a direct flight to many U.S. cities or destinations in Mexico or Japan. But the airport’s location and flight-path requirements also restrict building heights. These limits affect downtown’s skyline and urban form (downtown consists primarily of mid-rise buildings), as well as its total development capacity and real estate economics. In most developments, a developer of a 40-story building will make much of his or her income from the top 20 stories, which command higher rents. Downtown San Jose’s two tallest buildings, The 88 (a 23-story residential tower) and City Hall (18 stories) both top out at less than 290 feet.⁹

Short of moving the airport to another location, which is not possible in the near term, there are no real ways around the height limit. Some want to remedy the situation

⁹ Office towers tend to have taller floors and thus fewer stories than a residential building of the same height.

by applying only the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) height standard, not the One Engine Inoperable (OEI) standard that some airlines use. (Certain airlines require an airplane that loses an engine on takeoff to fly straight ahead — i.e., over downtown — rather than banking to the west. The FAA would allow the plane to bank, and thus does not require the lower heights downtown.) But adopting the FAA standard as opposed to the OEI standard may mean losing major airlines, such as Southwest, which make up a majority of current flights. Also, it’s not clear how many more floors of additional development would be possible under the FAA standard alone. This is an issue worth exploring further.

The second restriction on growth is minimum parking requirements, which mandate that certain uses (such as residential and office space) provide a minimum number of parking spaces, set per housing unit or by square footage. (See Figure 8 on page 21 for examples.) In a 600,000-square-foot office building that meets the minimum parking requirement, only about 40 percent of the square footage would be available for leasing. Another 40 percent would be reserved for parking. This makes the underlying economics of development in downtown San Jose difficult — even if there were stronger market demand. Quite simply, too much of a building has to be devoted to parking, and buildings cannot reach heights that would allow developers to command rent premiums.

Together, the height limits and parking requirements affect the economics of new downtown development by limiting the amount of marketable space. Given these considerations, our general argument for development downtown is that San Jose should follow the market rather than trying to 1.) encourage either jobs or residents or 2.) pick certain types of businesses over others. But we make one significant exception to that rule in the areas closest to future BART stations, including Diridon. On just these few key parcels, we think it’s worth holding out for office development or other job-generating uses, even though it may take several development cycles for jobs to arrive. The benefits of high-density employment near BART, and of ensuring that downtown has enough land for job growth, are simply too great to let these sites be used for apartments or condos.

SPUR’s Recommendations for Land Use Downtown

1. In most cases, continue to be agnostic about use and users within downtown.

As described above, the general approach to downtown development and retail proposals should be agnostic. This means that, with a few exceptions, any new building, business, event or other investment seeking city permits or approval should be encouraged — assuming that each proposal would bring more people downtown and not degrade the pedestrian experience. Our recommendation is contingent on the expectation that downtown will maintain standards of public safety and cleanliness, supported in part by the existing business improvement district managed by the San Jose Downtown Association.

Our key exceptions (described in Recommendations 2 and 3 below) should be based on objective criteria and key planning principles (e.g., responding to transportation investments and maintaining high-quality urban design), not on cultural expectations about what a downtown should or should not include. This means that some businesses that locate in downtown will not match everyone’s perceptions of what downtown San Jose is all about. In such circumstances, the city should allow these businesses to go forward without opposition.

Retail businesses and special events do not survive without a market to support them. SPUR recognizes the extraordinary risk entrepreneurs face when launching a new business — and the challenges property owners and their neighbors face when a venture fails. But accepting a particular business as a tenant has far less impact on downtown than building a new development. A tenant whose business does not succeed can always be replaced by another tenant. But decisions about permitting new development — particularly housing — are more permanent. Once in place, new residential buildings could last a century or more, with all of their particular pros and cons: height, amount of parking, street orientation, overall urban design, etc. It is these decisions about use, density and urban design — rather than types of businesses — that should call for the greatest debate and care when we think about the future of downtown.

Responsible parties: San Jose City Council; San Jose Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

2. Establish minimum densities within a half mile of regional transit.

To make the best use of transit investments, SPUR suggests that the City of San Jose work to maximize density within a half mile of the two future BART stations downtown (near Market and Santa Clara streets, and around Diridon Station). We encourage the city to explore tools such as a minimum floor-area ratio (FAR)¹⁰ for the sites within a half mile of future BART stations. Note that this area includes most of downtown. (See Figure 7.)

Based on our analysis, new development throughout downtown will need to average 10.0 FAR on sites east of Highway 87 and 6.0 FAR around Diridon to ensure that downtown maintains sufficient capacity for job growth (specifically the ability to add 48,500 jobs and 10,360 housing units from new development).

In fact, our analysis shows that when we apply minimum parking standards to the sites available for development downtown and assume that every one of

them achieves either 10.0 or 6.0 FAR, the total capacity of jobs and housing only reaches 46,587 jobs and 8,928 housing units. In other words, an aggressive build-out scenario for downtown still fails to reach the growth projections in the General Plan. Future development that is either lower FAR or includes additional parking will further reduce downtown’s overall development capacity.

As a result, we suggest the city explore a minimum FAR as a tool to ensure the efficient use of limited land for future development. The Diridon Station Area Plan includes a minimum 2.0 FAR. We think such a minimum is too low to ensure that the sites will be most appropriately used.

While we are recommending an FAR minimum as a tool to maximize future development, we also suggest building in the flexibility not to require every project to meet these minimums, particularly on parcels over 30,000 square feet (three-quarters of an acre), as that goal could be in conflict with creating high-quality urban design and architecture. Instead, the minimum FARs should be used as a goal for the total development possible on important parcels. (See Figure 6.)

Given the restrictions on overall development (mainly from the airport height limits), parking should be included in the minimum FAR. This means that in the context of San Jose, an FAR minimum is not the tool to reduce parking but instead the tool to encourage fuller use of the limited building envelope for each site. In a different urban setting where there is no height limit and developers want to build more than the minimum — conditions not currently present in downtown San Jose — parking should typically be excluded from the minimum

FIGURE 6

Downtown’s Capacity for Growth

Downtown San Jose has the capacity to more than double its employment and population base, but only under specific conditions.¹¹ Based on SPUR’s analysis, if all new development meets our recommended density minimums and includes only the minimum parking required, downtown will come close to meeting the job and housing projections in the city’s 2040 General Plan. If new buildings include enough parking to meet current market demand, the total capacity for jobs and housing downtown will decline further.

	Total New Jobs	Total New Housing Units	Total New Parking Spaces	Gross Square Feet of Office	Gross Square Feet of Residential
2040 General Plan goal	48,500	10,360			
Scenario 1: No parking	75,141	11,520	0	15,028,125	9,216,210
Scenario 2: Minimum parking requirements	46,587	8,928	31,936	9,317,438	7,142,563
Scenario 3: Market demand for parking	37,946	7,891	42,429	7,589,203	6,313,104

Source: SPUR analysis of data from SOM

¹⁰ FAR is the ratio of a building’s total floor area to the size of the piece of land it occupies. For example, an FAR of 2.0 means that the total floor area of a building is two times the square footage of the property. Since most buildings do not occupy the entire parcel, an FAR of 2.0 could produce a building of four stories or more.

¹¹ Our analysis included the following assumptions: all parcels would be developed at either 10.0 FAR (east of Highway 87) or 6.0 FAR (around Diridon); 200 square feet per worker; 800 square feet per residential unit; 325 square feet per parking stall; 25 percent of the site for common spaces and other uses such as retail.

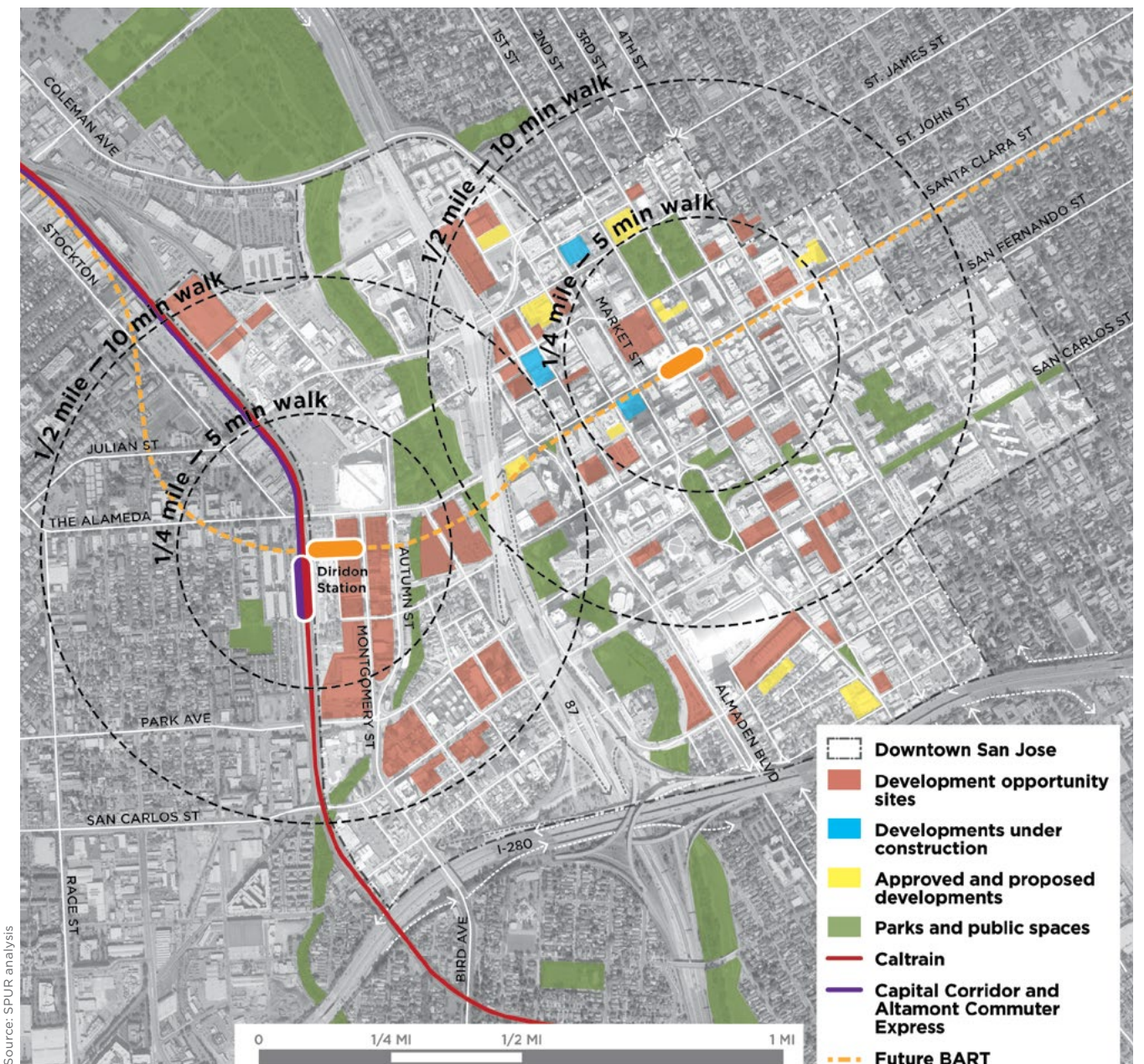
FAR calculation, forcing developers to build even bigger. In San Jose, however, the height limit already sets a much lower cap. For now, we encourage approaches to managing parking that will result in an overall decrease in the total space devoted to parking, such as promoting alternative commuting and shared parking arrangements with nearby buildings.

Lastly, as we explain in Recommendation 3, we think the parcels within a quarter mile from BART should emphasize employment uses. For the parcels beyond a quarter mile, we are agnostic about use

FIGURE 7

Available Development Sites Near Regional Transit

Downtown has a number of large unbuilt sites within a half mile of Caltrain and future BART stations. The majority of the area around Diridon Station is available for development. There are also several key parcels available along Santa Clara and San Fernando streets, including the site known as the Mitchell Block, between Market and 1st streets; Fountain Alley along 2nd Street; the south side of San Fernando Street between 1st and 2nd streets; and the south side of the housing development The 88, between 2nd and 3rd streets. SPUR recommends minimum density requirements within a half mile of regional transit stations and reserving sites for jobs within a quarter mile.



Source: SPUR analysis

and more interested in ensuring that the city achieves significant density. We recommend that the city discourage lower-rise housing construction types, such as a three- to five-story wood-frame structure over a podium, within a half mile of future BART stations downtown. Such building types should be encouraged to locate at the edge of downtown or in adjacent areas, not in the half mile around station areas.

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

3. Reserve sufficient land near regional transit for high-density, job-generating uses.

While overall development density in downtown is important to make best use of downtown’s infrastructure, locating employment immediately adjacent to transit is the best way to ensure high transit ridership. This is the key exception to our recommendation about being agnostic about use. We believe the parcels closest to BART should be reserved for high-density, job-generating uses such as office space.

Research shows that the closer workers live and work to a transit stop, the greater the likelihood that they will use transit — and the proximity of their workplaces to transit is, on its own, often a more significant variable.¹² In order to maximize transit ridership, it is better to put jobs, rather than housing, in a transit-rich location like downtown San Jose. A Bay Area study in 2006 showed that when people live within a half mile of rail or ferry stops but their jobs are further than a half mile from such stops, they take transit 16 percent of the time. But if their jobs are near transit and not their home, they take transit 28 percent of the time. Many statewide reports demonstrate that putting jobs within a quarter mile of fixed-line transit (such as light rail, subway or heavy rail) has a stronger impact on ridership than locating housing that close to transit.¹³

While other variables are also important in affecting transit use (e.g., the availability of free parking at work, the diversity of land uses and urban form in the area), the implication of these findings is that to get

commuters to use transit, it is essential to make sure there are jobs and other destinations right near transit stations. Residents who live more than a quarter mile from transit will still use transit in high numbers if they can get to their jobs directly on transit.¹⁴

This suggests that the best way to maximize ridership on the extension of BART to downtown San Jose will be to encourage lots of jobs that are immediately accessible from BART stations. If downtown San Jose continued to have a small job base, then it would be important to have employment opportunities near other BART stations. Yet few of the BART stations in southern Alameda County and Santa Clara County offer such opportunities today. Most stations (with the notable exception of Fremont’s Warm Springs Station) prioritize housing in their planning, not jobs. This means that it is even more important for downtown San Jose to retain the capacity to become a bigger job center and not allow development of key parcels near BART for housing.

As a result, SPUR recommends that the city, through its zoning code, reserve key highly visible and accessible sites for high-density office and employment uses. The locations we specify are those within a quarter mile of the two future BART station entrances on, along or near Market and Santa Clara streets and around Diridon Station. (See Figure 7 on previous page.) To reserve space for office and employment uses, we suggest not permitting housing on such sites unless the housing is a small portion of the site or total building program.

While we recommend that the city reserve key unbuilt sites of more than 30,000 square feet for new office development, there is another way to implement this recommendation. That would be to establish a target share or future percent of total new floor area (such as 70 percent) for office or employment uses within a quarter mile of future BART stations. The advantage of the second approach is flexibility for

¹³ One report noted that jobs within a quarter mile capture 10.5 percent of transit, compared with 9.7 percent for residents who lived within the same distance. See www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_211JKR.pdf. Other research observes that ridership on transit to work begins to drop off at a quarter mile or closer (even as little as 500 feet).

See Cervero, Robert. *Ridership Impacts of Transit-Focused Development in California*. UCTC Working Paper 176. 1993. Available at: www.uctc.net/papers/176.pdf

¹⁴ See Cervero, Robert. “Office Development, Rail Transit and Commuting Choices.” *Journal of Public Transportation*, Vol. 9, No. 5, 2006. “Concentrating housing near rail stops will do little to lure commuters to trains and buses unless the other end of the trip — the workplace — is similarly convenient to and conducive to using transit.”

¹² See Cervero, Robert. *Residential Self Selection and Rail Commuting: A Nested Logit Analysis*. UCTC Working Paper 604. Revised 2008. Available at: www.uctc.net/papers/604.pdf. “Even controlling for residential location, working in close proximity to transit significantly affected the odds of rail commuting.”

See Lee, Bumsoo Lee. et al. *The Attributes of Residence/Workplace Areas and Transit Commuting*. University of Southern California. 2011. Available at: www.jtlu.org/index.php/jtlu/article/viewFile/310/185. “We also found that workplace attributes matter more than residential neighborhood types.”

different market conditions. For example, it would allow residential projects to go forward initially (if the housing market is strong) as long as sufficient development capacity were reserved for jobs within the targeted zone. Once residential development reached its designated share, no more would be allowed in the zone. Such a policy approach is harder to implement, as it requires ongoing monitoring, which is why we have chosen to recommend setting sites aside instead.

Whichever policy is selected, SPUR recommends that the city monitor overall development in downtown and provide an annual report to the City Council. The report could include details such as the average FAR and densities of new development as well as whether the parcels nearest to BART have been developed for office or residential uses. This report could also detail information about downtown commuters’ and residents’ travel patterns.

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

FIGURE 8

Downtown Parking Requirements

The City of San Jose requires major downtown developments like offices and residential buildings to provide a minimum number of parking spaces. At 2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet, an office building may have to devote up to 40 percent of its total square footage to parking.

Building Use	Number of Parking Spaces
Financial institutions	2.5 per 1,000 sq. ft.
Business and administrative offices	2.5 per 1,000 sq. ft.
R&D spaces	2.5 per 1,000 sq. ft.
Live/work spaces	1.5 per unit
Multi-unit residences	1 per unit
Post-secondary schools	1 per 360 sq. ft.
Hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts	0.35 per room
Food, beverage, grocery stores	No requirement
Drinking establishments	
Museums, libraries	
Nightclubs	
Public eating establishments	
Retail stores	

Source: Downtown Zoning Regulations, Chapter 20.70.

4. Eliminate minimum parking requirements.

Downtown has significant parking resources today, with 25,000 total spaces. New housing or office developments are nearly always built with parking for all users, without making use of surrounding assets such as existing parking structures. Currently, the city requires 2.5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet for offices, R&D spaces and financial institutions. Standard multi-family residential development requires one space per unit, while live/work buildings must have 1.5 spaces per unit.¹⁵

There is no reason for the city to require more parking than developers believe they will need to meet market demand and make the project work. An oversupply of parking has many negative impacts: It adds cost to development, puts less development toward productive use and creates more auto traffic. It also harms the urban environment by making it easier for users to drive in and drive out of each development without ever walking around the surrounding city streets. Recognizing this, cities like Cincinnati have eliminated minimum parking requirements, and some downtowns, such as San Francisco, have even set parking *maximums* that limit how much parking can be built.

SPUR strongly recommends eliminating all minimum requirements for parking. We acknowledge that in the near term, the market is likely to demand as much or perhaps even more than these requirements.¹⁶ But the goal is to gradually shift away from requiring each building to provide parking for its own exclusive use.

At this time, SPUR is not recommending that downtown San Jose establish a parking maximum. That may be an appropriate strategy in the future, and SPUR would support such a policy move. Such a strategy might begin with a parking impact fee, to be imposed on projects that build more than an established rate of parking spaces, which could eventually be replaced with a hard cap on maximum parking per site. For now, we simply recommend eliminating the minimum in order to allow market mechanisms to determine the overall supply needed.

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

¹⁵ See Downtown Zoning Regulations, Chapter 20.70, Table 20-140. Available at: [http://sanjose.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/sanjose_ca/title20/zoning*1?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm](http://sanjose.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/sanjose_ca/title20/zoning*1?f=templates$fn=default.htm)

¹⁶ For example, the 1 South Market residential development in downtown San Jose was required to include one space per unit but is actually building 1.29 spaces per unit.

Big Idea #2

Make sure that what gets built adheres to key urban design principles.

Many good plans and principles have guided development in downtown San Jose, from the Downtown Strategy to the Streetscape Master Plan. But not all new development adheres to these already-adopted ideas. The current development culture of the city treats each project as a negotiation, and sometimes good principles of urban design are sacrificed in the course of such negotiations. (See our report *Getting to Great Places*¹⁷ for additional recommendations on addressing urban design and the development culture in San Jose.)

Every time a new building presents blank walls or highly visible parking to the street, or has low ceilings on the ground floor, it degrades the experience of the place and sets back the cause of downtown. San Jose deserves better, and the great buildings that already exist downtown deserve better neighbors. While we argued in our first big idea that downtown be flexible about use, we believe the city must hold the line on requiring good design.

We also think downtown should retain what it can of its high-quality historic fabric. San Jose has lost too many historic buildings already. One way to promote good urban design downtown is to keep what's left of the best structures built before World War II.

It does not have to cost more to retain existing historic buildings or to require a few clear urban design principles, particularly those that will promote walkability. The city should be united and clear about what is nonnegotiable. These few key moves will make downtown comfortable and inviting to pedestrians, which will help draw more people and more businesses.

SPUR's Recommendations for Urban Design Downtown

5. Require the ground-floor ceiling height on new development to be a minimum of 15 to 18 feet tall when measured from the sidewalk.

Generous ceiling heights at the street level make buildings inviting and are a prerequisite for retail, restaurant and other commercial uses on the ground floor. Tall ceilings are a hallmark of historic commercial buildings and one of the features that distinguish older buildings from newer ones. In historic buildings, commercial ground floors were often one and a half stories tall and were highly visible from the street. Contemporary buildings that maintain these dimensions work well for retail, restaurant and other active uses. In contrast, low ceiling heights on ground floors produce cramped spaces where retailers are often not as successful.

SPUR recommends that the city establish a minimum height for the ground floor in new development. The distance would be measured from the sidewalk to the ceiling of the ground floor. SPUR suggests that the minimum ground-floor height be set at 15 to 18 feet above the sidewalk. Note that 15 feet is a bare minimum; we encourage developers to consider even taller and more generous ground-floor ceiling heights.

The depth of the space also matters for certain kinds of retail. And it's important to ensure that there are proper mechanical systems for restaurants. However, instead of defining a set depth or minimum mechanical system requirement for each ground-floor space, we think these issues should be part of the

discussion with developers when they present their context map (see Recommendation 7).

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

6. Establish a policy defining active use requirements on ground floors along public streets.

Ceiling heights alone are not sufficient to produce good urban design outcomes. The types of uses that you see on the ground floor also affect the experience of a place. Retail and restaurants help to enliven the street, while ground-floor parking harms the pedestrian experience. In particular, many new development projects in downtown San Jose take up an entire block. This makes it even more important to ensure that all sides of a development project promote important values, most notably walkability.¹⁸

SPUR recommends that the city establish active use requirements for downtown ground floors along public streets. This means that all portions of the ground floor that front onto a public street (on all sides of a building) should be as transparent as possible, with uses that activate the street. These could include retail, restaurants, lobbies and common spaces, or even ground-floor offices. We are deliberately not proposing that San Jose require retail on all ground floors because there is not sufficient demand for this. But on streets that attract the greatest pedestrian activity, such as portions of 1st or Santa Clara, ground floors should be primarily devoted to retail.

On ground floors, utilities and vehicular access should be highly restricted. Blank walls, loading docks and exposed parking should be prohibited. In fact, parking should be as invisible as possible, with parking garage entrances minimized. The city should explore establishing maximum dimensions for the width of parking garage entrances downtown. It should also discourage using much of the building's ground floor for parking. Downtown Berkeley, for example, does not want buildings to devote more than 25 percent of their ground floors to parking.¹⁹

In addition, new buildings should be built to the street edge of the property, unless the setback at the front of a building is reserved for a public space. In no case should downtown developments have setbacks for surface parking. In fact, SPUR recommends that the city enact a prohibition on new retail surface parking in downtown.²⁰

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

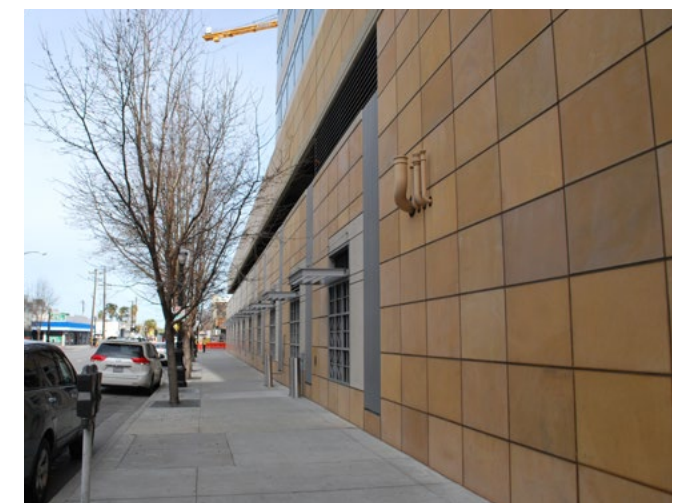
¹⁸ See SPUR. *Getting to Great Places*: "'Walkability' is excellent shorthand for good urban design. People react to cues in the environment. If a space is designed for people — if it's welcoming, safe and comfortable — they will walk. If a place is designed for cars, people will drive if they can." Available at: www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2013-12-12/getting-great-places.

¹⁹ City of Berkeley. "Economic Development: Goals, Policies & Implementation Measures." Available at: www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_DAP/EconDevelopment-CLEAN-80418.pdf

²⁰ While it may be unlikely for a new retail development to propose surface parking, there are a number of existing retail spaces within or adjacent to the downtown core with surface parking. Examples include the area near San Carlos and 4th Street and the retail center on Santa Clara between 6th and 7th streets.



Egon Terplan



Sometimes the same building exhibits both great urban design (generous ceiling heights and active uses on the ground floor) and what to avoid (blank walls and ground floors devoted to parking). This is increasingly important as downtown fills with more pedestrians and buildings. What was once the "back" of a building is now across the street from a new residential tower.

¹⁷ The report is available at www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2013-12-12/getting-great-places

7. Require developers to produce a context map that explains how the project’s ground floor connects with surrounding streets and uses.

Developers typically produce a site plan that includes some information about the uses on the ground floor. However, such a map does not provide information on the surrounding context for the project and often lacks sufficient detail about the quality of the ground-floor activation. SPUR recommends that the city require developers to produce a context map that demonstrates where the primary active frontages are on a project, as well as how the project adheres to Recommendations 5 and 6 regarding ground-floor heights and active uses. The map should include details such as entrances, parking, all ground-floor uses and dimensions, and any service needs for the building. It should identify the current uses on the surrounding parcels and how the building users will most likely access the building and the nearby destinations.

Currently, project developers can meet with city staff members prior to submitting a building permit application. This comprehensive preliminary review is a voluntary, fee-based service tailored to help applicants understand key city codes, policies and development review processes.²¹ Applicants who go through the preliminary review process produce an existing site plan with current uses, a proposed site plan (with parking analysis, if applicable), photographs of the site and surroundings, a landscaping plan and conceptual elevations. SPUR’s recommends adding to this review process a context map that more closely describes the treatment of the ground floor and the surrounding area.

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement



Because so much of downtown San Jose’s historic fabric is gone, what remains is an important asset. This block of Victorian homes on Autumn Street, just north of the Arena, should be preserved and incorporated into the redevelopment vision for the Diridon Station area.

8. Catalog and save downtown’s remaining high-quality pre-World War II buildings, but don’t let prevailing heights of historic buildings, or in historic districts, dictate heights of new buildings.

Downtown San Jose has already lost most of its historic buildings. The remaining contiguous areas of historic commercial buildings are primarily in the historic district along 1st and 2nd streets and along portions of Santa Clara Street between 4th Street and San Pedro Square. Outside of these few blocks, historic properties are scattered. Some key properties have been lost due to demolition, neglect or fire. Even as late as 2002, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency was proposing to demolish historic properties like the Houghton-Donner House, at 4th and St. John streets, in order to build a parking structure.²² Though placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002, the building was destroyed in a fire in 2007, and the property stands vacant today.

Given how little historic fabric remains, SPUR believes that nearly all of the remaining high-quality pre-World War II structures downtown should be preserved and demolition strongly discouraged. Our recommendation would allow for renovations and reinterpretations of historic buildings and would focus on preserving their exteriors.



Historic structures can blend well with new development — even modern mid-rise and high-rise construction, as seen in this example on South 1st Street.

Although we take a strong preservationist stance on individual properties, our approach to historic districts or parcels adjacent to historic structures is more flexible. In general, we think it’s fine to have modern, taller or denser buildings next to historic structures, even within historic districts.²³

Putting these suggestions into practice requires greater specificity and clarity in the city’s zoning code with respect to historic preservation. Too much of San Jose’s approach to historic preservation (and in fact all development) is context-specific, which leaves significant flexibility for staff and city council members to respond to specific proposals. Rules governing

historic properties are all too easy to circumvent. Even landmarked buildings can be demolished (should the property owner wish to go through the process of delisting the landmark). This approach undermines the goal of maintaining historic assets.

SPUR also recommends that the city conduct a more thorough historic survey of downtown and establish a hierarchy of buildings based on historic merit.

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

²³ For example, the long-vacant Fountain Alley sites on 2nd Street between Santa Clara and San Fernando should permit development that takes advantage of their proximity to current and future transit. This means development on the Fountain Alley sites should be high-density and likely have commercial or job-generating uses. While we agree in principle with the suggestion that development on these parcels should complement existing historic properties (such as the Bank of America building on 1st and Santa Clara), we do not believe such requirements for contextualism should be written

into the code. The San Jose Downtown Association writes about Fountain Alley, “The portion of the project that exceeds 60 feet in height, if any, should be sensitively designed to compliment [sic] the Bank of America building, therefore requiring an exception to the current guidelines on height for the district.” We agree that the design should be sensitive to the surrounding context. We also agree that it is appropriate to permit taller heights. This is one of those sites where it is important to maximize development potential for these parcels within a few blocks of a future BART station.

²¹ See www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=1756

²² See <http://beautifulbuildings.wordpress.com/2007/09/04/the-most-historic-building-in-san-jose-burns-to-the-ground>

Big Idea #3

Promote a larger area of Central San Jose, with downtown as its core.

Like many downtowns across the United States, downtown San Jose is ringed with walkable historic neighborhoods — such as Willow Glen, the Rose Garden, Japantown and Naglee Park — each with a distinct character. These areas can be a huge source of customers and visitors for downtown businesses and amenities.

But unlike some other cities, downtown San Jose is surrounded by many competing centers for work, shopping and other activities, such as Santana Row and North San Jose. Within a 30-minute trip on local transit, downtown residents can access 300,000 jobs, a third of all jobs in Santa Clara County. Additionally, 200,000 residents live within a 30-minute ride of downtown on local transit. Downtown San Jose has more jobs within 30 minutes on transit than downtown Denver and downtown San Diego.

The essence of this third idea is to reframe the surrounding areas as an asset to downtown, not a threat. In particular, SPUR suggests considering the benefits of better connecting downtown San Jose to the areas that are within a reasonable distance by transit or bicycle.

For example, employees at key professional services firms downtown have easy access to clients throughout the South Bay, particularly those firms in the central part of San Jose. Similarly, residents of downtown San Jose have an easy commute to hundreds of thousands of potential jobs, as well as other culture and entertainment centers.

Within the South Bay, no other downtown enjoys an equally close proximity to such a wide variety of other centers. Thinking of these surrounding areas as part of a unified Central San Jose is the core of our third idea.

What are our proposed boundaries for this area? San Jose has previously used the concepts of a “core” and a “frame” to define downtown and its adjacent areas.²⁴ This report accepts the city’s downtown core boundaries as

synonymous with “downtown,” with the exception that we also include SJSU and the areas north of the San Jose Arena to Coleman. But the city’s previously defined geography of the downtown “frame” is now too small to accurately describe the places that truly frame downtown. Quite simply, it includes neighborhoods immediately to the east but misses much of the dynamism and potential in the neighborhoods west and southwest of Diridon, as well as the connection to places further north and east.

As a result, SPUR proposes that San Jose adopt a new geography for the downtown frame, which could be simply referred to as Central San Jose.

This new geography would have the traditional downtown at its core and would encompass adjacent neighborhoods and activities that extend west to Santana Row, east to Little Portugal, south of SJSU’s South Campus (site of the university’s main athletic facilities) and north to North 1st Street around the Mineta San Jose International Airport. The precise boundaries of this area are less important than the notion of connecting downtown along key transportation corridors to neighborhoods, jobs and other destinations throughout Central San Jose.

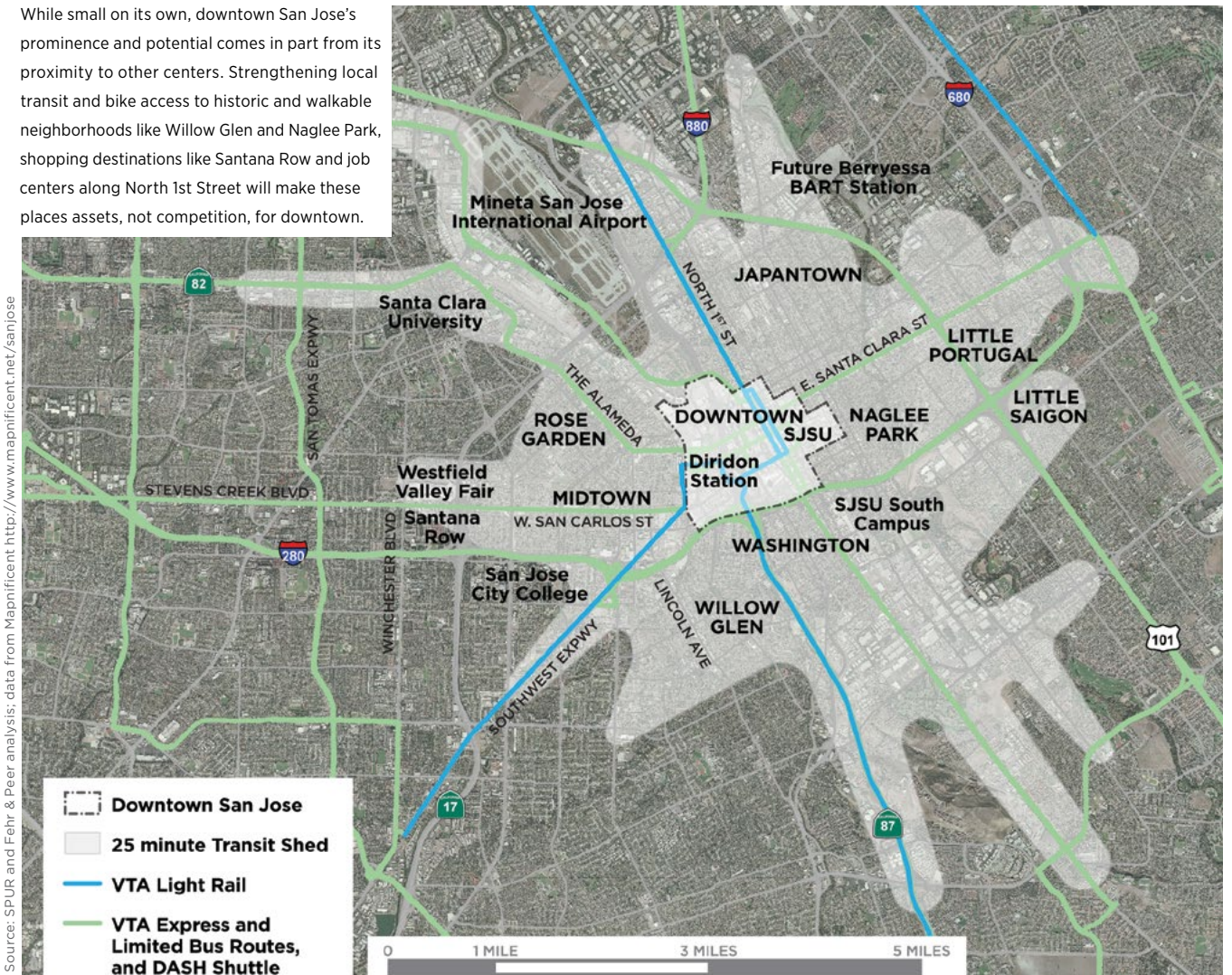
²⁴ In the Downtown Strategy of 2000, the downtown “core” included an area bounded by Coleman Avenue/Julian Street/St. James Street to the north, 4th Street plus Civic Plaza to the east, State Route 280 to the south, and Diridon Station to the west. The “frame” area extended further north to Taylor Street, east to 11th Street, south to Keyes/Willow Streets and a tiny bit west to pick up the area bounded by the Alameda, Stockton and Lenzen.

FIGURE 9

Defining Central San Jose

Neighborhoods Less Than 30 Minutes From Downtown on Local Transit

While small on its own, downtown San Jose’s prominence and potential comes in part from its proximity to other centers. Strengthening local transit and bike access to historic and walkable neighborhoods like Willow Glen and Naglee Park, shopping destinations like Santana Row and job centers along North 1st Street will make these places assets, not competition, for downtown.



Key Historic Neighborhoods Surrounding Downtown

Willow Glen, just south of Diridon, is one of San Jose’s oldest and most established neighborhoods. Nearly 30 percent of its homes were built before 1950 (whereas most homes in San Jose were built after 1970). Lincoln Avenue is a successful strip of retail and dining with a loyal customer base — and an example of a highly positive response to urbanism in San Jose. It is also on the Los Gatos Creek Trail and just a few miles from downtown, within easy bicycling distance.

The Alameda is the historic El Camino Real and extends northwest from Diridon. It is a mixture of old and new development, with a quarter of its houses built before 1939 and about 28 percent built since 2005.

Japantown, more than a hundred years old, is one of three remaining Japantowns in the United States. It’s home to a number of thriving cultural institutions, including the San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin and the San Jose Obon Festival. Currently, the neighborhood is experiencing a revival as an up-and-coming arts and retail corridor.

The Rose Garden is located due west of Diridon. Over a quarter of the homes in the Rose Garden neighborhood were built prior to 1939 (412 out of 1,586 homes). And two-thirds were built before 1960.

Naglee Park, to the east, reaches a density of 12,432 people per square mile, similar to some of the western neighborhoods in San Francisco and more than twice San Jose’s average density of 5,533. Nearly 37 percent of homes were built before 1939 (703 out of 1,932).

Why Define a Central San Jose?

- **Downtown is stronger when it's part of something larger.**

As noted previously in this report, downtown San Jose on its own is a small node within the large and decentralized landscape of the South Bay. But Central San Jose is much more dominant and distinct.

Central San Jose includes strong neighborhoods that could provide a core customer base for retail, restaurants and entertainment downtown. Supporting these neighborhoods, allowing them to grow and improving their connectivity to downtown will increase the population base that downtown serves.

- **Central San Jose has a distinct built form that supports denser urbanism.**

Central San Jose contains many of the city's pre-World War II neighborhoods, areas whose walkability and higher population densities enable them to take on additional population growth while reducing driving (as opposed to increasing traffic). The Central San Jose area has a population density of more than 8,700 people per square mile. This is more than twice the population density of the rest of San Jose, half the residential density of San Francisco and greater than the residential density of Oakland. Central San Jose also contains about half of the jobs and population of the City of San Jose.²⁵



Many of the neighborhoods surrounding downtown were built before WWII and feature a walkable main street and historic properties. Pictured: Lincoln Avenue in Willow Glen.

²⁵ The above analysis was conducted by the San Jose Department of Transportation. The geography for this analysis was a 49-square-mile area within San Jose extending 3 to 4 miles each direction from downtown. This area has 427,555 residents (45 percent of the city's residents) and 197,515 jobs

(56 percent of the city's jobs). The density is 8,726 people per square mile (compared with San Jose's citywide density of 5,414 people per square mile and San Francisco's density of 15,957 people per square mile).



Better transit and biking connections to nearby destinations like Santana Row (pictured) could turn their proximity into an asset for downtown, rather than a competitive threat.

- **Central San Jose turns competition into an asset.**

The larger geography defined as Central San Jose includes areas with much stronger market dynamics than downtown. Places like Santana Row and Valley Fair are often seen as competitors to downtown retail and job development. Defining a Central San Jose creates an opportunity to turn competition into an asset by focusing on downtown's convenient proximity to those areas (and correspondingly, the proximity of those places to downtown).

This strategy would focus efforts on transportation connections to and from outlying areas in Central San Jose (specifically light rail, bus rapid transit and bike infrastructure), as well as on land use planning in the corridors between downtown and these areas. For example, we see an opportunity to bring more residential development to the Midtown Specific Plan area (around San Carlos Street) as well as farther west along Stevens Creek. Combining new development with upgraded transit would reinforce this corridor and make the area a strong location between centers such as downtown and Santana Row.

SPUR's Recommendations for Central San Jose

9. **Redraw maps of the city, and begin marketing a larger Central San Jose geography with downtown at its core.**

SPUR proposes that the city update its maps and descriptions of downtown's core to include SJSU and the areas north of Diridon. We also suggest redefining the downtown frame as Central San Jose, a larger area that extends along key corridors farther west to Santana Row, east to Little Portugal, north to the airport and south of SJSU's South Campus. The maps should emphasize bike and transit connections from downtown to these nearby areas, as well as approximate travel times between them. They should also highlight walkability within each Central San Jose district.

But our recommendation goes beyond maps alone. More importantly, the city and its stakeholders, such as VTA, should re-envision San Jose as a city with a denser and more transit-ready central area. Institutions within this broader geography could take the opportunity to become better connected and even produce joint marketing materials that embrace a larger area.

Responsible parties: San Jose Office of Economic Development; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; San Jose Department of Transportation; VTA

10. **Emphasize investments in bike lanes, bike-share expansion, pedestrian improvements and transit to Central San Jose, and make the area a demonstration zone for achieving the city's transportation goal of reduced driving.**

San Jose has set an ambitious goal to encourage residents to shift from car travel to other ways of getting around. The 2040 General Plan aims to reduce the share of single-occupancy driving from 80 percent of all trips to 40 percent, and to increase transit trips to 20 percent and walking and biking to 15 percent each. Given Central San Jose's topography, historic form and existing transit corridors, SPUR thinks that this area is in the best position to demonstrate how to shift travel from cars to other modes of transportation. As such, SPUR suggests that the city establish Central San Jose as a demonstration zone for achieving this goal. We recommend that the city gather data on transportation within Central San Jose over time to evaluate whether or not the city's policies and investments are resulting in a shift from driving to other modes.

We also suggest that the City of San Jose and VTA prioritize funding toward investments in Central San Jose, as long as they can demonstrate that the investments will help support the city's goal of reducing driving. This is not to suggest that the city should not provide such investments to other areas. Instead, it is an acknowledgment that this central district is an appropriate place to concentrate early rounds of funding, particularly because the city wants to ensure that the greatest number of people shift from driving to other modes.

We also recommend investing in events and outreach to residents and employees in this area in order to encourage them to try different transportation options. Sometimes encouraging people to use existing facilities and services is far more cost-effective than adding wholly new infrastructure.

Finally, we encourage San Jose to consider the expansion of its “protected intersections” policy to Central San Jose. This policy exempts individual intersections from an analysis of auto delay and congestion that might result from new development (a metric known as “level of service”) as long as the overall area follows the guidelines in a master Environmental Impact Report.²⁶

See Recommendation 12 for greater specificity about how to implement these ideas downtown.

Responsible parties: City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA

11. Coordinate the Urban Village plans within Central San Jose.

San Jose's adopted Envision 2040 General Plan identifies more than 70 Urban Villages, areas targeted for new development and population growth. Many of them are located within Central San Jose.²⁷ SPUR supports this approach and encourages the Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement to coordinate among all the Urban Villages within Central San Jose and potentially conduct planning for them together.²⁸

By making this recommendation, we urge the city to focus its limited planning resources on a smaller geography where the goals of the 2040 General Plan are most likely going to be realized.

We also encourage the city to use this Central San Jose geography as the basis for its applications to VTA and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for Priority Development Area funding.

Responsible parties: City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement 

²⁶ A 2013 bill (SB 743) will lead to the State of California developing a new metric that may eliminate level of service as a measurement tool for the transportation impact of new development. See http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB743

²⁷ Urban Villages currently slated for planning include Five Wounds, South Bascom, West San Carlos, the Alameda, Stevens Creek, Santana Row/Valley Fair, Winchester and East Santa Clara (from City Hall to Coyote Creek). The city is also working on the Diridon Station Area Plan and an Alum Rock Rezoning Plan and has adopted specific plans for Midtown and Japantown.

²⁸ A few of the Urban Villages in the Central San Jose area are not currently slated for planning in the near term. These include North 1st Street, Race Street and the area around the Southwest Expressway.

Big Idea #4

Make it easier to get to and through downtown without a car.

Downtowns work by aggregating large numbers of people. By their nature, they function as central gathering places for people who don't live there. That's what makes a downtown different from a smaller-scale neighborhood shopping street. For downtown San Jose to work, the city has to do better at getting large numbers of people into downtown, which means that transit needs to be faster and much more convenient to access.

Despite perceptions otherwise, downtown San Jose is already quite easy to access and navigate with a car. It is surrounded by major highways, has very little street traffic relative to many parts of the Bay Area and has ample parking. There is still plenty of capacity — both in the transit system and on the roads — to accommodate more drivers, transit vehicles and other modes of transportation. But having sufficient capacity also means that there's room to experiment with new approaches. The goal must be to arrive at a future where the automobile is not the default method for every trip.

One way to make transit more effective is to solve the

“first mile” and “last mile” problem. A transit trip itself might be fast and convenient, but if getting to and from the station is too inconvenient, it can prevent people from choosing to take transit. Tools such as bike sharing, car sharing, shuttles and other systems could help create new connections to and from transit.

Some of the distances between downtown and key destinations like other job centers are perfect for bike trips. We think that bicycling has huge potential to grow, both as a way to move within downtown and, perhaps most importantly, as a way to travel from downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods of Central San Jose.



Sergio Ruiz

How Do People Currently Get Around in Downtown San Jose?

In downtown San Jose, a far greater share of people walk or take transit than in the City of San Jose overall. (See Figure 10.) With transit making up close to 10 percent of all trips, the ridership in downtown is comparable to the Bay Area regional average but far below other downtowns like Oakland and San Francisco.

Quite simply, not enough people are riding transit, either citywide or within downtown. VTA faces an uphill battle because low-density Santa Clara County is spread out, and too few jobs are located near VTA transit stops. The only way the agency will become a more important mobility



Sergio Ruiz

FIGURE 10

How People Commute to Work

Not surprisingly, residents of downtown San Jose are far less likely to drive alone to work than residents of the city as a whole. In fact, downtown residents' rate of solo driving is nearly halfway to the city's goal of 40 percent or less.

	City of San Jose	Downtown San Jose	Envision 2040 Goal
Single-Occupant Automobile	78%	61.2%	No more than 40%
Carpool	10.6%	7.3%	At least 10%
Public Transit	3.4%	9.4%	At least 20%
Bicycle	0.9%	3.6%	At least 15%
Walking	2%	11.4%	At least 15%
Other Means	1.2%	2.1%	n/a
Work at Home	3.7%	4.6%	n/a

Source: American Community Survey 2011, 5-year estimates; and Envision San Jose 2040

provider is by making its service much faster. It is crucial for transit to be more competitive with driving, and VTA's light rail and bus services are currently much slower than car travel.

To encourage visits to downtown, the light rail system was designed to travel through its heart, instead of taking a bypass route that would have followed the median of Highway 87. Today, the trains do indeed go through downtown, but the alignment is awkward (with many turns and stops) and the speeds are very slow. As a result, not enough people are on those trains. Instead, they're in cars on the highways, not stopping downtown as they travel from home to work and back again. If some significant portion of these drivers can be induced to ride light rail, businesses will be able to attract some of them to stop and spend time downtown.

What Is the Capacity of the Road Network Downtown?

"Road capacity" indicates how much room there is to add more cars, transit or bikes on a given street. Adding new transit lines or stops, or dedicating some lanes exclusively to transit, is great for improving transit speeds, but it can have an impact on congestion or overall driving time for private cars. Some observers caution against giving transit lines priority over cars in all cases, particularly if it creates a trade-off for driving times. Transit has a small share of the transportation market relative to driving, they argue, so improving transit will not attract many new people. Or, they

FIGURE 11

Road Capacity in Downtown During Peak Commute Hours

Downtown's streets have additional capacity during both the morning and evening commute times in all directions. The capacity is lowest crossing the east and north boundaries, where many vehicles hold outbound commuters or are just passing through downtown.

Boundary of Downtown	Direction of Traffic (Into or Out of Downtown)	Roadway Capacity Used	
		A.M.	P.M.
North	In	50%	78%
	Out	85%	47%
South	In	79%	41%
	Out	31%	77%
East	In	80%	89%
	Out	62%	91%
West	In	67%	74%
	Out	62%	78%

Analysis by Fehr & Peers

may say, downtown has only one major east-west street, so dedicating space for transit on this street will negatively affect traffic flows.

Our analysis shows that there is currently additional capacity on the roadways into downtown San Jose in all directions. (See Figure 11.) The travel direction with the least amount of capacity is eastbound out of downtown during evening commute hours, which is at 91 percent capacity. Westbound travel into downtown at this time is at a similar level of 89 percent capacity. Other directions have more capacity. This suggests that there is available roadway space to use as dedicated space for transit.

In addition, we see significant capacity on the transit system. Through downtown, transit is operating at about 21 percent of total capacity during both morning and evening commute hours. This means that nearly 80 percent of the total space on transit is available for additional riders. Some lines — like the 522 Rapid — have more frequent and faster service and show high ridership. This suggests that investments in high-quality transit service, such as increasing speeds and efficiencies, can attract more riders.

SPUR's Recommendations for Transportation

12. Use downtown and Central San Jose as the model for achieving the city's goal of reduced driving.

As we pointed out in Recommendation 10, downtown San Jose and its surrounding neighborhoods are the best places to achieve the city's goal of reducing solo driving to only 40 percent of all transportation trips. Ironically, despite this official goal, some transit investments (like proposals for dedicated bus lanes) remain controversial. Getting key downtown stakeholders to agree on important high-level principles for downtown may alleviate future disagreements about how to manage road space.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for meeting the city's goal downtown:

a. Draft and update a downtown multimodal strategy.

The San Jose Department of Transportation should collaborate with VTA, the San Jose Downtown Association, the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, SPUR and other stakeholders (such as the Chamber of Commerce and TransForm) to draft and continually update a strategy to balance the various modes of travel to and through downtown while explicitly seeking to reach the city's goal of reducing driving.

b. Establish a transportation management association

(TMA) that encourages downtown employees and residents to change their travel behavior. While such entities are more often found in suburban office park environments, Austin and Philadelphia both have downtown TMAs. In San Jose, the TMA for downtown would be responsible for helping implement programs that shift travel behavior. The TMA would work in close partnership with the Department of Transportation and VTA, as well as with nongovernmental stakeholders like the San Jose Downtown Association. The TMA would be involved in marketing transportation demand-management activities, such as the implementation of SB 1339, the statewide commuter benefits law.²⁹ The group could also work on providing secure bicycle parking, facilitating shared parking agreements between landlords and implementing parking "cash-out" laws³⁰ and other programs that reduce automobile travel to and from downtown.

²⁹ See http://rideshare.511.org/pdfs/BAAQMD_SBI339_flyer_MTC_2pg_4.pdf

³⁰ State law requires certain employers who provide subsidized parking for their employees to offer a cash allowance in lieu of a parking space.

- c. **Make existing unlimited transit passes (such as VTA's Eco Pass and Caltrain's Go Pass) available to smaller downtown employers.** Unlimited transit passes are a great way for an employer to provide less expensive commuting options to its employees. The current fare structure caters to larger employers and is prohibitively expensive for smaller employers. SPUR suggests that the City of San Jose work with Caltrain and VTA to allow a TMA to purchase unlimited passes in bulk and make them available for smaller employers. For example, Caltrain offers an unlimited annual pass for employers as long as they purchase the pass for all of their employees. Right now the full discount does not apply for employers with fewer than 80 employees.³¹

Responsible parties: City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA, San Jose Downtown Association, SPUR, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Transform

13. Make light rail transit more efficient by running trains faster, studying double-tracking, reducing the number of stations, reconfiguring the network and improving the timing between connections.

Light rail transit in Santa Clara County carries about 34,000 passengers per day on more than 42 miles of track. That's about 800 passengers per mile and only 20 percent of the system's full capacity.³² Increasing the train speed is essential to shifting more travelers to transit.

There are many reasons for the current slow speeds through downtown. Light rail cannot travel faster than 10 mph on the transit mall, where it runs in the middle of the sidewalk. The southbound trains and northbound trains run on parallel streets for several blocks, and it takes several minutes for trains to cross over and back. The system has too many stops. And the alignment at various places is indirect: For example, trains leaving Diridon stop a few hundred feet away at San Fernando and then bend south for a stop at the Convention Center before turning north again for the route along the transit

mall. The trip from Diridon to 1st and Santa Clara streets, in the core of downtown, takes 11 minutes — only a few minutes faster than walking.

While fixing any of the above issues would improve transit operations, addressing them all does not make financial sense given the low ridership on the light rail system. While we have ideas for how to straighten the alignments through downtown from Diridon, we think the most significant changes to transit in downtown will come from improving the slow speed along the transit mall and eliminating the switch from 1st to 2nd Street and back.

The current light rail configuration splits north- and southbound trains onto parallel streets — 1st and 2nd streets — for six blocks. To accommodate the one-way tracks on 1st and 2nd, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency entirely rebuilt both streets between St. John and San Carlos. The street design is composed of a 40-foot-wide sidewalk on one side, with light rail trains running on the sidewalk, a 16-foot-wide sidewalk on the other side, and a 24-foot roadway in between, with one bus lane and one general purpose traffic lane. There are also three rows of trees, as well as rows of planter boxes adjacent to some of the trees.

While the split configuration was initially intended to increase the area that is easily accessible from transit, it reduces the efficiency of the system. Because the trains are effectively running on the sidewalk, they are not able to travel faster than 10 mph. Additionally, the crossovers at the northern and southern end of downtown slow the trains and increase travel times by several minutes.



Sergio Ruiz

While some praise the urban design of the transit mall on 1st and 2nd streets, others are concerned that it puts pedestrians and bicyclist into direct conflict with heavy rail cars and leads to very slow transit speeds as trains must slow down in these areas.

³¹ Participating employers pay the greater of \$165 per employee or \$13,750 annually. At this price, the Go Pass offers a huge discount from the \$169 current monthly pass for all zones. Although an employer would only need seven or more employees for the \$13,750 to be less expensive than the \$169 full-price monthly rate, they would need more than 83 employees to make the minimum price less than the \$165 annual rate per employee. As a result, many smaller employers do not participate. This recommendation could be implemented by the TMA and/or the City of San Jose. See www.caltrain.com/Fares/tickettypes/Go_Pass.html

³² Current Light Rail System Data, VTA. April 2013. Available at: www.vta.org/sfc/servlet.shepherd/version/download/068A0000001Faph

SPUR thinks that the current transit mall streets are beautiful and well designed, but that the transit configuration is inefficient. We believe that having trains run on the sidewalk only works when there are few pedestrians. Therefore, we recommend that the city consider double-tracking both the northbound and southbound light rail service onto 1st Street. Southbound trains would continue south on 1st and would never cross over to 2nd Street. See Appendix 2 on page 62 for an evaluation of the proposal to double-track light rail.

Given the above considerations, the following recommendations focus on both interim and long-term enhancements to light rail and the bus system downtown:

- a. **Ensure a one-seat ride from any station on the system to downtown San Jose and implement other changes to increase speed and service to downtown.** VTA is currently completing its Light Rail Improvement Program. This involves four key changes to the light rail system: expanding commuter express service to all-day service on the Santa Teresa to Alum Rock line; establishing new direct service from Almaden to Mountain View through downtown San Jose; turning the Winchester line from Campbell around in downtown San Jose; and implementing a real-time, reliable transit signal prioritization and light rail vehicle detection system to increase speeds. Collectively, these changes will increase service downtown and reduce travel times from stations in the south. SPUR supports full implementation of this program.
- b. **Fund and conduct a major study of double-tracking light rail transit onto 1st Street through downtown.** This study must include specific evaluation of time savings and operational cost reductions for each possible change.
- c. **In the interim, explore efforts to increase the speed of trains along 1st and 2nd streets from 10 to 20 mph through safety measures such as installing bollards.** SPUR encourages VTA to explore whether speed increases are possible under the current regulatory environment and to apply for exemptions from California Public Utilities Commission rules to enable trains to run faster, potentially up to 20 mph. Although we support permeable concepts like bollards (short posts), we're concerned about the potential impact of full physical barriers and opposed to adding barriers like chains (or a combination of bollards and chains) because they would effectively narrow the pedestrian portion of

the sidewalk and thus undermine the purpose of the street design.

- d. **Explore consolidating two downtown light rail stations into a single station between Santa Clara and St. John.** Today, there are three downtown stations on the north-south light rail alignment: St. James Park, the stop between Santa Clara Street and San Fernando, and the Paseo de San Antonio. At each stop, trains dwell for at least 30 seconds to load and unload passengers. Consolidating two stations would save at least 42 seconds of travel time on each trip. This seemingly small time savings is actually a real improvement for travelers and a notable cost savings for VTA. We propose combining the two northern stations into one new station on 1st Street in the block just north of Santa Clara. It would make the most sense to do this as part of double-tracking so that the city would not incur the costs of consolidating stations on 2nd Street only to have those stations removed in the future. An alternative would be to consolidate the stations on 1st Street while keeping the two separate stations on 2nd Street, but this might create too much confusion for riders.

Responsible parties: City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA

14. Make the downtown and surrounding bus network easier to use by building bus rapid transit, improving public awareness of services and better integrating with rail.

Buses draw the largest numbers of transit users in the South Bay. They carry about 105,000 passengers every day — three quarters of VTA's nearly 140,000 daily passengers.³³ Most of the highest-ridership lines



Sergio Ruiz

³³ VTA Facts, Bus System Overview. Accessed February 2014. Available at: <http://www.vta.org/news-and-media/resources/vta-newsroom-fact-sheets-vta-information>

connect through downtown, including routes along Santa Clara, the Alameda and San Carlos. In part due to the high ridership on these existing bus lines, VTA is also planning three bus rapid transit (BRT) lines that connect through downtown: Santa Clara/Alum Rock, El Camino Real and San Carlos/Stevens Creek.

SPUR recommends the following changes to the downtown bus network:

a. Build the BRT network with dedicated transit lanes through the downtown core. SPUR supports the full build-out of VTA's planned BRT network and encourages efforts to ensure that the service achieves internationally recognized standards for BRT.³⁴ Currently, the proposed BRT design does not include dedicated lanes for transit, except for one block downtown and in some outlying areas. SPUR believes it is important to give transit dedicated roadway space, especially as downtown becomes a more popular place. While some argue that dedicated transit lanes will increase congestion for cars, there are ways to establish dedicated lanes that do not reduce auto capacity — for example, by using the right shoulder and parking lane as a bus-only lane during commute times. This is something San Jose should pilot. SPUR also suggests that San Jose further review left turns along Santa Clara Street that impede transit service through downtown and are dangerous to pedestrians.

b. Study where to locate future north-south bus service. If VTA decides to double-track light rail on 1st Street and the city closes 2nd Street through St. James Park (which SPUR proposes later in this report), north-south bus service (currently on 1st and 2nd streets) should be relocated. This change would put both directions of bus service on the same street. SPUR suggests VTA and the Department of Transportation conduct a study to determine where to locate this north-south service. One option to consider is Market Street.

c. Improve the visibility and public awareness of the DASH service and further expand it. DASH is a free bus service from Diridon to SJSU. This successful service carries about a thousand riders per day, a four-fold increase from when it began in 1996.³⁵ Its current route from Diridon travels east on San Fernando Street and west back to Diridon on San Carlos Street.³⁶ VTA has successfully extended DASH shuttle operation hours later into the evening. But currently, many visitors to downtown don't know that a free downtown bus service exists. SPUR

recommends that VTA think of DASH as a downtown streetcar that is easy to hop on and off. This means that the route has to be very clear and obvious to riders. Anyone arriving at Diridon should notice DASH and understand where it goes. We suggest that VTA and the city think carefully about how to enhance the visibility of the DASH route through better signage both along the route and at specific stations, especially Diridon.

d. Complete and implement a BART transit integration plan. When BART service begins at Berryessa in 2018, the extension to downtown San Jose will still be years off. In the interim, the city needs to provide efficient connecting service from Berryessa to downtown. Buses that previously operated between downtown and Fremont BART should be discontinued and replaced by express bus and/or BRT service to Berryessa BART, with significant midday service. This BRT connector could become an extension of the future Stevens Creek BRT. The transit integration study should also consider bicycle and pedestrian access to and from Berryessa and include an analysis of transit service in downtown during BART construction, when there will likely be some disruptions.

Responsible parties: VTA, Department of Transportation

15. Make the city, particularly Central San Jose, into a bike paradise.

A combination of bicycle infrastructure, the new Bay Area Bike Share program, flat topography and great weather make San Jose and its central neighborhoods a potential biking paradise. The city has appropriately ambitious plans to make Downtown San Jose the “most bike-friendly place in the Bay Area.” Achieving this will require implementing the current 2020 Bike Plan.

In general, SPUR recommends that the City of San Jose continue to build out a broad and more connected bike network, first in the downtown core and then between downtown and the surrounding areas. In particular, we suggest the city focus on creating better bikeways (preferably separated bike

³⁴ *The BRT Standard 2013*. The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy. March 2013. Available at: <https://go.itdp.org/display/public/live/The+BRT+Standard>

³⁵ City of San Jose Department of Transportation. Memorandum. July 13, 2009. Available at: www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/Agenda/20090804/20090804_0207.pdf.

³⁶ See www.vta.org/schedules/SC_201.html

lanes) and extending existing bikeways through downtown and to nearby areas.

The city has begun a very effective and ambitious restructuring of downtown streets to calm traffic and make streets more bicycle-friendly, and that should continue. The city has also taken great steps to better coordinate bike planning with transit planning and to recognize how bikes and transit complement each other; in the South Bay, there are many “last mile” gaps that can be easily filled with a short bike trip.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for bike paths and lanes:

- a. Complete key bikeway connections and bicycle infrastructure through downtown and out to surrounding neighborhoods.** Potential changes include:
- Closing the gap in the Los Gatos Creek Trail through Diridon to establish a strong bike connection to Willow Glen.
 - Fixing other short gaps east and west through Diridon — for example, by extending the bike lanes from San Fernando and connecting to Park Avenue to the west.
 - Establishing a two-way bike path on St. John where it crosses under Highway 87.
 - Extending the existing bike lanes on 3rd, 4th and Almaden farther north and south.
 - Making the 4th Street bikeway along the SJSU campus two-way.

b. Increase the availability of bike parking, particularly secure bike parking at transit facilities, and require new development to provide secure indoor parking. Currently, the city requires new development to provide showers and bike parking, but the parking can include less secure options, such as shared cages for residential projects or bike racks for retail. Meanwhile, transit stations need additional secure bike parking, not just bike lockers that serve daily riders. As more people come to downtown on bike, secure bike parking should be available to more infrequent and casual riders in the form of individual bike lockers or bicycle valet services like the one at the 4th and King Caltrain station in San Francisco.

c. Conduct an outreach and education campaign to encourage people to ride bicycles on the streets, not the sidewalks, in order to ensure safe and convenient travel for pedestrians. If such an education campaign is successful, and if the culture increasingly shifts toward biking in the street, there will not be a need to outlaw bike riding on the sidewalk.

d. Expand Bay Area Bike Share to more stations and areas downtown and throughout Central San Jose.

Responsible parties: Department of Transportation; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; VTA; MTC; Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

16. Make new maps, improve wayfinding and signage, and ensure that all transit vehicles and stations have electronic signage and real-time information.

Pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders arriving in downtown need more help finding their way, including clearer signage, real-time information and wayfinding about available transit service, bicycle routes and pedestrian paths. In particular, Diridon lacks adequate tools to connect travelers to the downtown core. All trains and buses, as well as transit stations, should have electronic signage and real-time transit information.

SPUR also recommends using a common vocabulary and style for maps throughout downtown. Bay Area Bike Share's maps are an excellent improvement, but they are too few and far between. To improve wayfinding, the city could conduct a design competition, with the winning design piloted on sidewalk signs or maps throughout downtown. We suggest considering successful models from other cities, such as the pedestrian map design used throughout London. One side of the sign includes



Legible London



The pedestrian maps found throughout Central London identify key destinations within a 5-minute walk. Adapting this concept to San Jose could encourage greater pedestrian activity in downtown and allow visitors and residents to discover more of what's immediately around them.

walking maps of destinations five to fifteen minutes away (i.e., less than 1 mile away), and the other side shows transit and bike destinations 20 to 30 minutes away (i.e., within a 3-mile radius).

These maps should be developed and designed together with the events and information maps described in Recommendation 24.

Responsible parties: Department of Transportation, VTA, MTC, San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs

17. Extend BART to Diridon.

With BART slated to begin passenger service from Fremont to Berryessa in 2018, many stakeholders are focused on building the next phase of BART: the extension to downtown San Jose. This extension will include three additional BART stations in San Jose: Alum Rock, Market and Santa Clara streets, and Diridon.

Santa Clara County has been very generous in its local support for transit, particularly the BART extension. It makes sense to secure regional, state and federal resources to finish the job.

The extension of BART to downtown San Jose remains among the top two regional transit priorities for the MTC under Plan Bay Area.³⁷ The plan's other

major priority is extending Caltrain to the Transbay Transit Center in downtown San Francisco. Importantly, these top priorities will connect BART and Caltrain into the downtowns of the region's two largest cities. In so doing, they will also connect these two downtowns — San Jose and San Francisco — to each other.

When extended to Diridon, BART will transform the relationship between downtown San Jose and labor markets in the East Bay. Although there are more total jobs in North San Jose, the BART extension means that downtown will remain a much more accessible location than North San Jose. This presents a significant opportunity for downtown to position itself as a destination for residents of the East Bay, as well as for downtown and San Jose residents to access jobs and activities throughout the BART network.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for BART in downtown San Jose:

- a. **Locate stations in the places that will yield the highest ridership, and make the connections between BART and other modes of transit as seamless as possible.** This means putting a station with exits near Market or 1st/2nd and Santa Clara, not as far east as 4th Street. It is essential that riders be able to access the most important destinations downtown within a quarter- to half-mile radius of the BART entrances.
- b. **Ensure that the station at Diridon has the easiest possible connection to Caltrain and future high-speed rail service.** BART riders should be able to make this transfer without crossing any public street. This means that the BART station and entrance should be located within the future multimodal rail station at Diridon.

Responsible parties: City Council, Department of Transportation, BART, VTA, MTC

18. Work with Caltrain to ensure faster bullet trains to San Jose under its electrification plan.

The advent of Baby Bullet service in 2004 coincided with a major increase in Caltrain ridership. Between 1997 and 2008, Caltrain ridership increased by 55 percent while total hours of service increased by 65 percent. Over this same time period, Caltrain's inflation-adjusted operating costs decreased by nearly 20 percent, making it the only major transit system in the Bay Area to have an inflation-adjusted decline in unit costs. Quite simply, time is money — and reducing the time spent traveling between places is very popular with transit riders.

When Caltrain switches from diesel to electric engines in 2019, it will increase its ridership and popularity. First, electrification lowers operating costs and could facilitate all-day frequent service. Second, electrification allows Caltrain to reduce travel times through faster acceleration and deceleration, as well as faster top speeds. This improves both the accessibility of downtown San Jose and the transit experience between downtown and cities to the north.

SPUR recommends that Caltrain establish an express service between San Jose and San Francisco that is faster than the current 60-minute Baby Bullet service. The future high-speed rail system is planning for a trip from San Jose to San Francisco to take only 30 minutes. The express service we recommend could be somewhat faster than 50 minutes, depending on the number of stops and the final infrastructure configuration. Some want to wait for high-speed rail to establish the faster service, but since high-speed rail is still years away, this would be a major missed opportunity to shorten the travel time between San Jose and San Francisco. It should be a priority for both cities to achieve a faster service before high-speed rail is built.

In the near term, SPUR recommends that Caltrain establish express service that comes close to the speeds and duration of future high-speed rail, with stops in San Francisco, San Francisco International Airport/Millbrae, one peninsula city (we suggest Palo Alto, Caltrain's second-highest ridership stop behind San Francisco) and San Jose/Diridon. Although Diridon

is currently the fourth-highest ridership stop (behind Mountain View), it is likely to become the third highest based on growth trends, with SFO/Millbrae remaining the fifth-busiest station.

One major advantage to this express service is that it would shorten the time people have to wait for high-speed service between San Jose and San Francisco. It could be branded "baby high-speed rail" as a way to begin building ridership for high-speed rail years before it even opens.

SPUR recognizes that the ability to access a range of destinations and markets is also key for San Jose. Therefore, we'd like Caltrain to explore combining this new express service with a skip-stop service in which every stop on the system is served by every other train. With six trains per hour, this would yield service every 15 minutes for all stops and every 10 minutes for a few key stations (like Diridon) where every train stops. The skip-stop pattern would average 43 mph and would require three tracks along much of the route and four tracks in some places. Its primary advantages are that it would achieve current bullet speeds of 60 minutes for all trips between San Francisco and San Jose and that it would radically increase access to destinations throughout the South Bay and peninsula. The skip-stop service and SPUR's proposal for interim bullet service can both be accommodated.

While the Caltrain Joint Powers Board is the implementing agency, this recommendation calls on San Jose and VTA leadership to prioritize faster bullet service to San Jose. SPUR also calls on San Francisco leadership to prioritize establishing a faster express service after electrification.

Responsible parties: Caltrain Joint Powers Board, Department of Transportation, VTA, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, SamTrans



Sergio Ruiz

After electrification is complete, Caltrain should establish a faster express service that connects San Jose and San Francisco in less than an hour.

Big Idea #5

Retrofit downtown to be more pedestrian-oriented.

During the 1950s and '60s, downtown streets were altered to make them more car-friendly. Two-way streets were converted to one-way couplets to bring drivers as quickly as possible through downtown to jobs in the north. Sidewalks were narrowed and traffic lanes added. "Pork chop" islands³⁸ were carved into intersections to make it easier for cars to make right turns with minimal slowing. Highway 87 was built as an elevated viaduct, separating the downtown core from its train station. In subsequent decades, a number of streets were built or rebuilt to focus on accommodating more cars. South Almaden Boulevard was constructed as a wide thoroughfare that does not permit street parking. Coleman Avenue was built as a major auto street that loops around the northern portion of downtown before crossing a bridge over train tracks that end at Julian Street.

In recent years, the City of San Jose has begun retrofitting its auto-oriented grid. One-way streets have become two-way. The city has put some streets on "road diets," removing traffic lanes on Almaden Boulevard, 3rd, 4th and other streets, usually to accommodate a bike lane. These changes make better use of limited infrastructure by maintaining sufficient space for cars while clearing room for a wider range of users. There is a "green bikeway" (a buffered bike lane painted green to increase visibility) along San Fernando and another protected bikeway on 4th Street. The city is removing pork chop islands from Almaden Boulevard and other streets. This is a significant change and has improved the quality of the public realm in downtown San Jose.

But there is still more to do.

Buses do not have priority treatment on key streets. Traffic signals are timed for cars, not pedestrians. Left-turn lanes and dedicated left-turn arrows privilege auto access, not pedestrian flow. Although the city has very strong policies on the books to ignore intersection congestion³⁹ and to reduce

driving, some current decisions still privilege the automobile. This is a case where the existing policy is fine — but city officials' desire to balance the needs of different modes of travel sometimes means that cars continue to be at the forefront of decision-making.

For several decades, downtown San Jose has made targeted investments in improving its public realm, and today many urban design features make the city a walkable place: generous sidewalks on 1st and 2nd streets, well-designed parks and plazas like Cesar Chavez Plaza and Parque de los Pobladores, and a legacy of public art left by the redevelopment agency. These aspects of downtown make it different from most of the South Bay.

Nonetheless, there are parts of downtown that do not adhere to the principles of "walkable urbanism," nor do they truly distinguish downtown as a unique place.⁴⁰ Retrofitting the parts of downtown that are still not walkable is the focus of Big Idea #5.

Because many people will still drive to downtown, it's also an important part of the retrofit to make downtown into a "park once" district: a place with such a great public realm that people will prefer to park their cars and then get from place to place on foot. And if it is easy to get around downtown as a pedestrian, it will be easier to encourage people to leave their cars at home in the future and come downtown by transit, walking or biking.

³⁸ "Pork chops" are triangular islands that separate right-turn lanes from through-traffic lanes to allow cars to make a curved right turn without stopping. They increase the crossing distance for pedestrians and decrease safety.

³⁹ At many downtown intersections, San Jose has eliminated level of service as a metric for project analysis.

⁴⁰ Leinberger, Chris. "Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization." Brookings Institution, March 2005. Available at: www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2005/03/downtownredevelopment-leinberger

SPUR's Recommendations for Street Design and Parking Downtown

19. Retrofit street crossings to make them more pedestrian-oriented.

Several key changes could make walking in downtown San Jose easier and safer. SPUR makes the following specific recommendations:

a. **Require all signals to have an automatic pedestrian crossing on every phase.** At some intersections, pedestrians have to push the pedestrian crossing button in order for the walk sign to go on. Instead, every green light cycle should automatically include a pedestrian phase that is concurrent with the motor vehicle phase. This means that a walk signal appears every time the light turns green, regardless of whether a walk button is pushed.

b. **Change cycle lengths to reduce wait times for pedestrians.** Many intersections downtown require lengthy wait times for pedestrians because the cycle lengths are timed to move large numbers of cars through the intersections. Separate left-turn lights further increase the wait time for pedestrians. Over time, some of these protected left turns should be eliminated.

c. **Implement pedestrian countdown signals at all intersections.** This means that the walk signs at all intersections should include the number of seconds remaining for pedestrians to cross.

d. **Continue to move toward full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) at all intersections.** This would require installing or reconstructing all curb ramps to meet current requirements. These changes would not only benefit those with disabilities but anyone with a stroller.

Responsible parties: Department of Transportation

20. Maintain and enhance the downtown street network, and all street design guidelines, to be pedestrian-oriented, and expand the existing network of paseos.

San Jose has moved a long way toward enhancing its street design guidelines. SPUR encourages the city to continue on this path, developing guidelines that are consistent with nationally recognized best practices. The following are some of the key ingredients that should be included:

a. **Make sure all blocks have sidewalks.** Prioritize adding sidewalks to blocks that lack sidewalks today, and eliminate barriers in blocks with narrow sidewalks to improve ADA access (and access in general).

b. **Change pedestrian crossing signals at intersections to reduce wait times.** (See Recommendation 19.)

c. **Expand the use of "continental" striping for crosswalks (i.e., highly visible black and white zebra stripes).** Extend this treatment to the entire Central San Jose area, rather than just downtown.

d. **Shorten street-crossing distances for pedestrians.** This includes establishing standards for the shape



Despite recent pedestrian improvements, there are still places downtown where the sidewalk infrastructure is lacking and the street is designed entirely for the automobile, such as the southwest corner of Market and St. John streets.

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of the corner curb radii⁴¹ and expanding the use of pedestrian “bulb-outs.”⁴²

- e. **Focus on the pedestrian realm in all design guidelines.** This includes widening sidewalks and adding street furniture (such as benches), street trees, water fountains, pedestrian-scaled lighting, public art and other amenities.

Additionally, **San Jose could expand its network of paseos in order to improve pedestrian accessibility throughout downtown.** The Paseo de San Antonio is successful and should be extended to Diridon Station. Additionally, some paseos could be incorporated into future development. For example, the city has opportunities to establish a mid-block paseo from San Fernando Street north to Fountain Alley and to put paseos in the Mitchell Block development between Santa Clara and St. John and between Market and 1st Street. It will be essential for the city to establish street design guidelines that require incorporating paseos in the new major development projects.

Responsible parties: Department of Transportation; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; VTA; MTC

21. Make downtown a “park once” district through better management of the overall supply of parking.

It’s easy to park in downtown San Jose. There are 25,000 total off-street parking spaces, and many lots are only 50 percent occupied during peak daytime hours. There are also more than 2,300 on-street metered spaces in downtown east of Highway 87 (i.e., not including Diridon). Most of the on-street spaces are metered and



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only allow up to two hours of parking. In the near term, many of downtown’s parking spaces, both on-street and off-street, will remain underused, which offers an opportunity to manage them in new ways.

But downtown will attract more people if it’s an interesting and appealing place to go — not just a place with free parking. Parking should remain easy, but the goal should be to get people to park their car once and then get around by walking.

We understand the role of parking as an economic development incentive: Parking makes it easier for employers to locate their companies downtown. The city’s current incentive program, which provides a 50 percent subsidy on parking costs in city garages for up to four years, is a reasonable approach to try to fill downtown buildings and eventually create demand for new office construction.


But eventually, as more people spend time downtown, the price of parking will naturally rise, and the city may not need its parking incentive program anymore. Higher parking prices are an indication of success. They may also encourage more shared parking uses (where parking spaces are shared by more than one user, such as between daytime commuters and nighttime visitors or residents), which do not exist in most private downtown garages today.

We are not advocating making parking more difficult or artificially expensive in order to encourage transit. Instead, we want to make the alternatives to driving easier and better. For those who choose to drive, we’d like downtown San Jose to be a park-once district. A number of cities, including Pasadena and San Francisco, have rethought parking management to

make their systems more flexible, and we suggest that San Jose do the same.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for parking in downtown:

- As stated in Recommendation 4, **eliminate minimum parking requirements for new development.** This would free some developers from building all the needed parking on-site and allow them to acquire additional parking from other buildings in the surrounding area.
- Allow the city’s publicly owned parking to be available for new development.** Explore further policy tools to allow transfer and lease arrangements for such parking. The goal is to better manage an existing city asset, not to privatize a city resource. Another benefit of using public parking for drivers who otherwise would park in their destination building is that they will become downtown pedestrians during each trip.
- Continue with the rollout of smart meters, and explore advanced approaches to managing downtown parking.** Look at models such as SFPark, which allows for market-based pricing of parking. Explore opportunities to pay for parking through the Clipper Card transit payment system.
- Eliminate time limits on parking meters.** Ensure that smart meters enable visitors to park all day and do not provide a disincentive for staying multiple hours.
- Unbundle parking from residential and commercial developments.** Require that renters and homeowners purchase parking separate from the cost of their unit.
- Require that all garages have space for car-sharing stalls and secure bike parking near the entrance to the garage.** Car sharing can enhance a park-once district by encouraging multiple users of the same vehicle, as well as by freeing the driver from having to retrieve a car from the same place they left it (assuming there are multiple car-sharing locations downtown).
- Consider imposing a tax or fee on privately held surface parking lots in the downtown core.** This would establish an incentive to develop surface parking lots, which are currently lucrative. A fee on maintaining such lots could be dedicated to alternative transportation in downtown.

Responsible parties: City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA, MTC, Downtown Parking Board 

⁴¹ The curb radius, or shape of the corner, affects the distance a pedestrian has to cross a street at an intersection, as well as the speed a car must travel to safely make a turn. The smaller the radii (i.e., the closer the corner is to a 90 degree angle, as opposed to a curve) the shorter the distance for the pedestrian to cross to the other side and the slower the car must travel to make the turn. See <http://www.sfbetterstreets.org/find-project-types/pedestrian-safety-and-traffic-calming/traffic-calming-overview/curb-radius-changes/>

⁴² “Bulb-outs,” or curb extensions, are a method of widening the sidewalk at pedestrian crossings in order to shorten the crossing and make pedestrians more visible to drivers.

Big Idea #6

Build on downtown's strengths as the cultural and creative center of the South Bay.

Downtown is the largest social and cultural district and the center for entertainment in the South Bay. There are 38 cultural institutions and venues in or directly near downtown and more than 300 restaurants, bars and other entertainment venues. Whenever there is a major sports or entertainment event at the San Jose Arena (which hosts a total of 150 small and large events per year), downtown's streets fill with pedestrians. The Convention Center schedules events a year in advance, and most of them bring in thousands of visitors. Downtown museums, art venues and performance spaces can attract tens of thousands for special events, exhibits and performances.⁴³

But as this report has discussed, there is not yet enough life to fill and activate all the great existing spaces downtown,

from the outdoor plazas to the museums and other cultural institutions.

The essence of our sixth idea is to focus on the people and activities that will fill downtown with life on an ongoing basis. We think a key way to do this is to strengthen downtown as the South Bay's center of culture and entertainment and to make it easier for people to engage in all kinds of activities that enliven public space, as well as to invest in new creative businesses and events.

Some of this is happening naturally. San Pedro Square Market and the many businesses along the Paseo de San Antonio are great examples of private investments that have made the streets more lively. Also contributing to the action are downtown's many arts, music and cultural institutions (both large and small), events like the South First Fridays open art studios⁴⁴ and festivals such as San Jose Jazz Summer Fest and Christmas in the Park.

As downtown fills with more housing, it will be important to make sure that the new residents do not become impediments to the activity and life they presumably sought (or at least were aware of) when they selected downtown as their home. Residents of some new developments have already complained about live music at existing venues.⁴⁵ These

⁴³ See Downtown San Jose Convention Facilities Schedule. Available at: <http://www.sanjose.org/plan-a-meeting-event/venues/convention-center>

⁴⁴ See www.southfirstfridays.com

⁴⁵ This issue has affected live music at longstanding hotels and prevented the sale of alcohol from sidewalk seating areas.



Jerome Brunet, courtesy San Jose Jazz Summer Fest

downtown residents have every right to petition their elected officials about any matter that troubles them. But for new residents to become a barrier to the additional activation of downtown is a troubling trend. San Jose officials will have to be vigilant in defending the importance of a lively downtown.

To achieve these goals, we want to make sure we reduce barriers to current activity downtown and barriers to the additional growth of locally distinct activities. In particular, we think downtown should focus on expanding some of its unique offerings, from temporary activities in public spaces to small business and cultural ventures in existing buildings. The key is to experiment — while knowing and accepting that not everything will work.

There is also a crucial role for large arts and cultural institutions like the San Jose Museum of Art and the San Jose Repertory Theatre. These anchor organizations have been downtown for some time and formed a key part of the revitalization strategies of the 1980s and '90s. They bring attention to downtown and complement smaller institutions and those just getting started.

Although downtown offers more amenities than any other single place in the South Bay, it is nonetheless in competition



Aya Brackett

with other, smaller downtowns and centers. Many of these smaller centers — like downtown Campbell or Castro Street in Mountain View — have the advantage of a clear center of activity, which downtown San Jose lacks. Downtown Campbell, Lincoln Avenue in Willow Glen and downtown Sunnyvale each benefit from a single strip of concentrated development, making them desirable locations for visitors to park once and explore many blocks of retail and dining on foot. Downtown

Palo Alto, downtown Los Gatos and Santana Row, whose customer bases support higher-end shopping and dining, also benefit from a concentrated retail strip. Mountain View is the center of life for many tech and bioscience workers in the South Bay.⁴⁶ Its proximity to Menlo Park and Palo Alto makes

FIGURE 12

Culture and Entertainment Centers in the South Bay

While other places feature more retail, downtown San Jose has more restaurants, entertainment venues and bars than any other activity center in the South Bay.

	Eateries	Bars and Nightclubs	Retail Stores	Entertainment Venues ⁴⁷
Downtown San Jose ⁴⁸	199	44	28	25
Downtown Palo Alto ⁴⁹	100	12	103	6
Downtown Mountain View ⁵⁰	73	6	27	6
Downtown Los Gatos ⁵¹	52	13	112	4
Downtown Campbell ⁵²	26	6	35	5
Downtown Sunnyvale ⁵³	24	8	18	3
Downtown Willow Glen ⁵⁴	43	4	25	1
Santana Row ⁵⁵	25	14	69	1

Source: SPUR Analysis; see also footnotes 46–55

⁴⁶ See www.mountainview.gov/city_hall/community_development/economic_dev/major_mountain_view_companies.asp

⁴⁷ Entertainment venues are defined as places that regularly host live performances, including bars and restaurants. Art galleries and museums are not included.

⁴⁸ San Jose Downtown Association. Available at: <http://sjdowntown.com/go-play/dining>

⁴⁹ Palo Alto Downtown Business and Professional Association. Available at: www.paloaltdowntown.com

⁵⁰ Mountain View Downtown Guide. Available at: <http://mountainviewdowntown.com/dining>

⁵¹ Town of Los Gatos. Available at: www.losgatosca.gov

⁵² Downtown Campbell Business Association. Available at: www.downtowncampbell.com/directory.php#Food & Drink

⁵³ Sunnyvale Downtown Association. Available at: www.sunnyvaledowntown.com

⁵⁴ Willow Glen Business Association. Available at: www.willowglen.org/business-directory

⁵⁵ Santana Row Dining Guide. Available at: www.santanarow.com/files/SR_Spring2012_Dining_Guide.pdf

it a natural destination for office workers for meetings, lunch and happy hour.

For downtown San Jose to succeed, visitors and residents need to continue doing what they've been doing: supporting new and existing restaurants, bars, clubs and other businesses. Downtown property owners should keep being flexible and supportive of various uses within their buildings, including temporary installations and pop-up stores, often within vacant building space. Visitors and policy makers need to embrace downtown as a place that draws from and welcomes the city's entire economic and cultural diversity.



Romeo Durscher, courtesy San Jose Jazz Summer Fest



Courtesy San Jose Made

SPUR's Recommendations for Arts and Culture Downtown

22. Make it easier to hold concerts, festivals and other events that activate downtown.

One way to help downtown grow naturally is to remove some of the existing barriers to making the streets more active. For example, costs for a permit to close a street and for the city services that make an event safe (such as a fire inspection) are high, which limits street festivals and other events. This in turn limits new ideas for creative uses of the public realm.

The city and its partners have taken steps to identify and begin resolving some of these barriers. But there is more to do. SPUR recommends that the city and regulating agencies continue to remove barriers and restrictions on the use of downtown space, particularly to encourage outdoor special events and activities.

SPUR has the following recommendations for making events easier to hold:

- Allow minor street closures to occur without police staffing and/or permits at specific locations downtown.** These could include Post Street between 1st and Market Streets, South 1st Street between Reed and William, and St. John Street between Terraine and San Pedro.
- Make it possible to hold temporary outdoor special events more frequently on private parking lots downtown.** Today, there are limits to the number of temporary changes that can be made to an underlying land use. For example, if the primary use of a parcel is as a parking lot, it can only host a food truck for a limited number of times each year. We think no such restrictions should exist.
- Encourage activation in the public right of way.** This could include live music, sidewalk cafés and pop-up businesses.
- Eliminate permit requirements for small-scale events and activities such as food-truck gatherings.** Today, any gathering with more than one food truck requires a permit from the San Jose Fire Department. We think that small-scale events with up to three or four food trucks should be exempt from this permit requirement.
- Reduce the fire inspection fee for outdoor events.** The current fire inspection fee requires the city to charge event organizers for a three-hour inspection even if the inspection takes less than an hour. We

recommend adjusting the fee to one hour or the actual time spent by fire inspectors.

- Allow the serving of alcohol other than beer and wine at some outdoor festivals.** Relaxing this regulation under certain conditions would allow more event sponsorship opportunities.
- Consider the economic and community value when setting permit fees for outdoor special events.** Currently, the city requires special event fees to cover 100 percent of the cost to the city. SPUR recommends an approach that recognizes the economic value of events and lowers the fees accordingly. This means that the city will provide an up-front subsidy for event support. Such an approach has already been taken by the San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs, whose fees do not assume full cost recovery.
- Provide funding to support and attract signature events to San Jose.** As these activities grow and thrive, the city should provide more far-reaching and effective publicity across the South Bay in order to raise the profile and desirability of these events.

Responsible parties: City Council, Office of Cultural Affairs, San Jose Fire Department, San Jose Police Department

23. Support arts and culture.

Many existing arts and culture institutions downtown struggle for funding. These are important to maintain and help grow. SPUR makes the following recommendations for supporting arts and culture:

- Leverage public funding to attract and incentivize private sources of funding, such as local corporations and individual residents.** This would help position arts and culture as a larger public value that all benefit from supporting.
- Balance funding for arts and culture among small, mid-size and large arts and culture organizations to provide a wide range of cultural offerings.** There is a tendency in arts funding to invest the majority of funds in the largest institutions with the greatest visibility. While larger institutions serve a key role, it is also important for smaller and medium-size groups to share in the overall funding and investment.
- Direct grant making toward creative ideas that bring vitality to the entire district.** When making investment decisions, it is important for arts funders to consider how arts organizations and businesses

are adding vibrancy to downtown. For example, investments in some organizations will have more spillover to the surrounding area depending on their connections with others in the community.

Responsible parties: City Council, Office of Cultural Affairs, private philanthropy

24. Use lighting, art installations and interactive displays as a way to better connect places.

Lighting and other displays can help make downtowns more exciting and distinct. San Jose first used lighting in this way in 1881, when local citizens built a 237-foot-tall electric light tower at the intersection of Santa Clara and Market streets downtown. Today, the city focuses on illuminating key buildings or the paths under the freeway. But the logic of using lighting to attract attention and enhance the experience of downtown remains. SPUR recommends continued attention on lighting projects throughout downtown, which can be particularly important for connecting districts to each other.

SPUR also recommends that the city work with private partners to explore establishing interactive maps throughout downtown. These digital maps — similar to the tall, tablet-like devices found in shopping malls — can help visitors find what they are looking for, whether it be Thai food or the county courthouse. These maps should be developed with the proposed transit information maps discussed in Recommendation 16 and should include optimal routes for biking, walking and taking public transit.

These maps would also give the city the opportunity to strengthen and define the identity of downtown's neighborhoods. Ideally, the maps would pair with LiveSV, Metro or another local events calendar so that visitors can discover novel things to do while they are downtown.

The design of these maps should reflect a unique brand of arts and culture in San Jose. Because this is a place that brands itself as a hub of innovation, these maps should not look dated or function poorly. To prevent users from having to wait in line to use the maps, the city should make them available as a mobile app.

Downtown's many blank walls and empty spaces, both public and private, harm the pedestrian environment. But they present an opportunity to display art both during the day and at night, which would enhance the pedestrian experience. San Jose has done this well during the ZERO1 Biennial arts festival. SPUR recommends establishing more permanent exhibitions using these blank walls and spaces. We also encourage



Courtesy Zero1

Temporary light installation *Digital Kakejiku San Jose*, by Akira Hasegawa, (pictured at the 2006 ZERO1 Biennial) suggested possibilities for enhancing underutilized spaces such as City Hall plaza.

expanding the use of art on transit vehicles and stations, as well as along bikeways and pedestrian corridors.

Responsible parties: Office of Cultural Affairs, City Council, ZERO1, Silicon Valley Creates, San Jose Downtown Association

25. Continue to use downtown as a test lab for urban innovations.

Many Silicon Valley firms test their products and concepts in public spaces, particularly in urban environments. Such products include embedded sensors that measure things like air quality and traffic flows, displays such as those discussed above, and green technologies in energy and transportation. Downtown San Jose is a natural environment for promoting and testing these types of innovations.

SPUR encourages the City of San Jose to continue forming partnerships with innovative firms or with researchers at SJSU or other universities looking to test their ideas in an urban context. Promoting downtown as a laboratory might attract national universities or research institutes that are looking for a stronger foothold in Silicon Valley.

The presence of key firms and incubators downtown could also connect the youth of San Jose and surrounding communities to promising careers. Through initiatives like Linked Learning and Career Technical Education, middle schools and high schools

in California are transforming their relationship with the workplace. The small firms in downtown San Jose could offer young people opportunities to intern with or shadow working professionals.

These proposals would reinforce downtown San Jose as a creative center that connects the arts, music and culture with the technology development and entrepreneurship that is at the heart of Silicon Valley.

Responsible parties: City Council, Office of Economic Development, Office of Cultural Affairs 

Applying the Recommendations to Downtown Streets

Streets serve different functions and have different needs based on what activities take place on them and where they lead. The notion of a hierarchy of streets based on function emerged in the post-World War II era. With the expansion of suburban development, streets became classified by functions like “arterial,” “collector,” “local,” etc.⁵⁶ San Jose’s 2003 Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and the Envision 2040 General Plan propose that downtown maintain a hierarchy of streets. But these plans also view downtown streets as places that people are traveling to and through in order to arrive at destinations — not just as sets of lanes to move traffic. This new approach calls for a typology of streets to indicate which ones should be pedestrian-focused, supporting small-scale retail, and which ones should help a mix of users reach many destinations.

Below are SPUR’s suggestions for most of the major streets downtown. **For street locations, see map of downtown on page 6.**

Santa Clara Street: The Grand Boulevard

As the major east-west street entering downtown for both cars and transit, Santa Clara is the city’s iconic street, and it could be a great one. But it has some challenges.

Right now, its ability to be an efficient east-west street for cars and buses is limited in large part by bad signal operations. As on most downtown streets, the City of San Jose has timed signals to have long cycle lengths and protected left turns. This results in long pedestrian wait times and an inefficient progression of traffic through downtown.

⁵⁶ See www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/publications/flexibility/ch03.cfm



Sergio Ruiz

SPUR makes these near-term recommendations for Santa Clara Street:

- **Eliminate certain protected left-turn light phases by shifting to standard two-phase signals.** This means that left turns will be permitted but not protected. Signals would have a north-south phase and an east-west phase but no dedicated left-turn phase.
- **Eliminate left turns at key intersections** (like Market and Santa Clara).
- **Establish shorter cycle lengths that prioritize pedestrian crossing.**
- **Eliminate curbside parking during peak hours.** This approach would yield a transit-only lane during commute times.

In the longer term, San Jose should consider the following:

- **Prohibit left turns altogether.** Given that left turns are one of the factors slowing east-west traffic through downtown, eliminating them would speed traffic flow.

- Consider eliminating some on-street parking to make space for wider sidewalks.
- Maintain two lanes of traffic in each direction, with one of those lanes becoming a bus lane during peak hours.
- Use the construction of BART as an opportunity to pilot different street arrangements for downtown. For example, consider shifting auto traffic to St. John Street as a key east-west connection during BART construction, with an eye toward making this a long-term solution. This would relieve some of the traffic demand on San Fernando and Santa Clara. Also consider closing the Santa Clara off-ramp from Highway 87 and making Julian Street the main access to downtown. This approach would take some ramp realignment and would concentrate the auto access at one main interchange in order to reduce auto demand on Santa Clara.

Market Street: The North-South Boulevard

Market Street is a wide street with significant capacity for both cars and transit. If VTA double-tracks light rail onto 1st Street and removes it from 2nd Street, Market Street could become the primary north-south bus route in San Jose. This street can accommodate more development, more pedestrians and more transit. It's important to note that some would like to reduce the road capacity of Market Street in the area around Cesar Chavez (between San Carlos and San Fernando) in order to make targeted pedestrian improvements. While we support these kinds of changes, we acknowledge that such a move could impact the potential for Market Street to serve as a primary north-south transit route. This trade-off requires further consideration that takes into account how Market Street fits into the broader context of downtown (rather than treating Market as an isolated opportunity to prioritize either transit or walking).

South Almaden Boulevard: The Retrofitted Street

South Almaden Boulevard was designed in a prior era with the dimensions of a corporate office park. The city has already added a buffered bike lane and additional street parking, which will reduce some of the street's excess width and capacity. SPUR suggests creative approaches to reusing the center of the street for public space. For example, the city could hold a design competition to consider the median and side lanes as potential developable sites. Another option would be to make use of the generous sidewalks for exercise and other equipment.⁵⁷ Additionally, SPUR encourages the city to continue to remove all remaining pork chop islands on Almaden Boulevard.

Autumn Street: The New Park-Front Address

Autumn Street is scheduled to be rebuilt as Autumn Parkway in order to provide more capacity for cars and a direct auto connection to Coleman Street from the Diridon Station area. Auto travelers arriving on Highway 880 could take Coleman and the new Autumn Parkway to access the San Jose Arena and other future developments (such as a proposed baseball stadium) instead of using neighborhood streets like the

⁵⁷ This idea is proposed in an updated downtown streetscape plan for the San Jose Downtown Association by design firm CMG.

Alameda. This would involve building an entirely new street north of St. John. The newly built street would straighten the street alignment and feature four lanes, a 12-foot median (including left-turn lanes) and no on-street parking.

SPUR has three concerns with the concept and proposed configuration of Autumn Parkway. First, we don't think it's appropriate to privilege auto traffic anywhere in downtown, particularly through the Diridon Station area, with its high level of transit investment. Making it easier to drive to and through Diridon directly contradicts the city's stated goals of reducing vehicle miles traveled and encouraging non-auto modes of travel. It also undermines the combined billions in transit investment that will bring BART to Diridon and upgrade Caltrain and the bus network. Major attractions like baseball and hockey generate lots of traffic. Instead of rebuilding the street pattern around Diridon to reduce the congestion at these times, the city should encourage visitors to make use of the new transit to the station and facilitate park-and-ride opportunities from surrounding areas. If the idea is to reduce congestion at all times, it's important to note that the proposed street alignment would encourage a lot of through traffic, rather than local traffic, and could generate even more congestion.

Second, we are concerned that the design of the street will not promote walkability. Autumn Parkway will have a wide median and no on-street parking and will be designed for fast car traffic. This approach is more common for a suburban expressway than an urban street in a dense, walkable downtown.

Third, the street design and alignment would destroy some of the surviving traditional grid in the area. The straight alignment requires demolishing existing properties in the blocks north of the San Jose Arena (from St. John to the railroad tracks). The new street would cause a number of historic streets to become cul de sacs, and the essence of the old grid would be lost. As we noted earlier, too much of the historic fabric of downtown has already been lost. Building Autumn Parkway as designed would continue the pattern of demolishing a pre-World War II street pattern and replacing it with an auto-oriented pattern.

Given these concerns, SPUR recommends stopping the construction at Julian Street and waiting for significant development before deciding whether the full project extension south to Santa Clara Street is necessary.


Paseo de San Antonio: The Strolling Street

The Paseo de San Antonio is now a successful pedestrian and bicycle corridor connecting Cesar Chavez Park to SJSU. One of downtown San Jose's most important pedestrian assets, the paseo offers a continuous pathway for those walking east-west through the heart of downtown. Although it's not a historic feature of downtown (the concept was designed and implemented by the redevelopment agency in the 1980s), it has come into its own as an authentically urban place, with most storefront retail and restaurant spaces occupied. It's become a popular spot to stroll, linger and enjoy the urban experience.



Egon Terplan

However, the Paseo de San Antonio currently ends at Cesar Chavez Park. SPUR suggests that the city explore continuing the paseo farther west, ideally connecting to Diridon Station. While the precise geometry and orientation of this extension are not yet clear, the essential concept of a continuous and visible pedestrian path to Diridon is strong.

To ensure the long-term success of the Paseo de San Antonio, it will be important to identify places for additional retailers as demand grows. There are few vacant spaces on the paseo today, although some future development opportunities do exist. One is the current server farm pavilion, this site was converted for computer use in the late 1990s. While this tenant has no immediate plans to move, at some point the farm may look for other locations where rents and power costs are lower. If this happens, the city could reopen the retail pavilion, perhaps as a second public market with multiple vendors. Unlike San Pedro Square Market, which focuses on food, the newly reopened retail pavilion could promote locally made products and small creative businesses. 

Applying the Recommendations to Downtown Districts

The many districts within downtown too often feel like disconnected hubs of activity that don't add up to a single place. Each is somewhat distinct, but none is large enough to constitute a strong center for downtown.

SPUR has two broad recommendations to strengthen the districts of downtown. The first is to make the visual and physical connections between these centers clearer. For example, it should be easy to walk from SoFA (the South First Area arts district) to San Pedro Square, and the most exciting and interesting path should be obvious to an outsider.

Our second broad recommendation is to encourage what's already happening in these places and allow for its natural growth. For example, we hope to see an increasing number of occupied storefronts along South 1st Street between SoFA, the Paseo de San Antonio and the historic commercial district. We encourage the city, SJSU and private developers to establish an off-campus student hub near 4th and San Carlos and to connect that westward toward SoFA. San Jose should allow San Pedro Square's vitality to expand to the east side of the street and should support related pedestrian experiences along Post Street in order to connect San Pedro to the 1st Street corridor. This concept also means making sure that visitors arriving at Diridon Station know to head east, toward Santa Clara Street and other destinations downtown. It means using lighting to connect these places and encouraging more events, live music, art installations and other forms of activation. Until the overall density of activity is higher, it is essential to leverage the combined energy of all the downtown districts.

Below are SPUR's suggestions for the districts within downtown. **For district locations, see map of downtown on page 6.**

San Pedro Square: Expand on Success

The social heart of this district is the San Pedro Square Market. Opened in 2011, the market has come to define an authentic San Jose experience, with more than 20 vendors. On many evenings, the market is full of life — even crowded. The surrounding area is also emerging as a dense residential neighborhood. Projects like the Axis and the Centerra hold nearly 600 units combined. Other, newer developments to the north will provide even more customers for the existing San Pedro Square Market and surrounding businesses. These new residents will only add to the street life.

But San Pedro Square is really a one-sided retail and entertainment strip. That is, the primary activity for pedestrians and users is on the west side of San Pedro Street, with most of the east side of the street taken up by a parking garage. SPUR recommends making San Pedro Street between Santa Clara and St. John two-sided by



Courtesy San Pedro Square Market

making use of the parking garage. Many have proposed concepts for redeveloping the site. SPUR recommends simply allowing other users to take over the first row of parking, on a temporary basis, on the ground floor along San Pedro Street. The city should encourage and allow food trucks or other vendors to come inside and use the window slots of the parking garage as a natural counter. We also encourage the city to rethink the role of street parking and make the street more pedestrian-focused. This could involve removing street parking on the east side, just outside the parking garage, and then widening that sidewalk. Additionally, the walls of the parking garage could be repainted to match the historic and evolving character of the area.

Historic Commercial District: Allow for New Growth



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The historic commercial district, also known as the Downtown Historic District, is a National Register of Historic Places district and includes 1st and 2nd streets and portions of Santa Clara. This is where SPUR's San Jose office is located, and it is the current transit mall. The historic buildings date from the 1870s to the 1940s. In Recommendation 13, we argue for exploring double-tracking light rail on 1st Street. If this happens, 2nd Street could become a two-way bikeway. But when making these potential changes, the city should make sure that 1st Street retains a large enough sidewalk to accommodate outdoor seating at restaurants.

SPUR has also argued, in Recommendation 8, that historic districts should not determine the building heights of new development within them. As a result, SPUR supports development proposals for the Fountain Alley site that maximize its development potential and bring more activity to this transit-rich area. SPUR also supports incorporating a north-south paseo from Fountain Alley along the back side of the businesses that front 1st Street (including SPUR) to

San Fernando Street, where there is an existing partial paseo beside the Gordon Biersch restaurant.

Convention Center District: Create Improved Pathways North and West

The Convention Center district contains the city's major cultural institutions, (including the Tech Museum of Innovation, the Children's Discovery Museum, the San Jose Museum of Art, Cesar Chavez Park and the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Joseph), as well as some of downtown's signature events. While it exerts a strong emotional pull on many residents at certain times of the year (such as during Christmas in the Park⁵⁸), it would benefit from more activity and concessions that would entice people to linger outdoors before or after visiting one of the nearby attractions.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for the Convention Center District:

- **Put a café or other food concession with seating in Cesar Chavez Park.** This was called for in prior downtown strategies put forward by Silicon Valley Creates.⁵⁹ San Jose's parks need more reasons for people to spend time in them. Cesar Chavez Park draws many people throughout the day, but it could become an even more popular destination with a concession.
- **Engage visual and performing artists to help activate Cesar Chavez Park.** In addition to a food concession, encouraging live artists to perform in the park (and supporting them financially) is another way to activate the space.
- As discussed in the previous section, **consider extending the Paseo de San Antonio to the west.**
- **Make clearer pedestrian pathways to the north.** Those attending conferences and staying at nearby hotels could make much better use of downtown. Although there are numerous restaurants, services and activities in San Pedro Square and on the Paseo de San Antonio, visitors are not always clear about where to go or the best way to get there. More continuous development and activity on key streets like Market or 1st, as well as clearer pathways and signage, could solve this.

⁵⁸ See www.christmasinthepark.com/home.html

⁵⁹ The strategy was developed by 1stACT: Silicon Valley, one of the two organizations that were merged to establish Silicon Valley Creates. The other organization in the merger was the Arts Council Silicon Valley. See www.svcreates.org

- **Utilize plazas as outdoor marketplaces.** Outdoor marketplaces are a great way to activate public space. Several areas near the Convention Center could host a regular outdoor market, including the Circle of Palms Plaza, the Plaza de Cesar Chavez and the area outside of the San Jose Repertory Theatre. These markets could feature farm produce or local artisans such as members of SJMADE or the vendors at subZERO.
- **Better connect visitors to nearby amenities like Discovery Meadow, the Children's Discovery Museum and the Guadalupe River Trail.** These important destinations currently feel isolated from the rest of the downtown. Solutions may include boosting pedestrian activity and improving wayfinding. Spots along the Guadalupe River Trail could be used as amphitheaters or gathering spaces. It is also important to create connections and viable travel paths to and from downtown for walkers, runners and cyclists on Guadalupe River Trail.

SoFA (South First Area): Encourage New Activity

SoFA is downtown's arts, culture and nightlife district. It includes residential developments like the 360 Residences, a 213-unit luxury apartment building, and features many of the elements of an exciting urban district. But it still lacks many people. In recent years, the number of employers and other daytime users has increased, but the district has not achieved the same kind of dynamism at night. Our goal is to continue to revitalize SoFA with both daytime and nightlife activities.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for SoFA:

- **Allow for a permit-free "pop-up zone" for temporary events in Parque de los Pobladores.** Local businesses and institutions, such as the weekly Metro newspaper, MACLA (Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana), the Institute of Contemporary Art and the Museum of Quilts & Textiles could form a group to take responsibility for insurance and event scheduling.
- **Consider adding bollards or other equipment to street crossings to make it easier to close streets temporarily.** In particular, we recommend this at 1st and San Carlos and 1st and Reed.
- **Reduce empty storefronts by requiring property owners to mount displays or installations.** This requirement should be imposed only for storefront windows that have been vacant for a period of time.

- **Encourage daytime uses of nighttime venues.** Some of SoFA's nightlife venues are empty at other times. Operating them as cafés and restaurants could enliven them during the day.
- **Incorporate a shade structure and seating areas into Parque de los Pobladores and encourage concessions like a café.**

San Jose State University: Integrate Downtown and Campus

SJSU is the largest university located in the core of a downtown anywhere in California.⁶⁰ It is also the oldest public university in California. SJSU has 30,000 students and 4,000 staff on an 88-acre campus at the eastern edge of the downtown core and on South Campus, a sports complex 2 miles south. Nearly a billion dollars in proposed construction projects — housing, classrooms, sports facilities — are underway across these two campuses. The SJSU Event Center on the main campus hosts about 72 events, attracts 100,000 visitors and generates \$8 million in ticket sales each year. SJSU's 475,000-square-foot Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library is the first joint-use library to be shared by a major university and a large American city.

In recent years, SJSU has added student housing, and it plans to add more. Current policy requires any students who live more than 25 miles away to reside on campus their first year. Even with this policy, only about 5,000 students live on or near campus, and there is a wait list for student housing.



⁶⁰ See www.sjsu.edu/about_sjsu/mission

The downtown campus holds 3,700 student housing units, and there are proposals to increase this supply to 6,000 units. SPUR supports efforts to add thousands of new housing units on campus, and we encourage building heights as tall as the airport flight path allows (at least 18 stories). SPUR also supports efforts to encourage students to live in surrounding neighborhoods that are a short bicycle or transit trip from campus.

SPUR recognizes that SJSU needs to have sufficient parking for staff, students and visitors. There are currently 4,000 parking spaces. Although the university can finance new parking, all efforts should be made to manage the current demand for parking rather than building any new parking. SJSU has adopted this approach, and SPUR encourages the administration to continue with it. In addition, we further encourage the university to build more housing so that fewer students will need to drive to campus.

SPUR also recognizes that SJSU will need additional classrooms. We support efforts to consider using vacant space downtown as temporary off-campus classroom space. Such an approach could help the university manage overall classroom load and better connect students to downtown. Another way to increase the supply of space without building new classrooms would be to increase the percentage of time that rooms are actually in use from 50 percent to 60 percent. Accomplishing this would require better scheduling.

Overall, SPUR supports the university's general campus planning. Our goal for this district is to encourage more downtown residents and workers to use SJSU and to draw more of the dynamism of SJSU onto the streets of downtown.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for further connecting SJSU with downtown:

- **Establish a student district just off campus on 4th and San Carlos.** SJSU should pursue joint-venture real estate deals with a private landowner or developer for both student housing and related retail. We recognize the financial risk the university faces by going into the development business off campus. But SJSU could sell tax-exempt bonds and partner with other established developers. The university could start with an off-campus housing development for faculty and staff.
- **Paint university-focused signage on bike lanes connecting to South Campus.** Signs could include the SJSU Spartan logo to reinforce the path as a route to South Campus.

Diridon Station: Improve Walkability and Link to the Rest of Downtown

The Diridon Station Area Plan supports adding 25,000 jobs and 2,600 housing units, representing a significant expansion of the downtown area. The station is currently served by Caltrain, which will be electrified in 2019; the Altamont Commuter Express; and Amtrak's Capitol Corridor line to Sacramento. In the future, both high-speed rail and BART will stop there. These investments will make Diridon one of the most transit-connected areas in the state.

A lot of uses could be viable here, and given the many surface parking lots, there is significant opportunity to add development where there is currently surface parking. Much work has been done on planning Diridon, but we are concerned that the current plan may not result in an optimal pedestrian experience given the scale of many of the streets.

We are also concerned that the plan places too little emphasis on east-west connections and too much on north-south connections between the "Innovation District" (north of the San Jose Arena), the "Central Zone" (around the station) and the residential Diridon neighborhoods to the south. As the plan itself notes, "many stakeholders expressed a strong desire to see stronger east-west connections to help overcome the physical presence of the freeway and railroad overpasses, which cut north-south through the area."⁶¹ There are still barriers between Diridon and the rest of downtown, created by Highway 87 and by the lack of clear visual cues connecting the Diridon area to Santa Clara, San Fernando or other streets that bring travelers east, in part due to the orientation of the streets around the station.

We'd like to see the new Diridon Station area express some important values. In particular, new development must embody key transit-oriented and place-making goals. There should be short blocks and human-scaled streets to make the area walkable. Transit should be easy to locate and navigate, as should bike routes and pedestrian corridors. And commercial office space or other destination uses, such as retail, should take priority in development near the station.⁶² These principles are all included in the Diridon Station Area Plan and should be fully implemented for new development.

To reduce the psychological and physical barrier of Highway 87, it's important to brand Diridon as a part of

⁶¹ Diridon Station Area Plan. Final Draft Report, December 2013, pp. 2-12. Available at: www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/25145

⁶² SPUR argued for emphasizing commercial development in high-speed rail station areas in our 2011 report *Beyond the Tracks: How Smart Land-Use Planning Can Reshape California's Growth*. Available at: www.spur.org/publications/library/report/beyond-tracks

downtown San Jose. This could involve adding the word “downtown” to the station name on Caltrain and other future services, as well as being careful to include Diridon in all maps of downtown.

In addition to Recommendation 17, SPUR makes the following recommendations for the implementation of the Diridon Station Area Plan:⁶³

- **Reserve sites near the station for commercial or job-generating uses.** (See Recommendation 3.)
- **Ensure that the streets are pedestrian-scale and not focused on auto traffic.**
- **Improve the east-west connections to the rest of downtown through better signage, street design and other forms of wayfinding to lead people east from the station.**
- **Incorporate public art into Diridon Station improvements and public spaces.** This will reinforce the station’s role as a gateway into San Jose, the capital of Silicon Valley. Art should also be used as a connector to and from the station.
- **Make clearer the various transit options, both within the station and at the bus transfer stops outside.** Because so many different transit services are available at Diridon, it’s imperative (and challenging) to provide good travel information. We recommend better signage and digital displays of real-time information for all trains at Diridon, rendered in a consistent way across different transit services and repeated throughout the station area. The 511 maps located just outside the station are an improvement but do not give enough detail about the places to go downtown, nor do they provide any real-time information about transit or the DASH shuttle. We also recommend establishing a hub for all bus lines outside the station with similarly clear real-time signage and mapping.
- **Orient redevelopment of the sites east of Autumn Street toward Los Gatos Creek.** The creek is a key downtown asset, but current development turns its back to the creek. New development could emphasize the water and open up access to it. While we are not expecting this riverfront space to become an asset on par with projects like River Walk in San Antonio, Texas, we do think that the waterfront properties around Diridon could become their own type of destination if planned properly.

We also have a few comments on the current proposal for a major retail and sports complex with a baseball stadium in the Diridon Station area. We see the logic of locating this type of destination entertainment complex near rail transit. If well designed, major sports and entertainment complexes can add to the pedestrian environment. The presence of Major League Baseball in San Jose would generate significant activity downtown. But the city should be cautious and judicious about the use of public funding in any stadium proposal.

If a major new sports entertainment center is built near Diridon, we want to encourage some of the stadium restaurants and amenities to locate east of Highway 87, not directly adjacent to the stadium. This would support the portion of downtown east of Highway 87 that currently gets a boost from San Jose Arena events, when many people start their evenings at bars and restaurants in this area before walking to the arena for the game or concert. If the baseball stadium and entertainment complex were built as a single and complete destination, then the remainder of downtown would not see as much benefit from the development. Many visitors would simply go right to the stadium without ever crossing under Highway 87 for dinner, drinks or other activities.

We also want to encourage those who come to the arena and to any future entertainment or sports activities in the Diridon area to use transit as much as possible. Employers in the area should offer programs such as VTA’s Eco Pass and/or Caltrain’s Go Pass (see Recommendation 12), and event promoters should actively encourage non-auto travel to and from events, perhaps by adding a surcharge on tickets that could fund a reduced-fare transit trip home.

Lastly, developing the area around Diridon will take strong cooperation among various interests and property owners. Given that there are three primary property owners — VTA, Caltrain and the City of San Jose — SPUR supports the city’s efforts to establish a joint powers authority (JPA) among these three entities. The JPA should focus on implementing key changes, such as consolidating parking or establishing a new parking district, building a new bus transit facility, financing new streets and other improvements. The JPA could also hire a master developer and create a revenue-sharing plan. This approach is analogous to what San Francisco created in the Transbay Joint Powers Authority. This JPA focuses on managing the development of the new bus and train station in downtown San Francisco, as well as the key development sites around the Transbay Transit Center.

⁶³ See also SPUR’s comment letter on the Diridon Station Area Plan, submitted February 13, 2014. Available at <http://www.spur.org/publications/policy-letter/2014-02-13/spur-comments-diridon-station-area-plan-draft>

St. James Park: Draw People Into the Park

St. James Park was laid out in 1848, before California became a state. Surrounded by a City Landmark District, it encompasses a smaller area considered a National Register of Historic Places District, with nine contributing buildings plus the park.⁶⁴ Its 19th-century layout was altered in the 1950s, when 2nd Street was built directly through the park. Light rail was added along 2nd Street in the 1980s.

Today, the park does not see much activity. Those who use it the most tend to struggle with a range of social and economic challenges. These issues are complex and not



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easily solved with the current supply of social services. But we believe that St. James Park can and should cater to many types of users. Minor changes to the park’s urban design could make it more welcoming to a broad mix of people.

Filling the park with more people first requires new development of the surrounding sites. The eight-story Family Courthouse, scheduled to open in 2015, is a major development. While SPUR is interested in reserving key parcels near regional rail for additional job-generating uses, we think some of the smaller parcels on or adjacent to St. James Park are appropriate for residential development. Most importantly, as stated in Recommendation 8, we do not recommend requiring that new development in or adjacent to a city historic district be of comparable height and size to the

⁶⁴ See www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=2980

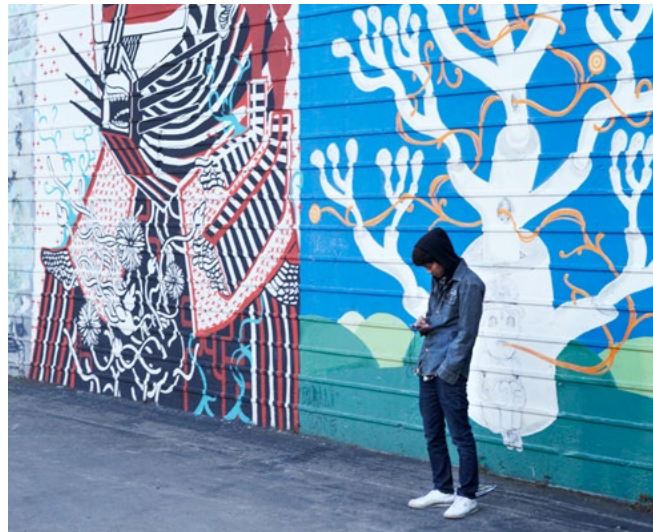
buildings around it. We support high-density development on these sites.

SPUR makes the following recommendations for St. James Park:

- **Encourage private concessions in the park, such as a café or beer garden.** In addition to putting more people in the park (and more eyes on the pathways), a concession could provide needed funding for San Jose’s Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services department.
- **Engage artists to make use of key sections of the park.** Also consider forming a conservancy to manage the park (with revenue from the concession).
- **Establish a public venue for entertainment in the park.** SPUR supports efforts to establish a pavilion in the park to host concerts and other events, as long as the design does not allow for closing parts of the park. We also suggest that the city consider integrating infrastructure to support outdoor events, such as electrical improvements and a stage canopy or shade.
- **Do not close the park with fencing.** Parks are public assets and frequently become the living room for the surrounding community. The new pavilion should not include a fence that prevents access to parts of the park.
- **Close 2nd Street to cars and transit and reconnect the entire park.** This would occur after the city implements a solution to the one-way transit split in downtown (such as double-tracking 1st Street).

City Hall: Activate the Plaza

City Hall is not quite its own district, but it is a distinct piece of architecture and a significant destination downtown. Unfortunately, it also demonstrates an underwhelming use of an urban plaza. Our key goal for this area is to bring more life to the plaza. We recommend doing this by placing a bus rapid transit station in front of City Hall and adding more outdoor seating to the plaza. The corner of 4th and Santa Clara would make a good site for a building with a ground floor café with glass walls and outdoor seating. This would not only frame the plaza but bring people to its edges. We also suggest using the plaza for arts events and other installations, such as lighting projections. ☉



Aya Brackett



Photos by Sergio Ruiz, unless otherwise noted

Conclusion


It is difficult for a downtown in any city to adhere to a specific vision. Cities by their nature evolve and change, and constraining their future by forcing them to move toward a particular ideal can stifle opportunities. But having a goal and a set of hypotheses about a downtown is necessary — and something that would benefit San Jose.

Downtown San Jose has an opportunity to be the South Bay’s central social district, an urban place with the greatest density of people and walkable activities. But it must also become a place that captures jobs and takes best advantage of the major transit investments being made there.

It is always difficult to shift patterns of investment — and it’s particularly challenging in San Jose, given the historical patterns and current landscape of the South Bay. As a result, this report has argued that San Jose needs to focus on the fundamental tools that can have a big impact: land use planning near transit, urban design quality, transportation investment, street design improvements and helping what is already successful continue to grow. Over the next decade, these ideas will help the current downtown evolve and thrive.

Many other big ideas are beyond the scope of this report, and SPUR will explore them in future work. These

include how the high-speed rail system will interact with city neighborhoods, what the future of Highway 87 should be and whether that land could be reclaimed for other uses, and whether the airport will always remain where it is today and how much its flight pattern should impact building heights. These are all reasonable issues for San Jose to consider, and SPUR hopes to be a part of those dialogues.

The recommendations discussed in this report are SPUR’s thoughts on how downtown San Jose will achieve a better future. We look forward to a long presence in San Jose and its downtown, working to help implement these and other ideas. 

Appendix 1

Plan of Action: SPUR Recommendations

ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
BIG IDEA #1	
Welcome all kinds of uses into downtown — but hold out for jobs near regional transit.	
1. In most cases, continue to be agnostic about use and users within downtown.	San Jose City Council; San Jose Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
2. Establish minimum densities within a half mile of regional transit.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
3. Reserve sufficient land near regional transit for high-density, job-generating uses.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
4. Eliminate minimum parking requirements.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
BIG IDEA #2	
Make sure that what gets built adheres to key urban design principles.	
5. Require the ground-floor ceiling height on new development to be a minimum of 15 to 18 feet when seen from the sidewalk.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
6. Establish a policy defining active use requirements on ground floors along public streets.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
7. Require developers to produce a context map that explains how the project's ground floor connects with surrounding streets and uses.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
8. Catalog and save downtown's remaining high-quality pre-World War II buildings, but don't let prevailing heights of historic buildings, or in historic districts, dictate heights of new buildings.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
BIG IDEA #3	
Promote a larger area of Central San Jose, with downtown as its core.	
9. Redraw maps of the city, and begin marketing a larger Central San Jose geography with downtown at its core.	San Jose Office of Economic Development; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; San Jose Department of Transportation; Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
10. Emphasize investments in bike lanes, bike-share expansion, pedestrian improvements and transit to Central San Jose, and make the area a demonstration zone for how to achieve the city's goal of reduced driving.	City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA
11. Coordinate the Urban Village plans within Central San Jose.	City Council; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

ACTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
BIG IDEA #4	
Make it easier to get to and through downtown without a car.	
12. Use downtown and Central San Jose as the model for achieving the city's goal of reduced driving.	City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA, San Jose Downtown Association, SPUR, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Transform
13. Make light rail transit more efficient by running trains faster, studying double-tracking, reducing the number of stations, reconfiguring the network and improving the timing between connections.	City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA
14. Make the downtown and surrounding bus network easier to use by building bus rapid transit, improving public awareness of services and better integrating with rail.	VTA, Department of Transportation
15. Make the city, particularly Central San Jose, into a bike paradise.	Department of Transportation; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; VTA; Metropolitan Transportation Commission; Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition
16. Make new maps, improve wayfinding and signage and ensure that all transit vehicles and stations have electronic signage and real-time information.	Department of Transportation, VTA, MTC, San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs
17. Extend BART to Diridon.	City Council, Department of Transportation, BART, VTA, MTC
18. Work with Caltrain to ensure faster bullet trains to and from San Jose under its electrification plan.	Caltrain Joint Powers Board, Department of Transportation, VTA, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority, SamTrans
BIG IDEA #5	
Retrofit downtown to be more pedestrian-oriented.	
19. Retrofit street crossings to make them more pedestrian-oriented.	Department of Transportation
20. Maintain and enhance the downtown street network, and all street design guidelines, to be pedestrian-oriented, and expand the existing network of paseos.	Department of Transportation; Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement; VTA; MTC
21. Make downtown a "park once" district through better management of the overall supply of parking.	City Council, Department of Transportation, VTA, MTC, Downtown Parking Board
BIG IDEA #6	
Build on downtown's strengths as the cultural and creative center of the South Bay.	
22. Make it easier to hold concerts, festivals and other events that activate downtown.	City Council, Office of Cultural Affairs, San Jose Fire Department, San Jose Police Department
23. Support arts and culture.	City Council, Office of Cultural Affairs, private philanthropy
24. Use lighting, art installations and interactive displays as a way to better connect places.	Office of Cultural Affairs, City Council, ZERO1, Silicon Valley Creates, San Jose Downtown Association
25. Continue to use downtown as a test lab for urban innovations.	City Council, Office of Economic Development, Office of Cultural Affairs

Appendix 2

Evaluating the proposal to double-track light rail on 1st Street

This appendix explores the idea of double-tracking light rail on 1st Street downtown by moving trains from 2nd Street to 1st Street and moving the rail lines from the sidewalk to the street. Double-tracking is a project worth serious study and consideration, but it is also one that would significantly alter a prior generation’s major contribution to the downtown’s public realm. As such, we are including a full examination of both sides of this issue.

Pros of Double-Tracking 1st Street

- **Faster speeds would reduce travel times.** Currently, the trains can go up to 10 mph on the sidewalk. But they could operate as fast as 20 mph with interim improvements (i.e., physical barriers) or 25 mph if tracks were on the street instead of the sidewalk. Achieving these faster speeds and eliminating the crossovers to 2nd Street could save nearly three and a half minutes for trains passing through downtown. As a result, a trip from Japantown to the Convention Center would only take a little over six minutes, compared to the current nine and a half minutes. This decline would be a boon for both passengers (in time savings) and VTA (in operating cost savings). Quite simply, faster transit speeds mean a transit operator can deliver the same amount of transit service in fewer runs, which equates to lower operating costs.
- **Making the system easier to understand would attract more casual riders.** Under the current split-track system, there are a number of stops where riders have to board at a different place than where they got off. This makes it more difficult for casual riders to make

use of the system. Double-tracking would dramatically simplify the experience.

- **Increased safety would reduce the potential for injuries.** A 40-foot sidewalk is wonderful in a downtown with few pedestrians. But as more people come downtown, pedestrians will increasingly get in the way of trains and run a greater risk of being hurt.
- **Double-tracking would allow for reconnecting St. James Park.** Double-tracking would eliminate the trains on 2nd Street, which currently cuts through the middle of St. James Park. Removing these tracks would allow the city to close the street to all traffic (including both buses and cars), giving the park the opportunity to reclaim its role as a 19th-century gem.

Cons of Double-Tracking 1st Street

- **Rebuilding would be costly.** The streets were expensive to build and may cost \$100 million or more to rebuild.
- **Rebuilding would negatively affect a beautiful street environment today.** 1st and 2nd streets are among the better-designed streets in the Bay Area. The current 40-foot sidewalk environment is a generous public space that allows pedestrians and transit to coexist, reminiscent of many European cities. Shifting transit to the street and separating transit from pedestrians are appropriate measures for a suburban context but not a dense urban environment like downtown.
- **Double-tracking would remove one of three rows of trees.** One of downtown San Jose’s great assets

is its tree canopy and large urban forest. The middle sidewalk currently includes a row of plane trees that would be lost with double-tracking.

- **Double-tracking would leave little room for bus service.** While the current configuration allows direct transfers from light rail to buses heading in the same direction, the reconfigured street would not have sufficient room for buses heading in both directions. As a result, it might work best for buses to shift to a different street, such as Market.
- **Double-tracking would leave phantom infrastructure on 2nd Street.** Removing trains from 2nd Street would create some dead space along the 2nd Street transit mall. The current level of pedestrian activity does not require such a generous sidewalk area. To make better use of the space, the city could establish a two-way bikeway or run historic streetcars on the tracks. These options would continue to put pedestrians and other modes of transportation in conflict on the same sidewalk.

- **Less destructive changes can yield time savings that are almost as large.** Changes to the transit mall — namely, consolidating two stations and improving safety with physical barriers along the sidewalk — would produce more than half the time savings as fully rebuilding 1st Street in a double-track configuration.

FIGURE 13

How Much Time Would Changes to the 1st Street Transit Mall Save?

Key changes to light rail will save significant travel time. Putting both north-bound and south-bound tracks on 1st Street will reduce light rail travel times by nearly three and a half minutes. Consolidating two stations into one saves nearly another minute.

From (Station)	To (Station)	Travel Time (in minutes)		
		Existing Conditions	Interim Safety Measures	Double-Tracking 1st Street
Japantown	St. James	2:47	2:23	1:33
St. James	Santa Clara	1:19	0:46	0:39
Santa Clara	San Antonio	1:10	0:41	0:36
San Antonio	Convention Center	2:06	1:51	0:03
Total run time*		9:30	7:44	6:09
Percentage of travel time savings through downtown			-19%	-43%
Minutes of travel time savings through downtown			1:46	3:21
Plus station consolidation at Santa Clara Street (estimated savings of additional 00:42)			-26%	-52%
Total potential travel time savings through downtown			2:28	4:03

* “Total run time” is defined as the length of time it takes a train leaving Japantown to reach the Convention Center. It includes dwell times (i.e., waiting to pick up passengers) at St. James, Santa Clara and San Antonio. (The total estimated dwell time for those three stations is 2:18.)

Source: VTA calculations



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