

Decision 01-11-058 November 29, 2001

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Application of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority for an order authorizing construction of grade separated crossings of Interstate 280 (82D-4.8) and Meridian Avenue (82D-4.9) by the light rail transit line of the Vasona Light Rail Project in the City of San Jose, County of Santa Clara.

Application 01-05-062
(Filed May 29, 2001)

OPINION

Summary

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) requests authority to construct the grade separated crossings of Interstate 280 (I-280) and Meridian Avenue by the light rail transit line of the Vasona Light Rail Project in the City of San Jose, Santa Clara County.

Discussion

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) was created as a County department by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors on June 6, 1972 to oversee the region's transportation system. VTA's primary responsibility since its creation has been the development, operation and maintenance of the bus and light rail system within the County. VTA separated from the County of Santa Clara and merged with the region's Congestion Management Agency in January 1995; thereby it gained the additional responsibility of managing the County's blueprint to reduce congestion and improve air quality.

The Vasona Light Rail Project will be an extension to the existing 28.6-mile VTA light rail system (see Appendix A). The alignment of the proposed Vasona Corridor extends from downtown San Jose to the Vasona Junction in the City of Los Gatos. The northerly terminus of the alignment is at the intersection of West San Carlos Street and Woz Way in downtown San Jose, where the Vasona line connects to the existing Guadalupe Corridor line. From this point, the alignment extends to the west along West San Carlos Street to Delmas Avenue, passing under the SR-87 overpass. The LRT line extends north along the east side of Delmas Avenue to San Fernando Street, at which point the alignment turns west again. The line continues to the San Jose Diridon Station on an alignment to the north of San Fernando Street, crossing Los Gatos Creek on a proposed new bridge. The segment west of Autumn Street, including the location where the LRT line crosses the existing UPRR and PCJPB Diridon Yard tracks, is underground. After crossing under the yard tracks at the San Jose Diridon Station, the alignment returns to the surface and heads in a southerly direction along the west side of the Diridon Yard tracks. From a point just south of Park Avenue, the proposed alignment utilizes the existing Vasona railroad corridor. The project remains within the railroad corridor all the way to the Vasona Junction in the City of Los Gatos. Existing freight rail service in this corridor will continue unchanged, although the existing single track will be relocated in many areas to allow for construction of the light rail transit tracks.

The proposed project is expected to be funded in three phases. Phase 1 constructs the portion of the project from downtown San Jose to the Downtown Campbell Station. Phase 2 extends the line from Downtown Campbell Station to

the Winchester Station. Phase 3 extends the line from Winchester Station to the Vasona Junction Station in the City of Los Gatos.

The light rail transit tracks, which are grade separated, will cross over Interstate (I) 280 and Meridian Avenue. The grade separated crossings are the most financially and environmentally acceptable choice and are in keeping with the open access concept of light rail transit. Construction of this project serves the public by providing efficient transportation in a growing area of the Santa Clara Valley.

VTa is the lead agency for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended, Public Resources (PR) Code Section 21000, et seq. A Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Vasona Corridor Light Rail Transit Project was released to the public in October 1999, beginning the formal review period. VTA and the Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Authority prepared a Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/ Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in March 2000 in accordance with CEQA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIS/EIR evaluated the proposed rail transit project and several alternatives. Public scoping meetings were held on April 14-15, 1999, at which meetings, the light rail project was discussed at length with local citizens in the surrounding communities. In addition, there had been previously a period of public comment where in local citizens were asked to write in their comments and concerns regarding impact on their properties or other pertinent matters. Comments by the public, where feasible, were incorporated into the environmental documents and considered in the preparation of the EIS/EIR of the Light Rail Corridor.

On May 4, 2000, a Notice of Determination (Notice) was filed with the State Secretary of Resources - Office of Planning and Research, Sacramento and the County Clerk Recorder's Office - Santa Clara County, city of San Jose. The Notice, which is included in Appendix B, advised all interested parties that the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) was in compliance with Section 21108 of the California Public Resources Code.

VTA has approved the proposed project as the environmentally superior alternative and further stated that:

1. The project will not have a significant effect on the environment.
2. A Final Environmental Impact Report was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.
3. Mitigation measures were made a condition of the approval of the project.
4. A Statement of Overriding Considerations was not adopted for this project.
5. Findings were made pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.

A certification was made that the Final EIR with comments, responses and record of the project approval was made available to the General Public at the Environmental Analysis, Building B in the city of San Jose on May 5, 2000.

The Commission is a responsible agency for this project under CEQA (Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq). CEQA requires that the Commission consider the environmental consequences of a project that is subject to its discretionary approval. In particular, to comply with CEQA, a responsible agency must consider the lead agency's EIR or Negative Declaration prior to acting upon or approving the project (CEQA Guideline Section 15050 (b)). The specific activities which must be conducted by a responsible agency are

contained in CEQA Guideline Section 15096. The site of the proposed project has been inspected by the Commission's Rail Safety and Carriers Division – Rail Crossings Engineering Section staff. Staff examined the need to construct the proposed grade separated crossings, as indicated in the Exhibits attached to the application, and recommends that the application be approved.

The Commission has reviewed the lead agency environmental documents. The EIS included an analysis of potential environmental effects, including impacts related to transportation and traffic, air quality, noise and vibration, energy, land use, socio-economics and environmental justice, vegetation and wildlife, water quality, floodplains, geology, hazardous materials, magnetic fields and interference, cultural resources, aesthetic considerations, safety and security, construction and growth-inducing impacts.

The EIS analyzed 35 potential environmental impacts. Of that number, 17 were found to have no effect, be not substantial, potentially beneficial or beneficial. 18 were found to have potentially significant or significant effects. However, mitigation measures were adopted and will be implemented as specified by the lead agency to either eliminate or substantially lessen those environmental impacts. Safety, security, transportation and noise are within the scope of the Commission's permitting process. In particular, we have considered the following information.

The proposed project will reduce overall vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) and vehicle-hours-traveled (VHT) in Santa Clara County. Reducing traffic congestion will also reduce auto emissions that degrade air quality. This is a beneficial

impact because a decrease in VMT and VHT reduces congestion, air pollution and energy consumption.

The lead agency EIS did not identify any impacts from the project related to safety and security. One significant transportation impact was identified at an existing railroad crossing located between Sunnyside and Hacienda Avenues. This will be mitigated to a less than significant level by pavement modifications or lane stripping, and signs on northbound Winchester Blvd.

Noise impacts were identified as exceeding Federal Transit Administration (FTA) thresholds at various residences along the alignment as well as vibration levels, which may exceed FTA thresholds at those locations. These impacts would be mitigated to less than significant levels by mitigation measures including the construction of soundwalls, building modifications, if required, and the use of vibration-dampening track construction materials and/or trenches, if required. In addition, special track design & lubrication will be employed to reduce wheel squeal.

Socio-Economic impacts will be less than significant, as the project will not result in disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations. No neighborhoods will be divided and no cultural or religious facilities will be impacted by the project.

The proposed project will not result in significant air quality impacts. In fact, the project is anticipated to result in a beneficial impact on regional air quality. Furthermore, the proposed project conforms to the requirements of the federal Clean Air Act.

The project will provide opportunities for joint development at various locations. Joint development, sometimes referred to as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), has overall beneficial land use impacts because it allows for high density infill with easy transit access.

The proposed project will not result in significant long-term water quality impacts. However, the proposed project could result in significant short-term water quality impacts during construction. The short-term impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level by the specific construction practices and methods that will be utilized.

As to each of the potentially significant or significant impacts identified in the EIS within the scope of the Commission's permitting authority and discussed above, the Commission finds the lead agency adopted feasible mitigation measures to either eliminate or substantially lessen the impact to less than significant levels.

Due to the fact that the proposed crossings shall be grade separated, protection at the crossings is not necessary.

The application was found to be in compliance with the Commission's filing requirements, including Rules 38-41 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure. Site maps of the grade crossing are as shown on plans attached to the application and Appendix A.

In Resolution ALJ 176-3065, dated June 14, 2001 and published in the Commission Daily Calendar on June 15, 2001, the Commission preliminarily categorized this application as ratesetting, and preliminarily determined that hearings were not necessary. Since no protests were filed and no hearings were

held, this preliminary determination remains accurate. The Commission's Rail Safety and Carriers Division recommends that this application be granted. Given these developments a public hearing is not necessary, and it is not necessary to disturb the preliminary determinations made in Resolution ALJ 176-3065.

This is an uncontested matter in which the decision grants the relief requested. Accordingly, pursuant to Public Utilities Code Section 311 (g) (2), the otherwise applicable 30-day period for public review and comment is being waived.

Findings of Fact

1. Notice of the application was published in the Commission Daily Calendar on June 1, 2001. There are no unresolved matters or protests; a public hearing is not necessary.

2. Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) requests authority to construct grade separated crossings at I-280 and Meridian Avenue by the light rail transit line of the Vasona Light Rail Project in San Jose, Santa Clara County.

3. Construction of the proposed project is an essential element in the construction of the Vasona Light Rail Extension Project. The project is required in order to provide quality and accessible public transportation system in the Vasona/Highway 17 Corridor area within the Cities of San Jose, Campbell and Los Gatos. The goal is to construct a system which is convenient, is integrated with other rail and bus service, and which minimizes environmental effects on existing land uses to the extent practical. The benefits of the project include a reduction in automobile trips, improvements in air quality and a reduction in energy usage.

4. Santa Clara County, referred to as Silicon Valley, contains many high-tech companies from other nations. The growth of that industry has resulted in substantial increases in jobs and population in the County, and such growth is projected to continue.

5. The substantial growth and development that has taken place in Santa Clara county during the last decades has caused transportation system deficiencies in the Vasona corridor, as well as throughout the County. To address the resulting increase in traffic demand on the County's transportation system, a comprehensive transportation plan was established. The plan identified the future deficiencies in the county's transportation system by identifying the planned transportation system improvements in relation to the existing need and anticipated population growth. One of the conclusions of the plan was that the Vasona Corridor was an important corridor to be considered for future transit improvements.

6. Public convenience, safety and necessity require the construction of the grade separated crossings.

7. VTA is the lead agency for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

8. VTA prepared a Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and a Final Environmental Impact Statement in March 2000, State Clearinghouse Document #99032027, as shown in Appendix C.

9. The Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report was approved by U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit

Administration, pursuant to (State) Division 13, Public Resources Code (Federal) 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2) (c) on May 15, 2000.

10. A Notice of Determination was filed on May 4, 2000, with the State Secretary of Resources - Office of Planning and Research, which stated that "the project will not have a significant effect on the environment."

11. The EIS analyzed 35 potential environmental impacts. Of that number, 18 were found to have potentially significant or significant effects. However, mitigation measures were adopted and will be implemented as specified by the lead agency to either eliminate or substantially lessen those environmental impacts.

12. Safety, security, transportation and noise are within the scope of the Commission's permitting process.

13. The Commission is a responsible agency for this project, and has reviewed and considered the lead agency's Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report for the Vasona Corridor Light Rail Transit Project, prepared for and approved by the Federal Transit Administration and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority.

14. The EIS/EIR did not identify any impacts from the project related to safety and security

15. The Commission finds that for each potentially substantial environmental impact identified in the EIS/EIR within the scope of the Commission's permitting process and discussed in this decision, the lead agency adopted feasible mitigation measures to eliminate or substantially lessen the impacts to less than significant levels.

Conclusion of Law

The application should be granted as set forth in the following order.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is authorized to construct the grade separated crossings of I-280 and Meridian Avenue, to be identified as crossing 82D-4.8 and 82D-4.9, respectively, by the light rail transit line of the Vasona Light Rail Project in the City of San Jose, Santa Clara County, as set forth in Appendices A, B and C and as more fully described in the application.
2. Clearances and walkways shall be in accordance with General Order (GO) 143-B.
3. Due to the fact that the proposed crossings will be grade separated, protection at the location of the crossings is not needed.
4. Construction and maintenance costs shall be borne in accordance with an agreement which has been entered into between the parties. A copy of the agreement shall be filed with the Commission prior to starting construction.
5. Within 30 days after completion of the work under this order, VTA shall notify the Commission in writing that the authorized work was completed.
6. This authorization shall expire if not exercised within three years unless time is extended or if the above conditions are not complied with. Authorization may be revoked or modified if public convenience, necessity, or safety so require.

The application is granted as set forth above.

Application 01-05-062 is closed.

This order is effective 30 days from today.

Dated November 29, 2001, at San Francisco, California.

LORETTA M. LYNCH

President

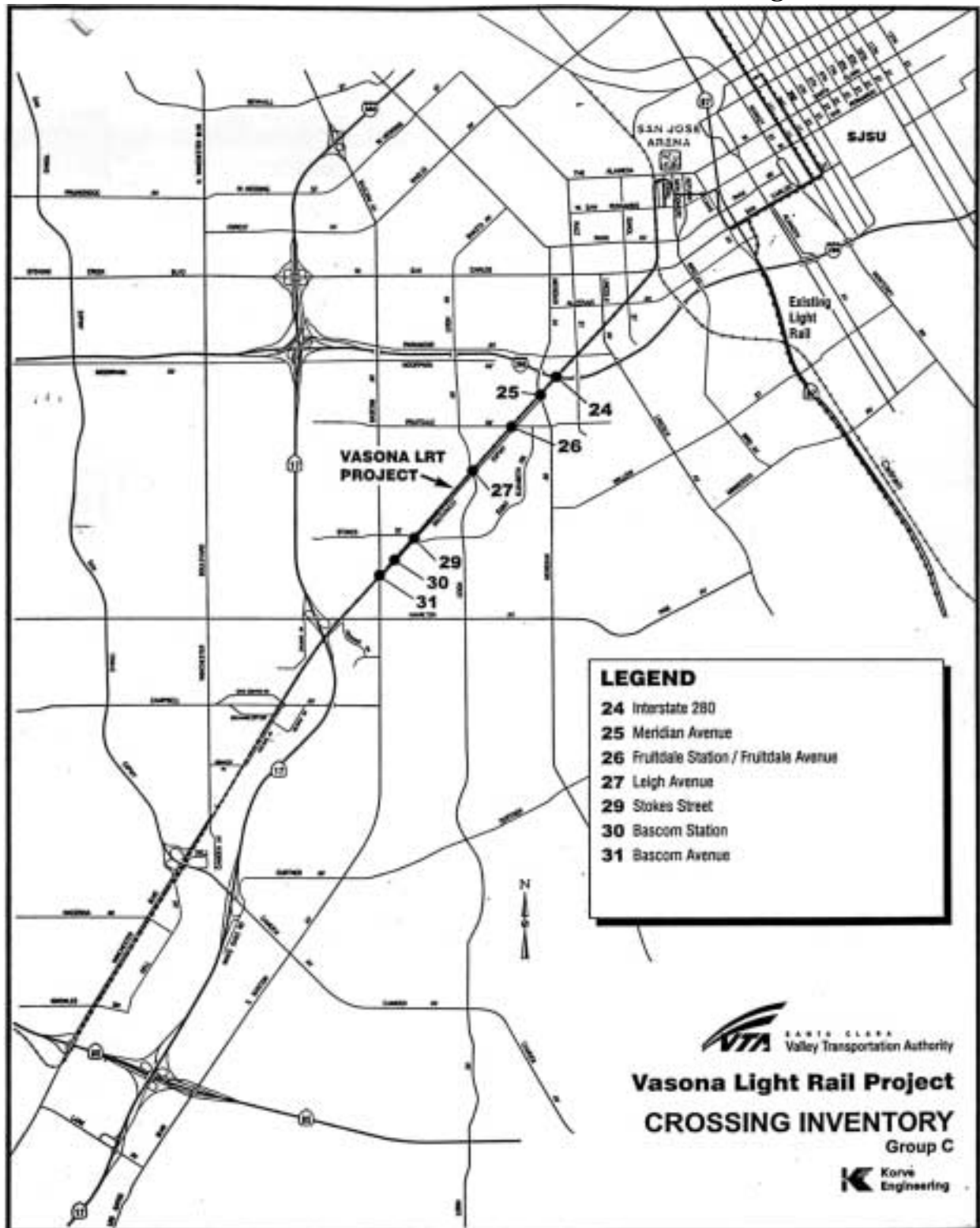
HENRY M. DUQUE

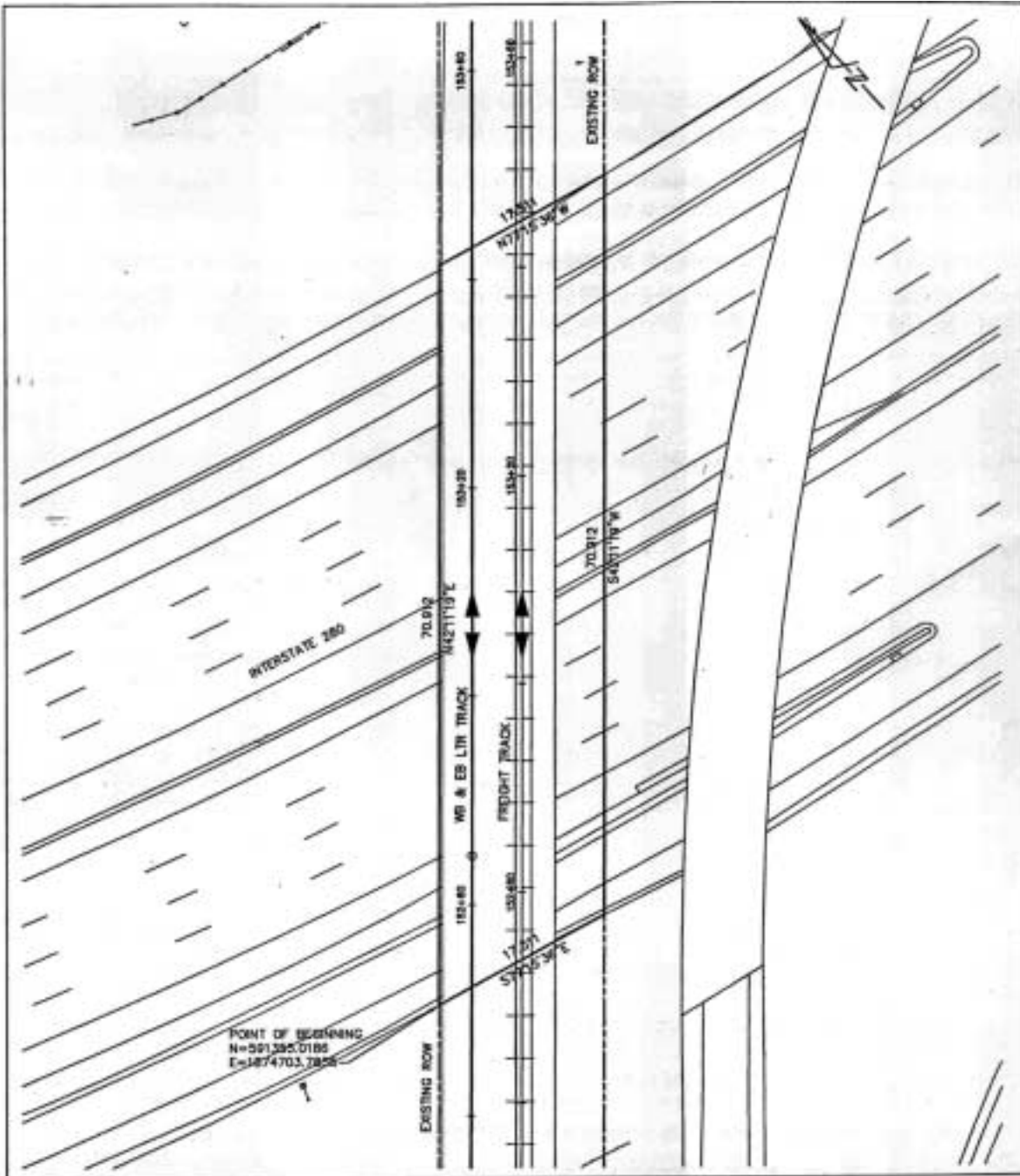
RICHARD A. BILAS

CARL W. WOOD

GEOFFREY F. BROWN

Commissioners





INTERSTATE 280
PLAT MAP
82D-4.8
SCALE 1=500



(End of Appendix A)

<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; letter-spacing: 5px;">R E C E I V E D</div> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 5px 0;">MAY 8 2000</div> <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">STATE CLEARINGHOUSE</div> </div>	
Notice of Determination	
To: <u> X </u>	Office of Planning and Research 1400 Tenth Street, Room 121 Sacramento, CA 95814
<u> X </u>	County Clerk Recorder's Office County of Santa Clara 70 West Hedding Street, First Floor San Jose, CA 95110
From: Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority 3331 North First Street, Building B San Jose, CA 95134-1906	
Subject: Filing of Notice of Determination in compliance with Section 21108 of the Public Resources Code.	
<u>Vasana Corridor Light Rail Project</u>	
Project Title <u>99032027</u>	<u>Julie Klingmann</u> Lead Agency Contact Person
State Clearinghouse Number (If submitted to Clearinghouse)	<u>14081 321-5789</u> Area Code/Telephone/Extension
<u>Downtown San Jose through Campbell into Los Gatos, Santa Clara County, California</u> Project Location (include county)	
Project Description: The Project extends light rail 6.8 miles from downtown San Jose through the City of Campbell to the Town of Los Gatos in Santa Clara County California. The proposed alignment is from the existing system, along West San Carlos Street to Delmas Avenue, north to San Fernando Street, then along the future street alignment of San Fernando Street. From there the alignment would enter a tunnel, under the San Jose/Diridon Railroad yard, then surface to follow the west side of the UPRR tracks south to Vasana Junction, near Highway 85, in Los Gatos. The proposed project would, ultimately, include eleven stations and five Park and Ride lots with Transit Centers.	
This is to advise that the <u>Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority</u> has approved the above described project <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 20px;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lead Agency <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible Agency </div> on <u>May 4, 2000</u> and has made the following determinations regarding the above described project: (Date)	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The project [<input type="checkbox"/> will <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> will not] have a significant effect on the environment. 2. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An Environmental Impact Report was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA. <input type="checkbox"/> A Negative Declaration was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA. 3. Mitigation measures [<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> were <input type="checkbox"/> were not] made a condition of the approval of the project. 4. A statement of Overriding Considerations [<input type="checkbox"/> was <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> was not] adopted for this project. 5. Findings [<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> were <input type="checkbox"/> were not] made pursuant to the provisions of CEQA. 	
This is to certify that the final EIR with comments and responses and record of the project approval is available to the General Public at:	
<u>3331 North First Street, Environmental Analysis, Building B, San Jose, CA 95134-1906 contact: Julie Klingmann</u>	
<u>Julie Klingmann</u> Signature: Julie Klingmann, VTA	<u>May 5, 2000</u> Date
<u>Environmental Analyst</u> Title	
(Date received for filing of OPR:	

(End of Appendix B)

FTA-CA-EIS-99-xx-F

State Clearinghouse # 99032027

**Vasona Corridor Light Rail Transit Project
Santa Clara County, California**

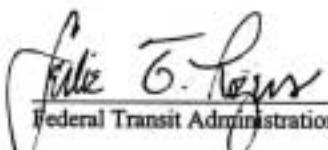
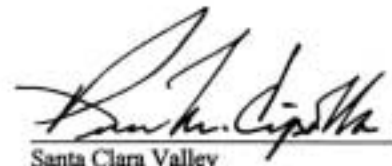
**FINAL
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

*Pursuant to (State) Division 13, Public Resources Code
(Federal) 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2) (c)*

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Federal Transit Administration**

and

SANTA CLARA VALLEY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

 Federal Transit Administration	MAR 15 2000 Date	 Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority	3/22/00 Date
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The following persons may be contacted for additional information concerning this document.

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Federal Transit Administration
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San Francisco, CA 94105-1926
(415) 744-3115

ABSTRACT: The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) [also known as the Santa Clara County Transit District (SCCTD)] proposes to construct a 10.9-kilometer (6.8-mile) extension of its existing light rail transit (LRT) system into the Vasona Corridor of Santa Clara County, California. The extension will pass through portions of the Cities of San Jose, Campbell, and Los Gatos. The project will provide a high-quality public transportation facility which will directly connect to other existing commuter and intercity rail lines and bus routes. This report discloses the environmental impacts of this proposed action which include increases in noise and vibration, relocation of businesses and residences, a loss of riparian habitat, and a visual/aesthetic impacts.

(End of Appendix C)