



August 15, 2011

Mr. Andrew Crabtree, Envision Team Leader
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
San Jose City Hall
200 East Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113

RE: Greenbelt Alliance comment letter on the Draft Program Environmental
Impact Report for Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan

Dear Mr. Crabtree,

Thank you for allowing Greenbelt Alliance the opportunity to comment on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan. Greenbelt Alliance has had the pleasure of sitting on the General Plan Task Force for nearly four years and looks forward to a visionary document being adopted by the San Jose City Council this fall. We intend to support this document as it is implemented and what follows are our suggestions for how to make it even stronger. Also, we very much appreciate the two week extension on comments.

Envision 2040 has many great goals, policies and actions that will set San Jose on a course to a more sustainable, equitable future. A focus on urban villages, infill development, and a multi-modal approach to mobility makes this plan a model. Taking the urban reserves off the table for development and recognizing Coyote Valley as a wildlife corridor are steps in the right direction as it allows San Jose to reinvest in existing neighborhoods and ensure valuable infrastructure dollars are being used to make what is already built even better.

As Public Health Law and Policy stated in their memo,

“The draft Plan represents one of the strongest land use policy statements on healthy communities that we are aware of in California to-date...” and “Overall, the current draft does an excellent job of identifying clear and specific goals, policies, and objectives. Adopting a plan with such a clear and specific policy framework will go far to ensure that San Jose’s vision for a healthy community becomes a reality.”

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Greenbelt Alliance wants this vision to become a reality. The draft EIR is the community's chance to see what the environmental impacts of the proposed plan will be and where the opportunities lie to ensure that policies are consistent and the intended outcomes are reached. Many environmental impacts also impact a community's health and well-being. And many of our comments below relate to the air quality impacts of increased vehicle miles traveled (VMT). While it is a significant sea change to move away from an auto-centric land use pattern to one that favors others modes of travel, and while this may be difficult to implement at times, the benefits that accrue back to residents and the City as a whole are worth that effort.

Thank you for taking the time to review our comments.

Jobs-Housing Balance

In an attempt to reverse the current situation of having more employed residents than jobs, San Jose is planning for a significant increase in jobs over the next three decades. Factoring in the number of planned new homes, San Jose is proposing a 1.3 jobs to 1 employed resident ratio. Whether or not this ratio is reached over the life of the General Plan, specific uses, like jobs, are proposed for specific areas, like North Coyote Valley. The Bay Area is a jobs-rich region, while affordable housing continues to be elusive, especially in Silicon Valley. By pursuing far more jobs than homes, San Jose is actually exacerbating a regional problem. More people will be commuting in to San Jose for work.

San Jose is at the crossroads of a plethora of transportation options, such as multiple freeways, a multi-modal transit hub at Diridon Station, extensive bus and light rail lines and the future extension of BART, High Speed Rail and Bus Rapid Transit. Since people are more likely to ride transit to get to work, one would hope this would be the preferred mode of travel for those who would be commuting into San Jose for work. However, as noted in the Draft EIR, *"The percentage of jobs within walking distance of rail stations and the top 15 bus routes would, however, decline compared to existing conditions."*

The Draft EIR goes on to state that the plan proposes to place a substantial number of jobs at locations where major transit is not currently proposed nor planned. These job locations include New Edenvale and North Coyote Valley. In its quest to attract any and all jobs, San Jose may gladly allow North Coyote Valley to build out with jobs. Considering North Coyote Valley's location, most people employed at this site would drive and the environmental impact, as highlighted in the Draft EIR, is that Envision 2040 will generate a significant increase in traffic.

Greenbelt Alliance suggests the following mitigations to offset this significant impact:

1. Backload North Coyote Valley and other transit-poor future employment lands until all infill areas near transit are exhausted first. North San Jose, Downtown and Diridon Station are all expected to absorb job growth and these areas make sense as they all benefit from multiple transportation options. According to Public Policy Institute of California's report, *Driving Change*, *"High employment densities appear to boost transit ridership (and therefore reduce VMT)...in part because it is relatively easy to drive or bike from home to a transit stop or station but not as easy to drive or bike from a transit station or stop to their workplace."* Boosting employment densities at transit-rich locations first before accommodating jobs in places like North Coyote Valley achieves a greater reduction in VMT which helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air quality impacts.

2. Encourage high density homes to be located on employment lands such as North Coyote Valley. By clustering a mix of homes, jobs and shops at these locations, it allows people to live closer to where they work which cuts down on commuting by car.
3. Pursue more aggressive transportation policies that support a shift to walking, cycling and riding transit.

Additionally, the draft EIR seems to take lightly the potential for displacement from future growth especially around transit. A recent study out of the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, *Maintaining Diversity in America's Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change*, found that, “*While patterns of neighborhood change vary, the most predominant pattern is one in which housing becomes more expensive, neighborhood residents become wealthier and vehicle ownership becomes more common.*” The report goes on to state that “*People of color, low-income households and renters... are disproportionately likely to live in households without vehicles....and are all more likely to use transit than the average American. These three groups represent the majority of what we refer to as core transit riders.*”

It is very likely that an influx of new infill development near transit in San Jose will drive up prices and lead to voluntary displacement as people move to find more affordable homes. These more affordable homes may be further afield, in communities like Los Banos or Tracy, which in turn forces people to commute back to the community in which they may work. It is therefore critical that San Jose has strong affordable housing policies. San Jose has an excellent record in building affordable homes and Greenbelt Alliance recognizes that the future is uncertain when it comes to building more homes affordable to a range of incomes. That said, Envision 2040 is planning for the next three decades and the economy will go through many cycles. Greenbelt Alliance asserts that displacement is a significant impact and suggests the following mitigations:

4. Ensure that strong protections are in place to preserve affordable housing stock in transit zones, especially Diridon Station which will provide local and regional connections, ensuring access to opportunity.
5. As massive planning efforts move forward, such as Diridon Station, ensure that the affordable housing requirements are met on site and not elsewhere in the City.
6. If San Jose's Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance does not support rental units, consider a Commercial Linkage fee as a way for new jobs to support the workers who will fill those jobs.

According to Working Partnerships' report, *Life in the Valley Economy 2010*, “*Approximately 31.6% of all Silicon Valley workers are paid \$ 15/hour or less.*” Additionally, a July 2011 article in the *Wall Street Journal* stated that, “*Rent levels rose fastest in San Jose, CA. to \$1,501.*” *(attachment 1)*

Transportation

Envision 2040 has very ambitious mode split goals, proposing that the percentage of trips made by bicycle will increase from 1.2% in 2008 to at least 15% in 2040 while the number of those driving alone will decrease from 78% to no more than 40%. San Jose should be applauded for pursuing these goals and Greenbelt Alliance enthusiastically supports these mode splits as well

as the 40% reduction in VMT over the life of the Plan. However, very aggressive policies and land use patterns will be needed to achieve these targets. Planning for a sustainable, equitable future is one thing. Implementing the goals to get San Jose to that future is another. Envision 2040 is the roadmap to show residents, developers, elected officials and advocates what needs to happen to get us to this future. Achieving these goals will have numerous benefits to San Jose's residents, including improved health as a result of more trips being made on foot or by bike and less by car.

However, at the moment, the Draft EIR states that *“With the projected increase in vehicle miles traveled, beyond or above the growth in population and employment, impacts associated with increased emissions of criteria pollutants would remain significant and unavoidable.”*

Greenbelt Alliance challenges the notion that this is unavoidable. The location of future employment lands coupled with expanding vehicle capacity on roadways creates a situation that necessitates driving and makes it as easy as possible. This endorsement to increase automobile capacity through road supply generates induced demand for more drivers on the road and is working directly against the City's goals of reducing automobile emissions. On page 244-245 of the draft EIR, the number of multimodal streets is 12. The number of streets with expanded capacity is 27. Over twice as many streets will add vehicle capacity than will decrease it.

Greenbelt Alliance notes some discrepancies between the tables on page 244-245 and Figure 3.2-5 on page 240. There appears to be more streets designated for downsizing on the map than appear on the multimodal table. The map of Proposed Network Changes in Figure 3.2-5 should more closely reflect the street segments listed in Table 3.2-10 to ensure there is no conflict of Protected Intersection development with Expanded Roadway Capacity. Also, why is the Alameda's future downsizing not reflected in the map and table?

Figure 3.2-5 on page 240 shows which streets will be increased and which decreased by one or more lanes per direction. Zanker Road in the North San Jose area will be widened. This area has eleven light rail stations and is proposed to add a strong mix of homes, jobs and shops. Widening Zanker does not support transit-oriented development in North San Jose. Autumn Street just east of Diridon Station is planned to be widened from two lanes to four lanes. Diridon Station is one of the most transit-rich stations in the Bay Area; expanding roadways through it (and adjacent to the Guadalupe River and Los Gatos Creek trails) does not support transit-oriented development at Diridon Station. A new four lane road will open up Almaden Ranch just south of Branham Lane; an area proposed for auto-centric regional retail uses. The above actions encourage driving and discourage cycling and walking.

Figure 3.2-6 on page 249 shows all the protected intersections in San Jose. A comparison of this map to the one on page 240 highlights how policies can be inconsistent: A protected intersection and a roadway expansion occur in the same vicinity of West San Carlos and Meridian. While the protected intersection policy is a good one, using it sparingly does not achieve the mode split targets San Jose is striving for.

Table 3.2-14 on page 270 shows that with the proposed Envision 2040 General Plan policies, the percent mode share increase in bicycle trips is 1% for a total of 2% of all trips made by bike. This is evidence that stronger, more holistic bicycle measures are necessary.

Greenbelt Alliance is concerned that the Plan's emphasis on more jobs than homes and significant roadway expansions will negate the balanced transportation goals of Envision 2040. San Jose is moving in the right direction, but this is a 30-year plan. In the next three decades the

effects of climate change, an aging population, a new economy and rising healthcare, energy and food costs will be very apparent. Now is the time for San Jose to prepare residents for these changes and Envision 2040 is the blueprint. More must be done to make a shift away from auto-dependence.

Greenbelt Alliance has the following questions and suggested mitigations:

1. Will the Protected Intersection Policy be applied citywide to support multimodal development? San Jose should make the Protected Intersections approach the rule. Currently, the City uses this policy as spot zoning. Specifically:
 - Every intersection in Planned and Identified Growth Areas should be allowed to exceed automobile Level of Service D, and
 - Every project in Planned and Identified Growth Areas should construct improvements to the city's non-auto transportation system, rather than expand road capacity at a given intersection, regardless of the current LOS at that intersection (e.g. even intersections that currently operate at LOS A, B, or C should not be expanded if a new project will cause their LOS to deteriorate).
2. Consider adopting the Multi-Modal Level of Service approach to traffic analysis that provides a comprehensive perspective on the interactions of Automobiles, Bicycles, Pedestrians and Transit and the condition the City's transportation network. Improved evaluation of the speed, convenience, comfort and security of transportation facilities as experienced by users can better inform the City on success and challenges to delivering a suite of attractive public and physically active transportation options. This works towards achieving reduced emissions targets from pervasive automobile use and promoting the health of San Jose residents by encouraging more walking and cycling.
3. **Does San Jose's Travel Demand Forecasting (TDF) model take into consideration rising gas prices and the cost of parking?** Mode choice is the third step in the modeling process, where a determination is made about which transport mode a person will choose for each trip. If a wide street currently has no bike lanes or sharrows, will this lead to a determination that the mode choice in this instance or location is a car, therefore leading to a travel demand forecast of more driving? Can San Jose's TDF model include inputs for foreseeable changes on the horizon, such as \$5/gallon for gas or parking lots being redeveloped as townhomes? The TDF model must account for the viability of free parking. These issues influence travel behavior and residents will be better served in the future if roadway improvements today focused on walking, cycling and supporting transit.
4. Create Parking Benefit Districts throughout the City, especially in urban villages and near transit stations. Charge performance based prices for curb parking and return the revenue to the neighborhood to pay for improvements, such as graffiti removal, streetscape improvements and landscaping. Making the true cost of parking more apparent will influence travel behavior. This in turn will affect the TDF model which could forecast a preference for other travel modes. As a result, funding decisions in favor of walking and cycling would be made. An increase in protected intersections combined with a program to manage parking assets supports a safer, more accessible and attractive pedestrian and bicycle realm.

5. Add Action TR 8.10 as one to be achieved under Tier 1 Reduction of Vehicle Miles Traveled Policies and Actions. Plentiful, free parking skews travel choices in favor of the car. Progressive parking policies must be considered as a way to achieve a 10%-40% reduction in VMT over the next three decades. The California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA) prepared the report, *Model Policies for Greenhouse Gases in General Plans*. They suggest and Greenbelt Alliance echoes the following policies as a way to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks:

- 5.1.1 Reduce the available parking spaces for private vehicles while increasing parking spaces for shared vehicles, bicycles, and other alternative modes of transportation;

- 5.1.4 Use parking pricing to discourage private vehicle use, especially at peak times;

- 5.1.6 Establish performance pricing of street parking, so that it is expensive enough to promote frequent turnover and keep 15 percent of spaces empty at all times;

TR-5.3 Parking “Cash-out” Program: The City/County will require new office developments with more than 50 employees to offer a Parking “Cash-out” Program to discourage private vehicle use.

An increase in VMT leads to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions. It also leads to significant health impacts. A recent study out of Canada found that cyclists had heart irregularities in the hours after their exposure to a variety of air pollutants on busy roads. *“Our findings suggest that short-term exposure to traffic may have a significant impact on cardiac autonomic function in healthy adults,”* the scientists from Health Canada, Environment Canada and the University of Ottawa wrote in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*. If San Jose is proposing to add capacity to roadways, then the health impacts to cyclists and pedestrians exposed to vehicles must be considered.

Greenbelt Alliance suggests the following policy:

6. Provide grade separated bicycle lanes where overlap occurs with high auto trip roadways. A study of bike lanes in Portland, Ore., showed that lanes separated by planters actually decreased cyclists' air pollution exposure. The following comes from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's Community Air Risk Evaluation Program:

“In the Bay Area, diesel particulate matter (PM) accounts for about 80% of the cancer risk from airborne toxics....Diesel PM consists of primarily fine particles. In addition to the toxic effects of diesel PM, all fine particulate matter also aggravates heart and respiratory disease, including asthma. Major sources of diesel PM include on-road and off-road heavy duty diesel trucks and construction equipment. The highest diesel PM emissions occur in the urban core areas of eastern San Francisco, western Alameda, and northwestern Santa Clara counties.”

The map on page 370 shows areas of San Jose that are in the top 25% Quartile of toxic air contaminants (TAC) exposure.

Greenbelt Alliance suggests the following policy changes and would like to echo the suggested changes made by the American Lung Association of California in their letter:

7. Policy TR-8.6 ~~Allow~~ **Require** reduced parking requirements for mixed-use developments and for developments providing shared parking....
8. Action TR-10.1 ~~Explore development of a program for implementation as part of Tier II,~~ **Develop policy** to require that parking spaces within new development in areas adjacent to transit and in all mixed-use projects be unbundled from rent or sale of the dwelling unit or building square footage.
9. Action TR-10.3 ~~Encourage participation~~ **Facilitate** car sharing programs ~~for new development in identified growth areas.~~ **throughout the city.**
10. TR-1.8 Actively coordinate with regional transportation, land use planning, and transit agencies to develop a transportation network with complementary land uses that encourage travel by bicycling, walking and transit, and ensure that regional greenhouse gas emissions standards are met. **Prioritize investments in bicycle and pedestrian facilities in low-income communities, which are less likely to have access to a private automobile, and thus more likely to be dependent on walking and bicycling for transportation.**
11. Greenbelt Alliance also sees opportunities to enhance the bicycle network by connecting remaining gaps in Primary Bikeways to encourage a complete network (*attachment 2*):

#1-Leigh Ave

- o Connect Leigh Ave to Los Gatos Creek bikeway

#2-Santa Theresa Blvd

- o Connect Santa Theresa Blvd at Coleman Rd

#3-Ocala Rd

- o Connect S. King Ave to E. Capitol Expy

#4-Hedding Rd

- o Connect Berryessa Rd to Guadalupe River bikeway
- o Connect to N. Winchester Blvd

#5-Lawrence Expy

- o Expand south down Quito Rd

#6-N. Winchester

- o Connect Williams Rd along N Winchester
- o Connect to Homestead Rd to Lafayette St to De La Cruz Blvd/Coleman Ave bikeway

#7-N. Capitol Ave

- o Connect between Coyote Creek Trail and Penitencia Creek Trail

It should be noted that on page 807, the DEIR finds that, *“the City’s projected 2035 GHG emissions, without further reductions, would constitute a cumulatively considerable contribution to global climate change by exceeding the average carbon-efficiency standard necessary to maintain a trajectory to meet statewide 2050 goals as established by Executive Order S- 3-05.”* Executive Order S-3-05 establishes a target that by 2050, greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to 80% below 1990 levels. This is considered a significant impact and can be attributed to excess in-commuters from increased job production.

Open Space

Envision 2040 intends to preserve a permanent greenbelt of open space and natural habitat along the city's edges. The City proposes no development in either urban reserve over the life of the General Plan and recognizes wildlife movement in Coyote Valley. San Jose must be commended for focusing on infill development to accommodate projected growth as a way to protect surrounding open spaces. These open spaces range from Prime Farmland to scenic hillsides to wildlife and creek corridors. These are natural assets San Jose already has that contribute to residents' high quality of life.

While the Coyote Valley Urban Reserve is off limits to development over the life of Envision 2040, North Coyote Valley is slated for future jobs at any time. The DEIR notes that the loss of Prime Farmland is a significant unavoidable impact, since *“the protection of other existing farmland, such as through the use of agricultural easements or outright purchase, would not be considered mitigation under CEQA because the net result of such actions would still be a net loss of farmland acreage.”* There are approximately 957 acres of Prime Farmland in North Coyote Valley.

The DEIR discusses agricultural conservation easements as an implementation tool to protect farmland. Several times, the DEIR refers to mitigation for farmland that is not planned for urbanization in the timeframe of Envision 2040 and that lands that are planned for urban development, like North Coyote Valley, have been designated for urban uses within the City's Urban Growth Boundary for many years. A number of North Coyote Valley properties have existing entitlements that are due to expire. What is unclear is whether development in North Coyote Valley will trigger an agricultural mitigation program where Prime Farmland elsewhere in San Jose or South Santa Clara County will be protected. Will this be considered when existing entitlements expire? While North Coyote Valley is already annexed into San Jose and does not need to go through LAFCO's agricultural mitigation program, the loss of Prime Farmland is a significant impact that must still be mitigated.

Additionally, while Envision 2040 recognizes that wildlife passes through Coyote Valley, it fails to find the development of North Coyote Valley as a significant impact. There is some discussion on page 474 that recognizes that,

“Future development and infrastructure improvements allowed under the General Plan would make it more difficult for mammals to move across Coyote Valley in a west-east or east-west direction. This would be a result of new development on both sides of Bailey Avenue from the west side of Coyote Valley east to Monterey Road, increased traffic from new development in North Coyote Valley, and widening of Santa Teresa Boulevard on either side of the Fisher Creek crossing.”

It goes on to say that,

“The importance of the landscape linkage across northern Coyote Valley in supporting regional populations of animals has been recognized within the last 10 years, as documented in the draft HCP/NCCP. Even though development allowed under the General Plan will not completely eliminate wildlife movement across Coyote Valley, new impediments to successful dispersal across the valley, including development allowed by this General Plan, could result in a substantial impact to regional wildlife movements in the vicinity of Bailey Road.”

However, with various mitigations in place, the DEIR finds this to be a less than significant impact.

A series of draft maps from Science and Collaboration for Connected Wildlands shows Coyote Valley, and in particular North Coyote Valley, as the preferred route for wildlife crossings. Mountain lions, bobcats, badgers and more cross between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Mount Hamilton Range. *(attachment 3,4)*

One of the projects of Science and Collaboration for Connected Wildlands is the Bay Area Critical Linkages. In March 2009, a task force was convened to:

“explore the need and feasibility of identifying and protecting critical linkages within the San Francisco Bay Area eco-region and connections to adjacent eco-regions. The task force identified several proposed linkage planning areas that could be irretrievably compromised by development projects in the next decade unless immediate conservation actions occur. The Critical Linkages project will fine tune the (Bay Area Open Space Council’s) Upland Habitat Goals conservation lands network to insure functional habitat connectivity at a regional scale. This large wildland network will serve as the backbone of a regional conservation strategy.”

Additionally, De Anza College’s Wildlife Corridor Technician Program finds that North Coyote Valley is a significant component to the Coyote Valley wildlife corridor, with Mid Coyote Valley being the primary corridor. Internationally recognized conservation biologists and corridor experts Dr. Reed Noss and Dr. Paul Beier recommend wildlife corridors to be at least 2 kilometers wide, on average, and state, *“In our opinion, protecting and restoring functional wildlife movement corridors between the Diablo Range and Santa Cruz Mountains is a high priority locally, regionally, and statewide.” (attachment 5)*

North Coyote Valley is a critical piece in this larger vision of wildlife connectivity and habitat, and development of this site will be a significant impact that the DEIR fails to recognize. In fact, Policy ER-7.7, *“Include barriers to animal movement within new development and, when possible, within existing development, to prevent movement of animals (e.g., pets and wildlife) between developed areas and natural habitat areas where such barriers will help to protect sensitive species”* has good intentions, but could create a barrier to wildlife movement through North Coyote Valley.

Greenbelt Alliance has the following questions and suggests the following mitigations and changes to Envision 2040:

1. Adopt a citywide agricultural mitigation policy for Prime Farmland that is slated for urban development. This can be used to protect Prime Farmland in other parts of Coyote Valley.
2. Why is Santa Teresa Boulevard being widened in Coyote Valley? This seems like a costly and unnecessary infrastructure improvement that does not support wildlife crossing nor a reduction in VMT.
3. Include Policy IN-1.11, *“Locate and design utilities to avoid or minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive areas and habitats”* as mitigation for impacts to wildlife movement in Coyote Valley as discussed on page 477 of the DEIR. Facilities in North Coyote Valley should incorporate habitat design that facilitates the movement of wildlife along the east-west corridor, especially along the urban reserve’s northern border.

4. Add ER-8.5 which states: *Identify and protect critical linkages in the Coyote Valley floor, especially in Mid Coyote Valley, as the Coyote Valley Critical Linkages for Wildlife.*
5. Encourage the acquisition and protection of key parcels in North, Mid and South Coyote Valley to maintain connectivity.

For lands outside the UGB, it is important that they remain as undeveloped open space. There was some discussion at the Task Force that uses such as cemeteries and golf courses will be needed. Lands outside the UGB play an important role as natural infrastructure, cleaning our air and water. While technically ‘open’, golf courses can be extremely harmful on the environment and are definitely a form of development. To that end, we recommend the following change:

6. Strengthen Policy LU-19.10, which seeks to preserve the non-urban character of lands outside the Urban Growth Boundary, as follows: “*e) For non-agricultural land uses, disturb no more than 10% of the total site area through grading, changes to vegetation or other development activity.*”

Conclusion

Greenbelt Alliance very much appreciates being a part of the Envision San Jose 2040 process and believes this to be a model General Plan in many ways, including how it touches on the health benefits of increased walking and cycling and access to healthy foods, parks and trails. Our above comments, questions and suggestions reflect our desire to strengthen this Plan even more so it may be touted across the State as a landmark document. Greenbelt Alliance is also committed to ensuring this Plan is implemented according to the community’s vision for a sustainable, equitable and healthy San Jose. San Jose has already demonstrated leadership on many fronts and we believe the City can become a regional and statewide leader on sustainable land use. We recognize that this will not be easy, and look forward to finding ways to support San Jose on this journey.

Sincerely,



Michele Beasley
Senior Field Representative