



December 7, 2009

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

RE: Comments for the San Jose General Plan Task Force meeting on Transportation

Dear Mr. Crabtree:

Thank you for allowing Greenbelt Alliance the opportunity to comment on policies for the Transportation/Circulation Element of the San Jose General Plan. San Jose is a regional leader when it comes to providing homes for Silicon Valley's workers and has demonstrated a commitment to infill development near transit stations. Greenbelt Alliance also applauds the City's recent proposals to set ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in Envision San Jose 2040. The next challenge facing San Jose is the need to plan the transportation system for people, and not cars. By focusing on enhancing mobility for all users of the roadway network, rather than improving auto traffic circulation alone, San Jose can serve as a model for the region, state and nation.

### **A New Reality**

By 2035, an additional two million people will be living in the Bay Area. And in Santa Clara County, one in five people will be over the age of 65. We need to plan today for an aging population, taking into consideration that many households who cannot drive, will be stranded if the only way to get around is by car. Older adults, as well as young people and working families, need safe, affordable options for how to get around without a car.

In addition, transportation accounts for 42% of greenhouse gas emissions in the Bay Area. The majority of this comes from single occupancy vehicles. This is a direct result of our sprawling land use patterns which have placed homes far from shops and jobs. The bulk of San Jose has been designed around the automobile at the expense of those who prefer to walk, bike or ride transit. Updating the General Plan can change this pattern by designing around people; giving everyone more options for how they meet their daily needs.

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The San Jose General Plan can lay the foundation for a city that responds well to these new challenges. Strong policy language that favors more walkable, sustainable neighborhoods is needed, but the key to success is community buy-in. Cities can act locally while recognizing their vital role within the larger Bay Area region. Together, we can design senior- and child-friendly communities that increase people's ability to move around while also making a positive impact on the planet. The Transportation Element of the General Plan plays a significant role in achieving this vision.

Greenbelt Alliance recognizes that the City of San Jose has adopted some very good transportation policies and would like to support the City in being aggressive when it comes to increasing mode shares for transit, walking and bicycling.

### **Road Diets and making space for pedestrians and bicyclists**

San Jose's Department of Transportation has already identified numerous streets to be 'right-sized' either on the ground or in the General Plan. Right-sizing, or 'road diet', allows for a road to be down-sized to automobile traffic in order to add capacity for bicyclists and pedestrians in the form of bike lanes, wider sidewalks, landscaped medians, and so on. This is critical if San Jose wants to be successful in encouraging people to explore other means of travel. It also helps the City reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by reducing vehicle miles traveled.

However, Greenbelt Alliance cautions the City to not widen too many roadways. This may cancel out the greenhouse gas emission reductions achieved through road diets. San Jose has identified a significant amount of roads to be expanded, which encourages people to drive more and drive faster.

San Jose's General Plan should include language which recognizes the role of road diets in the creation of safer and more livable communities; as well as in addressing climate change. Coupled with a 'Complete Streets' policy, the right-sizing of critical streets in the network allows for all users to have safe and convenient access to the road network. Children can safely ride their bikes to school; older adults can easily cross streets to shops and restaurants, and the City can achieve some real success with its Green Vision.

By creating safe and attractive bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, Portland reduced vehicle trips by 10%. And on San Francisco's Valencia Street, bicycle traffic increased by 140% when a lane of traffic was removed and bike lanes added.

### **Level of Service and Protected Intersections**

Greenbelt Alliance commends San Jose on its Protected Intersections policy. This policy begins to modify Level of Service for automobiles, which is an outdated metric that accommodates drivers over all other road users. Depending on how much time delay is caused to drivers as a result of new development, roads are usually widened to increase automobile traffic volume and speed. However, this decreases the livability of a neighborhood, as streets become unattractive and unsafe 'road-blocks' to pedestrians and bicyclists. In the short-term, traffic congestion may

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be eased, but overtime, congestion will build up again as a result of a city's investment in road infrastructure. More driving means more greenhouse gas emissions and less walkable communities.

San Jose has taken Level of Service and modified it to improve the pedestrian and bicyclist environment. Greenbelt Alliance encourages San Jose to designate more intersections as protected, especially in the targeted areas for growth around transit stations. For example, downtown San Jose should expand, and as it does, so should the number of protected intersections in downtown. This creates a level of congestion which is good for local businesses, as people drive slow enough to see what is happening on the street. Others abandon driving altogether to walk, bike or ride light rail.

This modified Level of Service would ideally translate new development into more livable streets for people. It is a good transitional policy that will move San Jose towards something along the lines of a Multi-Modal or Quality of Life Level of Service or an Auto Trips Generated metric. San Jose should begin to measure person delay instead of vehicle delay.

One metric that Greenbelt Alliance would like to challenge is "Existing Conditions". Modeling is based on how people act and move today. It ignores the high likelihood that gas prices will go up and that cities should charge for parking, both of which will influence people's travel patterns. If a particular intersection is studied for impacts to pedestrian movement, but today, few pedestrians are even using that intersection, then there is no impact, and improvements to the pedestrian environment are not made. In San Jose, this is very likely, because much of the City is unfriendly to pedestrians. All cities should look at their preferred mode shares (which should be aggressive for transit, walking and bicycling) and then predict the infrastructure improvements needed to get to these ideal future conditions.

At the end of the day, the goal is to design a City that allows people to circulate in a safe, attractive and convenient manner; in a way that is good for our health and good for our planet.

### **Parking and Transit**

While parking is traditionally considered a service that must be provided in order to meet new demand, quite the contrary is true. In fact, parking induces demand. Parking generates and enables vehicle trips, traffic, and pollution. Quality transit, walkable streets and restricted parking work together to reduce vehicle trips.

While much of San Jose offers free parking, it is important to note that there is no such thing as free parking. Depending on the type of space, one parking spot can cost between \$20,000 and \$75,000. Even if these spaces are provided free of charge, there is a cost in terms of the trade off. This land could have been used as a park or a cultural amenity. By always providing free and low-cost parking, driving is encouraged. This creates more traffic congestion and pollution.

If San Jose is truly going to achieve its desired mode shares and 'Green Vision', then parking and congestion pricing will need to be addressed.

Some cities around the region “unbundle” the cost of parking from a rental unit; separating out the cost of a unit from a parking space. This makes sense for transit-oriented neighborhoods. This way, those who do not own a car can save money and are not subsidizing parking for others. Greenbelt Alliance encourages the City of San Jose to consider the unbundling of parking costs.

As much as possible, the City should also look into shared parking, structured parking and paid parking. Land in the Bay Area is expensive. Free parking is a waste of money and land in these trying economic times. Even more importantly, San Jose should further reduce parking requirements in downtown and near transit stations. Parking ratios should also be reduced for senior housing and low-income housing.

It is important to note that according to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, people who both live and work near transit are ten times more likely to take it than people who do not live near transit. In fact, 30% of Bay Area households who live within a half-mile of a fixed rail stop own zero vehicles.

Downtown Redwood City’s parking management system has received nationwide attention. Instead of adding more parking spaces, the City decided to manage what they already had better. Some elements of their market-based system include the elimination of time limits and the dedication of surplus parking revenues to the downtown core. The result is that 15% of the spaces are open at any time.

And in Mountain View, restaurants along Castro Street often rent the parking spaces in front of their establishment to increase the amount of outdoor dining. This has helped make their downtown the envy of neighboring cities and highlights a movement that is gaining more appeal in large cities. As population in urban areas grows, many people want and need more park space. A “Pavement to Parks” program can take surplus parking spaces and turn them into wider sidewalks, tot lots, pedestrian paseos and more. San Jose should consider such a program to meet the needs of residents in 2035.

### **Safe Routes to Schools**

Greenbelt Alliance encourages the City of San Jose to partner with local school districts to enact a Safe Routes to Schools program. Only one generation ago, most children walked to school. Today, only one in ten children walks to school regularly. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since the mid 1960's rates of childhood obesity have increased exponentially from 4% to 16% nationwide, while the number of walking and bicycling trips made by children has fallen by 65%.

Marin County is a national leader in the Safe Routes to School Movement. Nelson/Nygaard Consulting analyzed the impact of one year in this program. 37 schools participated and over the course of the year, the percentage of children arriving and leaving school in a family car dropped from 55% to 42%. The evaluators were able to extrapolate from the data that 2.6 million vehicle miles were reduced over the year and that this translated to an annual reduction of 1,190 tons of

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carbon dioxide emissions. An added benefit is that the children were more productive in class because many had started the day off either walking or cycling to school. A considerable amount of traffic in cities and towns is a result of parents dropping off and picking up their kids to and from school.

### **Complete Streets**

Last year, Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 1358 into law, requiring all cities and counties to include complete streets policies as part of their general plans so that all users are granted safe and dignified access to the roadway network. The entire right-of-way of a roadway is planned, designed and operated to provide safe access to all users – including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, children, older adults, disabled people and motorists. Streets should be designed from the outside in, starting at the sidewalks, then bicycle lanes and finally vehicle lanes.

San Jose is already looking at Complete Streets language and Greenbelt Alliance encourages that it:

- Includes a vision for how and why a community wants “complete streets”;
- Encourages street connectivity and aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network for all modes of movement;
- Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads;
- Applies to both new and retrofit projects;
- Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes;
- Includes specific, concrete steps for implementation of the policy; and
- Applies to every development project that receives CEQA review.

Enrique Penalosa, former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia has said that quality sidewalks are a sign of a quality city~ they are more closely related to parks than to streets, and that a great city is one where a child can go anywhere safely on a bike. In Europe where cities are denser and the pedestrian infrastructure is better, 50% of their seniors walk or bike compared to 8% of American seniors.

While downtowns and transit-oriented developments are ideal locations to begin working on “Complete Streets”, the policy should rapidly be adopted city-wide so that all residents can begin to feel and experience the benefits of more equitable street design. For instance, cars are guests in residential neighborhoods, and it should be obvious that the streets are for people, so if children are playing in the street, they should not be fearful of fast-moving vehicles. Traffic calming helps to complete the streets.

### **Healthy, Livable Streets**

The policies mentioned above have multiple benefits to San Jose’s residents and workers. By giving people more options in addition to the car for how they move around town, San Jose is reducing its carbon footprint and addressing climate change. Even if everyone is driving an

electric car by 2040, the amount of land dedicated to moving and storing cars is considerable. It uses land inefficiently, leading to sprawl, lost farmland and more congested roads.

A shift away from designing and building for cars- whether gas or electric- also means moving towards more walking and bicycling. This is better for our health, both physically and mentally. Streets become places where people meet, mingle, play and trade. Streets become places where all users are equal.

### **Conclusion**

Greenbelt Alliance recommends that a key overarching policy goal for the San Jose General Plan is: Achieve a net reduction in total VMT within San Jose below current levels while accommodating the City's share of the region's population growth. The above policies start to move San Jose towards this goal.

San Jose should be commended again for pursuing many of these policies already. Now, the community must come together and support the City in implementation of these policies. Residents want safe, attractive, livable streets. We must ensure San Jose is getting those streets by measuring the number new street trees, pedestrian lights and benches; by measuring the miles of new on-street bicycle lanes, off-street trails and continuous, wide sidewalks. San Jose has a ways to go as far as implementation, but if the community supports and strengthens existing policies and helps to come up with new aggressive policies, visionary plans can lead to attractive, walkable neighborhoods.

Sincerely,



Michele Beasley  
Senior Field Representative