

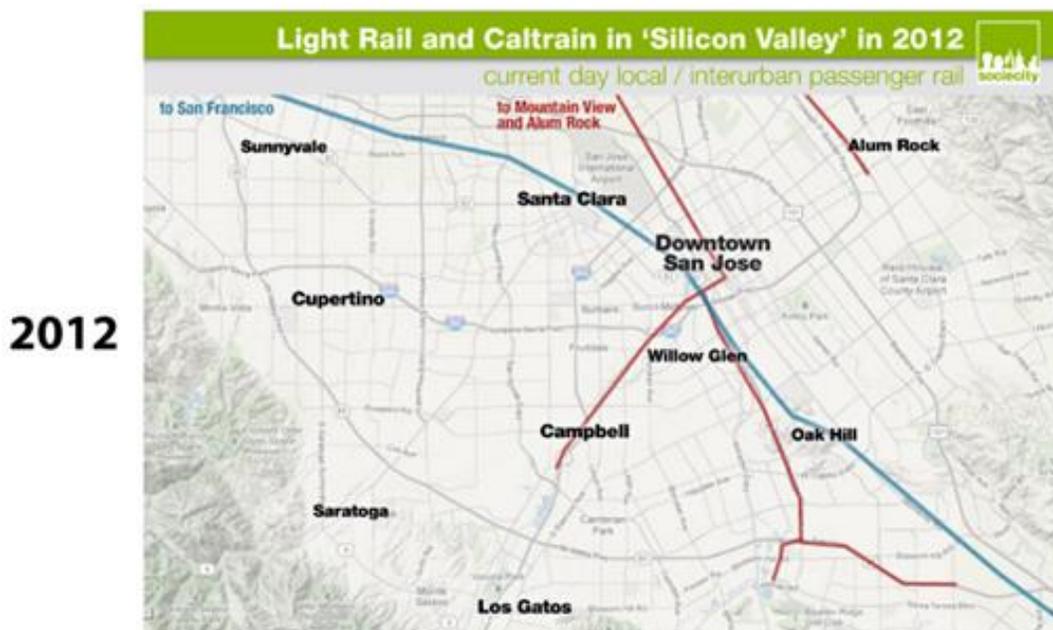
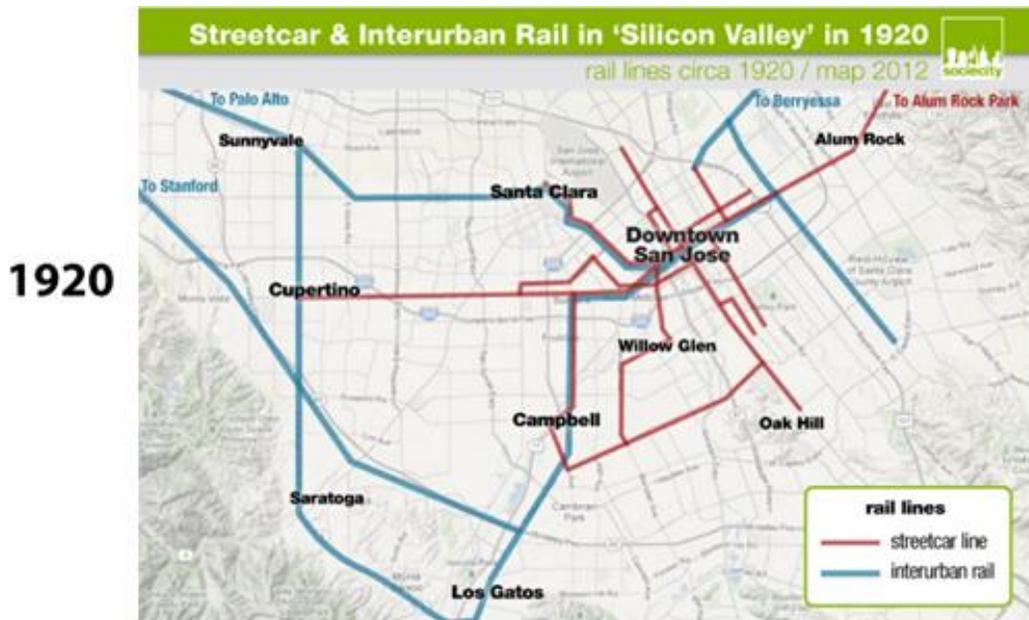
Transit & Transportation

Cupertino is a transit desert.

We have several VTA bus routes, though we have been losing routes as VTA tries to cut service to balance their budget, and this was before Covid-19 decimated transit ridership.

Originally, we were supposed to get light-rail service up the median of Highway 85, through Cupertino, to Mountain View. VTA long ago reneged on this promise. While we deplore the poorly planned light rail system, the reality is that it was planned just fine, it was just never built. When you build half a system, leaving out the key links between housing-rich and jobs-rich areas, you have to expect that it won't be heavily used. Due to the undue influence of San Jose, the portion of the light rail system that was built was designed to bring people into downtown San Jose. Unfortunately, for most residents of Santa Clara County, downtown San Jose is not their destination. Similarly, BART to San Jose may bring some workers from Fremont, and other cities in western Alameda County, to San Jose, but it won't serve many Santa Clara County residents.

Long before Silicon Valley, there was a network of streetcar and rail lines serving Santa Clara County, including Cupertino, and the population density was far less back then. The rails were ripped up and replaced by roads.



If you've visited European cities, you've seen the extensive streetcar lines, in addition to subway systems and interurban rail. Berlin, Vienna, and Milan are three cities I visited in 2019, and it was wonderfully easy, and inexpensive to get around. Lyft and Uber don't exist. I also visited Shanghai where there are no streetcar lines but there is an amazing subway system, all of which was built in the last 30 years.

Enrique Peñalosa, the former mayor of Bogota Columbia stated: "A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use public transportation." VTA has managed to create a public transportation system that neither the rich, poor, or middle class use except as a last resort. They continue to cut routes while running far too many empty buses along El Camino and Stevens Creek because they need to maintain 15 minute headways to ensure that PDAs (Planned Development Areas) have that level of service. It is almost always faster to ride a bicycle from your home to your destination than to use VTA, a result of the combination of having to walk to a bus stop, wait for a bus, ride a bus that shares the roadway with cars, then walk from the bus stop to your destination.

Due to continuing reductions of VTA service In Cupertino we funded the Via on-demand Shuttle, which is extremely popular, and much more cost-efficient than VTA. On-demand shuttles are a much better use of public money than further funding of VTA. Due to Covid-19, and Social Distancing requirements, the Via Shuttle service has been temporarily reduced, but once we have a Covid-19 vaccine we expect to go back to full service, if we have the funding. Adjacent cities have expressed interest in expanding the Via shuttle to their cities.

Pouring more money into VTA buses would be a mistake. Completing the light rail system would be wonderful, but there's no money for that. We need to find other transit solutions. The Cupertino VIA shuttle is a good start. Electric bicycles will make bicycle commuting more practical for many, and for trips of ten miles or so, it will not be appreciably longer in time than driving, and will be faster than using public transit.

We also have to understand the long-term impacts of Covid-19. There will be a reluctance to use mass transit at all, plus many more people will be remote-working many days of the work week. We also have to understand that for many people, especially in Silicon Valley, the 8-5 job is a thing of the past. As an engineer, I frequently worked late into the night because of a need to communicate with colleagues and customers in Asia, and rarely arrive at work the next day until 10-11 a.m.. Not many workers are going to be willing to wait for an infrequent bus at midnight.

One City Council member deplored the lack of a "Transit Center" at the new Westport project. We must comprehend that a transit center without transit is senseless. Until we have plans, and money, for separated-grade rail transit on major corridors there's no need for "Transit Centers." Few Cupertino residents would drive to a transit center, park, then get on a VTA bus that goes up to Mountain View (Google) or Menlo Park (Facebook), especially since these companies offer private bus transportation directly to their campuses. Someone in South San Jose or Almaden Valley might ride fast light-rail to Cupertino or points north, but there are no plans for such light-rail.

We also have to realize that the permanent increase in remote-working is going to have a long-term positive effect on traffic congestion. This will make the use of mass transit less compelling. I was talking to one constituent two weeks ago who told me "with solar panels on the roof of my house, and an electric car, the incremental cost of driving is very low, basically the cost of wear items on the car, such as tires." He succinctly stated the likely future of personal transportation that is environmentally friendly. The societal changes that would make the use of mass transit, were it to ever be built in this area, are unlikely to occur. The satirical web publication, The Onion, said it best "Report: 98 Percent Of U.S. Commuters Favor Public Transportation For Others"

(<https://www.theonion.com/report-98-percent-of-u-s-commuters-favor-public-trans-1819565837>).

We need to look at the big picture when looking at transportation solutions. Electric cars, electric bicycles, on-demand shuttles, and fast interurban rail that takes people from areas with sufficient land for housing to Silicon Valley job centers is the future. We cannot force people to live in expensive, high-density housing when they prefer single family homes with yards, gardens, and nearby parks. We also have to consider the fact that many tech companies will allow workers to do remote-working long after the current pandemic is over. It is a huge cost savings to companies to be able to have less expensive office space. Now that companies are learning how to gauge performance by results, rather than on whether or not a worker is present in the office, there is no going back.

Steven Scharf for Cupertino City Council 2020 FPPC ID #1388099