



ZACH HILTON

Gilroy City Council Member

Livable Gilroy for All

January 4, 2026

Caltrain South County Connector

I've seen the **November South County Connector** ridership numbers (**Monday-Friday 4 Trains North in morning and 4 Trains South in evening**) Gilroy 133 riders/day, San Martin 34 riders/day, Morgan Hill 136 riders/day, Blossom Hill 76 riders/day, Capitol 49 riders/day. It's not fiscally responsible to fund Caltrain South County Connector at **\$15 million for 428 riders/day M-F** when they aren't serving the current commute travel patterns and while VTA is facing a fiscally constrained FY26 and FY27 Transit Operating Budget. Caltrain is heading into a deficit for FY27 too. These five stations south of Tamien are not electrified and Caltrain doesn't own the tracks, Union Pacific Railroad does. South County Caltrain service doesn't have the impact needed to relieve congestion on U.S. Route 101 today or historically.

Although VTA Staff has stated they will not cut frequent/daily Gilroy VTA bus service in order to keep Caltrain service, I remain concerned that Caltrain Staff will still try and pursue this option. All while VTA is facing a fiscally constrained FY26 and FY27 Transit Operating Budget and Caltrain is heading into a deficit for FY27 too. The demographic of riders I am currently hearing from that use VTA vs South County Caltrain are contrasted between those whose incomes need frequent/daily public transportation on VTA for their jobs, groceries, healthcare, and aging in place, may be sacrificed for those with significantly more means that are attending private prep-schools and commuting an average of 3 days a week on Caltrain.

We continue to talk about this at our South County VTA agenda preparation meetings with VTA staff and Caltrain staff. Caltrain and VTA aren't focused just on Gilroy and Morgan Hill. We are focused on moving the most people on mass transit from Gilroy to Diridon. We track and budget the ridership/cost from both agencies and have been comparing them for a long time. When ridership is low, services get cut, that's a given.

Seated capacity for each of the 4 diesel trains that make up the **South County Connector** as configured currently (3 cars, including 1 bike car) is 394-415, with space for 24 bikes. Each car has between 114 and 144 seated capacities and the standing room capacity ranges from 472-498. **Total max seated capacity of the South County Connector service is 1,660.** Standing room max capacity 1,992. Caltrain FY26 cost of South County Connector from a calculation in April is \$14,451,619. More trains or increased frequency will increase that cost. That's

not worth it for the current or future budget cycle. Caltrain operations should not be funded from VTA Transit funds, 2000 Measure A funds, or 2016 Measure B Caltrain Corridor Capacity. There are no grants that would be beneficial in funding this current level of service and ridership. Caltrain is currently using Federal funds to operate the South County Connector and that is about to run out.

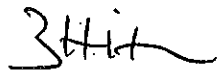
Gilroy isn't the starting point for traffic any longer. San Benito County and Monterey County drivers contribute to it as well. In 2023 **Caltrans Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) at Cochrane in Morgan Hill was 142,000 vehicles per day** and in 2019 Caltrans Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) at Cochrane in Morgan Hill was 148,000 vehicles per day.

Per the 1996 Restated Joint Powers Agreement (JPA Sections A and B) make VTA "responsible for all net operating costs of the Gilroy service" and "obtaining all Gilroy Service capital projects". It does not obligate Caltrain or VTA to operate service to Gilroy, though it assumed there would always be a market.

The State provided funding for one battery powered train (not four) which will serve as a pilot and it is supposed to run on the electrified system from Diridon to SF. The last update I received is this is not going to happen in FY26 or FY27.

VTA, Caltrain, and South County communities do minimal to increase Caltrain South County Connector ridership, so the expectation that ridership on Caltrain will increase is not a reality today. It's not fiscally responsible to fund \$15 million for 428 riders/day M-F.

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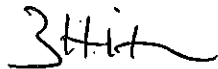
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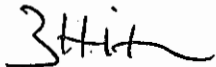
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