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## San Jose, VTA to advance bike plans

By Gary Richards  
grichards@mercurynews.com

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This has been the year of the bicyclist in the South Bay, and it's going to get even better.

The San Jose City Council will adopt the city's first comprehensive bike plan today, one that could double the number of lanes reserved for bicyclists from 250 to 500 miles over the next decade. Then next month the Valley Transportation Authority will set in motion a pilot project for riders on Caltrain and light rail to have bicycles available at selected stations to ride to job sites.

This follows the opening this summer of three pedestrian-bicycle bridges and several underpasses, plus trail extensions in the South Bay — more than \$40 million in improvements that have turned Santa Clara County into the most bike-friendly region in the Bay Area.

The number of bicyclists remains small, but it's growing. Four years ago, San Jose estimated that 0.4 percent of all commuter trips here were made on bicycles. Today that figure is 1.2 percent.

The national average is 0.5 percent, and San Jose currently ranks 15th in the nation for bike commuting.

But the goal is more ambitious — 5 percent in 10 years. That would put San Jose on a par with Portland, considered the biking mecca of the nation,

with 6 percent of commuters on two wheels.

"Obviously, we're no Copenhagen," said San Jose Councilman Sam Liccardo, who often travels to city and VTA meetings on his blue Globe bike. "We've got a long way to go, but that's extraordinary progress in a short time."

San Jose officials say their bold plan will grab the attention of both riders and motorists. It calls for eliminating parking spaces and car lanes on 18 city corridors to accommodate bicyclists, such as on Hedding Street, Alma Avenue, Branham Lane, Monroe Street, Hillsdale Avenue and Monterey Highway.

New traffic signals would be installed to detect waiting bicyclists and trigger a green light. The pavement on some bike lanes would be painted a different color to make them more visible and safer for riders. And 5,000 lockers for bike storage are planned.

"This plan is ambitious," said Corinne Winter, executive director of the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition. "We need to ensure that hard commitments and funding streams follow. To turn this plan into a reality, the city will have to put dollars behind developing these bike facilities."

The VTA has earmarked \$160 million for bike and pedestrian improvements over the next 25 years in Santa Clara County, compared with its last big infusion of \$30 million, set aside nine years ago. And the Metropolitan Transportation Commission will spend \$1 billion on such improvements over the same period throughout the nine Bay Area counties, five times the amount it planned a few years ago.

The extra money being spent may seem like a lot, but it remains a small fraction of the \$218 billion allocated for all transportation needs, from

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highways to trains to bus lines, over the next 25 years in the Bay Area.

Next month the MTC is expected to approve VTA's request for \$500,000 to cover the cost of the bike-sharing program. It would allow bikes to be picked up at Caltrain stations in San Jose, Mountain View and Palo Alto — reducing the number of passengers needing to bring them onboard to ride from the train to work or school. The pilot program could be under way by spring.

"The goal here is to ask 'What about bikes?' every time a planning decision is made," said Richard Swent of Palo Alto, chairman of the VTA's bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee. "Many countries in Europe have much higher percentages of bicycling, helmet use is rare, yet cyclist injuries and fatalities are much lower than in this country. The difference is not in the facilities but in people's attitudes and behaviors. This is by far the most difficult area in which to make progress."

**What would it take for you to bicycle to work or when running errands near your house? Contact Gary Richards at 408-920-5335 or at [mrroadshow@mercurynews.com](mailto:mrroadshow@mercurynews.com)**

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