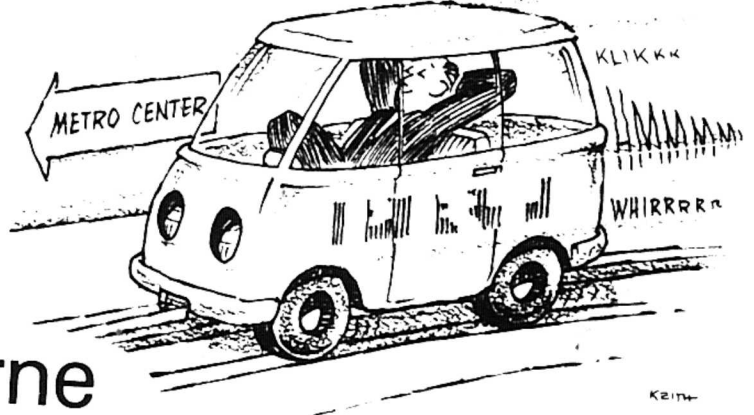


Not just buses but personalized systems

Future transit in the county: more fantastic than Jules Verne

By SUSAN COHEN



JULES VERNE could write it better, but not imagine it any more fantastically: The sun shining bright on a smogless San Jose day as you dash out to a van waiting to take you to work. The van heads to the freeway and drives onto a fixed rail substituted for one of the lanes, linking like a caboose with other vans, spurring forward with a burst of electricity. Then, driving off the rail into traffic, it heads for the industrial park where you work and deposits you next to a moving sidewalk to your plant.

That bright scene is one of many dancing through the heads of the transportation experts who are discussing the fate of mass transit in Santa Clara county. They plan on July 22 for the first time to paint some of the pictures they have been imagining to the board of supervisors who sit as the transit district.

"WE'RE REALLY GETTING into the meat of the project now," explained James Schmidt, "into talking about cost and the effectiveness of different systems." Schmidt is vice president of DeLeuw, Cather and company, the San Francisco planning firm which is heading the county's search for a mass transit system.

Schmidt heads a consortium of consulting firms studying alternatives for Santa Clara county transit, taking into account land use, financing, and social and economic effects, and aiming at capturing 30 per cent of the riders now using their own cars. He reports monthly to the Rapid Transit Development project board, a collection of county supervisors, representatives of neighboring counties and of the metropolitan transportation commission.

"No one has really faced up to the objective of what we're trying to do," Schmidt said, "it's very far reaching. We're talking about 30 per cent fewer autos on the street, fewer parking lots, less noise, less pollution."

"WE'RE LOOKING FOR a public transportation system," Schmidt went on, "that has the adequate quality to eliminate the necessity for (a family's) second and third cars." According to Schmidt, this county's approach, setting a specific ridership goal against which to examine the alternative systems, is unique.

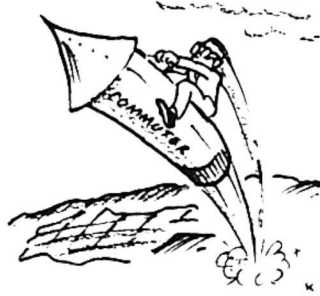
While the final report setting out alternatives developed by the six month project is not due till October, the rapid transit development board expressed impatience at their June meeting that they have not yet been told the details of the systems under study. At the same meeting, a letter from the Sierra club and a spokesman

from the Valley Coalition both complained about the lack of public participation in the project. The groups said they were fearful that behind the scenes, light local types of transit were being ignored in favor of a study "skewed" towards heavy, long distance commuter transit.

Not true, according to Schmidt. "We're not trying to make a system selection in phase one of the project."

THE PROJECT, as Schmidt described it, lays out scenarios for transit — "how it will run and where it will go" — so that "you can decide if this is a good investment," leaving decisions to the public and the politicians.

At the scheduled workshop with the board, Schmidt will be describing the pieces in a transit jigsaw puzzle that will match a collection-distribution system (to get you from your house, for example to rail transit or from a transit station to your final destination with a corridor or major



transit system). Both types of transit may be needed, Schmidt says, because "in Santa Clara county people are coming from everywhere and going to everywhere," with "no dominant corridor or destination focus."

The alternatives are many. But the project is basically looking at five major corridor systems and studying their effectiveness for 100 mile, 170 mile and 250 mile systems: buses, BART, personalized mass transit (PMT), personalized rapid transit (PRT) and dual mode.

IF THE COUNTY DECIDED to rely on buses as the major method of mass transit, the study will indicate alternatives from conventional bus routes to dial-a-ride systems, express service on arterial streets and freeways, metering entrances and exits to freeways and express bus lanes.

Under BART, the study is considering two alternatives. One is a Metropolitan Transportation commission study on a BART loop around the South Bay. The other is a link into, extending several

BART lines into the county. But, Schmidt said, the second possibility is remote. "We simply don't need that capacity (28,000 people each direction an hour) in the major corridors of Santa Clara county and we don't need that scale of investment," he said.

BART is the regional transportation system of the Bay Area and, Schmidt noted, "whatever is done needs to connect to a regional system," but the connection may be made at the East and West ends of the county with a lower capacity system in between.

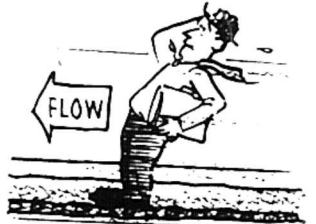
ONE SUCH LIGHTWEIGHT system is the PMT. It would carry 20-30 passengers per car versus BART's 70-80. Six cars would make up a train, contrasted with 10 for BART, so that PMT would service 120-180 seated passengers per train while BART carries 700. PMT works on an electric guideway which would probably be elevated if built in Santa Clara county, Schmidt said. The tracks are narrower than BART and the stations closer together. But because vehicles remain on the guideway, it requires a support system for passengers to travel to and from the stations and that second system could be dial-a-ride, conventional buses or automobiles. PMT has not been built as a large system anywhere in the country though Seattle and Tampa use PMT for shuttle service to their airports.

Another lightweight alternative is PRT. Its vehicles are even smaller, carrying four to ten passengers. Unlike other guideway systems, PRT is "demand responsive," meaning a passenger can punch a destination and be delivered non-stop, at least during certain hours of the day. At other hours, part or all of the system could work on a schedule. To allow the individual cars to pass each other, the stations would have to be removed from the main line. PRT is in the developmental stages and there are no prototypes besides exhibits built for exposition. Since PRT goes directly to destinations, the study is considering whether another collection or distribution system would have to be coupled with it. This decision, of course, would depend on the number and accessibility of the PRT stations.

THE LAST CORRIDOR system under study, dual mode, is a cross between PRT and PMT. The vehicle, which would probably be a small van-like bus, operates manually until it reaches a fixed guideway where it joins with other vans and becomes automated. The van could hold 12-20 passengers or be as small as a car and could respond to calls like a dial-a-ride bus. Once on the guideway, it would be safer and could carry more people than automobiles. Dual mode is being tested

and developed with federal government contracts by several manufacturers.

The study is also identifying "major activity centers" such as Stanford University or Cupertino's proposed Vallecito park. Within these centers moving sidewalks or local PRT might move people from the corridor system to their final destination.



SOUND FUTURISTIC? Schmidt admits that some of these alternatives "may fall out as being technologically uncertain," through he is not ready at this point to identify which are most realistic. "We are looking at advanced concepts because it is necessary," he said, "but we will deal with the issue of technology and development risk."

The Sierra Club, in its recent letter, signed by Ralph W. Ballmer, called for a demonstration project "to prove system feasibility and to expose to the public an operating modern transit system." A demonstration project had been included in the transit district's early plans for the rapid transit development project but was cut out when the federal government refused to participate and the project began with only local funding.

But county Supervisor Vic Calvo has commented that "we've got to keep alive" the possibility of such a demonstration. Calvo has also agreed with another public concern voiced by Valley Coalition spokesman, Dr. Joseph Clevenger from Saratoga, that a mass transit system could be an effective tool in land use planning.

THE EFFECT ON land use seems as likely to become as controversial as the system itself. While public works director James Pott says that the current transit project "is not an effort to remake Santa Clara county on the spot, we are taking something as given," Consultant Schmidt admits, "It may well be that one of these systems may structure land-use and where growth occurs." The environmental, social and economic effects of mass transit alternatives are all further pieces of the rapid transit development project report which are still to come out.