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## A boost for area transit

### MORE TRAINS RUNNING NOW BETWEEN EAST BAY AND SILICON VALLEY

By Gary Richards  
Mercury News

When BART will come to San Jose is anyone's guess, but transit service between the East Bay and Silicon Valley is being beefed up starting today.

Six new weekday trains and two more weekend trains will run from Oakland to San Jose on the Capitol Corridor, the biggest expansion in the line's 15-year history. And the Altamont commuter service from Stockton to San Jose will add a midday train.

The first Capitol train will leave San Jose at 6:40 a.m., compared with 7:50 a.m. under the old schedule. The first train into San Jose will arrive at 7:35 a.m. compared with 8:45 a.m.

Train officials believe the changes will make the Auburn-to-San Jose route more commuter-friendly -- especially from Oakland, where a trip to San Jose will take roughly an hour. That might be faster than the time it takes to drive down Interstate 880 during commute hours.

Work on \$72 million in track improvements has been completed, and that allows more trains to run. The Capitol line serves 17 stations along the 170-mile corridor and is now the third-busiest intercity passenger rail route in the nation.

The Altamont Commuter Express' new train will leave Stockton at 9:30 a.m. and arrive in San Jose at 11:40 a.m., with a return trip heading out of San Jose at 12:05 p.m.

Ridership on all Bay Area transit lines has jumped this year, a sign of better economic times, more highway congestion and high gas prices. But the Capitol line has been a steady hit, with record ridership numbers of 120,000 passengers a day this year, up from 38,583 when service began. The fare box recovery on the Capitol line has gone from 30 percent in 1998 to nearly 50 percent this year.

``Perhaps it's the crazy increase of gas prices; perhaps highway traffic has passed a tolerable threshold," said General Manager Gene Skoropowski. ``Whatever the reason, more and more people are looking to the train as a viable transportation alternative."

Road construction could also be a factor. Work on the interchange at Mission Boulevard and Interstate 880 in Fremont brings traffic to a nightmarish standstill every day. And soon work on widening Interstate 205 in Tracy could lead to delays along that key east-west route.

``It's nice that they've added a late train at 7:30 p.m. for those folks that need to work late," said Dean Grannes of Fremont, who occasionally rides the Capitol train. ``But that rarely happens for me, so it wouldn't really be useful."

ACE has operated three daily, round-trip commuter trains between Stockton and San Jose, with stops in Lathrop, Tracy, Pleasanton, Fremont and Santa Clara. About 1,400 people ride these trains each day.

Many ACE riders want a train that leaves the South Bay later than the current 5:27 p.m. departure.

``I would have preferred that ACE offered a later train," said Marta Seda, a regular rider from Pleasanton to the Great America station in Santa Clara.

Yet there are times that the midday offering will be nice, said Scott Gill, a Nortel engineer who commutes from Livermore to Santa Clara.

``I can get to or attend either late day or early morning events at my kids' school in Livermore," said Gill, 38. ``As with many tech workers, I work a lot with the Far East. I can come in late, commuting home, then dialing into my evening meetings with China or India."

Union Pacific signal problems have delayed trains between Tracy and Lathrop, and recently at the Altamont Pass.

Union Pacific expects to finish half of the signal upgrades by Halloween.

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