

How to Kill a Bus Route (The Death of the 65)

Route 65, a north-south bus line that ran from Kooser, along Leigh Avenue to Downtown San Jose, met its untimely death on August 1, 2019. This was despite the fact that the VTA's proposal to kill the route—by the Board's own admission—was met by some of the most fervent opposition by students, the disabled, and regular citizens in San Jose. The route, though hampered by low ridership (more on that below), was important because it:

- serviced two major educational institutions—San Jose State University and San Jose City College;
- connected to major public transportation hubs like Diridon station, and numerous bus and light rail routes for seniors and disabled riders; and
- constituted a dedicated line that offered ordinary citizens with jobs located in downtown San Jose and cities along Caltrain line an alternative to their cars.

The Route also represented a beacon of potential, since it would have led directly into the proposed Google campus, and provided connections to the new BART extension in Berryessa.

So how does one kill such a terrific bus line? Here's how:

1. Over the course of 10 years, hobble the ridership by cutting the line so it no longer runs on weekends, and instead of having it run all day every 20 minutes, have it run every 45 minutes from 6 am to 6 pm;

2. Double the fare in 2018;

3. Ignore previous analysis done two years earlier by a world-renowned expert that Route 65 ridership would meet minimum requirements if it was shortened and ran in conjunction with the BART extension;

4. Ignore the directive to "proceed to committee for further refinement...work with the City of San Jose and County of Santa Clara on the length of the route...and work with folks along route 65 over the summer to increase ridership . . . and return in late summer." In fact, rather than simply failing to proceed to committee, why not just cancel the committee meetings in July altogether.

5. Do a half-hearted, rushed, and non-Route 65 specific marketing campaign for 3 weeks in June, historically the month with the lowest ridership and when SJSU and SJ City College are out of session;

6. Ignore the understanding to return in late summer, and give less than a week's notice of the Board's intention to vote on the final fate of Route 65 at a hearing to occur on August 1, 2019, when most Board members have been previously unavailable to meet with concerned citizens over the summer. Also, be sure to hold the meeting at a different location than normal (VTA headquarters), and be sure that location is harder to access (North San Jose) than the normal location (County offices on Hedding Street in Downtown);

7. Ignore requests to delay the vote so that additional marketing efforts that might actually work—like providing free bus routes to students in their fall orientation packets, could be explored and discussed.

Killing a bus route is actually quite simple. Just slowly strangle its viability by starving, rather than nurturing it, and when it comes time to actually kill it, be sure to have a non-transparent, seemingly pre-ordained process that ensures that most of its riders can't be there to witness its demise.

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