

LOCAL NEWS

Union City: Council moves to take over ‘east-west connector’ project



Union City’s City Council voted Tuesday night to further explore the possibility of taking over management of the \$320 million east-west connector roadway project, angering many in the crowd who turned out to question the project’s worth and costs. Some held paper signs that read “RETHINK.” (Joseph Geha/Bay Area News Group)

By **JOSEPH GEHA** | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: February 28, 2018 at 12:48 p.m. | UPDATED: February 28, 2018 at 2:58 p.m.



End of Summer Sale: Only \$1 for 6 Months - Read with No Article Limits

SUBSCRIBE NOW >



Officials say the planned three-mile roadway — which would connect Mission Boulevard at 7th Street in Union City to Paseo Padre Parkway in Fremont and widen portions of Decoto Road and Paseo — is crucial to the city’s transit-oriented development and vitality.

The council’s decision disappointed many of the dozens of people who attended the meeting to question the project’s cost and worth. Prior versions of the connector have wended through the public process for decades without going anywhere, in part because of the complexities involved.

The four-lane connector would require construction of three bridges and three grade separations at rail crossings.

The council voted 4-0, with Councilman Gary Singh absent, to authorize staff to talk with Alameda County Transportation Commission officials about the city possibly taking over the entire project. The commission requested that the city do so to speed the project along, according to a city staff report. The commission “has stated that by having the local jurisdiction who is most vested in the project taking over, the project delivery would allow that jurisdiction the most flexibility to control the project’s cost,” the report says.

As part of the talks, the city will propose using all \$190 million allocated to its various transportation improvement projects from the 2014 half-cent sales tax increase Measure BB for the connector project instead.

The switch includes [diverting \\$75 million](#) that was to be spent revamping the Union City BART station to make it a major regional intermodal transit hub. Public Works Director Thomas Ruark said he believes some of that money can be recouped through other state or regional funding sources.

The Alameda County Transportation Commission already has committed \$109 million to the connector project as well.

Any proposed agreement between Union City and the commission “will contain language allowing the city to withdraw from the project if funding cannot be identified and secured to complete the project,” according to a [staff report](#).

Fremont Public Works Director Hans Larsen told the council Fremont is ready to work with Union City if it takes the lead on the project to help deliver segments of the roadway in Fremont.



End of Summer Sale: Only \$1 for 6 Months - Read with No Article Limits

[SUBSCRIBE NOW](#) >



“At this point there are a lot of ifs,” Councilwoman Emily Duncan said. Vice Mayor Lorrin Ellis said he recognizes the challenges but thinks it’s worth the risk.

Mayor Carol Dutra-Vernaci said “it’s huge” that Fremont is ready to work with Union City, noting that its opposition to a four-lane highway in previous years contributed to the delays.

Ruark called the connector “vitaly critical” for easing the flow of traffic through the city’s transit district, where major commercial development is planned.

But some speakers complained that adding lanes will only encourage people to drive more instead of taking transit and biking. One man said the new roadway would only connect the “two parking lots” of Interstate 880 and Mission Boulevard during commute hours.

Ruark said any agreement would still need to be ratified by the Alameda County Transportation Commission and and the City Council at future meetings.

In other action Tuesday, the council voted to form a Fiscal Stability Advisory Committee to review the city’s financial condition and postponed deciding whether to declare that Union City is in a fiscal emergency.

Staff writer Erin Baldassari contributed to this report.

[Report an error](#)

[Policies and Standards](#)

[Contact Us](#)

 **The Trust Project**

Tags: [Traffic](#), [Transportation](#)

 Author **Joseph Geha | Reporter**

Joseph Geha is a multimedia journalist covering Fremont, Milpitas, Union City, and Newark for the Bay Area News Group. His prior work has been seen in multiple Bay Area outlets, including SF Weekly, as well as on KQED and KLIV radio. He is a graduate of California State University, East Bay (Hayward), a Fremont native and a lifelong Oakland Athletics fan.



End of Summer Sale: Only \$1 for 6 Months - Read with No Article Limits

SUBSCRIBE NOW >

