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# The Mercury News

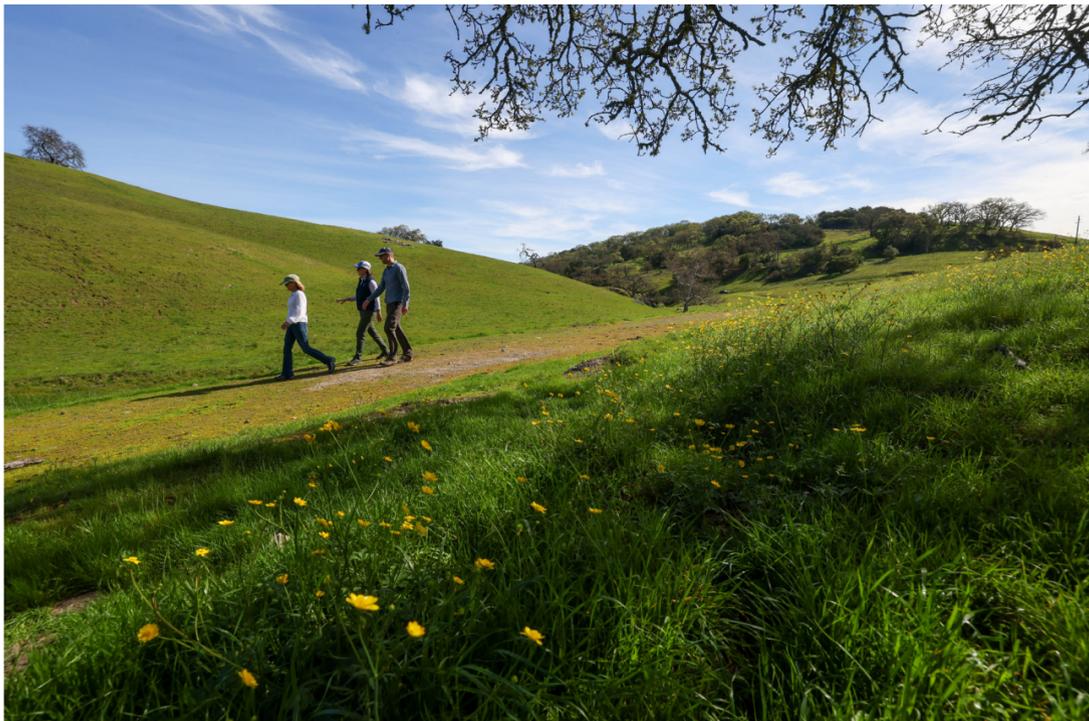
BayArea NewsGroup

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**SANTA CLARA COUNTY**

## Trust buys land to preserve open space



Peninsula Open Space Trust president Gordon Clark and two company officials walk through Mead Ranch in Morgan Hill on Friday. The 1,921-acre property was sold to the nonprofit for \$24.3 million. **PHOTOS BY RAY CHAVEZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

### Environmental nonprofit pays \$24.3M to secure legacy of Mead Ranch

**By Paul Rogers**  
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The Peninsula Open Space Trust made headlines in January when it closed the last significant part of a \$63 million deal to buy the 6,500-acre Sargent Ranch south of Gilroy that had been the center of battles since the 1990s over a proposed casino, subdivisions and gravel mine.

On Tuesday, the nonprofit environmental group based in Palo Alto secured another landmark property in Santa Clara County, announcing it had purchased Mead Ranch, a 1,921-acre parcel between San Jose and Morgan Hill, for \$24.3 million.

The ranch, located in the rolling foothills along Uvas Road, will be preserved as open space, according to the organization, commonly known as POST. It's the latest property in recent years to be set aside for wildlife, farming or open space in and around Coyote Valley, an area west of Highway 101 on San Jose's southern edges where tech giants Apple and Cisco once



A deer crosses the road at Mead Ranch, a scenic property between San Jose and Morgan Hill that was recently purchased by Peninsula Open Space Trust to preserve its bucolic nature.

proposed to build huge campuses in the 1980s and 1990s.

"There are rolling hills, oak-studded grasslands, ponds and beautiful views," said Gordon Clark, president of the Peninsula Open Space Trust, during a recent visit to Mead Ranch. "This property

is a key linchpin that connects the Santa Cruz Mountains to Coyote Valley."

Clark said the purchase, which was funded in large part by a grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, is the latest example of a wider strategy to provide places to roam

for mountain lions, deer and other wildlife that are increasingly isolated by freeways and development across California.

"We've been filling in puzzle pieces on the valley floor at Coyote Valley and

See **RANCH** on Page A5

**GLOBAL TURMOIL**

## Attacks intensify across Mideast

Trump says assault on Iran could take several weeks, with more forces on the way

**By Jon Gambrell, Melanie Lidman and Sammy Magdy**  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Israel and the United States pounded Iran on Monday in a campaign that President Donald Trump said would likely take several weeks. Tehran and its allies hit back against Israel, Gulf states and targets critical to the world's energy production.

The intensity of the attacks, the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the lack of any apparent exit plan set the stage for a prolonged conflict with far-reaching consequences. Safe havens in the Mideast like Dubai have seen incoming fire; hundreds of thousands of airline passengers are stranded around the globe; energy prices shot up; and U.S. allies pledged to help stop Iranian missiles and drones.

With no sign of the conflict abating, Trump said operations are likely to last four to five weeks but that he was prepared "to go far longer than that."

In a sign of concern over the potential for spiraling violence, the State Department on Monday urged U.S. citizens to leave more than a dozen Middle Eastern countries due to safety risks.

"The hardest hits are yet to come from the U.S. military," Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters. "The next phase will be even more punishing on Iran than it is right now."

Trump said the military campaign's objectives

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**MENLO PARK**

## Families sue to keep district from closing TIDE Academy

Shuttering will hurt area students with disabilities, parents say

**By Ryan Macasero**  
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Parents of students with disabilities at TIDE Academy in Menlo Park are asking a federal judge to block the Sequoia Union High School District from shutting down the campus, arguing the move would unlawfully harm students who rely on its small, specialized environment.

The parent group is seeking a temporary restraining order to prevent the district from closing the school, terminating staff or transferring students without consent while a lawsuit over the pending closure moves forward.

A hearing is set for Thursday before U.S. District Judge Trina L. Thompson.

Tide Rising, a parent-led group, filed suit last month alleging the closure — approved by the school board unanimously early February — violates federal anti-discrimination laws and would cause "irreparable harm" to students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students.

Opened in 2019 with at least \$50 million in bond

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**SAN JOSE'S BART EXTENSION**

## Transit bailout could impact project

State senator worries that feds could deny \$590M loan due to other needs

**By Grace Hase**  
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A \$590 million bailout for the Bay Area's struggling transit agencies has raised concerns for a Silicon Valley legislator that it will put San Jose's long-awaited BART extension at risk.

The loan will help

sustain Caltrain, Muni, AC Transit and BART as state leaders pursue long-term funding through a potential November sales tax measure that could stave off a transit doomsday scenario of station closures and service cutbacks.

But the loan requires the state to tap into a pool

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Passengers wait to board a BART train at the West Dublin/Pleasanton station on Feb. 18. **DAI SUGANO — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

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**WEATHER FORECAST**

**WEATHER**  
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## RANCH

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bigger pieces on the hillsides around it," Clark said. "We're trying to protect big blocks that wildlife can use as habitat, and which link to Diablo Range and the rest of the state."

The ranch is roughly twice the size of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. From its highest hills, visitors can see Mount Hamilton to the east, and Mount Umunhum and Loma Prieta to the west. With the purchase, about 49,000 acres of open space now exists between Mount Umunhum and Highway 101 — an area six times the size of Stanford University.

Since 1954, Mead Ranch had been owned by the family of Stephen D. Bechtel Jr., who from 1960 to 1980 served as president of Bechtel, a major American engineering and construction company. Bechtel was married to Elizabeth Mead Hogan, who died two years ago. Stephen D. Bechtel Jr., died in 2021 at age 95, with a net worth estimated at \$3.5 billion.

Founded in San Francisco in 1898, the Bechtel company built Hoover Dam, BART and the Channel Tunnel between England and France, along with airports, nuclear plants and other huge projects around the world. Over time, some Bechtel heirs have moved out of the Bay Area, and the company shifted its



The Peninsula Open Space Trust, a nonprofit environmental group based in Palo Alto, purchased Mead Ranch in Morgan Hill for \$24.3 million. **RAY CHAVEZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

headquarters to Virginia in 2018.

Along with his friends and family, Bechtel used Mead Ranch for getaways and hunting trips. In 2007, he hosted the National Retriever Championship on the property, an annual event in which hunting dogs from around the United States compete to retrieve birds, like ducks or pheasants, while navigating challenging terrain.

Evan Johnstone of Reno, Bechtel's grandson, declined to comment on the sale.

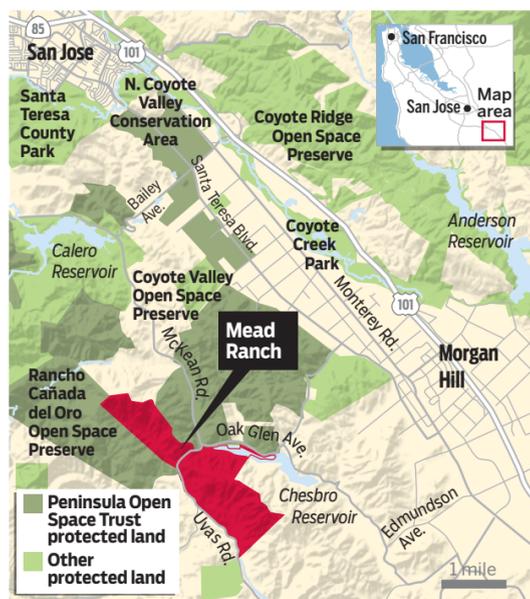
In 2023, another branch of the family sold an adjacent property called Lakeside Ranch to POST for \$22 million.

POST transferred that property to the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency, a government agency that

preserves open space as part of a broad countywide plan in which developers pay fees to offset harm they do to endangered species on their properties so they can obtain permits. Clark said the same outcome is likely with Mead Ranch.

Santa Clara County's landscape and politics have shifted considerably since the Bechtels, who also have lived in San Francisco and Piedmont, first bought the two ranches during the Eisenhower years.

From the 1950s until the 1980s, San Jose sprawled in all directions. With a booming post-war economy driven by military contractors, electronics companies and computer firms, city leaders eagerly approved bulldozing orchards and farms that



Source: Peninsula Open Space Trust

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

had given the area the name "Valley of Heart's Delight" for freeways, subdivisions and businesses.

By the 1980s and 1990s, political views began to shift. San Jose, neighboring cities and Santa Clara County began passing rules to limit development on hillsides and some farmland. Environmental groups and land trusts began pushing for new parks and open space preserves. Many old-time ranching families sold their properties, which have increasingly become parks and open space preserves.

"It used to be that Grandpa bought the land," said Henry Coletto, a retired game warden with the Santa Clara County Sheriff's office from 1988 to 2004, who also worked as a county parks ranger in 1967. "His family raised cattle, then the second generation raised their family there, and the third generation sold the property because they didn't want to be in the cattle business. It's a tough life. Today, there are only a handful of cowboys who own their own land in this area. The rest are renting it from open space and parks

agencies."

Coletto said that amid the working ranchers, several wealthy families from the Peninsula and San Francisco, including the Hewletts and Packards, bought large pieces of land in rural Santa Clara County in the 1950s and 1960s.

"Back then, it was a trend for people who had money to have a big ranch and be a cowboy or raise horses," Coletto said. "The Bechtels didn't spend a lot of time on the property. But they did invite friends to do pheasant hunting and work with dogs. They did a beautiful job of maintaining the fences and the corrals and the houses."

The Bechtel family allowed cattle grazing on the ranch, which POST will continue. The family also built six homes on the property. POST says it's not sure yet what it will do with them or if there ever will be public access to the property, although it could provide a 1.5-mile addition to the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Coletto said he hopes it's not too heavily grazed in the future, particularly around two sensitive streams that run through the property, Uvas and Llagas creeks.

"The big thing is that the land is not going to be developed," he said. "It's like its own little mountain range back there. There are some good water areas there on the west side. The whole area is pretty important for wildlife."

## IRAN

From Page 1

are to destroy Iran's missile capabilities, wipe out its navy, prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon and ensure that it cannot continue to support allied groups like Lebanon's Hezbollah, which fired missiles at Israel on Monday.

The chaos of the conflict became apparent when the U.S. military said Kuwait had "mistakenly shot down" three American F-15E Strike Eagles while Iran was attacking with aircraft, ballistic missiles and drones. U.S. Central Command said all six pilots ejected safely.

As several airstrikes hit Iran's capital, Tehran, the top security official Ali Larijani vowed on X: "We will not negotiate with the United States."

World markets were rattled as the fighting expanded across a region vital to energy supplies.

Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura oil refinery came under attack from drones, but its defenses downed the incoming aircraft, a military spokesman told the state-run Saudi Press Agency. The refinery has a capacity of over half a million barrels of crude oil a day.

"The attack on Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura refinery

marks a significant escalation, with Gulf energy infrastructure now squarely in Iran's sights," said Torbjorn Soltvedt, an analyst at the risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

The Gulf state of Qatar said its air force shot down two Iranian Sukhoi Su-24 bombers, and QatarEnergy said it would stop producing liquefied natural gas indefinitely, taking one of the world's top suppliers off the market. European natural gas prices surged by 40% in response.

Several ships have been attacked in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil traded passes and where Iran has threatened attacks.

Reza Najafi, Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters that airstrikes targeted the Natanz nuclear enrichment site on Sunday.

"Their justification that Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons is simply a big lie," he said.

Israel and the U.S. have not acknowledged strikes at the site, which the U.S. bombed in the 12-day war between Iran and Israel in June. Israel has said it is targeting the "leadership and nuclear infrastructure."

Iran has said it has not enriched uranium since June, though it has maintained its

right to do so while saying its nuclear program is peaceful.

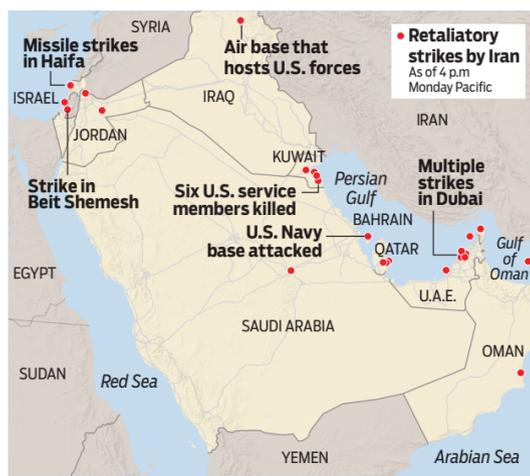
The Iranian Red Crescent Society said the U.S.-Israeli operation has killed at least 555 people. In Israel, where several locations were hit by Iranian missiles, 11 people were killed. Israel's retaliatory strikes against Hezbollah killed dozens of people in Lebanon.

The U.S. military announced that two previously unaccounted for American service members have been confirmed dead, bringing the total to six. All six were Army soldiers and part of the same logistics unit in Kuwait, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Three people were reported killed in the United Arab Emirates, and one each in Kuwait and Bahrain.

Iran's top diplomat on Monday shared an aerial photo showing rows of graves that he said were for more than 160 girls killed during a U.S.-Israeli strike on an elementary school in Minab. "Their bodies were torn to shreds," Abbas Araghchi, the country's foreign minister, said on X.

In Israel, three young siblings killed by an Iranian strike were being laid to rest at the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem on Monday night.



Sources: Iranian state news agency, verified satellite images and video, MarineTraffic and VesselFinder.

NEW YORK TIMES

Yaakov, 16, Avigail 15, and Sarah Biton, 13, were among the nine killed Sunday when a missile slammed into a shelter located in a synagogue in Beit Shemesh.

Hezbollah fires on Israel, prompting massive response. Hezbollah said it fired missiles on Israel early Monday in response to Khamenei's killing and "repeated Israeli aggressions." It was the first time in more than a year the militant group has claimed an attack.

There were no reports of injuries or damage.

Israel retaliated with strikes on Lebanon. The country's Health Ministry

reported at least 52 people were killed and 154 wounded in overnight strikes in the Beirut suburbs and southern Lebanon. Associated Press journalists in Beirut were jolted awake by loud explosions that shook buildings and shattered windows.

An Israeli military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Effie Defrin, said Israel is keeping "all options on the table," including a potential ground invasion of Lebanon.

The Israeli military said it had completed a wave of strikes targeting branches of al-Qard al-Hasan, a charity operating outside the Lebanese financial system that

Israel says is used to fund Hezbollah's military wing.

Israel also struck a building housing Al-Manar channel studios in Beirut's southern suburbs following an evacuation warning, the channel said. The military said it targeted "Hezbollah command centers and weapons storage facilities in Beirut." No immediate details on casualties were available.

The U.S. military, which has used B-2 stealth bombers to strike Iran's ballistic missile facilities with 2,000-pound bombs, said Monday that it had taken out 11 Iranian warships. Trump has said the Iranian navy's headquarters had been "largely destroyed."

While Danny Danon, the Israeli ambassador to the U.N., said the conflict would continue "as long as it takes," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters Monday that the U.S. is not engaged in a nation-building effort, saying, "This is not Iraq. This is not endless."

Trump sought to more clearly define the administration's objectives on Monday following an earlier statement — as the attack was unfolding Saturday — in which he listed various grievances dating to Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and urged Iranians to "take over" their government.

There have been no signs yet of any such uprising.

## BART

From Page 1

of money — known as the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program, or TIRCP — that's supposed to be allocated to critical capital projects at a later date. If projects are ahead of schedule, the loan could ultimately affect the timing of when those projects receive their promised funds.

That's a problem for state Sen. Dave Cortese. The San Jose Democrat, who chairs the transportation committee and is part of the chamber's senior majority leadership, described the situation as "mortgaging your capital projects in order to make payroll."

But the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, the agency in charge of constructing the project, is confident in the bailout plan, and others backing the decision assure it won't put capital projects at risk as the law that authorized the bailout outlines a repayment process and contemplates scenarios where a project might need funds sooner than expected.

The 6-mile, four-station BART project, which will expand the line from the Berryessa Transit Center in north San Jose through downtown and into Santa Clara, has been awarded \$1.125 billion in TIRCP funds from the state — but \$866.4 million of that is expected to be allocated to the project. The project has faced a series of cost increases

over the years, with a 2014 projection pegging the price tag in the \$4 billion range. The extension is expected to be complete in 2036 — a full decade longer than expected.

As VTA prepares to go to the federal government later this year to finally secure the \$5.1 billion that the Biden administration awarded to the project, Cortese worries that the bailout will put the funding, which makes up nearly half the budget of the \$12.75 billion project, at risk.

"I'm pretty sure that even a very generous federal administration like the last one would call into question money being pledged for a project that has a state lien on it," the state senator told the Bay Area News Group. "I think there's even more concern with the Trump administration given their track record at this point with putting these kinds of transactions under scrutiny."

During the grant application process, the Federal Transit Administration examines whether all local sources of funding for a project are in place and whether any other initiatives would jeopardize the funding. A spokesperson for the FTA could not be reached for comment about the transit bailout's impact on the San Jose BART extension.

John Goodwin, a spokesperson for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which will administer the loan, said in a statement that the "loan is structured to uphold the state's commit-

ments to awarded projects while minimizing risk to project schedules."

The loan makes up nearly half of the \$1.5 billion currently in the TIRCP fund set aside for Bay Area projects. Goodwin said that capital projects often have long construction timelines and that the bill that authorized the transit bailout lays out a process in case a project is ahead of schedule and needs to tap into those funds sooner.

"If this occurs, it could affect the timing of when projects receive allocations, but it won't alter the state's commitment to ultimately provide the awarded funds," Goodwin said. "The requirement for coordination with MTC and project sponsors on any allocation plan means that it would be developed in a collaborative and transparent manner."

State officials believe that the need for any such plan is unlikely as the TIRCP fund isn't tied to the state's budget and is constantly being replenished. MTC estimates that the Bay Area receives roughly \$300 million in TIRCP funds every two years.

The \$590 million loan is expected to be repaid in quarterly installments over the next 12 years. If a transit operator misses a payment, MTC could redirect the agency's share of funds that stem from a tax on diesel fuel to help repay the loan.

Cortese, who abstained from voting on the bill that authorized the bailout because of his concerns,

called assurances that the BART project would be protected "worthless," noting that the MTC doesn't have its own money as it's a "pass through organization of existing state and federal money."

But Greg Richardson, VTA's deputy general manager, said that the transit agency isn't concerned about any impact the bailout will have on the project.

"We won't be drawing on those monies until a little bit down the road," he said. "That may speed up a bit with some of the things we're working on right now, but even then it will be a little bit until we start drawing on that." Richardson said the agency is likely to tap into the money in spring or summer of 2027, though it could be moved up to late 2026 or early 2027.

Campbell City Councilmember Sergio Lopez, who serves as the chair of VTA's Board of Directors, said that "there's few people who care more about this project and transit in Santa Clara County than Sen. Cortese." He said the agency has done its "due diligence" looking into the senator's concerns, pressure testing cash flow scenarios and engaging in conversations with both MTC and the Federal Transit Administration about the situation. Lopez said those conversations are ongoing and have yet to yield any formal assurances.

"This process and these decisions made it absolutely clear to me that all of

our partners want and need BART to Silicon Valley and the connection that VTA is leading to succeed," he said.

BART, which is projecting a \$376 million operating deficit for the upcoming fiscal year, plans to take a "conservative approach to using the state loan money," according to spokesperson Alicia Trost. The agency is expected to receive \$285 million from the bailout.

"We will only use what we know we can repay," she said in a statement. "Our plan is to use the loan funds if the November funding measure passes. If the measure fails we will not use loan funds to continue operations because we would not have a revenue source to pay it back."

But other transit operators included in the bailout might tap into the loan before any assurance that long-term funding might be available — a potential risk when it comes to the future of repaying the loan if the tax fails.

Robert Lyles, the spokesperson for AC Transit, said in a statement that the loan gives them "critical breathing room at a pivotal moment." The agency is facing a projected \$74 million deficit next fiscal year and "may draw up to \$55 million from this emergency loan for operations by July 1, while we continue working on additional solutions to close the remaining gap," Lyles said.

Muni spokesperson Erica Kato also said they plan to use the loan in the first year of the agency's two-year budget to "avoid significant service

cuts" driven by the projected \$307 million deficit for the upcoming fiscal year. Muni is expected to receive \$200 million from the bailout.

Caltrain spokesperson Dan Lieberman didn't say when they'd draw on the loan, but said the agency is "relying on those funds to sustain current service levels in its upcoming fiscal year budget." Caltrain has the smallest share of the bailout funds and is expected to receive \$50 million.

The proposed revenue measure would create a half-cent sales tax in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties and a one-cent sales tax in San Francisco for the next 14 years. It's expected to generate nearly \$1 billion annually for struggling transit agencies that have seen ridership declines in recent years.

While an early poll commissioned by MTC last year showed support for the measure, Cortese isn't convinced it will pass given growing concerns about affordability issues across the state.

The only way he sees VTA being able to tap into the funds it was promised is if the loan is paid off or if new legislators or a new governor that's elected in November recognize that "the South Bay got screwed."

"The transit operators in the Bay Area — especially the ones underwater — are rolling the dice," Cortese said. "It's riverboat gambling to hope and pray that they're going to pass the transit measure this year."