

October 16, 2019

Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit  
Board of Directors  
5401 Old Redwood Highway, Suite 200  
Petaluma, CA 94954

Dear Directors,

Marin County Bicycle Coalition (MCBC), Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition (SCBC), and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) appreciate the opportunity to provide input on SMART's Draft 2020 Expenditure Plan. Our organizations work to make walking and bicycling safe and convenient options for transportation and recreation, with an emphasis on the completion of continuous pathway systems. As the spine of the North Bay's active transportation network, the SMART pathway is the highest organizational priority for MCBC and SCBC, and the highest for RTC in Marin and Sonoma Counties.

MCBC, SCBC, and RTC were highly supportive of Measure R in 2006 and Measure Q in 2008. Our missions are aligned with SMART's stated commitment to provide a "safe, reliable, and efficient transportation alternative to traffic and congestion." We continue to believe in the important role SMART serves in providing the North Bay with car-free mobility options.

However, our organizations and the thousands of members we represent have been frustrated with SMART's slow progress on the pathway. Over ten years since the passage of Measure Q, the pathway is far from complete along the Initial Operating Segment (IOS), with no funding strategy or timeline in place.

SMART has relied almost entirely on grant funding to construct the pathway, with impressive results. However, bicycle/pedestrian funding is becoming increasingly competitive as more communities strive to become walkable and bikeable. In the last round of Active Transportation Program--California's primary bicycle/pedestrian funding source--the state received over \$2.2b in requests for just over \$200m in available funding.

Even with continued success, if SMART relies solely on grant funding for the remaining 13.1 miles of unfunded pathway along the IOS, we will continue to see slow, piecemeal delivery. The only way to guarantee progress on the pathway is to establish a reliable source of funding.

## **EXPENDITURE PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

In reviewing the Draft 2020 Expenditure Plan, we were troubled by the omission of the following language from the 2008 Expenditure Plan:

*8. If additional funds become available, the SMART Board will prioritize completion of the bicycle/pedestrian pathway.<sup>1</sup>*

If SMART proceeds with the 30-year sales tax extension, the savings resulting from the restructured debt service will provide an unprecedented opportunity to make progress toward the completion of the pathway, especially before passenger rail service to Healdsburg and Cloverdale becomes operational.

Starting in 2023, SMART projections show reserves growing by an average of over \$3m per year, to over \$35m in 2029. Unlike the other capital needs identified in the 2020 Expenditure Plan, SMART would make meaningful progress on the pathway through relatively small, incremental investments over time.

We respectfully request the inclusion of the following elements in the 2020 Expenditure Plan under Section V, "Implementation Guidelines."

***1) If reserve funds become available, the SMART Board will prioritize the completion of the bicycle/pedestrian pathway between the Larkspur and Sonoma County Airport Stations.***

In addition to establishing a reliable funding source for the pathway, this would:

- Preserve funding for operations and maintenance of existing infrastructure, preventing cuts to rail operations or maintenance during a recession.
- Allow SMART to continue to seek grant funding for the pathway, but without delaying progress if and when grant funding is not secured. SMART would be able to prioritize reserve funds toward pathway segments that are less competitive for grant funding.
- Allow SMART to spend reserve balance on other projects, but establish policy direction for those decisions, forcing SMART to periodically revisit and consider progress on the pathway and ensuring accountability to the public and Board.
- Hold SMART accountable and committed to the same project and implementing guidelines passed by voters in 2008.

***2) When implementing the Windsor, Healdsburg, and Cloverdale rail and pathway extensions, SMART will strive to fund, design, permit, and build the rail and pathway projects concurrently.***

When SMART was conceived, most imagined that the rail and pathway would be built in lockstep. Though this obviously didn't happen due to financial constraints, it should remain the

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<sup>1</sup> Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District 2008 Expenditure Plan, pg. 7

goal. Doing so is more efficient and less disruptive--and funding agencies now favor multi-modal projects.

Through these asks, we are not seeking to undermine rail operations and maintenance or thwart progress on future rail improvements. Our concern is that, with several competing needs, your Board will continue to think and act as a rail-first agency, rather than a rail and pathway agency. The insertion of these implementation guidelines would go a long way toward renewing commitment to the pathway and regaining confidence from our organizations and constituents.

## WHY THE PATHWAY MATTERS

Like the train, the pathway is a key piece of the North Bay’s transportation network and SMART’s stated commitment to provide a “safe, reliable, and efficient transportation alternative to traffic and congestion.” SMART’s environmental studies predicted that the pathway would be used by 7,000-10,000 people per day when complete.

The pathway holds regional significance as the North Bay’s only north-south bicycle and pedestrian route separated vehicle traffic and thus, accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Many of the individual segments have high utility for local trips as well, eliminating lengthy detours along busy streets and across freeway interchanges.

The following table lists all of the unfunded pathway segments in the IOS, as well as the nature of the detours that people are currently forced to use in their absence:

County	Segment		Segment Length (mi.)	Detour Length (mi.)	Additional Mileage	Primary Detour Route	Detour Level of Traffic Stress
Sonoma	Airport Blvd.	W. Steele Ln.	4.3	6	1.7	Fulton Rd	4
Sonoma	W. Steele Ln.	Guerneville Rd.	0.3	0.4	0.1	Coffey Ln	4
Sonoma	6th St.	3rd St.	0.2	0.4	0.2	Santa Rosa Creek Trail	1
Sonoma	E. Railroad Ave.	Main St.	1.5	2	0.5	Petaluma Hill Rd	4
Marin	Rush Creek Pl.	Grant Ave.	0.6	0.8	0.2	Redwood Blvd	4
Marin	Novato Creek	Rowland Blvd.	0.7	1	0.3	Rowland Way	4
Marin	Rowland Blvd.	Hanna Ranch Rd.	0.4	5.2	4.8	Novato Blvd	4
Marin	Bay Trail	State Access Rd.	1.6	1.7	0.1	Nave Dr	4
Marin	Main Gate Rd.	Smith Ranch Rd.	2.7	4.4	1.7	Lucas Valley Rd	4
Marin	Smith Ranch Rd.	McInnis Pkwy.	0.8	2.8	2	Redwood Hwy	4
Totals			13.1	24.7	11.6		

As shown above, the unbuilt segments create lengthy detours along busy, dangerous roadways.

Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) is a metric used to evaluate the extent to which a roadway safely accommodates people on foot and bike, based on vehicle speed, number of lanes, interaction with traffic, and proximity to traffic. LTS 1 represents a roadway or route suitable for children--

like the SMART pathway--whereas LTS 4 appeals only to the "strong and confident." With the exception of one short segment in Santa Rosa, every detour is LTS 4.

While on-street routes may be available to connect existing segments of pathway, these detours are so circuitous and dangerous that they will not encourage people to walk or bike.

## **CONCLUSION**

Like the train, the pathway stands to be an incredible asset serving the communities you represent. The sooner it is built, the sooner people of all ages, abilities, and incomes will have a safe car-free mobility option that improves public health, connects communities, fights congestion, and addresses our climate crisis.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and look forward to supporting SMART toward the timely completion of a world-class rail and pathway system, as approved by voters.

Respectfully Submitted,



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